

## Electronic Communication Practice Activities

With hopes of staying more connected with her grandparents, Maria's family recently purchased a new webcam for their home computer. However, before they attempt their first video chat, Maria's best friend, Abby, advised her to try a few strategies for having an engaging and successful chatting experience. Abby said that she and her mom did not practice before their first chat and things did not go well at all. Maria was thankful to have this information before talking with her grandparents.

Now it's your turn to practice and prepare for a video conferencing experience. Try one, or more, of the following strategies to improve your ability as an electronic communicator:

### 1. Make a "Conferencing Checklist"

- List all of the steps that you should go through before starting to communicate digitally. Be sure to include the steps that apply to your specific situation. Keep the list handy and add things to it as you become more experienced.

### 2. Hold a dress rehearsal

- Before a video conference, practice with a friend who lives in your own town. This will allow you to easily communicate face-to-face about the practice session. By practicing with the equipment, environment, and message you will be confident when the real event happens.

### 3. Concentrate on listening

- Be sure to remember to use Active Listening skills when communicating digitally. Work to focus on the speaker, think about what is being said, and respond verbally and non-verbally. Always recognize that interrupting can interfere with the communication process.

### 4. Agree on a signal

- When practicing with another person, agree on a visual signal to use to let your partner know that you are ready to make a point. Lift your hand up or raise and wiggle your index finger. This way you don't have to interrupt what they are saying but they can tell that you have a point to make. The non-verbal signs that we pick up on when we are in the same room with someone can often be lost with electronic communication.

Finally, go to the following website learn more about ways to improve your listening skills:

<http://www.livestrong.com/article/174105-improve-listening-skills-children/>

In this article you will find 8 different activities to do with children in order to improve their listening skills. These everyday activities allow children to see and practice listening skills with a family member or caregiver.

Electronic communication is becoming increasingly important for both personal and professional situations. Remembering the keys to Active Listening and the basics of electronic communication will log you onto the path of success.

### Improving the Quality of Electronic Communication

- Manage the equipment - check software, camera, microphone, and speakers
- Manage the environment - think about the location, lighting, and background sounds
- Determine time and who will initiate the call
- Make sure all parties are registered correctly and that everyone has the right contact information

### 4 Key Components of Active Listening to be Used When Videoconferencing

#### 1. Focus on the speaker

- Look at the camera
- Forward documents in advance
- Make sure documents show up clearly

#### 2. Think about what the speaker is saying

- Don't let the technology get in the way
- Ask for the information to be repeated

#### 3. Respond verbally

- Avoid speaking too softly or in a monotone voice
- Speak in short, clear sentences

#### 4. Respond non-verbally

- Use precise and deliberate gestures

## **Dealing With Delays When Videoconferencing**

- Wait until the other person is finished talking
- Take notes and paraphrase
- Write down clarifying questions
- Be confident

Monday morning, during her Science class at school, Maria was given the assignment to complete a presentation on a favorite animal. Maria is very interested in dolphins but, living in the Midwest of the United States, she doesn't know where she can get first-hand information on this subject. To help her with this dilemma, Maria's Science teacher has lined up a video conference with a real-life marine biologist living in California. The video conference is to be held on Friday in the school's library. Maria wants to do her best when interviewing this professional expert, so her teacher has advised her to complete some specific activities prior to the video conference session.

Now it's your turn to complete the following activities on your own:

### **1. Prepare yourself**

Make a list of points, stories, questions or ideas that you want to share when you hold your video conference. Carefully read through the list to be sure that you have everything on it.

### **2. Practice Managing the Equipment**

Practice managing all of the equipment you are going to use during the conference before you start your event. Troubleshoot any problem areas that arise. It is a good idea to see what you look like on screen. Practice looking at the camera in order to make good eye contact with your audience. This will help you become an active and engaged participant during the "Speaker/Listener Communication Process."

### **3. Practice Managing the Environment--Remove Distractions**

Check out the room where you are holding the video conference for any distractions. Inspect the area for lighting concerns, background noises, and any other distractions. Remove or adjust these items. Work to make your audience as comfortable as possible. Don't forget to remove/turn-off your other electronic devices, too. You don't want your cell phone to ring during a conference!

Finally, go to the following websites to learn more about ways to improve your listening skills:

### **Listen to a Podcast on What It Takes to be a Good Listener?**

This podcast and transcript has been developed by the Center for Creative Leadership. It details the ideas of: paying attention, withholding judgment, reflecting on information, clarifying with questions, summarizing as needed, and sharing connections to the speaker. This podcast can be found at:

[www.ccl.org/leadership/podcast/index.aspx](http://www.ccl.org/leadership/podcast/index.aspx)

or

[www.ccl.org/leadership/podcast/transcriptTheBig6.aspx](http://www.ccl.org/leadership/podcast/transcriptTheBig6.aspx)

Watch a series of short videos highlighting real life jobs where strong listening skills are crucial.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/topic/types-of-listening>

## **Video Conferencing Options**

**Google Video Chat:** This option is a free alternative to Skype for anyone using Gmail. <https://www.google.com/chat/video>

Challenge yourself to use Google Video Chat with a friend or family member. All you need is a webcam to get started. To help users Google has released a simple video guide and PDF guide.

**VSee:** This option allows you to host a video conferencing and share your desktop with other people.

<http://vsee.com/>

Practice hosting a multi-person video conference. While you are conferencing, share your desktop with others. Together talk, edit, and revise documents. When you are finished send it to others by dragging it to another person's video window during your call.

## **Articles/Tips for Video Conferencing**

5 Ways Classrooms Use Video Conferencing

**<http://mashable.com/2010/04/21/classroom-video-conferencing>**

This article was written by 12 year old, Adora Svitak. In it the author writes about how video conferencing allows the user to connect with experts, take virtual field trips, work together with other people, access previously unavailable courses, and help teach the teachers.

Quick Tips for Planning a Video Conference

**<http://www.uwex.edu/ics/video/plan.htm>**

This links to a short guide presented by "Instructional Communication Systems" that explains how to plan for a successful video conference.