



# The Aspirin of Crisis Negotiation: Judging the Use of Active Listening Skills (ALS) by Negotiators

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## ABSTRACT

**Research Summary.** Crisis negotiation is a demanding communicative event that saves lives. It requires several skills, most critically active listening skills (ALS). Role-playing is the primary method for teaching these essential skills. One southern university hosts an annual competition where crisis negotiation teams resolve a scenario while being judged and scored by experts. Using these judges' feedback, this study examines their perceptions of the negotiators' ALS skills and how frequently each skill is used in a role-playing scenario.

**Policy Implications.** The results suggest that crisis negotiators should practice ALS during role-play training (RPT) to become more conversational. Although RPT takes more time than classroom training, crisis negotiators must prioritize it. If negotiators do not make ALS a priority and use them to demonstrate empathy, develop rapport, and influence to ultimately attempt to change the subject's behavior, they risk escalating critical incidents. This escalation could lead to injury or even death.

**Keywords:** crisis negotiation, hostage negotiation, active listening skills (ALS), role-play training (RPT)



## Introduction

Law enforcement personnel are increasingly utilizing crisis negotiation as a tool (Van Hasselt et al., 2006). Its widespread use includes hostage situations, attempted suicides, and kidnappings. The value of crisis negotiation has been demonstrated through the successful resolution of tens of thousands of crises worldwide. Crisis negotiation has navigated the resolution of 95% of critical incidents without injury or death, while 78% of forceful assaults by law enforcement have resulted in injuries or deaths in hostage situations (Miller, 2006). Crisis negotiation tactics provide the perpetrator with time to process the situation and rationalize, thereby increasing the likelihood that they will be more receptive to a peaceful resolution (Hatcher et al., 1998).

A demanding communicative event, crisis negotiation requires several skills; active listening is the most critical (Braten et al., 2015; Herndon, 2009; Vecchi et al., 2019). Active listening skills (ALS) are among the most efficient and effective tools for law enforcement in saving lives during crisis negotiations (McMains, 2002; Noesner & Webster, 1997). They are among the most cost-effective tools to use and are integral to the negotiation process (McMains, 2002; Noesner & Webster, 1997; Royce, 2005; St. Yves et al., 2022; Van Hasselt et al., 2005, 2006).

Most information on the efficacy of ALS comes from self-reported data on surveys (Grubb et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2018; Poorboy, 2021). However, this data indicates negotiators feel that ALS is an essential part of negotiations (Grubb et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2018; Poorboy, 2021). When studying ALS, Webster (2004) expected it to be used frequently in crisis negotiation; however, he found it was used only occasionally, limiting the opportunities for study. Another limitation of the current literature is that it primarily focuses on the use of ALS by FBI agents. This study examines whether experts believe that law enforcement negotiators are utilizing these essential skills effectively. It expands its examination beyond the FBI population to compare negotiators from local, state, and other federal law enforcement agencies.

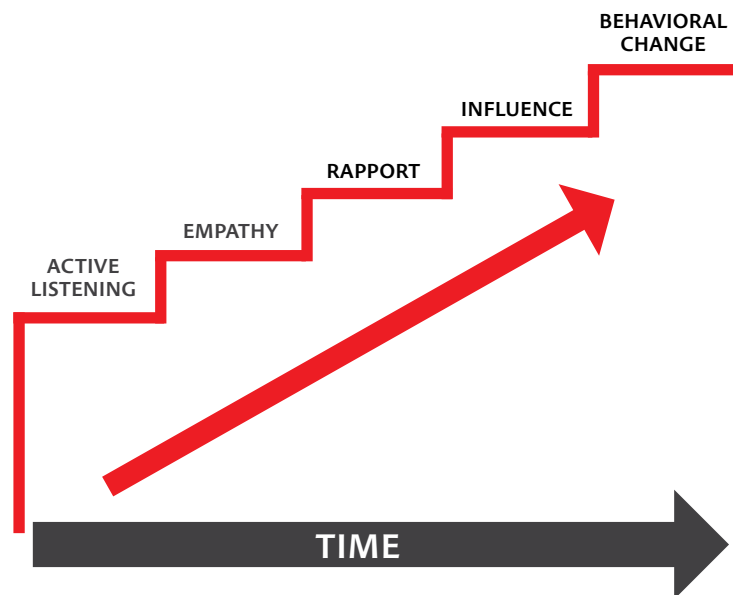
To effectively utilize ALS, the negotiator needs to be well-trained and well-practiced. Role-playing, a form of deliberate practice, plays a crucial role in this training. According to a growing body of scientific research, this type of training can elicit significant physiological activation (e.g., increased heart rate and respiratory rate, loss of fine motor skills) in police officers, similar to their responses in real-world situations (Anderson et al., 2019). Role-playing among hostage and crisis negotiation teams has possibly the most extensive history within law enforcement training (Van Hasselt et al., 2008). Role-playing is used to train negotiators by “the vast majority of crisis negotiation training programs and is considered the premier way to assess and train crisis negotiators” (Baruch & Zarse, 2012; Vecchi et al., 2005). It exposes negotiators to the physiological and psychological sensations of negotiations, allowing them to learn adaptive responses and offset negative impacts on performance (Di Notia & Hutha, 2019). Specifically, active listening and other behavioral competencies can be assessed using role-play training (Van Hasselt et al., 2008). As McMains (2002) aptly says, “Like aspirin, active listening skills need to be *used* to be effective.” Role-



playing as a practice bridges the gap between instruction and the real world, making it easier for participants to apply what they have learned correctly (Baruch & Zarse, 2012).

## ALS

Active listening skills (ALS) are verbal behaviors that contribute to building rapport and are considered powerful tools (Gabbert et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2018). These skills include using minimum encouragers, open-ended questions, reflecting, emotional labeling, paraphrasing, using “I” statements, making effective pauses, and summarizing. ALS are the first step in the Behavioral Change Stairway Model (BCSM), a crisis negotiation model developed and trained by the FBI. As shown in Figure 1, active listening is followed by empathy, which is then used to establish rapport. Empathy, or the understanding of another’s feelings, motives, and situations, is created through effective active listening (Poorboy, 2021). ALS enables the negotiator to work collaboratively with the subject, fostering increased trust and mutual affinity to gather more information and gain a deeper understanding of the subject’s circumstances while also reducing the subject’s emotional distress and promoting rational thinking (Poorboy, 2021; St. Yves et al., 2022). The negotiator can influence the subject only when the subject accepts the negotiator’s suggestions and then changes their behavior accordingly (e.g., releasing a hostage or surrendering).



**FIGURE 1:** Behavioral Change Stairway Model (BCSM) (Bennett, 2016)

Rapport-building skills, including ALS, have also gained much empirical support in investigative interviewing contexts of policing research (Alison et al., 2013; Bull & Milne, 2004; St-Yves & Deslauriers-Varin, 2009; Wachi et al., 2018). Creating rapport in an investigative interview increases the subject’s cooperation (Brimbal et al., 2021). Rapport-building skills also



elicit an increase in overall, accurate, and actionable detail when compared with methods that do not emphasize rapport-building (Brimbal et al., 2019; Dianiska et al., 2021). Building rapport is particularly critical in determining whether a suspect confesses to engaging in criminal behavior (Cleary & Bull, 2021). Active listening skills are a form of conversational rapport that enables the interviewee to be actively engaged in the interaction (Brimbal et al., 2021). They actively participate in an interrogation (Yang et al., 2017); therefore, engaging the interviewee with active listening skills enables them to participate more fully in a two-sided conversation and may lead to increased information yield.

Active listening skills advance the conversation by creating a context in which a participant feels comfortable, safe, and willing to talk, allowing the active listener to draw out more of the story (Hutchby, 2005). Active listening has been a key component of crisis negotiation since its inception in 1973 (Noesner, 2024). The untrained often think that crisis negotiators need to be smooth-talking; however, it is active listening that is the “backbone of negotiation” (Call, 2003; Royce, 2005).

Given the emphasis on ALS in the negotiation process, Vecchi et al. (2005) identified three core active listening and four supplemental skills. The core skills are mirroring, paraphrasing, and summarizing; the supplemental skills, which enhance the effectiveness of these core skills, include effective pauses, minimal encouragers, open-ended questions, and I-statements (Vecchi et al., 2005). The skill of mirroring, also known as reflecting, communicates to the subject that the negotiator hears and understands what the subject is saying, as demonstrated by repeating the last word or phrase. The negotiator is paraphrasing when they use their own words to repeat the subject’s meaning. During the summarizing step, the negotiator restates the emotion and content of the subject’s statement (i.e., “It sounds like you are saying...”) (McMains et al., 2021; Vecchi et al., 2005). To emphasize a point, negotiators use effective pauses and minimal encouragers, which are brief, well-timed responses such as “And?” Such responses demonstrate that the negotiator is listening (McMains et al., 2021). Open-ended questions begin with phrases like “Tell me...” “Explain...” or “Describe...” They encourage the subject to respond narratively and tell their story. I-statements are used to develop further rapport or make a personal disclosure when a subject verbally attacks the negotiator (McMains et al., 2021; Vecchi et al., 2005). The FBI developed the acronym MOREPIES as a memory aid for practically applying these skills:

- M**inimal encouragers
- O**pen-ended questions
- R**eflecting
- E**mootional labeling
- P**araphrasing
- I**-statements
- E**ffective pauses
- S**ummary



Numerous studies have identified the importance of ALS (See Grubb et al., 2019, for a complete list of studies). Ireland and Vecchi (2009, p. 216) state, "An effective communicator is an active listener and an effective talker." Negotiators from English police forces identified the use of active listening skills as an essential skill for crisis negotiators (Grubb et al., 2021). In a survey of 188 negotiators, active listening skills were identified as the most frequently cited key to success in a negotiation (Johnson et al., 2018). Poorboy (2021) reported similar findings in an online survey of 115 participants, with 100% of negotiator respondents rating ALS as "extremely" or "very important," and 96% of negotiator respondents reporting that they used ALS "always" or "very often."

## Role-Playing in Crisis Negotiation

While it is essential to be able to recite the active listening skills, it is even more crucial to learn how to use them effectively during crisis negotiations. Specifically, "the effective use of ALS and the ability to manage one's emotions despite the intense stress of a critical incident cannot be fully learned or assessed in the classroom" (Baruch & Zarse, 2012, p.46). One effective way to fully develop these skills is through role-playing and role-play tests (RPTs). Law enforcement frequently utilizes scenario-based training to acquire essential skills and facilitate motor learning. This "deliberate practice" training (Ericsson, 1998) allows officers to experience the physiological and psychological sensations triggered by stress and pressure in high-stakes scenarios. Training in this environment enables officers to condition themselves and develop adaptive stress responses. Increased exposure to occupationally relevant stress can also offset negative impacts on performance when a critical incident does occur (Di Noti & Hutha, 2019).

Role-playing facilitates learning by making the student an active participant (Kilgour et al., 2015). Rather than memorizing and recalling facts and figures, it enables a deeper level of learning, allowing students to apply the information in real time, reflect on how they are applying it, and internalize the knowledge. Role-playing is widely used in law enforcement for various types of assessments (Van Hasselt et al., 2005). For example, the FBI has utilized role-playing to assess active listening skills among crisis negotiators (Van Hasselt et al., 2005, 2006). In one study, the FBI evaluated the use of ALS by special agents in 12 scenarios before and after they completed the FBI National Crisis Negotiation Course (NCNC). Comparing pre- and post-course scores revealed improvements in emotional labeling, paraphrasing, and total ALS use. Reflecting and mirroring frequency also increased (Van Hasselt et al., 2006). In another study, the FBI compared the use of ALS between 25 FBI agents with no formal negotiation training and 25 expert FBI negotiators (Van Hasselt et al., 2005). Negotiation experts scored higher in their frequency of paraphrasing, emotional labeling, reflecting and mirroring, and overall active listening skills. Current literature primarily examines FBI personnel's use of ALS in crisis negotiation. Our study extends the studied population to include local and state law enforcement and corrections crisis negotiators' use of ALS during an RPT.



## The Current Study

The current study is a summative content analysis. The authors explored existing and emerging themes in RPT judges' perceptions of negotiators' ALS use at a time when they should be displaying their best work, specifically during a competition. By systematically identifying and coding these themes, the authors provide increased knowledge and understanding of the use of ALS in crisis negotiation training (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Specifically, the authors take a summative approach, starting with the keyword MOREPIES and expanding as other themes emerge.

The authors reviewed the feedback of 63 judges for 22 teams at a crisis negotiation competition held at a southern university in January 2023. The judges selected for the competition were subject matter experts. Given that active listening skills are essential to negotiation, we hypothesized that the judges' feedback would focus on the appropriate use of these skills.

## Method

The data analysis was a combination of deductive and inductive analysis. The deductive analysis involved reviewing feedback to specifically identify the skills outlined by several researchers as defining ALS (Van Hasselt et al., 2005; Zaisser & Staller, 2015). Inductive analysis was used to explore themes throughout the feedback. The unit of analysis was at the sentence level. To complete the analysis, the authors reviewed each of the judges' feedback forms to saturation over several months. First, they reviewed the forms to familiarize themselves with the content and context. During the subsequent reviews, they identified themes and pertinent notations for analysis, searching for existing and emerging themes.

The authors expected two themes to be present during their review:

**Theme 1: Emphasis on the importance of using ALS.** Given that research has demonstrated the effectiveness of these skills, judges are expected to document whether ALS skills were utilized during the role-play test and assess the overall quality of skill implementation.

**Theme 2: Focus on the use of individual skills.** The authors are interested in whether some skills are deemed more important or relevant than others and whether some are more frequently discussed or commented on during the judges' assessments.

## Sample

In January 2023, 22 teams competed in a crisis negotiation competition at a southern university. This was a two-day competition in which each crisis team participated in at least one



negotiation scenario involving multiple hostages. The teams came from many areas in the United States. They included local and state law enforcement and corrections agencies, as well as a couple of non-FBI federal government agencies. Each team was given a scenario, and the team lead was briefed at the beginning of the day. Teams were invited to set up a command center in one of the available classrooms or bring their command center and set it up in the parking lot. The teams negotiated primarily with the primary hostage taker; however, they are expected to deal with whatever the situation requires (e.g., talking to another hostage taker or a hostage if one gets on the phone).

Each team was judged by at least two experts in crisis negotiation. These individuals were deemed experts because each had at least 10 years of experience as a crisis negotiator with a local, state, or federal agency. Many of the judges had participated in this competition as judges on several occasions. The Institutional Review Board approved this study (#8093) at the university where the competition occurred. Judges were briefed on the research and then signed an informed consent form.

### *Instrumentation*

As part of the RPT, each judge filled out a form focusing on various aspects of the day's negotiations for each team. These forms were distributed electronically or in paper form, and judges updated them throughout the day. Completed copies of these forms were utilized for this study's analysis. The form instructed judges to complete each item on each team's form at least twice daily, once at the end of the morning session and once at the end of the afternoon session. However, most judges kept a running feedback commentary, recording the time and noting their feedback (e.g., 10:05 - good use of ALS). The judges evaluated participants on active listening skills, the pacing of communication with actors, and many other practices. However, this study focuses specifically on the judge's feedback regarding the use of ALS and the pace of communication.

Specific to the judge's evaluation of ALS skills within each negotiation, each judge assessed emotional labeling, paraphrasing, minimal encouragers, open-ended questions, effective pauses, mirroring, and I-messages. These skills are included in the official acronym MOREPIES (Zaisser & Staller, 2015). Judges were asked to circle each skill used, rate the overall use of ALS on a scale from 1 to 12, and provide specific feedback about these skills.

### *Coding and Analysis*

After reviewing six forms (9.5% of the data) together and verifying interrater reliability, the authors examined the remaining data independently, focusing on the two identified themes and any additional themes that emerged while periodically checking in. It is generally accepted that checking with coding partners to maintain clarity about coding is sufficient for interrater reliability (Patton, 2015). The data were analyzed using NVivo, where each completed form was uploaded. NVivo enables accessible thematic coding and facilitates various analytical graphs and visual representations of analysis.



In coding with NVivo, two separate counts were initially considered for this study. The first was the number of teams in the competition for which the specific feedback was given. The second was the number of times the feedback was provided across all teams. This information assisted with analysis on two levels. It identified the importance of a skill or theme and its presence in the judges' minds, as evidenced by the number of departments that received feedback on a particular skill. It also demonstrated the focus on a skill or theme and whether it was mentioned several times throughout each judge's form.

## Results

When searching for our first theme, the emphasis on the importance of using ALS in role-playing tests was mentioned by every judge, generally, and across all teams. General ALS skills were mentioned 45 times, more than any other category coded for this study (see Table 1 for coding related to our two themes). The content of this feedback included references to the success or failure in the overall use of ALS skills. Twenty-one mentions of ALS were positive evaluations of the use of these skills; four were neutral comments, and 20 discussed how to improve the use of ALS skills.

**TABLE 1.** Coded Themes

SKILL	# OF DEPARTMENTS THAT RECEIVED FEEDBACK	TOTAL NUMBER OF TIMES REFERENCED ACROSS DEPARTMENTS
General ALS	22	45
Minimum Encouragers	4	5
Open-ended Questions	15	27
Reflecting	9	16
Emotional Labeling	17	35
Paraphrasing	7	9
I-Statements	4	4
Effective Pauses	4	5
Summary	9	9

In our second theme, the use of individual skills, the skills coded were included in MOREPIES. There was considerable variation in the frequency with which judges mentioned various skills. Every skill was mentioned at least four times. The most frequently mentioned skill, emotional labeling, was mentioned almost nine times (8.75) more than the least frequently mentioned skill,



I-statements. While none of the MOREPIES skills were mentioned in every department, there was also considerable variability in the number of departments that received feedback on each skill. For instance, 17 teams received feedback on emotional labeling, while only four teams received feedback on minimum encouragers. Only two skills, open-ended questions and emotional labeling, were mentioned in more than half of the departments. Table 1 presents a breakdown of the skills coded, the number of departments that received feedback on each skill, and the total number of references to that skill across all departments.

Five additional categories arose from our analysis: anti-ALS, conversational skills, techniques, tone, and other. Anti-ALS coding related to comments pointing out activities contrary to active listening. Conversational skills coding related to comments specifically regarding a conversation that occurred. Techniques coded were not specifically related to ALS but still referred to the use of techniques, such as rapport building. Tone coding was about the negotiator’s tone. The other category included references to skills that are not ALS but were noted in the ALS section, such as minimization, which is an accusatory tactic in investigative interviewing literature.

Table 2 lists these additional categories, the number of departments for which each category was mentioned, and the overall number of times each category was mentioned in feedback. Again, there are differences in the frequency with which various categories were mentioned. Two categories, anti-ALS and conversational skills, were mentioned to each department. However, listening was only mentioned in five departments. Additionally, the most frequently referenced category, anti-ALS, was mentioned eight times. The least frequently referenced category was listening. Except for the anti-ALS and conversational skills categories, only pace was mentioned in over half of the departments; the remaining categories were mentioned in fewer than half of the departments.

**TABLE 2.** Additional Categories Related to ALS

SKILL	# OF DEPARTMENTS THAT RECEIVED FEEDBACK	TOTAL NUMBER OF TIMES REFERENCED ACROSS DEPARTMENTS
Anti-ALS	22	42
Conversational Skills	22	39
Listening	5	5
Technique	10	14
Tone	9	11
Pace	14	24
Other	7	10



Table 3 lists all coded items in descending order of frequency. Overall, general ALS skills were mentioned most frequently, with 45 references, and anti-ALS skills were referenced next most frequently, at 42 references. Conversational skills (39), emotional labeling (35), open-ended questions (27), and pace (24) are the following most frequent categories. Reflecting (16), summary (16), technique (14), and empathy (12) came next. Tone (9), summary (9), reflecting (9), paraphrasing (7), other (7), listening (7), effective pauses (5), minimum encouragers (5), and I-statements (4) were the least-mentioned skills.

**TABLE 3.** All Coding, in Order of Most to Least Frequently Referenced

SKILL	# OF DEPARTMENTS THAT RECEIVED FEEDBACK	TOTAL NUMBER OF TIMES REFERENCED
General ALS	22	45
Anti-ALS	22	42
Conversational Skills	22	39
Emotional Labeling	17	35
Open-ended Questions	15	27
Pace	14	24
Reflecting	9	16
Summary	9	16
Technique	10	14
Empathy	7	12
Tone	9	11
Other	7	10
Paraphrasing	7	9
Listening	6	7
Effective Pauses	4	5
Minimum Encouragers	4	5
I-Statements	4	4



## Discussion

Previous work has focused on using ALS or crisis negotiation skills within FBI populations. This study extends that work to local and state law enforcement and corrections populations. It provides a unique perspective into the perceptions of crisis negotiation experts regarding ALS use in a role-play competition. Crisis negotiation literature points to active listening skills as an important, if not essential, component of crisis negotiation (McMains, 2002; Noesner & Webster, 1997; Royce, 2005; St. Yves et al., 2022; Van Hasselt et al., 2005; Van Hasselt et al., 2006) and has embedded them into the framework of crisis negotiation since the beginning (Noesner, 2024). The role-play test is the second-best approach to training, outside of direct or natural observation, which is unrealistic given the dangers of real-world crisis negotiations (Van Hasselt et al., 2005). During crisis negotiation, “knowledge of principles of hostage negotiation is critical, but so are active listening skills and the management of personal emotions, such as anxiety and frustration” (Baruch & Zarse, 2012, p. 46).

Whether in RPT or actual crisis negotiations, negotiators recognize the importance of ALS. They should be on their “best behavior” given that they are being observed in a competitive environment or utilizing these skills to solve a real-world crisis. In this competition, experts were tasked with evaluating whether negotiators demonstrated these essential skills. Given the emphasis on ALS in crisis negotiation, we were interested in what this feedback would contain.

Our first anticipated theme, which was that judges would comment on the negotiator’s use of ALS skills, was present in our review. Each judge mentioned ALS skills, in general, in their feedback. However, this finding should be viewed cautiously because it suggests that the negotiators used the ALS skills. However, there was no quantitative analysis of the percentage of time ALS was used. Previous research has surmised that the use of ALS skills could be as low as 13% of the time or worse (6%) when minimum encouragers are removed (Webster, 2004).

Judges not only commented on ALS skills but also encouraged improvement and praised teams for utilizing ALS. The frequency and content of feedback on general ALS skills indicate that both negotiators and judges appreciated the importance of ALS skills. One judge said, “Remember, ALS is the foundation of the behavior continuum.” Another judge said, “More ALS—you want to ‘ALS’ the hostage taker to pieces!” Judges also discussed the importance of how the skills are used, with another judge saying, “Use the skills to move you forward, not just check them off the list.”

However, the theme of anti-ALS is contrary to sound negotiation tactics. For instance, Johnson et al. (2018) found that behaviors such as arguing, yelling, rushing the process, and being confrontational should be avoided. Webster (2004) found that negotiators often (94% of the time) employed skills such as confronting, suggesting, and offering advice. In this study, judges provided feedback on anti-ALS behavior twice as often as they offered praise for using general ALS. This is troubling and may indicate that negotiators are attempting to solve problems prematurely by acting quickly and with authority in the negotiation process rather than investing the necessary time to



build rapport. A successful negotiation cannot occur if negotiators do not use active listening, build rapport, and fight the urge to act (Van Hasselt et al., 2005; 2006). Judges noticed when ALS was not used appropriately. Their second most common comment was pointing out what behavior was antithetical to building rapport and ensuring the hostage taker felt heard. Such frequency validates the importance of ALS, deliberate practice training, and role-play so that negotiators improve their skills and become more natural at using ALS.

Regarding theme 2, it is undoubtedly the case that some skills were mentioned more frequently than others. Although Vecchi et al. (2005) suggested that core ALS skills, such as reflecting, paraphrasing, and summarizing, should be used more often, this study found that supplemental skills were mentioned much more frequently. Judges made multiple mentions of supplemental skills such as emotional labeling, open-ended questions, and reflecting and summarizing. This may indicate that the judges consider such skills important in building rapport and ensuring the hostage taker understands their purpose and motives. This study's findings on emotional labeling were consistent with those of Van Hasselt et al. (2005) on this skill. They found that expert negotiators recognized the importance of emotional labeling in building relationships and used this skill more frequently than non-expert negotiators. Conversely, the infrequency of mentioning I-statements suggests that judges and negotiators may not consider it an important skill. Most feedback and comments on emotional labeling were neutral, noting that it occurred. However, all four mentions of I-statements included examples of how to improve its use and encouraged doing so in the future. Judges emphasized improving both of these skills, which further provides evidence that a few judges felt that improvement of I-statements was necessary compared to emotional labeling.

Our review of the judges' feedback identified several key themes that were added to the study. Specifically, judges outlined things that were not ALS to note behavior that should be adjusted or changed. Recording specific actions or words may have been the judge's way of helping teams identify areas for improvement in the future. Notations of how negotiators were not engaging in ALS or executing ALS inappropriately provided valuable information. One judge pointed out that a participant "Almost always had a negative response to the demands and nothing to offer as an alternative." While this behavior does not fall in any of the identified MOREPIES categories, it does speak to the level of rapport being built. It defeats the purpose of ALS skills, which is to make the hostage taker feel heard and understood.

Given the importance of ALS in building rapport, the pace, tone, and quality of conversation are essential in executing these skills. As one judge said: "His ability to maintain a good 'conversation' with the [hostage takers] HTs helped keep negotiations continuing smoothly until the change in HT."



## Limitations and Future Directions

Although this study is an essential first step in gaining insight into how subject matter experts evaluate ALS skills in negotiators, it has limitations, and there is ample room for future research.

We were able to review the judges' comments and can entertain some thoughts around what it means for them to mention each of these skills and categories in various frequencies. However, we would have found it helpful to receive further input from the judges regarding their thought processes, the percentages of their scores based on the team's use of ALS, and whether they value some skills over others for building rapport. Future research may ask crisis negotiation experts to provide insight into how they view active listening skills overall and what they look for when evaluating a crisis negotiation team. Future research may also conduct a quantitative analysis comparing the use of ALS skills and other tools used throughout the day to gain insight into the proportion of crisis negotiation tactics that include the use of ALS.

Empirical support has established the validity of using rapport and active listening skills in other areas of policing, such as investigative interviews (Alison et al., 2013; Bull & Milne, 2004; St-Yves & Deslauriers-Varin, 2009; Wachi et al., 2018). However, to our knowledge, no empirical research has been conducted on the efficacy of ALS skills in negotiations. As ALS has been part of crisis negotiation since its beginning, research is needed to empirically test the impact of these skills on the crisis negotiation process. Future research could investigate the overall use of ALS and its impact on information yield. Studies could also explore specific skills and their differential impacts on information yield. A quantitative analysis can also determine the importance placed on individual ALS. Such research would benefit negotiators and law enforcement by providing more information about essential training.

## Conclusion

Role-playing is frequently used to train officers, particularly for crisis negotiation (Ericsson, 1998; Van Hasselt et al., 2005). It is well established that ALS is critical in building rapport (Alison et al., 2013; Brimbal et al., 2019; Bull & Milne, 2004) and that rapport is essential in crisis negotiations (McMains, 2002; Noesner, 2024; Noesner & Webster, 1997; Royce, 2005; St. Yves et al., 2022; Van Hasselt et al., 2005; Van Hasselt et al., 2006). However, the scholarly record has yet to reflect the importance or contributions of ALS to crisis negotiation outside the FBI. This study is the first step in expanding the literature to local and state law enforcement and corrections populations.

This study provides further insight into the importance of ALS by examining the perception of subject matter experts who assess ALS skills in an environment where crisis negotiators are expected to execute their skills to the best of their ability. Since ALS has been involved in crisis negotiation since its inception, the importance of these skills should be thoroughly studied. ALS



must be trained and then practiced regularly to use these critical skills proficiently in various law enforcement capacities.

Lastly, and most importantly, this study's results suggest that crisis negotiators must practice ALS more to become more proficient in its use and to avoid engaging in behaviors considered anti-ALS. During an RPT or a competition, these behaviors will result in critical feedback or the loss of points. However, there are real-world implications, including injury or the loss of life, if negotiators do not use ALS during critical incidents. Negotiators must prioritize using RPT to practice ALS, ensuring they are prepared to handle any crisis negotiation safely. Remember: Like aspirin, ALS must be used to be effective.



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