

Listening Reflection Essay: Appreciative Listening

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When we listen to a podcast, binge our comfort TV show, attend a performance at the theatre, have a dance party to our favorite tunes, or engage in a friend's story, we are embracing listening appreciatively. Every day we engage in listening more than any other form of communication. Whether the listening take place in a discriminative, comprehensive, therapeutic, critical or appreciative manner, it's important to recognize when certain listening types are appropriate. Not all communication is intended to receive an oral response but rather to elicit emotional responses and serve as a personal outlet.

Appreciative listening is an extremely personalized process to gather sensory stimulation for entertainment or aesthetic purposes. Everyone has a unique appreciative listening formula that involves a range of preferences of musical genre, themes, TV shows, talk radio, film, theatre, podcasts, audio books and so on. It's important to take the time to explore the artistic expressions of others within noise and silence to discover how art personally speaks to you and changes the way you perceive.

Mozart once said, "the music is not in the notes, but in the silence between." (Mozart, n.d.) When we truly listen to all parts of an artistic expression and soak in it, we uncover the depth. Appreciative listening not only extends to tangible art forms, but also to environmental sounds that are worth taking a moment to slow down, breathe and attend to. For example, valuing the rain pattering on your roof at night as you gracefully drift off to sleep, a distant bird singing when dawn arrives, or the ding of the oven when your mom finishes baking chocolate chip cookies. After this course, I am conscious that appreciating spoken art is one of my favorite ways to tune-in, learn and grow through listening.

In like manner, noticing environmental sounds is to admire the connectedness and beauty in stillness. The textbook quotes novelist-essayist Alice Walker perfectly, "if you are quiet enough you hear incredible things... you begin to realize that you are everyone and everyone is you." (Andrew Wolvin, Carolyn Gwynn Coakley, 1996, pg. 368) Appreciating environmental sounds is one of the greatest ways to develop particularly in a spiritual sense. I've always had

an appreciation for environmental sounds. However, this course highlighted how noise impacts my mood and communication style. Through my studies, it's clear that pausing to evaluate how noise affects my mood improves the way I listen to others.

When it comes to listening to other forms of artistic expression such as audio books, podcasts or talk radio, analyzing the oral style of a piece can be a powerful tool. Doing so requires filtering our natural responses to sounds. It's essential to focus on the rhetorical style of a work to discover your personal appreciative listening formula. Observe features such as the clarity, force and liveliness of a speaker's rhetoric to determine your personal style and appreciate the power of a quality speaker. (Andrew Wolvin, Carolyn Gwynn Coakley, 1996, pg. 367)

In addition, through the works and experiences of others, we are able to find solace and pleasure. Appreciative listening to music can elicit a sensual, emotional or intellectual response or a mixture of two or three factors at a higher level of appreciation. Sensuality refers to the physical influence music has on one's body. Does a particular beat make you want to get up and dance the night away? Or rather make you want to slowly sway back and forth in awe? An emotional response is how a piece makes you feel. What kind of music makes you smile? Do you ever find yourself crying to a song? I know I do! Ask yourself why and dig deeper. I recognize there is a reason we experience a range of extreme emotions to certain melodies. It's worth uncovering why certain songs or themes elicit emotional responses in order to become in touch with your feelings and efficiently communicate with others. Lastly, music involves an intellectual aspect. Concentrating on what's occurring "in order to appreciate the sounds and their manipulation" is an important part of appreciating and practicing music. (Andrew Wolvin, Carolyn Gwynn Coakley, 1996)

In my personal experience, I relate to music on all three levels. For example, Dua Lipa creates a variety of songs I deeply appreciate such as "Hallucinate." (Dua Lipa, Frances, SG Lewis, Stuart Price, 2020, track 9) I recognize the sensual value because "Hallucinate" is one of

many tracks that makes me want to dance. This can be explained by Dua Lipa's disco 80s influence. According to The New York Times, her debut album *Futura Nostalgia* includes "favored up-tempo, dancey and joyous-sounding tracks that, even when they are about breaking up, encourage sweat, movement and optimism." (Joe Coscarelli, 2020) When listening to her groovy beats, I can't help but move! At the same time, I notice the emotions the song provokes. I am radiating with confidence and excitement! At an intellectual level, I have background knowledge of music through my own experience with instruments and manipulation of sounds that I can distinguish and appreciate while jamming out. Even if one hasn't quite developed their personal connection to the arts, one can engage intellectually by considering the way sounds are presented throughout the piece.

Moreover, Appreciative listening increases our sense of self. By discovering our perceptions of various artforms, identifying what kinds of art we prefer, and examining how our previous experience and education impacts our listening, we can get to know ourselves through appreciating music, theatre, audio books, tv, radio and all the like. (Andrew Wolvin, Carolyn Gwynn Coakley, 1996)

The process of listening in any context requires one's full attention. According to Kaufmann, author of *Sensible Listening*, the process of listening appreciatively consists of attraction to the stimulus, a creative spark that connects with the right-brain and encourages us to return to it, and our left-brain deciphering if the piece is worth retaining focus. (Andrew Wolvin, Carolyn Gwynn Coakley, 1996, pg. 364) When I am listening to a piece, I often catch my brain going through this process.

When a new song is recommended to me, I listen to understand if the beats, rhythms and dynamics connect with the right side of my brain, while the left side of my brain critically analyzes the lyrics and progression to decide if I enjoy the piece as a whole. When I enjoy a song, I immediately add it to a Spotify playlist, research the meaning behind the lyrics, and learn the chords. After listening and conducting research, I fully embrace the piece by participating

alongside using my piano, guitar, ukulele or voice. Music is the hobby I am most passionate about. By directly involving myself in the art form after effectively listening appreciatively, I am gaining experience, enhancing my skills and creating in addition to consuming the arts.

“Listening to others perform without performing oneself is limiting. We should involve students in creating the art form. In this way they can better understand the conversations of art and become more artistic as listeners and viewers.” (Andrew Wolvin, Carolyn Gwynn Coakley, 1996, pg. 376)

After all, I learned how to write music by listening to and analyzing the patterns of my favorite singer-songwriters. For example, Taylor Swift has taught me several lessons by closely listening to her discography since childhood. After consistently listening to and learning how to play alongside her music, I discovered her songs typically follow a creative variation of the same four chords: EM, G, C and D (as with most pop music). I also noticed the way she formats a song is typically verse one, pre-chorus, chorus, verse two, pre-chorus, chorus, bridge, chorus, chorus. Taylor Swift uses vivid storytelling to convey her thoughts which is a powerful tool to draw listeners in, particularly in the United States where “Americans love to listen to stories.” (Andrew Wolvin, Carolyn Gwynn Coakley, 1996, pg. 371) By appreciating her music, I can incorporate her ideas into my own creative work. This is one of the most beautiful ways humans can connect with art, apply concepts to their own work and altogether benefit from listening.

It's very common for artists to be inspired by listening to others. For instance, Disney+ star Olivia Rodrigo who is currently dominating the charts recommends effective appreciative listening in order to hone skills. She advises, “listen to music like a songwriter. I have grown exponentially from this.” (Elana Rubin, 2021) Olivia Rodrigo is inspired by Taylor Swift in the same regard I am. To magnify the power of her music, she adds, “I'm obsessed with the way that Taylor paints pictures and her imagery is fantastic, and her storytelling is insane. I don't think I'm as good of a storyteller as she is yet, but I always try to put aspects of that sort of

narrative, singer-songwriter-y lyricism in my songs.” (Elana Rubin, 2021). Olivia Rodrigo acknowledges the impact that listening to others has had on her songwriting journey.

There are many benefits to listening appreciatively. However, there are challenges associated with this type of listening. For starters, if one doesn’t possess a willingness to listen appreciatively, they cannot begin to receive the impact of the arts. If one refuses to let the piece have the impact its designed to, the entire point will be missed.

In addition, it’s important to understand that not everyone is going to enjoy the same forms of presentation or topics. Different interests and perceptions can lead to miscommunication. For example, one may find the dialogue of a thriller movie to be intriguing and exciting. However, another person may watch that same movie, be uncomfortable and not a fan. Understanding and accepting one’s unique personal formula as well as other’s right to form their own interpretation of art is a way to overcome this communication barrier.

Another concern is that some of us with artistic backgrounds can’t enjoy other’s work without critiquing it. Paul Friedman, who writes about training people to be appreciative listeners, said, “If the listener becomes too concerned with the principles of musical form and structure, his or her enjoyment of the pure musical experiences may be diminished.” (Andrew Wolvin, Carolyn Gwynn Coakley, 1996, pg. 365) An example includes theatre people who are trained to study all elements of a production and cannot enjoy a show because they’re too busy analyzing. Although I understand some people feel this way, for the most part I can’t relate. Especially after learning about appreciative listening, the several musical productions throughout my life doesn’t stop me from putting my background aside in an effort to be willing to give artistic pieces a chance.

All in all, appreciative listening is a very personalized activity that all of us take part in some way or another. Spoken art can be observed in so many ways and it’s up to the listener to discover their preferences. Our unique formulas change the way we interact with art as well as communicate and listen to others. When you’re listening to any story, consider the power of

effective appreciative listening. By submerging yourself in a variety of artistic scenes and being open to receive, one can truly benefit from listening appreciatively.

## References

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