

Evaluating Listening Using *The Daily Show*: Analyzing How Critical Listening Influences Communication Skills

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Recommended Courses:

Introduction to Communication, Public Speaking, Communication Theory, Persuasion, Improving Communication Skills, Introduction to Media

Student Goals & Learning Outcomes:

By completing this activity, students should be able to:

- ☑ Understand how listening is not an automatic event and influences our communication with others
- ☑ Identify how possibility, plausibility, probability, and certainty relate to critical listening
- ☑ Evaluate how skepticism, true belief, and cynicism can interfere with effective critical listening
- ☑ Apply critical listening to their own communication, media literacy, and critical thinking skills

Rationale:

This activity emphasizes how communication classrooms can discuss and implement effective critical listening skills. Students often associate listening with the act of hearing, but listening is a more complex process that involves the creation of meaning; therefore students often underestimate its value. Moreover, becoming a critical listener also requires the development of additional skills. Through this activity, students assess how possibility, plausibility, probability, and certainty relate to improving their critical listening skills. Acquiring critical listening skills is vital to improving one's ability to communicate with other people, to develop intimate relationships with others, to increase one's media literacy, and to become an effective public speaker.

These discussion questions and video clips provide students with the opportunity to identify, examine, and assess critical listening. Through a visual example of how possibility, plausibility, probability, and certainty relate to critical listening, this media clip provides students with the opportunity to assess how and when critical listening occurs. Using these observations, students can also evaluate to what extent critical listening determines the quality and importance of the information presented. Through examples from *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* in which Jon specifically focuses on the lack of attention to detail by a media outlet, students can start to understand the difference between listening and critically listening to someone. Because Jon Stewart uses humor to illustrate and emphasize the flaws in specific media reports, students can start to assess how critical thinking will improve their own communication skills.

Directions & Explanation:

Prior to class, students should read the chapter in their textbook that covers listening and communication. This information is well explained using Rothwell's (2013) *In the company of others: An introduction to communication, 4th edition*. Instructors should obtain an episode of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* in which Jon finds fault in the logic of a media report. For example, Jon Stewart discusses Fox News and their coverage of the Ferguson protests in this clip:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0i8-ZNLEeag>.

Once class begins, start a discussion on the difference between hearing and critical listening. Assess how possibility, plausibility, probability, and certainty relate to improving their critical listening skills. Ask students to conceptualize these terms based on their initial reading and class discussion. After this initial dialogue, play one of the clips of the actual news broadcast that Jon Stewart references. The news broadcast is included within *The Daily Show* clip, but be careful not to reveal to the students that the story comes from *The Daily Show* yet. Also be certain to NOT play the visual aspect to allow students to only use their listening skills thus far. Once the clip has been played, divide students into small groups and have them answer the following questions:

- 1) Which aspect of the news story is possible?
- 2) Which aspect of the news story is plausible?
- 3) Which aspect of the news story is probable?
- 4) Which aspect of the news story is likely certain?

Following their conversations, gather the class back together as a whole to discuss what themes emerged within the small group discussions. Using the video clip, students can also debate how their understanding of possibility, plausibility, probability, and certainty may have changed.

Debriefing:

After the students have conversed about their initial observations, play the video clip (visual and audio) with Jon Stewart's commentary. Through the use of humor, Stewart stresses the flaws and absurdities within the report. Using humor is vital to this activity since, as Kaufmann (2010) observed, "students began developing an awareness that multiple reading positions were not arbitrary, but rather were socially constructed and ideologically charged in distinct ways" (p. 47). Humor is also a multi-contextual genre in itself that allows for multiple readings within its text. Thus, it is the ideal source for students to start to critically listen to the media example in opposing ways through the use of Stewart's humor. Debrief using the following questions:

- 1) In what ways does Jon Stewart's commentary address skepticism? How does that change your initial observations about the media report?
- 2) In what ways does Jon Stewart's commentary address true belief? How does that change your initial observations about the media report?
- 3) In what ways does Jon Stewart's humor focus on cynicism? How does that change your initial observations about the media report?

Typical Results:

Students enjoy incorporating a popular culture reference, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, into their classroom learning. The show airs on Comedy Central weeknights and attracts numerous college-aged viewers. According to CNN, in 2012, the Pew Research Center for People and the Press concluded that 39% of the show's viewers are between 18 to 29 years old (Collinson, 2015). Therefore, while students may be reluctant to embrace critical listening and believe it is an automatic part of their daily routine, this activity demonstrates how critical listening is unique and vital to students' interpersonal communication, public speaking development, and media literacy.

References:

- Collinson, S. (2015). How Jon Stewart changed politics. *CNN*. Retrieved from: <http://www.cnn.com/2015/02/10/politics/how-jon-stewart-changed-politics/>
- Kaufmann, J.J. (2010). The practice of dialogue in critical pedagogy. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 60(5), 456-476.
- Rothwell, J.D. (2013). *In the company of others: An introduction to communication*, 4th edition. New York: Oxford University Press.