

# Hyperactive Listening

This is a set of group games which focus on critical and strategic analysis. In each game, players present hopes or fears. These may be societal—like hoping for the end of global warming or fearing continually rising inequality—or personal—like fearing you need a root canal, or hoping to live in a tiny house. In the final game, the group works together to simulate the systems involved, to assess risks and opportunities, and strategize about achieving what’s hoped for, or avoiding what’s feared.

## Warm Up Games.

*Before playing the full game, groups are encouraged to try these three warm up games. They are designed to be played in groups of 3-6.*

**#1 Clarifying Questions.** Each player shares a concern or aspiration present in their life right now. The person to their left gets to ask ONE clarifying question, and the sharer answers. After ONE clarifying question, someone else presents a new concern/aspiration. If a player thinks a question is particularly insightful or shrewd, they might high-five the question-asker.

INSERT EXAMPLE

**#2 Hopeless but Worth Considering.** A quadrant is drawn on a whiteboard.

INSERT QUADRANT

The y-axis runs from Hopeless → Hopeful, and x-axis from Dumb → Worth Considering Strategies. Players call out world issues or concerns that they believe are hopeless but worth considering. The group decides where on the graph these issues belong. The goal is to find a concern feels hopeless for those in the room, but also seems worth strategizing about by those in the room, the speaker gets a point.

INSERT EXAMPLE

**#3 Dream Teams.** Players take turns sharing a concern or aspiration present in their life right now. After each person shares, another player responds with a “dream team” -- a list of either specific people or specific professions that would be useful in neutralizing the concern/fulfilling the aspiration. Players should take the concern/aspiration at face value and work to find a dream team that would help. They should *not* try to talk the sharer out of the concern.

INSERT EXAMPLE

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# Full Game: Hyperactive Listening

Each player comes with a hope or fear they'd like to submit for consideration by the group. Optionally, you may take a few minutes before play begins to allow everyone to think of something.

## Roles:

1. In each round, the *presenter* is the player sharing their fear or hope. This fear or hope is called the *topic*.
2. The *conductor* moves the group through the phases of the game. Ideally, this person is familiar with the game.
3. The *interviewer* will ask the presenter clarifying questions. A *talking stick* is used to make sure only one person is the interviewer at a time. If someone wants to become the interviewer, they must ask for the stick.

## Game Play:

Players sit in a circle. Group members take turns being the *presenter*. The group interacts with the presenter's topic in five stages.

**(1) The group listens to the presenter.** The presenter describes their concern or aspiration.

**(2) The interviewer asks the presenter clarifying questions.** The interview should clarify what exactly concerns the presenter, or what exactly their aspiration is, and draw out the stakeholders/entities/or factors that are involved in its realization. In the next phase, group members will role-play these stakeholders/entities/factors, so the interviewer should get at their interests and context.

**(3) The group simulates the topic.** The goal of the simulation is to understand what entities are involved, what their motivations and interests are, and how the entities relate to one another. The conductor assigns roles to members of the group. These could be people (like the presenter's mother, boss, or the CEO of Google), or more abstract entities like auto companies, the consumer, or the total greenhouse gas load. Once assigned a role, the simulator will try to

speak to their entity's interests and indicate how their entity relates to other entities. The presenter and interviewer work with the simulator until the presenter feels that the simulation of each role is accurate. This assignment and tweaking of roles continues until the presenter feels that all the relevant entities are modeled in the simulation, constituting a comprehensive simulation of the topic.

**(4) The group researches the topic.** After simulation is at least sort-of successful, someone announces that it's time for research. The interviewer may ask some clarifying questions of the speaker, this time focusing on more quantitative/data driven issues. The *interviewer* and *conductor* ask other members, assigning research tasks to actors, who google to answer questions related to the topic. Or actors may volunteer to google a thing. Actors and researchers nominate themselves by saying "I will research" or may nominate another by saying "would you research".

**(5) Finally, each researcher reports their results.**

After the reports are finished the presenter thanks the group, there is silence again, and a new player presents their concern/aspiration.

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## Notes

*For advanced players, see [here](#) for variations on the game and for versions requiring more practice.*

*Game design by [Joe Edelman](#), as inspired by [Bret Victor](#)'s work on *Dynamic Conversation*, by [playback theater](#), by Quaker "Meeting for Business", by Co-counseling, and of course by [active listening](#).*

*Refinements by Bret Victor, the Communication Design Group, and Lily Lamboy.*