

Hearing Impairments

DESCRIPTION AND FACTS:

A student with a hearing impairment may be hard to recognize in the classroom. Some students use hearing aids and have learned to lip-read or sign. A person with no hearing is deaf. "Hard of hearing" defines a hearing impairment in which the sense of hearing, although diminished, is functional. The following list describes some facts about individuals with hearing impairments:

- An estimated 15 million Americans have some degree of hearing loss. Two million five hundred thousand Americans are congenitally deaf or lost their hearing before the age of five.
- Not all people with hearing impairments are good lip readers. Lip reading skill has no correlation to a person's intelligence.
- Only 26-30% of spoken English can be lip-read.
- Not all people with hearing impairments know how to sign. Not all students with hearing impairments use interpreters. Some prefer to communicate through lip reading and some prefer sign language.
- A hearing aid does not correct a hearing loss like glasses correct vision problems. Most persons with hearing impairments have sensory neural hearing losses and the clarity of speech is affected. The hearing aid does not make speech more clear; it merely amplifies the sound.
- Many people with hearing impairments are easily understood. Others cannot monitor the volume and tone of their speech and may be initially hard to understand.
- Students who have hearing impairments, just like students who do not have hearing impairments, vary to some degree in their communication skills.
- A student with a hearing impairment acquires English skills similarly to non-native speakers of English.
- The terms "deaf-and-dumb" and "deaf mute" are no longer acceptable. These terms carry a negative connotation and should not be used.

POSSIBLE BARRIERS:

- Lack of interpreters or people who understand sign language
- Decreased awareness of auditory cues in communication

INTERACTION WITH AN INDIVIDUAL WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENT:

Each student functions differently and is the best source of information about communication tips. The following suggestions will hopefully help with your initial encounter with an individual with a hearing impairment.

1. Get the individual's attention before speaking.
2. Look at the individual when you speak.
3. Do not block the area around your mouth as it may inhibit lip reading.
4. Speak naturally and clearly. Slowing down slightly may help. Do not exaggerate lip movement and do not shout.
5. Try to avoid standing in front of windows or other light sources. The glare from behind makes it difficult to read lips and other facial expressions.
6. Do not hesitate to ask the student to repeat if you do not understand. If repeating does not work, use a pen and paper. Communication is the goal; the method is unimportant.
7. If a student is using an interpreter, speak directly to the student, not the interpreter.
8. Short sentences are easier to understand than longer sentences with several clauses.
9. If the student does not understand, try repeating, and if the student still does not understand, rephrase a thought or use a different word order rather than repeating the same words. Do not be alarmed if the student does not understand and you cannot understand him or her. You will become accustomed to each other in time.
10. It is impossible to lip-read a word that the student has never seen before. If time permits, it helps to write the word and then let him or her see how it looks on the lips.
11. Facial expressions, gestures and other body language help convey the message.
12. If a sign language interpreter is present, request him or her to interpret - even for social and non-academic conversations.

TEACHING A STUDENT WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENTS:

1. Front Row Seating: Students with hearing impairments should sit near the instructor or speaker. A hearing aid is virtually ineffective if the instructor or speaker is more than three to eight feet from the hearing aid receiver. It is very hard to read lips at a distance.

2. Vocabulary: Some students with hearing impairments will have difficulty with vocabulary. This difficulty may arise in reading tests, in reading class materials, in reading lecture notes, or in taking tests. This is not a reflection of intelligence. The students have not learned the meaning of words because they have not heard them. The students are capable of learning vocabulary. They may, however, take more time to digest the material, or require more explanation. Sometimes it is helpful to give the student a brief outline of your lecture or any written material to compensate for what she or he has not heard. It is even more helpful if the notes are given in advance of the lecture. The student can become familiar with the language and vocabulary you are going to use.

3. Tests: It is the student's responsibility to arrange tests outside the classroom. Test accommodations will be listed on the *Authorized Accommodation Memo*.

4. If a student is utilizing an interpreter, you should know that:

- Interpreters are paid professionals who have gone through specialized training.
- An interpreter may be distracting at first. However, your students will soon become accustomed to the interpreter's presence.
- Interpreters follow a code of ethics and view all information from an interpreting situation as confidential.
- Interpreters are hired by the Lori Musser, Coordinator of Student Disability Services. Questions or concerns regarding interpreters can be answered by Lori Musser (Ext. 9516).
- Interpreters will sign the comments and questions of class members as well as everything you say. Interpreters will interpret in a manner that closely conveys the content intended by the speaker.
- Interpreters are not there to answer the student's questions. If the student has a question, he or she should direct it to you. The interpreter can voice the student's question if you do not understand.
- If you have a question, direct it to the student with a hearing impairment, not the interpreter.
- The interpreter is a few words behind the speaker and needs time to finish, so that the student can respond.
- Interpreters will not give their opinion of a student's progress as this violates the student's rights.
- Interpreters cannot be used as proctors for tests.
- Because the student and the interpreter experience mental, physical and visual fatigue after a lengthy lecture (more than an hour and 15 minutes), they need a break.
- If the class contains technical vocabulary, the interpreter and student with a hearing impairment must learn new signs or even create signs for vocabulary that has no signs. Therefore, it is most helpful to give the student and interpreter outlines of the lecture or written material in advance of the class. Desk copies of textbooks may be acquired by the interpreter from Lori Musser.
- The student and interpreter should be positioned so the student can see you and the interpreter simultaneously.
- In math classes or where the instructor frequently uses the blackboard, the interpreter may request to shadow the instructor. This means the interpreter will stand close to that section of the board that is being written on by the instructor. This allows the student to see both the signs and the writing.

5. If a student is not using an interpreter, you should know that:

- Classroom discussions are very hard to follow for a student who has a hearing impairment. The student must first locate the speaker who may have finished most of the comment by the time the student finds them. Repetitions or summaries of the most relevant comments are helpful.
- Student questions may be missed by the student who has a hearing impairment. You can help by repeating the question.
- Movies without captions are hard for a student with a hearing impairment to follow. There are captioning services on campus for movies created by instructors. Contact Tara Schneider

(9792) if you need to have a movie captioned that you created yourself. If captioned films are not available, a written summary or outline of the most important points is necessary. If your class is a Life Long Learning (distance learning) Class, please contact Robin Douglas (ext. 9887) to assist in scripting any audio portions of your class.

- Verbal class assignments and due dates, examination dates, changes in the normal class schedule, special dates and/or instructions, etc., may be missed by the student. Written instructions should be provided to avoid confusion.
- Answers to homework problems read aloud are very difficult for students with hearing impairments. While they are trying to check an answer, they may miss the next answer. If possible, use the overhead projector or give the student written answers.
- Frequently, a student who is lip-reading has to mentally “fill in the gaps” during communication. A valuable technique is to write on the blackboard a key word of the topic being discussed. This is especially important when the discussion topic changes frequently.
- The student cannot understand you if your back is turned while doing board work. By using an overhead projector you can do the work and face the class.
- It is especially important that you try not to stand in front of a light source, such as a window. The bright background shadows your face and makes speech reading difficult.
- Expect and encourage the student who is deaf to participate in class by answering questions, giving reports and volunteering for other verbal activities.
- The use of visual aids is most helpful, as vision is the student’s primary means of receiving information.