

MANITOBA CULTURAL SOCIETY OF THE DEAF

A NEW RHYTHM: TEACHING BEYOND SOUND

When you have a Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH) student in class without an Interpreter

Deaf (D) and Hard of Hearing (HH) students generally communicate very well in a one-to-one situation. However, in group settings, it is usually harder for them to follow what's happening unless there are supports in place.

Some individuals can speak for themselves, lip-read, use hearing aids, have cochlear implants, and only use American Sign Language (ASL) or Langue des signes du Québec (LSQ) or a combination of any of the above. They may resort to pen and paper or use text or microphone apps on their phones to communicate. It is important to ask each dancer their preferred mode of communication.

Remember there is no one size fits all. The ability to understand the instructor depends on a variety of things:

- the hearing status of the student
- type of hearing range (low tones versus high tones ability)
- skill in lipreading
- amount of background noise
- the clarity of the instructor's voice
- the amount of lighting in the environment
- other environmental barriers (examples below)

TIPS:

1. Call the student's name first to get their attention before you speak. If necessary, use an attention grabber technique (Example: Flicking a light switch). This gives the DHH student a chance to focus attention and reduces the chance of missing words at the beginning of the conversation.
2. Always face students if giving instructions. Keep your mouth clear and enunciate your words. Speak clearly, slow down a little, distinctly, but naturally, without shouting or exaggerating mouth movements. Pause between sentences or phrases, and wait to make sure the DHH student has understood you before going on. Avoid mumbling. Beards and mustaches interfere with the ability to lip read as well as eating, chewing, or smoking while talking.
3. Sometimes you will need to give the DHH student a bit more time to reply back for a question. They are often trying to decipher what you have asked.

4. Avoid using sentences that are too complex. If the DHH student doesn't understand instructions, rephrase your sentences. Certain combinations of words can be harder to understand than others.

GENERIC EXAMPLE:

"I am taking your Jeep to Safeway." It could be rephrased as "I am driving your car to the grocery store."

DANCE EXAMPLES:

- a. "Lengthen the line of your legs."
"Stretch your legs and feet."
- b. "For strong posture, lengthen your spine and engage your core."
"For strong posture, feel a long back and hold your abdominals."
- c. "We are going to travel across the room."
"We are going to start from the side."

5. If you are giving specific information – such as time, place or phone numbers, have the DHH student repeat the specifics back to you. Many numbers and words sound alike. (Example: make and bake - the m and b have similar mouth shapes, and numbers 50 and 60 sound similar).

6. Pay attention to any puzzled looks that may indicate misunderstanding. Be considerate when you ask the DHH student if they understood you, or ask leading questions so you know your message got across.

If the misunderstanding persists, write it down. Always have a pen and paper or a phone with texting ability handy. Shouting in frustration, in anger, or impatience distorts lip shapes and voice. It's not always about hearing you, it's about understanding you.

Be aware of the possibility of distorted sounds for the DHH student. They may hear your voice, but still may have difficulty understanding some words.

DHH people are very tuned in to facial expressions. They can read impatience and anger on faces and know something is wrong but not what. This can be demoralizing for them and lower their self-esteem.

7. Speak in good light whenever possible. Position yourself so that the light is shining on your face and not in the eyes of the DHH student.

8. Remember, listening with lower hearing levels is harder than it seems and it can be exhausting and isolating. Offer short breaks to help the fatigue to prevent inattention.

9. Ways to reduce background noise:

- Close the door or any open windows in the dance studio.
- Use a FM microphone if you have one and the DHH student has a hearing aid that has loop capabilities.
- Use the DHH student's FM pen system if they offer it to you. This is worn around your neck so they can hear you directly in their hearing aid blocking out most background noises.
- Avoid opening snack bags, drumming fingers or tapping items on objects while talking.
- Have the other students be quiet while you are talking.
- Turn down the music while talking.

10. If a DHH student joins an ongoing group conversation, immediately tell them the context of the conversation: "We are talking about..."

It is a quirk of being DHH, if they don't know the context of the conversation, then they will not understand anything that is said after they join the group conversation. Take turns speaking and avoid interrupting other speakers.

Something to note: DHH people will miss the punchline of a joke because of the nature of telling jokes. The person telling the joke will always drop their voice or mumble the punchline.

11. On class days, be aware of low pressure days (cloudy/rainy days), DHH students will have a harder time hearing and understanding on those days. Be extra patient in class on those days.

12. Never ever say: "Never Mind!". DHH people really hate this! It's one of the most demeaning sentences for them. They feel devalued and it's very isolating. You may have said a trivial thing but they really want to know regardless.

Thank you for reading our tips for communicating with DHH students without an interpreter. Ideally there should be one but do ask ahead of time what their needs are. Please contact us if you have any questions about this document. Contact email: projects@mcsd-dam.com