

Successful Communication with Students Who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing

Speak directly to the student. With students who do not know sign language, establish and maintain eye contact with them to enable as much speechreading as possible to augment what they hear with their hearing aids or assistive listening devices. When you are working with an interpreter and wish to address a student who is deaf, always speak directly to the student (e.g. "Do you want to ...", "How would you...") and avoid phrasing that treats the student who is deaf as a non-entity (e.g. "Ask her if she wants...", "Tell him to fill document..."). Always phrase your communication with a student who is deaf/hard of hearing as if you were communicating without interpreters.

Allow students to select where to sit in class. Most of the time, students who are deaf/hard of hearing will choose to sit in a location where they have visible access to both you (and the interpreter if they use sign language). Remember gum chewing, hand placement, and a turned back can all interfere with the person's ability to speechread you or see your facial expressions.

Avoid standing in front of windows or other strong light sources. When a person is standing in front of a strong light source (i.e. is backlit) it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish facial features and movements. Students who are deaf/hard of hearing rely on visual access to information.

During meetings, allow sufficient time for students to participate. During meeting/appointments, communication success often deteriorates for students who are deaf/hard of hearing. Sign Language interpreting by nature is approximately 15 – 30 seconds behind the spoken word. When you ask a question, the interpretation of that question will take place a couple of seconds later. To the student who is deaf/hard of hearing, identification of who is speaking is essential to facilitating speechreading. In order to allow students to participate fully in meeting/appointments, it is helpful to wait a short period of time before continuing. This allows all individuals the same opportunity to participate in the meeting and allows you to determine how well the information presented is being understood.

Moderate discussions so that one person speaks at a time and students are able to identify who is speaking. Discussion are often a large and essential part of classroom learning. However, discussions that include several people speaking at once can be difficult to interpret and are very challenging for a student who is deaf/hard of hearing to follow. Consider the best way for the student to know who is talking during discussions. Also, consider how the discussion facilitates or prohibits inclusion. Act as a moderator to assure that only one person is talking at a time. Be sure to recognize the next speaker in order to give the student and interpreter time to recognize who is talking...and from where. If at all possible, repeat or rephrase questions before a response is given.

Avoid situations that require multitasking. Please refrain from talking to students who are deaf/hard of hearing at the same time you're having them read something.

When communication breaks down, re-phrase rather than repeat. Consider using basic hand cues to assist with comprehension. Also, with most students who are deaf/hard of hearing, speaking very loudly or over-enunciating is not helpful. Instead, speak at a normal rate and enunciate clearly.

Ensure classroom lighting is sufficient for interpreting. If you are darkening a room for a program (e.g. a slide presentation), make sure lighting is sufficient for the student to speechread and/or see the interpreters.

Give materials to students and interpreters in advance whenever possible. Advanced copies of notes, hand-outs, song lyrics, et cetera will help orient the student who is deaf/hard of hearing and allow the interpreter/captioner to better prepare to translate the assignment content.

Please do not hesitate to contact the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (DHHS) Office should you have questions or want more information. DHHS at SAC coordinates District-wide interpreter services and are available to assist faculty and staff in creating the highest level of access for students who are deaf/hard of hearing.

714-564-6283 or Interpreter_request@sac.edu