**Teaching Strategies for the Deaf and Hearing Impaired**

Deafness is an invisible disability. It is easy for teachers to "forget about it" and treat the student as not having a disability. Hearing impaired students often learn to "feign" comprehension with the result being that the student does have optimal learning opportunities. Quick Tips offers you some positive strategies that you can implement for all students and that will benefit the student who may be deaf or hearing impaired.

**Definition**

Hearing impairments can vary from someone who is slightly hard of hearing to those who are profoundly deaf. Sounds can also become distorted, and conditions such as tinnitus produce background noise.

- **Mild deafness**: Some difficulty following speech, mainly in noisy situations.
- **Moderate deafness**: Difficulty following speech without a hearing aid.
- **Severe deafness**: Use a hearing aid and rely heavily on lip reading. May use sign language.
- **Profoundly deaf**: Usually born deaf or become deaf early on in life. Lip read and may use sign language. Hearing aids are of little or no use.

Languages are primarily learned through hearing them. Hearing people learn to read a language that they can already speak, but deaf people do not have this advantage and deafness can sometimes lead to linguistic problems.

Deaf people do not easily 'absorb' information in the same ways as their hearing peers, through television, radio, talking to friends etc. General knowledge may therefore appear limited which sometimes affects the maturity and depth of written work.

Over time, the average hearing impaired student can show a gap in vocabulary growth, complex sentence comprehension and construction, and in concept formation as compared to students with normal hearing.

**Technology Aids the Deaf and Hearing Impaired**

The following are examples of support strategies that a hearing impaired student may use to manage their academic and day to day life.

**Communication**

**Lip Reading** Most of us lip-read to some extent, especially in noisy situations. People with a hearing impairment can use lip-reading on its own, combined with residual hearing, or combined with some signing.

People who have become deaf later on in life, or who are hard of hearing usually use lip reading to communicate, while those who are profoundly deaf are more likely to use sign language.

Lip reading takes intense concentration and is tiring over long periods. Students may lip-read.

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**Source of Information**: "The Mainstream Teaching of Science: A Sourcebook", Keller et al.
GENERAL COURTESY

- Facial expressions, gestures, and other body language will help convey your message:
  - Get the attention of a student with a hearing impairment before speaking and communicating. Always face the student.
  - If not facing a student with a hearing impairment, gently touch a student on the shoulder or on the arm to indicate that you want to talk to him/her.
- Sequence topics so that new material is related to that previously learned.
- The use of visual aids is most helpful since vision is the student’s primary means of receiving information.
- Use written announcements (assignments, due dates, exam dates, changes in the class schedule, special event dates, etc.).
- Provide an outline in advance of the lesson/activity to give to the student, also list your expectations.
- Write all homework assignments, class instructions, and procedural changes on the chalkboard. Make notes legible.
- Do not talk while writing on the board.
- Use captioned films, videos, and laser disks.
- Avoid seating the student in heavy traffic areas.
- Do not touch or pet a hearing dog. These animals are working animals and it may be hazardous for the hearing impaired student if the dog is distracted.

GENERAL STRATEGIES

- Obtain feedback from your hearing impaired students at every opportunity as an indicator of the student’s level of understanding.
  - If the student lip-reads:
    - Have students sit closer to the lecturer.
    - Look directly at the student.
    - Speak slowly, naturally, and clearly.
    - Slowing down slightly may help.
    - Do not exaggerate your lip movements or shout.
    - If you have a mustache, keep it well trimmed.
  - If the student uses an interpreter:
    - Speak directly to the student rather than to the interpreter.
    - Signing can be distracting at first, but you and the other students will soon become accustomed to the interpreter’s presence.
    - Give the student and the interpreter outlines of the lecture or written material, in advance, so that they can become familiar with new technical vocabulary.
    - Interpreters will not give their opinion of a student’s progress as this can violate the student’s rights. Interpreters will not answer lesson related questions, the student directs all lesson related questions to the instructor.
    - Provide scripts of video and laser media when possible for both the interpreter and the student with a hearing disability (with or without captioning).
    - The interpreter will stand close to the section of the chalkboard that is being used by the instructor, to allow the student to see both the signs and the writing on the board.

TEACHER PRESENTATION STRATEGIES

- Provide the classroom audience with a clear and direct view of your mouth and face.
• Speak from a well-lighted area of the room.
• Reduce background noise by turning off slide projectors when not in use.
• Speak clearly and naturally, at your normal pace, unless asked to slow down.
• Begin explanations with concrete examples, working from the concrete to the abstract.
• Present only one source of visual information at a time.
• Repeat the questions other students in the class asked so that students with hearing impairments know what you are referring to.
• Maximize the use of visual media.

LABORATORY STRATEGIES
• In advance, provide an outline of the activity and give to the student your expectations.
• Write all homework assignments and laboratory procedural changes on the chalkboard.
• Use signaling devices to alert the student to a significant sound in the lab.
• Use an overhead projector to show step-by-step instructions.
• Provide indicator lights for the on/off status of equipment.

GROUP INTERACTION AND DISCUSSION
• A circle is the best seating arrangement for a hearing impaired student. Seat the student with his/her "better" ear towards the class.
• Be quite clear as to which topic is being discussed.
• Expect and encourage the student to participate in class by answering questions, giving reports, and volunteering for other verbal activities.
• Clearly identify who is speaking or asking a question (pointing is OK).
• In group or team settings, develop procedures so the student who is hearing impaired can express his/her communication needs to others.
• Show special awareness. Call the person who has a hearing impairment by name to initiate communication, (or a nod or a hand gesture is acceptable).

USE PLAIN ENGLISH
Phrasing written materials as clearly as possible will assist deaf students (and all students) with language difficulties. Examples are:
• Use short sentences.
• Use common words where possible.
• Present information sequentially.
• When phrasing questions, write statements first putting the question at the end.
• Avoid words with double meanings.
• Try not to use double negatives.

TESTING or INTERPRETER NEEDS: refer to the policies and procedures of the Disability Support Programs and Services.

American Sign Language
n. (Abbr. ASL)
The primary sign language used by deaf and hearing-impaired people in the United States and Canada, devised in part by Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet on the basis of sign language in France.
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Technology Aids... cont'd.

and touch type into a lap top computer simultaneously, or have a note taker in the lecture with them so they can concentrate on the speaker's face.

**SIGN LANGUAGE**  
Sign language is a language in its own right and many deaf people consider ASL (American Sign Language) as their first language. Signing varies between countries. ASL is an independent language and is as capable as a spoken language of conveying meanings and ideas. It has its own punctuation and grammar and can communicate complex theories and concepts.

**EQUIPMENT**  
**HEARING AIDS** Hearing aids are used by people who have some residual hearing, rather than those who are profoundly deaf. The hearing aid amplifies all sounds and does not distinguish between wanted and unwanted sounds. Background noise is equally amplified and hearing aids may be of little use in noisy situations or when several people are talking at once.

**INDUCTION LOOPS** An induction loop is a wire attached to the walls of a room and sets up an electromagnetic field within the enclosed loop. When a sound is made within that loop, the signal is received by the student's hearing aid and converted back to sounds.

**COMPUTERS** Hearing Impaired students who have English language difficulties may find a computer with language software useful, e.g. thesaurus, grammar check, etc. Many deaf people find email a very valuable aid to communication. Some students may use a lap top computer in lectures so they can lip read and touch type at the same time.

**CAPTIONING** The process of converting the audio portion of a video production into text which is displayed on a television screen. The captions are typically white upper-case letters against a black background. Closed captioning is a technique of displaying the captioned text only when it is desired. Open captions include the same text as closed captions, but the captions are a permanent part of the picture, and cannot typically be turned off. Transcripts provide a textual version of the content that can be accessed by anyone.

**LANGUAGE DISABILITY EXPERIENCES**  
Difficulties with language mean that hearing impaired students may present with some of the following difficulties:

- Difficulty extracting meaning from text.
- Restricted vocabulary shown by acceptance of particular words as having a fixed meaning relating only to a previous experience.
- Difficulty in absorbing and using new terminology or the application of everyday words in a technical context.
- Misinterpretation of information, particularly where there is some ambiguity.
- Incorrect verb endings and mistakes in written work.
- Errors in syntax e.g. incorrect word order, words omitted, extra words inserted etc.
- Limited vocabulary.
- Inappropriate or immature styles of writing in assignments.
- Difficulty in producing discussion elements of an assignment, particularly where they depend on abstract thinking rather than practical observation.

Adapted from: 2007 The University of Sheffield - Teaching Students with Hearing Impairments  
http://www.shef.ac.uk

We're on the Web!  
http://www.sdcity.edu/dsps/