

For Your Information: Active Listening

It is crucial that students are allowed to listen to the musical works from the youth concerts as often and as thoughtfully as possible. **Active listening** is the most effective way to get to know the music in an emotionally satisfying and intellectually challenging way. If you choose to create your own active listening lessons, the following information should help inform your planning.

There are two main types of listening – passive and active. **Passive listening** occurs when music is played in the background. You are aware of it, but the listener isn't specifically paying attention to it. **Active listening** occurs when the listener focuses on the music, blocking out all other incoming stimuli, and pays attention to details like form, instrumentation or an awareness of the emotions the music evokes.

Benefits of active listening

Emotional	changing your mood
Physical	improved circulation, slowing breathing, boosting immune system
Mental	improves memory and focus, stimulates brain activity, alleviates stress
Social	build confidence
Electrical	shifts brain waves from Beta to Alpha and Theta (more relaxed)
Neurological	resets and regulates nervous system
Energy	helps to relax, motivate
Chemical	increases the release of dopamine, prolactin and serotonin

Types of active listening:

Affective	emotion, colors, style, instrumentation, musical elements
Structural	how one part relates to the others (Form)
Dialogic	comparisons to works by the same composer or to other versions of the same work, connections made to art/literature/culture

Active Listening Process

Prepare	Relax in a quiet place
Tune in	Close your eyes and breathe slowly
Embody	Place one hand on heart, other on diaphragm – Where do you feel the music resonating?
Feel	What emotions do you feel?
Visualize	What images and colors are you imagining?
Analyze	Pay attention to details of music: melody/harmony/form/instrumentation/dynamics
Pause	At the end of the music, take a few moments before opening your eyes to fully take in the experience

Ensuring Success

Model good listening	Close your eyes, express emotions facially, show that you are affected by the music
Multiple listening opportunities	Play music when students enter/exit the room and during transition times
Ongoing commentary	As the music plays, point out musical elements and things students should focus on
Encourage critical thinking	Ask a question or tell students to listen for something specific <i>before</i> listening

Resources

Fitzpatrick, F. Music and the Brain: Active Listening.

<https://www.frankfitzpatrick.com/music-and-the-brain-active-listening/>

Thomas, C. Active Listening: Teaching with Music, November 30, 2015.

<https://campuspress.yale.edu/yctl/active-listening/>