

## **Tips for Working With Students Who Are Hard of Hearing (HH)**

- **Students who are Hard of Hearing are unique.** They are neither fully in the deaf community nor in the hearing community. Some of these students have acquired their hearing loss as adults later in life, e.g. veterans. Typically they have not had a classroom experience as a hard of hearing individual until now, so often they are unaware of possible accommodations and/or compensation strategies.
- **They depend on their vision to speechread** and gather visual cues such as body language and expressions from the instructor and others in the room.
- **In general, it is not possible to see and recognize all of our speech.** Only about 30% of the English language has visible lip formations, so sounds like “mat,” “bat,” “pat,” look similar. For this reason, students who are HH must rely on context and try to fill in the holes.
- **Speechreading** is affected by strong accents, facial hair, acoustics in the room, size of the room, lighting, lecture format vs. group discussion format, familiarity with the topic, technology, and the student’s speechreading abilities. Each classroom situation is unique.
- **Physical aspects of the classroom become very important**
  - Try not to stand in front of a light source which will create a shadow over your face.
  - Try to avoid speaking when the student cannot see your face (e.g. while writing on the board, walking around the room).
  - When using a computer or projector, stand to the side so your face is not blocked.
  - If using a microphone, hold the microphone below your mouth to facilitate speechreading.
  - Use visual aids when possible. It’s an HH student’s best friend!
  - When referencing something on the board or screen (picture, word or phrase) point directly to it.
  - When showing a video, make sure it is captioned. If you need assistance, contact Disability Resources.
  - For small classrooms, arrange desks in a semicircle so the student who is HH can speechread others in the room.
  - If that is not possible, the student may choose to sit in front and to the side to better see you and the rest of the class. This allows the student to easily monitor who is talking by simply turning his or her head.
  - Be aware of noise level. Students with this type of hearing loss may have difficulty distinguishing background sounds from speech. If there is group work where the room is noisy, it is helpful if the group with the student who is HH finds a less distracting place to carry on the discussion. We suggest a corner of the room or quiet hallway.
- **Teaching Strategies:**
  - Repeat questions from the class before responding. A student who is HH most likely will not be able to turn his/her head quickly enough to speechread the person who is talking. A student using an Assistive Listening Device (ALD) basically hears what comes from a microphone, so he/she will tend to miss comments and questions from others in the room.

- If you ask the students to read something, please avoid talking at the same time, so the student does not have to look up at you to speechread, therefore, losing focus on the reading. It is challenging for this student to look down at the paper, book, and/or computer and watch you simultaneously.
- If you arrange a meeting, try to make sure it takes place in a quiet environment. If the student comes to your office, you may want to write out specific terms you want the student to know. Try to avoid sitting in front of a bright window because the glare makes it difficult to speechread.
- Write important terms and concepts on the board or project them onto a screen (using Power Point slides, for example).
- **Notetaking:** It is challenging for a student who is HH to focus on speechreading and/or captioning while taking notes at the same time. Having a notetaker is a useful accommodation.
- **Testing Accommodations:** The students who request extra testing time may have difficulty with reading comprehension, especially if the student lost his/her hearing at an early age. They hear things differently, sentence structure can be difficult to decipher, and the nuances of written language may be missed. Extended testing time helps the student process the written language.

**Most importantly, every student who is HH will have a different type and extent of hearing loss, so each student will choose the accommodation(s) that are most appropriate for his/her needs.**

If you have questions, please contact Ila Sachs, Program Coordinator for Deaf/hard of hearing Services at x6811 or via email at [sachsi@sou.edu](mailto:sachsi@sou.edu).

Adapted from *Tips for Teaching Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing* (US Department of Education) and *Guide to Working with Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students* (Western Region Outreach Center and Consortia at the National Center on Deafness)