



**GUIDE: BEST PRACTICES  
FOR COMMUNICATING  
WITH DEAF AND HARD OF  
HEARING INDIVIDUALS**

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This guide is designed to help you improve interactions with your Deaf and hard of hearing colleagues and students at Oakland Community College. In this guide, we will discuss the provision of auxiliary aids and services, as well as strategies to use to bridge communication and cultural gaps between Deaf/hard of hearing and hearing individuals.

This guide is for informational purposes only. It is not intended as legal advice or legal opinion on any matter.

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# COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING INDIVIDUALS

Communication needs and preferences vary for each Deaf and hard of hearing individual. These needs and preferences can be impacted by a combination of the following: the type of interaction (e.g., 1:1, group setting, in-person, virtual), the Deaf or hard of hearing individual's language preferences (e.g., use of American Sign Language (ASL) and written/spoken English), their level of hearing, and environmental acoustics.

Communication Methods may include, but are not limited to the following:



## **Sign language interpretation**

The process of transmitting spoken English into American Sign Language (ASL) and vice versa between Deaf and hard of hearing ASL users and non-signers. These require using the services of an individual who bilingual and has also received specialized training and credentials to develop the skills and expertise needed to mediate meanings across languages and cultures.



## **In-person sign language interpretation**

A form of sign language interpreting where services are delivered at the same site of the Deaf and/or hard of hearing ASL users and non-signer(s).



## **Video remote interpretation (VRI)**

A form of sign language interpreting that allows Deaf or hard of hearing ASL users to communicate with non-signer(s) at the same site via videoconferencing instead of in-person, on-site interpreting.



## **Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) services**

Real-time captions, also known as live captions or Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART), can provide access in a variety of settings, including in-person and virtual settings.



# COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING INDIVIDUALS (CONTINUED)



## **Writing/typing back and forth**

Using paper and pen or technology to write messages back and forth.



## **Lipreading**

Watching the speaker's face to figure out their speech patterns, movements, gestures and expressions.



## **Using hearing aids and cochlear implants to hear**

Hearing aids are devices that amplify sounds while cochlear implants are a surgically implanted device that stimulates the auditory nerve and allow the user to receive and process sounds and speech.



## **Using additional assistive listening devices (e.g., pocket talkers, FM systems)**

These are devices designed to provide a user with the ability to hear clearly in a variety of circumstances, including small group settings or in public areas where additional amplification is needed.



## **Written materials**

These materials include presenter notes, PowerPoint presentations, and written documentation/instructions.



## **Transcripts**

A written or printed version of material originally presented in an audio-based format.



# COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING INDIVIDUALS (CONTINUED)



## **Cued Speech Transliterators**

These are individuals who use a method of communication in which the mouth movements of speech are combined with a system of hand movements to facilitate understanding by cued speech users.



## **Captions**

Captioning is the act of adding captions – text that explains what is going on on-screen, including dialogue – to video content.



## **Phones**

A telecommunications device that permits two or more users to conduct a conversation.



## **Video Relay Service (VRS)**

A form of Telecommunications Relay Service that enables Deaf and hard of hearing ASL users to communicate with voice telephone users through video equipment and an ASL-English interpreter.



## **Captioned phones**

These phones have a built-in screen that displays real-time text captions of the spoken statements made by the individual the Deaf or hard of hearing individual is talking with.



## **Amplified phones**

These phones allow phone callers to adjust the sound as necessary to hear speech clearly.



# 10 TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING INDIVIDUALS

- 1) **Ask their communication preferences and needs.** No one individual is the same.
- 2) **Provide primary consideration** to the requests of Deaf/hard of hearing individuals when determining which auxiliary aids or services to provide, including specific interpreters.
- 3) **Face the Deaf/hard of hearing individual and maintain eye contact.** The lack of eye contact may be considered disrespectful.
- 4) **Directly communicate to the Deaf/hard of hearing individual,** not the interpreter or other individuals present.
- 5) **Don't ask Deaf/hard of hearing individuals to lipread.** This shifts the burden to them to understand you. Additionally, in best case scenarios, lipreading is 30-45% effective.
- 6) **Yelling, talking loudly, and/or mumbling** can negatively impact comprehension.
- 7) **Avoid speaking too slow or too fast.** This can also negatively impact comprehension, as well as the interpreting and captioning processes.
- 8) **Avoid over emphasizing facial expressions or exaggerating lip movements** as it may reduce communication effectiveness.
- 9) **Leverage technology by typing back and forth** via computers, phones and/or tablets.
- 10) **Rephrase sentences that may not be understood.** Repeating the same words over and over in the same sequence may not benefit anyone.



# THE CLASSROOM

- Do remember that no one size fits all - every Deaf and hard of hearing student may have different needs and preferences.
- Do provide Deaf and hard of hearing students with preferential seating.
- When showing a video in class or assigning a video for homework, make sure the video has captions with accurate spelling, punctuation, and grammar.
- Try avoiding standing in front of a light source as this can put your face in a shadow and make it very difficult for students to lipread.
- Try avoiding speaking when the Deaf or hard of hearing student(s) cannot see your face, such as when you are writing on the board or walking around the room.
- When engaging in classroom discussions, make sure only one person is talking at a time. Additionally, make sure individuals talking identify themselves before speaking - this will help the interpreter and captioner identify who is speaking.
- When referring to items on the board or projector screen/monitor, try to be specific about the word or phrase you're making reference to by pointing directly to it or using a laser pointer.
- Be aware of noise levels in classrooms - Deaf or hard of hearing students, whether or not they use an assistive listening device, may be sensitive to background and environmental sounds. These should be kept at a minimum.
- Provide interpreter(s) and captioner(s) with prep material in advance of interpreting assignments - these include class agendas and PowerPoint notes.
- Do not single out the Deaf or hard of hearing students as needing special accommodations or assistance.
- Do remember and remind students that the interpreter(s) are there for the benefit of everyone, not just the Deaf or hard of hearing student(s).
- If a PA microphone is available in a large classroom, use this microphone - also, be sure to keep the microphone below the mouth to facilitate speechreading.
- If a Deaf or hard of hearing student provides you with an FM microphone, be mindful that the student may only be able to hear you, not everyone else. Repeat messages and questions from students during classroom discussions.

# USE OF INTERPRETERS

When working with an interpreter, it is important to remember:

- Interpreters shall be qualified and certified.
- Do ask if a Deaf or hard of hearing individual has their own preferred list of interpreters they would like to work with.
- Do not rely on on-demand interpreters for pre-scheduled events; instead, schedule interpreters in advance for meetings, webinars and other events.
- Provide interpreters with prep material in advance of interpreting assignments – these include meeting agendas and PowerPoint notes.
- Do not ask Deaf and hard of hearing individuals to bring their own interpreters.
- Do regularly engage the Deaf/hard of hearing individuals to ensure their needs and preferences are addressed, including room set-up and seating arrangements. Interpreters shall be allowed to provide input, as well.
- For in-person events, an interpreter should be located close to the individual(s) speaking to allow the Deaf/hard of hearing individual to see the speaker(s) and the interpreter easily.
- For in-person events, ensure proper lighting is provided for speaker(s) and the interpreter(s).
- For virtual events, provide the interpreting team with co-hosting capabilities on the virtual meeting platform.

When working with an interpreter, also remember:

- An interpreter can only interpret for one individual at a time.
- Turn taking and self-identifying before speaking are critical – this allows the interpreter to say who is speaking before starting the interpretation.
- Directly communicate to the Deaf/hard of hearing individual, not the interpreter.
- Do not ask the interpreter to omit something you said.





# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## **What are the best communication solutions Oakland Community College can provide?**

Communication needs and preferences vary person to person. Additionally, situational factors, including the type of interaction, one's language preferences, one's level of hearing, and environmental acoustics, may impact auxiliary aids and services that should be provided.

The best solution is to ask the Deaf and hard of hearing individual what works best for them.

## **Can Oakland Community College charge a Deaf or hard of hearing individual for part or all of the costs of providing an auxiliary aid or service?**

No, Oakland Community College cannot charge a Deaf or hard of hearing individual for the costs of providing auxiliary aids and services. Covered entities such as Oakland Community College are responsible for providing effective communication, including the provision of sign language interpreters, real-time captioning, and written materials.

## **Who is qualified to be an interpreter?**

A qualified interpreter is an interpreter who is able to interpret effectively, accurately, and impartially, both receptively and expressively, using any necessary specialized vocabulary.

It is important to note that there is a difference between a qualified interpreter and a certified interpreter.

A certified interpreter is one who has undergone rigorous testing from a certifying body and has obtained certification that provides independent verification of an interpreter's knowledge and abilities regarding the delivery of interpreting services.

While interpreters may be certified, this does not automatically mean this interpreter is qualified to interpret in higher education institutions. It is important to ensure that an interpreter has the requisite knowledge base and ability to interpret in the setting they're being requested to interpret in.

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

While Oakland Community College is a higher education institution, there are situations where specialized interpreters are necessary. Examples include interpreting for DeafBlind individuals or Deaf and hard of hearing individuals with low vision, as well as interpreting in medical, mental health and legal-related settings.

As a whole, to ensure Oakland Community College contracts/employs qualified interpreters directly or secures these services via an interpreting referral agency, there are several considerations Oakland Community College should take into account. Oakland Community College should:

- Ensure interpreters listed their interpreting credentials with LARA and have a valid Michigan certification card to be considered legally eligible to work in Michigan. Furthermore, if an interpreter desires to work in specialized settings, they must obtain Michigan Endorsements which have separate eligibility requirements for each applicable Endorsement. These include, but are not limited to: DeafBlind Interpreting, Medical/Mental Health Interpreting, and Legal Interpreting.
- Ascertain interpreters are nationally certified by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), National Association of the Deaf (NAD), and/or Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI).
- Inquire what standards are in place to assess and screen interpreters.

## **What are acceptable terms that can be used to describe members of the Deaf community?**

The most commonly accepted terms are "Deaf," "hard of hearing" and "DeafBlind."

The term "individual with hearing loss" may not always apply to all individuals, especially as there are many who are born Deaf/hard of hearing.

Additionally, the terms, "hearing impaired," "deaf-mute," and "deaf and dumb" should not be used due to the negative connotations associated with these terms.