RIT | Office of the Provost
AdvanceRIT

Tip Sheet

Communicating with People Who Are Deaf and Hard of Hearing

NSF AdvanceRIT is committed to ensuring that activities and events are inclusive and universally designed for maximum participation. People who are deaf or hard of hearing use many methods to communicate. Some use lip reading and speech, while others use sign language. Many individuals who experience a hearing loss may feel isolated and left out of social situations. The best way to communicate effectively with the people who are DHH is to ask them what they prefer and what you can do to help improve this process. Also ask them if an assistive listening device would be helpful. Here are some guidelines for effective communication.

1. Strategies:

● Remember that there are many ways to communicate! Speaking, signing, writing on a white board or paper, drawing a picture, demonstrating, and using the assistance of an interpreter.
● Identify yourself if you are signing and/or using the interpreter.
● If sight lines are interrupted, you may need to stand if you are signing and/or using an interpreter to be sure that you are visible to everyone in the room.
● Make sure you have the person's attention before speaking. Waving a hand, or a light touch on the shoulder or arm, is an acceptable way to get attention.

● Speak one at a time, be sure to identify the current speaker, and maintain eye contact.
● Make sure your face and mouth are clearly visible. Do not eat, smoke, chew gum or in any way cover your mouth.
● Remember that "knowing how to slow down and take turns" during a dialogue is important. It allows the interpreter to keep up with the conversation.
● Pace of communication is important, especially when interpreter services are being used. Slow, steady communication will ensure everyone can participate fully in conversations.

● Be patient and take time to communicate. Saying "never mind" or "it's not important," may cause anger, frustration or hurt feelings.
● Provide materials, presentation and new vocabulary in advance whenever possible.
● Do your best to include everyone in incidental learning environments, where interpreters are not present, such as informal chats while getting coffee.
● If breakout group activity is planned, consider in advance the logistics regarding interpreter needs, possible use of technologies and resources available and/or use visual aids to enhance communication effectiveness.

2. Setting

● Communicate in a well-lit and quiet environment with few visual and auditory distractions.
● Position yourselves so that all group members can see each other.
● Ask the person who is DHH to choose the best seating for his or her communication needs.
● It will be helpful to have a note taker to record minutes and notes for later reference.
● For a web conference setting, give time for everyone to turn and look at the deaf individual signing.

3. Support Services - Working with an interpreter

● It is helpful to meet with the interpreter about 15 minutes early to explain what will be covered. If possible, give a copy of handouts, overheads, and/or lecture or speech to be interpreted.
● Remember to speak directly to the deaf person, not the interpreter.
● Since the interpreter is a few words behind the speaker, give him or her time to finish, so that the deaf person can ask questions or join the discussion.
● If a meeting will last more than an hour and a half, it is preferable to have two interpreters.

What is Audism?

Audism is defined as "discrimination or prejudice that is based on a person's ability, or lack of ability, to hear." If you're a hearing person, you may not realize that some of your behavior excludes those with hearing loss, and would be considered to be audism. We list some common faculty-student examples of audism, based on the experiences of our faculty. In each case, if faculty addressed these matters all students, deaf and hearing, would benefit.

Experience	An Alternative	Benefits for Many
Faculty attend to students who voice for themselves over students who sign and depend on interpreters to voice for them.	Pause to see all the hands that may be raised, and consider that students who are deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) may lag behind while speech is being interpreted.	Pausing also allows participation by students who need time to process before responding or asking a question.
Faculty continue lecturing while writing on the board (i.e. talking to the board).	Pause to write on the board and then turn around to face the class while speaking.	This approach allows speech-readers to see your lips and improves acoustics for those in the back of the room.
Students who are DHH ask for clarity during lecture only to be told "you should be able to understand these concepts as presented" OR "you have the interpreter" OR "speech-reading is enough to understand the lecture"..	Don't judge what students need, or assume that speech-readers understand 100% of what is said. Provide clarification or alternative explanation when students express their confusion.	Other students may also be confused and would welcome additional clarity.
Faculty are reluctant to interact with students who are DHH one-on-one without an interpreter present.	Remember that you can use paper and pen, text, a computer, or gestures to communicate.	Demonstrating flexibility in communication makes you appear approachable for all students.
Announcements in class are only provided verbally.	Write announcements on the board, and follow up with email and/or myCourses reminders.	All students will be on the same page (and you may get fewer questions about what you announced!)
Video course material is not captioned (or has poor quality captions).	When possible, plan ahead to find appropriately captioned videos, request captioning from RIT Teaching & Learning Services, or create captions yourself (automated captions are not adequate). If not, consider if the video could be shown with the sound off, or if an alternative captioned video would suffice.	In addition to accommodating for hearing loss, students use captions to help with focus, retain information, overcome poor audio and speaker accents, and with language and vocabulary challenges.

To Learn More:

- http:/ /deafchoice.com/faq/what-is-an-audist/, http://blog.ai-media.tv/blog/5-examples-of-audism
- https://www.huffingtonpost.com/lydia-l-callis/deaf-discrimination-the-f_b_7790204.html
- Linder, K. (2016). Student uses and perceptions of closed captions and transcripts: Results from a national study. Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University Ecampus Research Unit