Hello and welcome to the Empathy in Online Instruction: Understanding Students presentation. By the end of this presentation and unit practices items you should be able to apply active listening strategies as a means to understand student problems and concerns in a way that will help them overcome barriers and be more open to solve problems.

This presentation contains audio, so please make sure your speakers are turned up on your computer. Click the forward button below to proceed to the next slide.
Other than expertise in your discipline one of the most important skills we find expressed by the best instructors is an empathetic understanding of their students’ point of view.
In this lesson you will learn to apply “active listening” in your online communication with your students. Active listening is an evidence-based strategy that professionals in a variety of occupations learn to use effectively including, for example, customer service representatives who handle product complaints, negotiators and psychologists. The goal is to attempt to understand what people are communicating when they are discussing emotional experiences. Listening is easy to learn and use. It is an important skill for all instructors but is even more important in online settings.
Listening effectively is perceived as empathetic.

People who listen effectively are perceived as empathetic to others and empathy is the basis for trust and collaboration.
Empathy is defined as shown on this slide “...the ability to recognize and understand another person's perceptions and feelings, and to accurately convey that understanding through an accepting response” (Haynes and Avery, 1979, p. 527).
Let students know you understand them without communicating judgment.

Empathy requires a neutral verbal or written confirmation of understanding, waiting to ensure that the other person acknowledges your understanding and sometimes sharing information or providing help. In this context, “neutral” and “accepting” implies simply letting students know you understand them without communicating a judgment about the students’ point of view. Active listening does not require that you agree or disagree with the student’s point of view – only that you convince them that you understand their views.
Most of us start teaching with the belief that our job is to “tell” students information that will help them succeed in their classes. In fact, one of the most important skills applied by successful instructors is listening. Students are not always very skilled at communicating in a way that will help us help them. When they feel frightened, threatened, angry, or depressed they tend to be even less able to communicate accurately or perform effectively.

This problem is complicated by the fact that most of our interactions with students are in print on discussion boards or in email messages. In these settings, we are challenged to interpret student meaning when the critical “non verbal” facial expressions and tone of voice that help us interpret the emotional side of communication are missing.
As educators, the more we listen actively, the more a student will trust us.

There is considerable research evidence for the use of active listening (and active reading of Internet communication). A principle drawn from this research could be stated as the listening principle, where “the more that we listen carefully to people who are describing emotionally-charged experiences and non-judgmentally paraphrase back to them what they told us, the more they will trust us and the less negative emotion and stress they will experience” (Mineyama et al, 2007).

The psychological reason for the increased trust and decreased negative emotion is that people who feel they’ve been understood when they experience strong negative emotions about problems gain a greater sense of being in control of the problems they are describing.
The LiSA strategy described next is the approach that most psychologists use to help them implement the listening principle and “hear” (or read) accurately what someone is trying to communicate.

**Listen, Summarize, Ask (LiSA)**

- **Listen** very carefully when someone is speaking or read carefully what they have written and do not interrupt.
- **Summarize** or paraphrase back to them briefly what they've said verbally or in print - in a neutral style (“What I heard (understood) you (to write) say is...”)
- **Ask** for confirmation (“Am I correct?”) and wait for a reply.
- **IF** they reply “No”, **THEN**
  - ask “Please try again and correct my understanding” and then repeat steps 1 through 3 (above) until they agree that you understand, or
  - IF they repeat themselves, AND refuse to accept that you understand when you try twice, THEN STOP and reschedule the conversation for another time by suggesting “We don’t seem to understand each other, why don’t we take a break and come back to this at ...[mutually agree to a specific time and place.”)
- **IF** they reply “yes” that you do understand them, **THEN** decide whether you can handle their problem now and describe what you can and/or can’t do OR if you need some time to think about it then say or write “I’ll get back to you by (name a day) with a suggestion.”
Thank you for taking the time to complete this presentation.

References