

From the Office of Disability Services

A Guide to working with Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students

A Synopsis of Deafness

Hearing loss affects more than 28 million people in the United States today. With the passing of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) law in 1990, an increased number of deaf and hard of hearing students are attending community colleges and universities, and looking for jobs.

Deafness is known as the invisible disability, it often goes undetected for an extended period of time. As a result, deaf individuals must learn, rather than acquire, their first language. Ways of communicating vary among these individuals and there is no right or wrong way to learn. Some individuals will use speech only; some will use a combination of sign language, fingerspelling, and speech; some will write; some will use body language and facial expressions to supplement their interactions. The important thing to remember is one deaf person's communication method does NOT represent the entire deaf population.

What does it mean to be hard of hearing? A person may be able to hear some individuals better than others, because the speaker's voice is generally outside the frequencies where the individual's hearing loss occurs. Whether a person has a significant hearing loss or a mild one, their dependence on acquiring and understanding sounds depends on the environment, the speaker, and the level of training received.

Hearing Aids and Cochlear Implants

Hearing aids and cochlear implants do not remedy the loss. Most hearing aids amplify a range of sounds specific to the individual's hearing loss. If a person has a loss in high frequencies but not the lower ones, most hearing aids will amplify only the high frequencies. Cochlear implants, on the other hand, are designed to bypass cochlear hair cells that are non-functioning and provide direct stimulation to the auditory nerve. Unfortunately, neither hearing aids nor cochlear implants discriminate between speech and background noise.

Do not assume a hard of hearing or deaf person with hearing aids is getting the complete information. A common example is when students are packing their books to leave class and the teacher announces a room change for the next class. Between looking down to pack books together and room noise, the student will not know the announcement has been made.

Lip Reading (or Speech Reading)

Lip reading is a skill that many deaf and hard of hearing individuals develop. These people will say, "If I can't see you, then I can't hear you." Nonetheless, **only 33%** of English speech sounds are visible on the mouth. Thus, lip reading involves using residual hearing, watching body language and facial expressions, and knowledge of the topic to correctly fill in the blanks. **Not everyone will be able to lip read in the language-**

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dense environment. A skilled lip reader will not be able to follow group discussions or instruction that is given while the instructor is looking down or has his/her back to the class. Students who lip read must concentrate intensely in order to acquire information. Brief breaks during the day help them release energy and/or relax.

Successful Communication

The key to conveying valuable information to deaf and hard of hearing students or clients is working with service providers or utilizing other creative resources and technology that will provide successful communication. Working with service providers does not need to be a daunting task and won't be once you understand what is involved. Utilizing modern technology can also be very beneficial when the need to talk with a deaf individual arises.

Sign Language Interpreters:

The interpreter is not the student's peer, but an adult in a professional role.

Interpreters facilitate communication between deaf/hard of hearing and hearing individuals by conveying all auditory and signed information ensuring individuals may fully interact. Interpreting may be done manually (using American Sign Language) or orally. Instructors should refrain from asking the interpreter to perform other tasks as it may interfere with the quality of communication provided and compromise the role of the interpreter. In other words, the interpreter should not participate in class.

Some ground rules include:

- 1. If the instructor or fellow students want to speak with the deaf or hard of hearing student they should talk directly to the student and not to the interpreter.**
- 2. Give the interpreter copies of all handouts.**
- 3. The instructor may want to set up a system in the classroom where only one student speaks at a time.**
- 4. The instructor should be aware of his or her own rate of speech. It may be necessary to slow down and include more pauses.**
- 5. The interpreter should not be thought of as a participant in class. They do not perform tasks.**
- 6. The interpreter is to interpret all information that is transmitted, including private but audible comments and environmental sounds.**
- 7. The lighting of the room where the interpreting is occurring should be adjusted in such a way as to not create shadows or glare for the deaf or hard of hearing students.**

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8. Whenever visual aids or demonstration will be used, allow time for a visual shift from the interpreter to the visual aid.

9. Captioned films and videotapes are strongly recommended to allow the student direct visual access to information.

Captionists:

Captionists take the instant transcription of the spoken word and change it to the English text using a stenotype machine, laptop computer or real-time software. The text is then displayed on a computer monitor or other display device for the student who is deaf or hard of hearing to read.

Notetakers:

Notetakers provide a written source of information after a class lecture. Notetakers are important because the student with a hearing loss will have his or her eyes occupied while watching an interpreter or the captionist, thus impeding their ability to take notes.

Assistive Listening Devices (ALD):

Ideal in a classroom setting, a small microphone with a transmitter is worn by the instructor to increase volume and clarity of class lectures. The student wears the receiver.

If any concerns involving the interpreter or the captionist in your classroom should arise, we ask you direct them to the individual providing the services. If your concerns cannot be resolved directly you should then direct your concerns to:

Molly Clevenger, Coordinator of Disability Services, at 1.800.628.7722 ext 2604 or mclevenger@sscc.edu