

Working with Students with Hearing Impairments

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Understanding hearing impairments

Hearing impairments can range from a slight loss of some ranges of sounds to profound deafness and accompanying difficulty with speech. Students who are deaf may find oral communication and sound cues to be a major challenge. Hearing-impaired individuals may use a variety of techniques for understanding and communicating such as hearing aids, lip reading, American Sign Language (ASL), finger spelling, interpreters, and written notes. Students who are hearing-impaired may need special consideration in arranging tests, especially oral tests or tests with an oral component.

Ways of helping students with hearing impairments:

- Face the student when speaking.
- Preferential seating might be important to ensure that the student is in a good position to clearly view the professor, the board, and his or her classmates.
- Speak clearly and project your voice appropriately; encourage all course participants to do the same.
- When reading from notes or books, look up as much as possible and do not cover your mouth and make every effort to keep hands and other objects away from your mouth.
- Do not speak when writing on the black board or with your back to the class. Avoid using nonspecific terms such as "this and that" or "here and there."
- Professors with accents are harder to understand through lip reading. If the professor cannot properly announce, he or she should provide written lecture notes in advance of the class.
- Write important announcements on the board or on a handout.
- Summarize key course announcement through e-mail or other course management tools such as CLEo.



- Use visual aids such as writing on the board, closed-captioned videos, and scripts for movies whenever possible. When showing slides or videos without closed captions, an outline or summary will help the student access the material. To reduce back lighting, avoid standing in front of a window. Darkened rooms impede lip reading; discuss lighting needs with the student.
- Pace lecture accordingly. Notes on the board or projected slides or other course materials are very valuable to students with a hearing impairment.
- Avoid pointing indiscriminately toward the board. Some students with a hearing impairment might interpret this as a visual cue – be clear if gesturing toward a specific point
- Discussions are the most difficult to access. Preparing the class in advance for discussion using email or course listserv might be helpful. Whenever possible, summarize the discussion throughout the class period; a student with a hearing impairment might not be able to participate as readily as others can.
- When questions are asked, repeat the question before answering it.
- It is difficult to lip read and take notes. A note taker might be needed. A student with a hearing impairment can arrange for note taking services through the Academic Resource Center (ARC).
- A visual warning system should be in place and reviewed in advance of class for any emergencies that might occur during the semester.
- Some students with hearing impairment might benefit from a FM transmitter system. If this is the case, you will be given a transmitter to wear. Remember to turn it off when the class ends or when you leave the room. If you do not, the student using the FM system will hear your conversations, even across campus.
- Hearing aids make sounds louder, not clearer. It is analogous to listening to a radio station with static, turning the volume up does not improve the clarity.
- Your central auditory system allows you to suppress background sound and tune into one voice during a lecture. With the use of a hearing aid, there is a loss of ability to inhibit auditory stimuli. The user will hear coughing, paper crumpling and someone rifling through his backpack as well as your voice.
- If an overheard projector is used during class, turn it off when not in use as it creates substantial background noise for students with hearing impairments.



Special resources for students with hearing impairments

Some students will use the services of an interpreter. You should meet with the student and the interpreter to discuss the best and most convenient use of this resource in the classroom. When you speak to a student who is using an interpreter, be sure to speak directly to the student rather than to the interpreter. This is both courteous and helpful to the student. If you are introducing new and unfamiliar vocabulary, it will be helpful to give a list of the terms in advance to both the student and the interpreter. Also, remember there is a slight time lag between the moments you speak and the moment the student receives your message. Speak slowly enough to allow time for the interpreter to translate your words, and do not be surprised if there is a slight delay in the student's reply. You should also be aware that the code of ethics of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf requires interpreters to keep all information confidential and to interpret faithfully and accurately what is said. They are precluded from counseling, advising, and interjecting personal opinions.

