PARAPHRASING

WHY:

- Paraphrasing is a fundamental listening skill. It is the foundation for many other facilitative listening skills, including mirroring, gathering, and drawing people out.

- Paraphrasing has both a calming effect and a clarifying effect. It reassures the speaker that his or her ideas are worth listening to. And it provides the speaker with a chance to hear how his/her ideas are being heard by others.

- Paraphrasing is especially useful on occasions when a speaker’s statements are convoluted or confusing. At such times, the paraphrase will help the speaker gauge how well his/her ideas are getting across.

- In sum, paraphrasing is the tool of choice for supporting people to think out loud.

HOW:

- Use your own words to say what you think the speaker said.

- If the speaker’s statement is one or two sentences, use roughly the same number of words when you paraphrase it.

- If the speaker’s statement is many sentences long, summarize it.

- Preface your paraphrase with a comment like one of these: “It sounds like what you’re saying is . . .” “This is what I’m hearing you say . . .” “Let me see if I’m understanding you . . .”

- When you have completed the paraphrase, look for the speaker’s reaction. Say something like, “Did I get it?” Verbally or nonverbally, s/he will indicate whether or not s/he feels understood. If not, keep asking for clarification until you understand what s/he meant.