

Classroom Tips for Teaching Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students

Use Good Communication Techniques

- Deaf and hard-of-hearing students are the best source of information regarding which communication strategies work best for them. If you have questions about which techniques to use, feel free to ask your students.
- When interacting with deaf students, talk directly to the students and not to the interpreter. Use “I” and “you” when you communicate with deaf students using an interpreter. This also applies when a student answers a question; look at the student, not the interpreter.
- Avoid talking while you are writing on the board or while your back is to the students. Try not to wander around.
- Emphasize important information such as technical vocabulary, foreign terms, formulas, equations, assignments, or schedule changes by writing details on the board and providing written handouts.
- Use visual aids whenever possible. Use the board, maps, charts, illustrations, and captioned movies.
- Includes deaf students in all class experiences. Include them in conversations and encourage them to join in group activities.
- Receiving information visually without breaks can be tiring and cause eye fatigue. Plan strategic breaks so that both students and interpreters can enjoy a mental and physical break. For classes longer than one hour in which only one interpreter is available, a mid-class break is essential.

Pace

- Interpreting is not instantaneous. Interpreters listen to or watch the communicator, process the information, and then interpret into the appropriate language (spoken English or ASL). This means that their interpretation is delivered after the speaker has gone on to his or her next thought.
- You can help facilitate this process by speaking naturally at a reasonable pace. Pausing between thoughts is helpful.

- It is especially important when reading from a book or article that you pause or “breathe” between sentences.
- Avoid the temptation to pick up the pace when time is short.

One Thing at a Time

- Students who are deaf require time to look at visual aids and print materials before returning their attention to the interpreter. Give them time to look at tests or visual materials before you discuss them or give instructions.
- Avoid talking while students are focused on written class work.
- Before showing slides or videos, provide students with an outline or summary of the materials to be covered. Make copies for the interpreter, too. During video and slide showings, be careful not to speak over sound portions.
- Captioned videos allow the students direct visual access to the information. Uncaptioned materials are inaccessible to students watching interpreters, as the students cannot attend to both the interpreter and a constant stream of visual media. This is also true for YouTube or other multimedia materials.

One Talker at a Time

- Interpreters can convey only one message at a time. Professors can help by acting as a moderator to assure that only one person is talking at a time. Point out who is speaking and try to repeat questions from others in the classroom before answering. This gives students time to realize who is talking and where that person is located.
- Deaf students sometimes miss the opportunity to answer questions or participate in class discussions because a professor calls on other students before the interpreter has finished interpreting the previous speaker’s comments. A deaf student may not even be aware that you’ve asked a question until after another student has already begun to answer it.
- You can provide deaf students with the opportunity to participate by asking students to raise their hands and wait for you to call on them. If you wait for the interpreter to finish interpreting your question before you call on someone, it will allow the students who are deaf or hard-of-hearing equal opportunity to participate.

Minimize Visual Distractions

- In order to make optimal use of visual cues, deaf and hard-of-hearing students often sit at the front of the classroom, near to and facing the instructor. Keep lines of sight free so that deaf students have visual access to information. In class, interpreters will position themselves in direct line with you, the students, and any visual aids.
- Avoid potential distractions, such as chewing gum or placing your hand in front of your mouth.
- Avoid standing in front of a window or other light sources; the contrasting light level will impede communication.