



Working with Students Who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing: Best Practices Guide



Academic Excellence and Support Services

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Purpose

This guide is intended to provide useful information and advice to faculty in any and all departments when working with and/or providing instruction to d/Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing (HOH) students. This comprehensive document will address the topic of d/Deafness; communication and language needs of d/Deaf and HOH students; best practices in working with d/Deaf and HOH students; best practices in working with service providers, whether sign language interpreters or CART (Communication Access Realtime Translation) writers; and contact information should there be any questions. Instructors and support staff will hopefully find this document useful in making decisions regarding the engagement of d/Deaf or HOH students and the resources to best work with said individuals.

1.2. Mission

1.2.1. *Disability Services Office (DSO) Mission Statement*

The Disability Services Office is dedicated to empowering students with disabilities through the delivery of reasonable accommodations and support services by bridging post-secondary education with future real world experiences.

1.2.2. *Communication Access Team (CAT) Mission Statement*

Through the provision of our services, our students: obtain access to communication, secure membership in the campus community, learn to interface effectively with service providers, and explore opportunities for academic and personal growth.

1.2.3. *DSO Service Provider Core Values*

- Respect for students, professors, colleagues and the university.
- Civility toward students, professors, colleagues and the university.
- Professional conduct and behavior in all UC settings.
- Open communication with students, colleagues and members of the DSO.
- Superior quality of service rendered to students at UC.

2. WHAT IS DEAFNESS?

2.1. Categories of d/Deaf people

2.1.1. *Deaf*

The term Deaf with a capital ‘D’ is used to describe those individuals whose hearing loss is severe to profound and who choose to identify with the Deaf community. Individuals in this category regard themselves as belonging to a cultural and linguistic minority. They are most often individuals who were born deaf or became deaf before acquiring language and their first language is American Sign Language (ASL).

2.1.2. *deaf*

The term deaf with a lowercase ‘d’ is used to describe those individuals whose hearing loss is severe to profound and who choose not to identify with Deaf culture or hold membership in the Deaf community. Individuals found in this



category may still use sign language to communicate, but it will most likely be a mode of sign language resembling spoken/written English.

2.1.3. *Hard of Hearing*

The term Hard of Hearing (HOH) is used to describe those individuals whose hearing loss is mild to moderate. These individuals will more than likely use English as their chosen mode of communication and may or may not use hearing aids.

2.1.4. *Late-deafened*

Late-deafened is a term used to describe those individuals who lost their hearing later in life, usually in late adolescence or adulthood. These individuals have a severe to profound hearing loss, may use hearing aids, and/or may also use interpreters as an aid to amplification or in speech-reading. Late-deafened people may or may not use a mode of sign language.

2.2. What is Deaf Culture?

As is true of any culture, Deaf culture is not easily defined. Deaf culture has its own traditions; values; history; and language, including language art forms such as ASL poetry, Deaf jokes, ASL storytelling, and others. Deaf culture is a part of the American Deaf community, where members can connect through shared experiences and a unified appreciation for visuality and American Sign Language (ASL).

2.3. d/Deaf and HOH Students in Higher Education

As alluded to in our mission statements, access to services provided by the Disability Services Office (DSO) and particularly the Communication Access Team (CAT) at the University of Cincinnati will afford individuals who are d/Deaf or HOH the freedom to participate fully in the student experience. While DSO and CAT do their best to remove any and all communication barriers for the d/Deaf and HOH student population on campus, they cannot always combat a lack of awareness, which can be just as harmful to academic success as the absence of services. It is important to make oneself and others aware in order to allow for true equality in opportunity as it relates to higher education.

3. LANGUAGE, COMMUNICATION AND d/DEAF AND HOH STUDENTS

3.1. Language Acquisition

3.1.1. *English as a Second Language (ESL)*

Many students who are d/Deaf were either born that way or became d/Deaf at a very early age, prior to acquiring language (prelingual d/Deafness). Thus, English is often their second language, while American Sign Language (ASL) is their first. Individuals who are d/Deaf differ from other ESL users as they are unable to learn English in the same fashion: by being immersed in the auditory language surrounding them. Additionally, ASL is a visual language and has no written form meaning its users do not have the same foundation other ESL users may have to apply when acquiring the written or spoken nuances of English.

3.1.2. *Linguistic challenges*

ASL has phonologic, morphologic, and syntactic structure that is rather different from English. These differences can lead to linguistic difficulties in written English work, manifesting in a variety of ways including issues with verb tense,



inappropriate use of function words (articles, determiners, prepositions, etc.), incorrect grammar construction, and the like. Moreover, these individuals often do not get any auditory feedback when reading through their own or others' written work, making it challenging to commit to memory what is or is not correct.

3.1.3. *Implications*

The overall effects of the aforementioned circumstances can yield the following: potential misunderstandings; difficulties with reading comprehension; problems in a student's written work including grammatical errors, limited vocabulary, improper or unfitting writing style, a lack of depth, or perhaps underdeveloped arguments; and/or a need for additional time to plan and compose written work. The essential takeaway is that in no way do these difficulties imply a deficiency in the d/Deaf or HOH student's intellectual ability, or their potential for academic success.

3.2. What is American Sign Language (ASL)?

3.2.1. *Definition*

ASL is one of the leading minority languages in the United States, with estimates of 500,000 to 2 million users (Lane, Hoffmeister & Bahan, 1996). ASL is a true language consisting of its own phonologic, morphologic, and syntactic structure distinct from that of English and is the chosen language of the majority of the d/Deaf population nationwide.

ASL is not 'English produced on the hands', nor is it a simplified version of spoken/written English. It is a bona fide language that was born generations ago and is constantly evolving as any other spoken language does. While historically it was not always judged as the best option for d/Deaf children, it is the preferred language of the Deaf community and has become more widely accepted as of the 1960s, when William Stokoe published his research on the linguistics of American Sign Language.

Since the 1960s, the status of ASL has grown immensely. ASL is taught in more high school and college classrooms each passing year and there is now evidence to show that acquiring ASL at a young age results in more effective learning for d/Deaf children. ASL has earned national recognition and is now valued by the linguistic community as a rich and creative language.

ASL is mainly the signed language used by American and Canadian individuals who are d/Deaf. Additionally, it is used by many countries in Africa, and has also had a heavy influence on sign languages in Asia. This means it is unlikely that d/Deaf students who use ASL will be able to communicate with d/Deaf students who are from other countries and so use different signed languages, as signed languages possess differences as complex spoken languages.

3.2.2. *English signing modes vs. ASL*

Individuals who lost their hearing after learning to speak (post-lingual d/Deafness) may have less difficulty with the English language and, indeed, may



prefer it to ASL. These individuals may use any variety of English sign systems, developed based on the English language with signs both created for these sign systems and borrowed from ASL, or Sign Supported Speech/Sign Supported English where the signs are intended more as a supplement to the spoken English. These sign systems are not languages, like ASL or English, but are signed communication modes created to echo the English language.

3.3. Myths About Language and Communication

3.3.1. *Lip-reading*

While many d/Deaf individuals use lip-reading, this should not be used as a primary method of communication unless expressly mentioned as a preferred method by the d/Deaf or HOH individual. Lip-reading should only be used as an aid to communication and only with a d/Deaf person who has full command of English. Even if the d/Deaf person does have full command of English and is quite skilled in lip-reading, relying on this as a complete communication strategy would be inappropriate for several reasons: many words and sounds look the same on the lips when produced, which makes it difficult to discern what is being said; any obstruction to the mouth (facial hair, hands, etc.), the line of sight, or the ability to enunciate clearly causes confusion; and the practice of lip-reading is extremely taxing for the d/Deaf individual, to name a few. Research has suggested that even the most skilled lip-readers can only read 25-30% of what is said.

3.3.2. *Writing back and forth*

It is common for people to resort to writing when faced with a need to bridge the communication gap between themselves and a d/Deaf person. Writing should be used for just that: a last resort. As mentioned above, English is not the first language of many d/Deaf people and as such writing is not always an effective communication strategy (see above 3.1.1.—3.1.3. for more information about why this is the case). It is important to ask the d/Deaf person how s/he prefers to communicate with you in one-on-one interactions. In the majority of cases, a sign language interpreter can be provided so one does not need to rely on written communication; it is ineffective and inconvenient for both the faculty/staff member and the d/Deaf student.

4. EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION SUPPORT: d/DEAF STUDENTS

4.1. Clear Communication Strategies

4.1.1. *Awareness*

Being aware of your d/Deaf students, their communication preferences and needs, and what support services are available to them is the best way to establish a path to clear communication. Educate yourself on effective communication strategies and what is required of your d/Deaf students when using support services so you know how to aid in their communication when necessary.

4.1.2. *Line of sight, lighting, noise (auditory and visual), and voice quality*

4.1.2.1. *Line of sight*



The d/Deaf or HOH student will benefit from front row seating. This will give him/her an unobstructed line of vision to see the instructor the interpreter(s), as well as course materials projected on the screen or written on the board. When possible, be mindful of your positioning in relation to the interpreter(s); attempt to remain outside of the sight line between the d/Deaf student and his/her interpreter(s) and position yourself where the student can see you and the interpreter(s). Be aware that the interpreter(s) may change position to accommodate your movements and the needs of the d/Deaf student.

4.1.2.2. Lighting

Make sure that the classroom is well-lit in order for the student to clearly see his/her interpreter(s). Please have at least partial lighting while showing videos, using the overhead projector, or for any other media viewing. Please note, the interpreter may adjust their position in order to capitalize on what light is available in the room.

4.1.2.3. Noise (auditory and visual)

Ambient noise in the classroom will make it difficult for those students making use of hearing aids and/or cochlear implants to attend to the content presented in class. Due to this, please be diligent in keeping noise in the classroom to a minimum. This will not only help the student make the most of what they are hearing but also help the service providers do their job most effectively.

Noise can also be visual. Since individuals who are d/Deaf and HOH rely heavily on visual information, it is easy for visual distractions (noise) to impact their ability to grasp material presented during class. This visual noise can include anything from a flickering light to people crossing back in forth in their line of sight and anything in between.

4.1.2.4. Voice Quality

Students making use of hearing aids and/or cochlear implants will have an easier time making sense of voiced information if it is spoken normally and clearly. This means faculty should avoid over-enunciating words and mumbling, but should also speak loud enough and at a consistent pace. When speaking one on one with a student who is d/Deaf or HOH, speak normally and look directly at her/him when speaking as s/he may be making use of lip-reading. Also, please be mindful of speaking in complete sentences, rephrasing rather than repeating when necessary.

4.1.3. Relationship with d/Deaf student(s)

Please feel comfortable talking to your d/Deaf or HOH student(s) to discuss their individual communication needs and revisit them on a regular basis, ensuring that their needs are being met. Developing a good rapport with the student(s) will afford them the comfort to come to you if they have ideas on how to meet their



needs more effectively or if they have questions/concerns about the course, making this relationship an academic benefit to the student(s) as well.

4.2. General Principles for Accessible Learning

4.2.1. Material availability

Whenever possible, please make course materials available to your d/Deaf and HOH students in advance. Such materials may include, but not be limited to, the course syllabus, book lists, any handouts to be used in class and/or any PowerPoint or other presentations to be used during class meetings. Since students who are d/Deaf or HOH will have their attention focused on their service provider (either interpreter or the CART writer's computer screen) it may be difficult for them to view overheads and still grasp content discussed during class. For this reason, providing said materials in advance will allow the students to review the information before arriving in class and feel free to watch their service provider without feeling as though they are missing vital information being discussed in class. Please also note that any digital lectures uploaded to Blackboard (audio or video) and/or online videos must be captioned in order to make them accessible to our d/Deaf and HOH students (see section 5.2.2. for more details).

4.2.2. Tips to facilitate full participation

Recognize that your d/Deaf and HOH students use service providers who process and provide interpretation/translation that is slightly delayed. As a result, this will potentially cause a delay in the student's receiving of information and/or in their asking questions, responding to questions, or offering any comments during the class discussion. Please allow adequate time for the d/Deaf and HOH students to fully participate in class discussions if they so choose.

When referring to a visual aid (overhead, charts, posters, diagrams, models, computer screens, etc.) or when doing a demonstration, please pause frequently so that the student has time to finish receiving the information from their service provider and to look at what part of the visual aid you are referring to. If you do not pause, it is probable that you will have moved on to a different section before the student has a chance to make the connection between the information s/he is getting and the visual being discussed.

Often times when questions are asked or remarks are made by other students in the classroom, those d/Deaf and HOH students who use amplification devices such as hearing aids or cochlear implants may be unable to hear them and likewise, their service providers may not be able to hear them clearly enough to interpret/translate the information. Please make an effort to repeat the question/remark in order to allow the d/Deaf and HOH students the opportunity to get that information.

In addition to the above tips, please be aware of overusing determiners when explaining visual information in class. When pointing at part of a diagram, figure, or any other visual aid be specific. If there is an abundance of words such



as ‘this’, ‘those’, ‘there’, ‘here’, etc., it can be quite difficult for the d/Deaf and HOH students to follow along with the discussion.

4.3. Laboratory/Practical Settings

Especially during demonstrations, please make sure that d/Deaf and HOH students can see you and what you are doing clearly in addition to being able to see the interpreter where appropriate. Whenever possible, encourage communication and interaction between the d/Deaf or HOH students and their hearing peers during practical sessions. When appropriate, summarize key learning or teaching points that may have arisen during peer interactions in practical sessions.

4.4. Strategies for Managing Divided Visual Attention

It is clear from information expressed above that students cannot possibly watch the speaker/instructor, the interpreter, the PowerPoint or other visual aid, the CART writer’s screen, and take notes all at the same time. Therefore, please point to visual material while it is being discussed and allow enough time for the student to read and assimilate the information from the visual aid and for the interpretation to be rendered prior to commenting or raising questions (see above 4.2.3.)

4.5. Group Work

Working in large groups can often be difficult for d/Deaf and HOH students as they will have a hard time following the discussion from one person to the next and interjecting comments due to the delay in interpreter/CART processing. Small groups will be more effective; however, if large groups must be used, please ensure there is someone selected to chair the group by controlling the pace of the discussion and making sure individuals speak up and do not speak over one another. This will help prevent unnecessary background noise, and will in turn create a better space within which the d/Deaf and HOH students can more fully participate.

4.6. Staff Development

Any and all questions concerning further staff/faculty development in relation to working with d/Deaf and HOH students can be directed to the Disability Services Office. There they will have access to any resources they may need.

4.6.1. Deaf awareness training

Live training will be held periodically throughout the year and will include information about practical teaching methods when working with d/Deaf and HOH students, such as the implications of d/Deafness on language development; the educational experience of d/Deaf and HOH learners; effective teaching strategies to make the course materials and content more accessible to d/Deaf and HOH students; the use and limitations of amplification systems as well as service providers; and details on working with service providers, as in sign language interpreters and CART writers. The live trainings are supplemental to the document and any online training.

4.6.2. Information on access and support services

Most information regarding access and support services can be found in various sections in this document. If a faculty or staff member has questions or concerns



about support services for their students or needs to arrange any support services, s/he may contact the Disability Services Office's Communication Access Team.

4.6.3. *Use of technology*

There is a range of technology and equipment available to our d/Deaf and HOH students, though they may choose to take advantage of this equipment or not (i.e. FM Systems). If at any time faculty or staff members are asked by a d/Deaf or HOH student to make use of this special technology or equipment and they require further training, they may contact the Disability Services Office's Communication Access Team.

5. EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION SUPPORT: SERVICE PROVIDERS

5.1. **Sign Language Interpreters**

ASL/English interpreters are frequently used by students who are d/Deaf and HOH, especially those who use American Sign Language as their main mode of communication. Working with ASL/English interpreters makes it important to know a little bit about their work and role in the academic environment. At its most basic, sign language interpreting is a process through which communication between people who are d/Deaf or HOH and people who can hear is made possible. This process is highly complex and demands its practitioners to possess a high degree of cognitive, linguistic, and cultural knowledge when taking on assignments, particularly those in an academic environment.

5.1.1. *Role of the interpreter*

Interpreters working on campus are placed in various academic settings in order to fulfill our students' requests for service providers. It is the interpreter's sole responsibility in these settings to ensure that students who are d/Deaf or HOH can readily communicate with the hearing individuals present and vice versa. Remember that interpreters are simply there to facilitate communication; address all comments and questions directly to the d/Deaf or HOH student and not to the interpreter.

Interpreters will familiarize themselves with the subject matter to be discussed in order to facilitate communication as effectively as possible. Interpreters endeavor to remain unbiased toward content of their interpreting assignments and will strive to maintain the intent, mood and spirit of the information being delivered to the best of their abilities.

It is the interpreter's responsibility to listen to everything a speaker says (this includes an instructor's lecture, group work in class, comments made by the students/participants, any side commentary that is audible, etc.), as well as any other audible information, and simultaneously render that information into the preferred visual communication mode of the d/Deaf or HOH student. The interpreters will provide an interpretation for all information shared and will not censor said information in an effort to uphold their standards of remaining unbiased.



Although the interpreter is working with the d/Deaf or HOH student in an educational setting, they are not a direct representative of the educational team, meaning they are not responsible for tutoring, explaining course information, answering questions about a course, or anything similar. Likewise, interpreters are not responsible for a student's academic performance, attendance, or transportation. Lastly, the interpreters are not there as participants, so please refrain from asking for commentary from the interpreter.

5.1.2. *Student participation*

The process of interpreting requires that the interpreter take in the source message (i.e. any information being spoken by the instructor) and mentally process it before constructing that message in ASL or any other signed mode of communication; therefore, students are receiving this information on a delay and as such may be delayed in participating in question/answer sessions, class discussion, or any other class activity that requires student response. Please take this into consideration when inviting student response and wait a few seconds before taking hands so that the d/Deaf or HOH student has an opportunity to participate that is equal to their hearing counterparts.

5.1.3. *Positioning*

d/Deaf and HOH students have an easier time following and engaging with the content being discussed if they can watch both the interpreter(s) and the speaker while receiving information. This means that interpreters do their best to maintain close proximity to the speaker (in most cases, the instructor). Please be aware of the interpreter's positioning and know that they may adjust this at any time to a position that is better suited to the d/Deaf or HOH student's communication needs.

5.2. **CART Writers**

CART is an acronym for Communication Access Realtime Translation and is a communication method used by many students who are d/Deaf and HOH. CART involves the use of a stenotype machine, specialized software, and a computer and allows the spoken word to be written in realtime. CART writers are trained in the use of machine shorthand, allowing them to write at speeds up to 225 words per minute and at higher speeds for short bursts. Like ASL/English interpreters, CART writers must have an expansive cultural and worldly knowledge and must be able to assimilate quickly any new material peculiar to each CART assignment.

5.2.1. *Role of the CART writer*

CART writers cover assignments in various places and academic settings. In every circumstance, the CART writer's role is providing communication access for the person who is d/Deaf or HOH. CART writers also familiarize themselves with the lecture material and remain unbiased toward the content of their assignments. While CART writers strive to write speech word for word, they may chunk information or leave out irrelevant words based on the needs of the student or the speed of the speaker.

5.2.1.1. *Realtime vs. supernotes*



CART writers at the University of Cincinnati provide two separate but similar services: realtime and supernotes. Both services involve conversion of speech to text; the difference lies in the delivery method. Realtime means the spoken word appears on a screen for immediate reading by the student; supernotes, which is a term developed by UC and used internally only, means the student does not read the screen. In both cases, the text is delivered to the student later via email in the form of a transcript. The service provided depends on the student's needs.

5.2.2. Video captioning

Captioning of videos is a reasonable accommodation and is therefore required under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Any video used must be captioned if the d/Deaf or HOH student requests it. If it is not, the student cannot be held responsible for the content of the video. Videos usually contain unknown content, unknown speakers, rapid and unintelligible speech, and other elements like environmental sounds. Therefore, CART writers cannot accurately capture the speech from a video in realtime. Even if they could, the student reading a realtime screen cannot see the video at the same time (see above section 4.4.). The DSO can provide captioning for all videos, but you will have to work closely with the Communication Access Team to ensure timely delivery of captioned content to the student. Because the captioning process is time-intensive, we need at least two weeks' notice to get a video captioned. A good practice is to provide us with all videos at the beginning of the semester along with the dates the videos will be shown.

5.3. Working with Service Providers

5.3.1. Managing turn-taking

As aforementioned in section 5.1.2., d/Deaf and HOH students receive information from their service providers on a slight delay; moreover, they can only interpret/translate for one person at a time. Please remember to make a concerted effort to control group discussions and ensure that people speak in sequence, not at the same time. This will be a tremendous help to the service providers in relaying the information to the d/Deaf or HOH students in a clear, understandable way.

5.3.2. Potential interruptions

There may be times when the service providers miss what was said due to ambient noise, overlapping speech with another person, acoustics, etc. When this happens, they may ask the speaker to repeat the information that was missed. Of course, they will make this request in the most unobtrusive way possible so as not to disrupt the class. Please do your best to work with the service provider(s) in a joint effort to provide communication to the d/Deaf and HOH student that is as accurate and complete as possible.

5.3.3. Access to course materials

The interpreters and CART writers are able to do their jobs more effectively if they have had a chance to familiarize themselves with course material prior to



arriving on site for the class. With that said, it would be helpful if the service providers had access to course materials with which to prepare. The Disability Services Office can supply the service providers with course textbooks, but will not have access to any other course materials. In cases where the course materials extend beyond the textbook, we ask that you provide Blackboard/Canopy access to the Communication Access Team (CAT) so that they may be able to retrieve posted materials and share them with the services providers assigned to the course.

5.3.4. Voice quality, volume, and pace

Besides the obvious challenges that students who are d/Deaf or HOH face, students whose hearing is in the normal range often have trouble hearing or understanding speakers who speak too softly, too quickly, or with thick accents. CART providers and interpreters are no different. Because their role is providing communication access, it is common for service providers to ask a speaker to speak up, to repeat, or sometimes to slow down. Always be mindful of your speaking volume and speed.



6. REFERENCES

Deaf students in Higher Education—How inclusive are you?: Giving deaf and hard of hearing students a head start, University of Central Lancashire.

Mainly used as a self-assessment tool to measure accessibility for Deaf and hard of hearing students at the University of Central Lancashire, this document provides useful and adaptable information to anyone working with Deaf or hard of hearing student in a postsecondary environment.

Lane, H., Hoffmeister, R., & Bahan, B. (1996). *A Journey Into the Deaf-World*. San Diego, CA: DawnSignPress.

Wareham, T., Clark, G., & Laugesen, C. (2001). *Providing Learning Support for d/Deaf and Hearing Impaired Students Undertaking Fieldwork and Related Activities*. Gloucestershire, UK: Geography Discipline Network (GDN).

Serving as a guide that discusses best practices when working with d/Deaf students in a postsecondary environment and particularly in fieldwork, this document includes information that concerns Deafness, sign language, how to work with d/Deaf students in an educational environment, etc., which is useful and adaptable to other postsecondary institutions even though its development was specifically for the UK through the Higher Education Funding Council for England. Available at <http://www.glos.ac.uk/gdn/disabil/deaf/index.htm>.