

what has just been said. All an adjudicator does is listen to every word, take notes, and think about whether speakers have addressed the key issues, given sufficient evidence to prove their claims, and developed their cases logically. If you are listening in the same way, you can address her concerns when you speak. Ask any experienced adjudicator, and she will tell you that one of the hardest parts of the job is continuing to focus while desperately hoping that someone tackles the really obvious point that she's noticed but none of the speakers have mentioned yet. You want to be the person to bring it up.

In addition to allowing you to understand the debate as the adjudicator sees it and gain an advantage through doing so, there's another reason for sharpening your listening skills—it makes for a better debate. If everyone in the room is an active listener—and is good at it—you no longer have a competitive advantage. Nevertheless, other speakers are more likely to address the points you make, and all participants are engaged with what is happening rather than what they hoped might happen or thought probably happened while they were muttering about strategy with their teammates.

Using Active Listening in Debate

Three questions should be at the forefront of the active listener's mind throughout a debate. This section deals with the first two: What is actually being said? and Why is it being said? The next section takes a look at the toughest of the three: What isn't being said?

Listening actively may seem challenging, especially if you're doing so while thinking about your own speech. However, as with the thinking skills covered in the last chapter, listening is actually more of an attitude that you acquire over time than a process you apply in response to every word a speaker utters. Usually, the major challenge for the active listener is to avoid thinking about what you're planning to have for lunch or whether the essay you finished yesterday will get a good grade. Focusing on just what's happening in the room is an important first step. The next step, of taking that information and assessing it in the context of what else has been said, is made a lot easier when you realize that your own speech is directly affected by what the person speaking is saying now, at this very second. By taking the points that a speaker has made and comparing them to your own remarks, those of your teammates, and the questions and issues raised by your own side, you can appreciate her speech as the adjudicator does—as one component to be judged by how well it relates to the broader debate. By gaining such an insight, you will find that fulfilling the requirements of your position in the debate ceases to be an exercise in box-checking and becomes an intrinsic and natural part of the way ideas and information flow in analytical situations. Speakers often feel that the most effective listening skills