

*Working with Deaf and
Hard of Hearing Students*

A Handbook for Instructors

Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

<http://www.nr.edu/cdhh>

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PURPOSE

The Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (CDHH) was established in 1979 to provide academic and technical training to deaf and hard of hearing students. As a result, these students have increased their employment opportunities. The Center further ensures the social well being of the student by providing the educational tools necessary to become successful, productive members of society.

STAFF

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THINGS TO CONSIDER

Teaching deaf/hard of hearing students, for the most part, is the same as teaching hearing students. However, there are some things you should be aware of to have a better understanding of the deaf/hard of hearing student in the classroom.

First Consideration: Mode of Communication

The first consideration you will be faced with is the mode of communication employed by the deaf/hard of hearing student. The mode will vary from student to student. Several factors that contribute to this are:

- Age
- Degree of hearing loss
- Time of hearing loss detection
- The cause of the hearing loss

The mode of communication will vary along a continuum from the use of American Sign Language (ASL) to the students' utilization of their own voices.

American Sign Language (ASL) is the form of sign language developed by deaf people in Canada and the United States over a period of several centuries. It is a totally visual language which has evolved into its present grammar and hand configurations because generations of deaf people [sic] through trial and error [sic] have found these to be the best (i.e., they are the easiest to form and to read). Fingerspelling is incorporated into ASL to express concepts for which there are no signs. Hence, when people use ASL, they sign primarily and fingerspell some [McCay Vernon, Ph.D. "Controversy Within Sign Language" (*The Deaf American*, vol. 38, no.1, Spring 1987), 24]

Receptively, the student may have some skill in lipreading as well as working with an interpreter. For those hard of hearing students who are skilled lipreaders and possess good speech skills, the usual mode of communication will be oral communication. Some of the hard of hearing students make use of the Phonic Ear. With this device the instructor wears a small microphone and his/her voice is transmitted while background audio interference is blocked out. Some students may rely on lipreading and have intelligible speech, but that is not usually sufficient in the educational setting.

It took the field of deafness almost 100 years to accept the obvious fact that the lip movements of speech do not provide enough information for deaf and hard of hearing people to understand what is being said. Under ideal one to one, face to face conditions, 40 to 60 percent of the sounds of English look the same on the lips or else they are invisible. In practice the best lipreader (or speechreader) understands 25 percent of what is said. Incidentally, these superior lipreaders are usually hearing people who have the English skills most deaf children lack. The average deaf person gets 5 percent of what is said through lipreading. Obviously, if a deaf person only perceives 5 to 25 percent of what is said, he will be unable to understand or communicate effectively (Vernon, 22).

Therefore, most deaf/hard of hearing students will rely on sign language to express and receive communication. For this reason, you will notice an interpreter sitting or standing near the instructor translating the instructor's message into sign language. The interpreter may also be called upon to translate the student's message into spoken English for the instructor and the rest of the class.

Second Consideration: Student Competency with English

The second consideration the instructor will face is the student's competency with the English language. The ability of some deaf/hard of hearing students to use English is not as developed as their hearing peers. The English language is based on oral-auditory stimuli. This makes it impossible for deaf/hard of hearing people to acquire English as other people do. English is often considered a foreign language for deaf people, and is taught as a second language. ASL is the third most widely used language in the United States. Its syntax has a closer resemblance to Mandarin Chinese than English. "If deaf children learn ASL, they may be taught mathematics, social studies, science, etc., in this language, but they will not learn English unless it is specifically taught to them" (Vernon, 24).

Deaf people tend to write what they see. This includes key words in lipreading and/or concepts in sign language. Prepositions and articles may be omitted in their writings and their syntax may appear to be awkward and/or jumbled. It is important to remember that the deaf student is dealing with two completely different languages, English and American Sign Language.

On the other hand, some hard of hearing students do have good English skills. There are several possible reasons for this. The student may have become deafened after the acquisition of the English language, may have minimal hearing loss, may have an inherent talent for language, or may have had parents who continually exposed them to the English language via sign language.

For the instructor, it is important to realize that the communication skills of deaf/hard of hearing students will vary and that evaluation of a student's subject matter knowledge must be done on an individual basis. Words, whether written or spoken, are not an indication of intelligence or level of functioning. The instructor needs to be aware of how the deaf/hard of hearing student performs on assignments and tasks, not necessarily the use of words or the order in which they are placed.

Third Consideration: Compassion vs. Pity

The third consideration is the tendency for some hearing people to feel sympathy or pity towards deaf/hard of hearing people. Having compassion for people is a virtue, but emotional attitudes can sometimes be more detrimental than helpful to the persons involved.

Keeping that in mind, the instructor must treat the deaf/hard of hearing student as an equal member of the class. This involves holding him/her responsible for course content as one would a hearing student. A student comes to this institution to prepare himself/herself for the future academically, socially, and individually. Making course work easier or eliminating content is not adequately preparing the student for his/her life and work after graduation.

The deaf/hard of hearing student should participate equally in the classroom, and should not be exempt from regular class participation requirements just because he/she communicates via an interpreter. This includes everything from introducing oneself on the first day of class to participating in a panel discussion. If an interpreter is there, it is for the purpose of having the deaf/hard of hearing student's ideas verbalized through the interpreter's voice. It is NOT THE IDEAS OR FEELINGS OF THE INTERPRETER that are being expressed.

The instructor should relate to the hard of hearing student as one would to any other student. Communication is a two-way street, and an effort must be made by both sides to ease whatever anxiety may be felt. The more at ease people feel with each other, the more communication takes place. The more communication that takes place, the more learning that will occur.

Note: To help you serve the educational needs of the deaf/hard of hearing student, the Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (CDHH) provides access to interpreters, notetakers, and tutors to assist the student and instructor to communicate more effectively. The Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing exists to serve both students and faculty. Hopefully, instructors will feel comfortable enough to work with the staff members of the CDHH as much as possible. As the instructor, if you have a question, concern, comment, or suggestion at any time, you should contact the CDHH coordinator at extension 3619.

HINTS FOR INTERACTING WITH DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING STUDENTS

This list is not intended as an all inclusive list of "do's or don'ts." Instead, it is intended to make you aware of some basic communication concepts and provide strategies that can solve common problems before they occur. Your best source of information is the student, so don't be afraid to ask.

Hints for Communication

Hint #1 Getting student attention

It is important to have a student's attention before talking, but the deaf/hard of hearing student cannot hear the usual call to attention. He may need a tap on the shoulder, a wave, or other signal to attract his attention.

Hint #2 Reliance on Facial expression

Please do not cover your face with your hands, papers, or books when talking with the deaf/hard of hearing student. The student relies on your facial expressions and lip movements for clues as to what you are saying. The student will encounter more difficulty in speech reading if you wear a beard or mustache that covers your lips.

Hint #3 Be Natural

When talking with the deaf/hard of hearing student, speak in a normal tone of voice. Do not raise your voice or exaggerate your lip movements. These tactics will not help the student understand what you are saying. In fact, abnormal lip movements may confuse the student and make you more difficult to lipread.

Hint #4 Vocabulary Choices

Usually a deaf/hard of hearing student does not have an extensive English vocabulary. If you are communicating with a student on a one to one basis, try to use common, everyday vocabulary. If a student does not understand you the first time, try to rephrase your question or answer, perhaps even using different vocabulary.

Hint #5 Maintaining eye contact

When conversing with the deaf/hard of hearing student, maintain eye contact with him/her and address the person directly. Say, "You will..." to the deaf/hard of hearing person, not, "Tell him..." to the interpreter. The interpreter is merely the facilitator of communication who connects you and the student.

Hint #6 Ability to Function

While understanding the student's English language difficulties, please remember that there is not a correlation between their command of English and their ability to function.

Hint #7 Eye Fatigue

Please remember that the eye is a muscle and, as such, it fatigues during long lectures. The eardrum is not a muscle and hearing is not impaired after long stretches. If a lecture continues for more than one hour, please schedule breaks.


Hint #8 Announcing Special Events

Please inform the interpreter when a field trip, special class meeting, etc. will occur so that he/she can make sure that the CDHH is aware of the plans. It may be helpful to write general class announcements and homework assignments on the blackboard to make sure that the deaf/hard of hearing students get the information.

Hints for Classroom Activities

Hint #9 Movies and Other Projections

If movies are to be shown in a dark room, please inform the interpreter beforehand so that arrangements can be made for a lamp or spotlight. It may also be possible to leave some room lights on without degrading the image quality. In this way, the student can benefit from interpreting services during the movie.

More and more movies and educational videos are available with captions. Try to obtain these when possible. Look for this symbol: 

A rich source for captioned teaching materials at no charge is the Captioned Media Program (CMP). Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the CMP can be found online at <http://www.cfv.org>. You can browse their catalog online or request a printed copy. Simply establish your own individual account and make your requests online.

Hint #10 One at a Time

In order to benefit fully from a classroom discussion, it is helpful for the deaf/hard of hearing student to know who is speaking. Allowing only one person to speak at a time will aid the interpreter and facilitate participation by the deaf/hard of hearing student.

Hint #11 Time Lag

Remember that there is a time lag between the spoken word and sign language interpretation. Because of this, the deaf/hard of hearing student may be slower in responding.

Hint #12 Only One Input Channel

Because the student must watch the interpreter, the student may have problems responding to immediate verbal instruction (i.e., "Look at the chart on page 82 as I explain..."). It may be better to give your instructions (i.e., "Take a moment to look at the chart on page 82."), pause, and then proceed with your explanation.

Hint #13 Use the Interpreter

Because English is probably a second language for your deaf/hard of hearing student, it may be easier to handle essay questions through the interpreter.

Hint #14 Face the Class

Try to face the class when speaking. Your lips cannot be read when you are facing the blackboard.

Hints for Interpersonal Relations

Hint #15 Student Interaction

Please encourage interaction between deaf/hard of hearing students and hearing students. NRCC offers an excellent opportunity for them to learn from each other.

Hint #16 A Pat on the Back

It is very helpful for the deaf/hard of hearing student to be reinforced by you directly. If the student has done well in class or on an assignment, tell the student with a note or through the interpreter. Sometimes compliments coming "second hand" (told to the interpreter in the absence of the student) are not as impressive.

INFORMATION ABOUT INTERPRETERS

1. All interpreters are required to adhere to the Code of Ethics as promulgated by the National Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf. The first item in this code concerns confidentiality; what is said through the interpreter is held in strictest confidence by the interpreter.
2. The interpreter works with the instructor, but should not be expected to teach, take attendance, discipline the students, keep records of the student's monthly progress, see that the student is in class, or monitor students when the instructor leaves the room.
3. As you, the instructor, talk with deaf/hard of hearing students, the interpreter will change your spoken words to sign language.
4. The interpreter in your classroom is there to assist in communication. The interpreter is not there to evaluate the instructor, nor should the instructor evaluate the interpreter. The goal for both should be to enable the student for independence on the job.
5. Interpreters are ethically bound to interpret everything the instructor says. The deaf/hard of hearing student has the right to hear everything, the same as hearing students.
6. The deaf/hard of hearing student does not want instructors to give him/her any special considerations regarding grades or work responsibilities. Treat him/her as you would any class member.
7. Disagreements with interpreters, if they occur, should be discussed in private and away from students.
8. The interpreter is required to wait for 10 minutes outside the classroom, for a student to show up for class. If the student does not show up by then, the interpreter is free to leave the classroom area and will not return.
9. Sign language interpreting is a physically and mentally exhausting process. If your class lasts longer than one hour, please plan a ten-minute break. All will benefit. If a special event will last longer than one hour, please inform the interpreter in advance so that a relief interpreter may also be scheduled.

COMMUNICATION AIDS IN CONFERENCE SITUATIONS

1. If you need to contact a deaf/hard of hearing student by phone, you may do so by using the Virginia Relay Center (just dial 711). The Relay operator will place the call for you and serve as a communication conduit between you and the student. Have the student's phone number ready for the operator.

To connect with the Virginia Relay Center from outside the state (calling into Virginia), dial 800-828-1120 or 1140. If you're on the NRCC campus, you can dial "O" and ask the college operator to dial 711.

2. For in-person meetings, arrange for privacy without interruptions by phone or visitors.
3. Have access to paper, pencil, or computer.
4. Watch the deaf/hard of hearing student's face for clues that he/she understands your message. Beware of "smiling noddles." Nodding does not always mean that the student understands.
5. Do not exaggerate your movements when you are speaking. Speak as you normally would; you will be easier to lipread.
6. Interpreters for personal meetings or tutoring are available upon request.