# Basic Cultural Awareness for Interacting with Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Persons and in a Classroom or Meeting Setting

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Rochester Bridges to the Doctorate

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**Introduction:** When you walk past someone in the atrium of the Clinical and Translational Science Institute (CTSI), or anywhere else on the University of Rochester campus and Strong Hospital, and say, "good morning" and this person apparently has ignored you, do not immediately assume that this person is rude. The CTSI is the home of the National Center for Deaf Health Research (NCDHR), a Center for Disease Control Prevention Research Center, and two National Institutes of Health funded training programs: Bridges to the Doctorate for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students and the Rochester Postdoc Partnership to Advance Research and Academic Careers of Deaf Scholars. It is possible the person you just greeted is Deaf or Hard of Hearing (D/HH).

**What is the difference between a person who is "deaf," "Deaf," or "hard of hearing"?**
Retrieved Aug 31, 2016 from: https://www.nad.org/resources/american-sign-language/community-and-culture-frequently-asked-questions/

> The deaf and hard of hearing community is diverse. There are variations in how a person becomes deaf or hard of hearing, level of hearing, age of onset, educational background, communication methods, and cultural identity. How people "label" or identify themselves is personal and may reflect identification with the deaf and hard of hearing community, the degree to which they can hear, or the relative age of onset. For example, some people identify themselves as "late-deafened," indicating that they became deaf later in life. Other people identify themselves as "deaf-blind," which usually indicates that they are deaf or hard of hearing and, also have some degree of vision loss. Some people believe that the term "people with hearing loss" is inclusive and efficient. However, some people who were born deaf or hard of hearing do not think of themselves as having lost their hearing. **[Please, do not use the term "hearing impaired"].** Over the years, the most commonly accepted terms have come to be "deaf," "Deaf," and "hard of hearing."

> In general, the term "deaf" with a lowercase "d" is used when referring to the audiological condition of not hearing, and the uppercase "Deaf" when referring to a particular group of deaf people who share a language – American Sign Language (ASL) – and a culture (Carol Padden and Tom Humphries, in Deaf in America: Voices from a Culture, 1988).

**Differentiating between Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people:**
- Deaf people rely primarily on vision to communicate**.**
- Deaf people do not view themselves as "disabled." For this reason, avoid using the term, "hearing impaired" – which comes across as inappropriate and negative.
- Deaf people communicate primarily in American Sign Language (ASL).
- Hard-of-Hearing Individuals rely primarily on amplification such as hearing aids, cochlear implants, and assistive listening systems to communicate (some Deaf people use these devices too).

*When in doubt, ask: "Are you Deaf or Hard of Hearing?"*

**To get the attention of a Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing person:**
- Use a visual movement to catch their attention such as waving your hand,
- Tap him/her on the shoulder
- Go around and stand in front of the person
- If you are in a conference room, flick the room's lights on and off.

**American Sign Language (ASL) is:**
- American Sign Language (ASL) is the primary language of culturally Deaf people.
- A visual language created by Deaf people. ASL is neither a written nor a spoken language.
- A fully developed, natural language, which has no grammatical relationship with English.
- Not a universal sign language. Different countries have different sign languages.

**Interacting with a Deaf person:**
- If your path is blocked by two Deaf people conversing in sign language, you can walk through. Many people hesitate, waiting for the conversation to end, or unnecessarily bend down very low in order to avoid passing through their signing space. This interrupts the conversation. Walking straight through allows little to no interruption to the signed conversation. A brief nod of the head indicates "excuse me."
- Speak slowly (although not too slow to be unnatural conversing) and clearly, but don't raise your voice or exaggerate mouth/lip movement. If you are asked to repeat something, rephrase the sentence.
- Do not be embarrassed to communicate by paper and pencil or using your smartphone if necessary. Getting the message across is more important than the medium.
- Do not hesitate to use pantomime, body language and/or facial expressions to offer more visual clues.
- Avoid asking the question, "Do you read lips?" Only 30% of English is visible on the lips and 50% of English words are visually similar (e.g. "disease" and "tease," "AIDS" and "Hands," "Flu" and "Food," "Baby," "Maybe" and "Pay me," or "Pill" and "Bill").
- Deaf people consider staring at a signed conversation "rude".
- Meetings are conducted in two languages - ASL and English.
- ASL interpreters are for both Deaf and hearing people.
- When communicating with a D/HH person through an ASL interpreter—**look at and speak directly to the Deaf signer, NOT the interpreter**. You are conversing with the D/HH individual, not the interpreter!
- To request accesses services, graduate (PhD, Master's, Certificate, visiting, non-matriculated), postdoctoral, and preparatory program (Bridges to the Doctorate, Summer Scholars, PREP trainees, SCRC summer students, unpaid academic interns/shadows) trainees at the University of

Rochester School of Medicine & Dentistry, please contact **Jen_Prosceo@URMC.Rochester.edu and email:**

> Deaf Professional Interpreter Services
> **DeafProfessional_InterpreterServices@URMC.Rochester.edu**

- The University of Rochester Medical Center Interpreter services webpage (patient care) can be found at:

  http://www.urmc.rochester.edu/strong-memorial/services-amenities/services/interpreters.aspx

**Interacting with a Hard-of-Hearing person:**

- If a Hard-of-Hearing person is having trouble understanding you, try moving someplace else in the building where there is less background noise (e.g., construction machinery, several conversations going simultaneously, etc.; turn off the radio or TV in the background).
- Speak slowly (although not too slow to be unnatural conversing) and clearly, but don't shout, yell or exaggerate mouth/lip movements. If you are asked to repeat, **rephrasing the sentence may help**. **NEVER tell a D/HH person "never mind, I will tell you later"—communication must be equal access in real time for all.**
- Classrooms or auditoriums may have an Assistive Listening System (ALS) that benefit(s) some Hard-of-Hearing individuals, with or without hearing aids/cochlear implants.
- Make sure you speak directly into the Assistive Listening System microphone.
- CART (Communication Access Real-time Translation [aka, real-time captioning but captionist usually remote]) or C-print may be used in meetings and classrooms; real-time captioning benefits Deaf and Hearing people alike!
- C-print—in room real-time captionists has the advantage of the captionist **making sure that spoken information, especially during discussions involving several individuals, is heard by the captionist so that it is communicated effectively to D/HH clients**.

**Ensure clear and comfortable line of visual contact for all participants and take turns when *speaking or signing*:**

- Do not stand or sit by or in from of the window when speaking with a D/HH person. The bright back lighting will cause the D/HH person to see only a silhouette making it difficult to understand facial expressions.
- Do not have a bright light behind you when **Zoom conferencing/teaching** for the same reason as above.
- Allow Deaf participants time to read handouts before speaking.
- **Do not block view between the interpreter and the Deaf participant (this can be a hard one for hearing scientists who like wo walk back and forth on the stage when presenting!).**
- Arrange classrooms or meeting rooms in a semi-circle to allow unblocked lines of visual contact during meetings.
- **Take turns**: Speak one at a time (an interpreter cannot interpret simultaneous conversations). **Raise hand to take turn speaking**. The **meeting facilitator should remind all participants to follow this practice**. Do not be shy about assigning someone to be a meeting facilitator if needed!
- Allow for **lag time.** Interpreters will finish signing the information *after* the speaker has completed his/her comments. Interpreters may delay signing to D/HH individuals until they hear enough of the English conversation to prepare proper ASL grammar and syntax.
- **If using slides in classroom lecture/seminars, make sure to keep the slide being discussed on the screen until the interpreter finishes signing the information.**

**Enhancing communication in didactic coursework lecture format:**

- Handouts/Presentations should be posted **minimally the day before** because **interpreters** have access to blackboard and **having that information before the lecture** can be used to facilitate communication between the interpreter and D/HH student.

- If complex terminology is used in the class lecture or seminar, **a list of discipline-specific terminology should be provided to the ASL interpreting team in advance** so they can become familiar with the spelling (because of the need to fingerspell) of words for which no ASL signs exist. Advance notice of terminology can help the interpreters and D/HH clients to communicate ahead of time to develop "short-cuts" to avoid fingerspelling of many scientific or medical terms.

- **Any videos (including YouTube videos) used during lectures or meetings MUST be accurately closed captioned (CC). (=PROFESSIONAL captioning is recommended. Resources/vendors for closed captioning can be suggested by the office providing access services to students, staff and faculty and meeting participants at your institution. Contact Jen_Prosceo@URMC.Rochester.edu in Graduate Education and Postdoctoral Affairs to facilitate this service for SMD graduate level classes.**
  - Note, the automatic "closed captioning" capability of online sources (Google/YouTube) are very INACCURATE and this is especially true for technical, medical, and scientific content. **Videos used to deliver content for coursework must be equally accessible to all individuals and delivered at the same time to hearing and D/HH individuals, thus** *professional closed captioning must be arranged well in advance of showing or assigning the video*.

- The interpreter and Deaf client need to have a **clear line of site**; however, it is best if the interpreter is near the speaker. **This necessitates the speaker's awareness of the line of site so the speaker does not wander back and forth in between interpreter and D/HH individuals.**

- Good lighting on the interpreters is required so that signs are visible as are facial expression and body movements, which are part of the grammatical structure of ASL. If dimming lights is needed to see a slide or two, it is IMPORTANT to return lighting to acceptable level for the D/HH student and interpreter.

- The speakers should not stand in front of a window or bright light as the speaker's face will be in shadow. The reasons are the same for proper room lightening for visibility of signs, facial expressions and body movements. Remember this applies for Zoom conferencing/teaching as well!

- Don't cover your face or mouth, or talk into (with back to audience) the projector screen, blackboard or dry-erase board as the D/HH participant cannot see your face. Limit back turning. Only ~30% of the English language is comprehensible through lip reading (and only for some individuals); however, you want to be sure that your mouth remains visible for those individuals who use this approach to supplement communication.

- Take cues from the D/HH individual for example if the student pauses to write something down (especially in one-on-one conversations), pause voicing until the student looks up again so they see the conversation when the speaker resumes voicing and the interpreter starts signing.

- If the class is small enough (and especially if a lot of class participation and discussion is required), the desks or tables should be set up in a U-shaped or semi-circular pattern to facilitate visual access to all individuals in the class AND interpreters for D/HH clients. Make your environment Deaf-friendly!

**Real-Time Captioning Services**

Real-time captioning (similar to closed-captioning) may be requested by D/HH persons, especially in classroom settings, lectures, seminars, journal clubs and workshops where there is interaction not only from the presenter/lecturer, but also questions and comments from the class or audience participants.

**Communication access real-time translation (CART)** service is done with the trained operator **at a remote location**. A voice connection such as a telephone, cellphone, or **computer microphone** (typically

used at URSMD) is used to send the voice to the operator (captionist), and the real-time text is transmitted back over a modem, Internet, or other data connection to a tablet or laptop in the client's possession or streamed in a text box at the bottom of the screen in the lecture hall or classroom.  The following etiquette will greatly facilitate transmitting ALL conversations to the remote captionists:

1) Make sure microphones are fully charged!

2) Have the lecturer wear a microphone and make sure the captionist can hear what the lecturer is saying so working with the instructor and client along with the remote captionist ahead of class start time to try out the system will save class time.

3) Depending on the size of the class, multiple microphones should be available so the class participants can access a microphone to ask questions or share comments.

4) Class participants should identify themselves by name so that the remote captionist can include who is speaking in the streamed and typed transcript.

5) ALWAYS use the microphone to communicate any spoken language (remember to take turns speaking).

6) **If there is only one microphone for the lecturer/presenter then that person must repeat the questions asked by audience members/class participants so that the remote captionist can hear it and turn the speech into text for captioning.** *This helps hearing audience members as well who may be at the back of a large lecture hall and not be able to hear the questions asked by folks in the front rows*.

7) **How lecturers can help notetakers, captionists and ASL interpreters in the classroom**:

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| **During the class the professor should do the following to help the notetaker, captionist and interpreter (retrieved from: http://deaftec.org/classact/challenges/support-services/notetaking )** |
| _____ Pause between topics and changes in subject material |
| _____ Allow visuals to remain posted until the notetaker (and all students) have had time to copy them |
| _____ If a student asks a question or has a comment or concern, repeat question if clarification is needed and allow a slight pause before responding |
| _____ If you have group work in class, encourage students not to talk over each other, and to allow a slight pause before the next speaker begins |
| _____ When deaf/hard-of-hearing and hearing students to work together in a group, ensure that the notetaker has a place in this group |
| _____ When students give presentations, ask them to speak clearly and slowly, and to give any handouts to the notetaker |
| _____ If you write multiple equations on the board, label them and refer to them by those labels |
| _____ **Avoid using references such as "this one goes here, and that one goes there," and instead refer to items by their names and to locations by specific references** |

 **"C-Print®** is a speech-to-text (captioning) technology and service developed at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, a college of Rochester Institute of Technology. The system successfully is being used to provide communication access to individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing in many programs around the country. In addition to educational environments, C-Print also can be used in business and community settings, and with individuals with other disabilities, such as those with a visual impairment or a learning disability. A trained operator, called a C-Print captionist, produces a text display of the spoken information in classroom or other settings. At the same time, one or more students read the display to

access the information [on a tablet or laptop]. A C-Print captionist includes as much information as possible, generally providing a meaning-for-meaning translation of the spoken English content. After class, the text can be provided in paper or electronic format for the student to use as notes." (Accessed Sept 15, 2019—definition verbatim from https://www.rit.edu/ntid/cprint/). C-print captionists are in the class-room in real-time with the D/HH client or via internet for Zoom classroom teaching and meetings.

**Hearing Loops**. Some hard-of-hearing people can hear and understand some speech using hearing aids or cochlear implants. A hearing loop allows for direct connection between the microphone system used during a spoken presentation and the hearing aid or cochlear implant. This eliminates background sounds and feedback, making the spoken words clearer. Most modern hearing aids and all cochlear implants will connect to a hearing loop. Currently, the University of Rochester Medical Center (URMC) has four (4) rooms with permanent hearing loops installed. Three of those four rooms are classrooms in the URMC Saunders Research Building (SRB), which houses the UR Clinical & Translational Science Institute. These rooms can be used for remote real-time captioning (CART) services as well, especially if there is a lot of spoken interaction among class participants and there is a shortage of microphones. The hearing loops have multiple mics, and the loop can be connected to a laptop or phone to provide audio input. That should improve the remote captionist's ability to hear multiple people (as long as the people are using the mics).

**Take Home Tips**

- When communicating with D/HH through an ASL interpreter, maintain proper eye contact—**look at and speak directly to the Deaf signer, not the interpreter**.
- **Do not use the term *"hearing impaired."*** The most commonly accepted terms are "deaf," "Deaf," and "hard of hearing."  ("***Hearing loss"*** is also considered a negative connotation in the Deaf Community).
- **Do not block view** between the interpreter and the Deaf participant; **maintain direct line of site** when communicating.
- Do not stand or sit by or in from of the window or bright light when speaking with a D/HH person. The bright back lighting will cause the D/HH person to see only a silhouette making it difficult to understand facial expressions.
- Do not have a bright light behind you when **Zoom conferencing/teaching** for the same reason as above.
- **Allow for lag time**—interpreters will finish signing the information *after* the speaker has completed his/her comment.
- **Take turns speaking** as the interpreters can attend to only one voice at a time to communicate in ASL!  **It's the polite thing to do anyway!**
- Why you may experience **delay in interpreter voicing**: Sometimes you will see a D/HH person signing, but the interpreter has not started voicing. This delay is so the interpreter can receive the information in ASL and then convey it in spoken English. This is perfectly normal. ASL and English languages have different syntax (and other complex linguistic features) so the interpreter is gathering the necessary information to voice a coherent message in English! The reverse is also true. Sometimes the interpreter does not start signing until the speaker has almost completed voicing so that the information can be conveyed to the D/HH recipient in ASL not signed English word order.
- **Good lighting** is required so that signs are visible; **facial expressions and body movements are part of ASL grammar**.
- When using remote real-time captioning (CART) services remember to use the microphones at all times, speak one at a time, identify who is speaking and, if only one microphone is available, the **lecturer/presenter must repeat the questions asked by audience members/class participants so that the remote captionist can hear it and turn the speech into text.**
- **Lecturers should avoid using references** such as **"this one goes here, and that one goes there,"** and instead refer to items by their names and to locations by specific references.