



THE LONDON SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■

Working with Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students

DWS Good Practice Guide

2018

Background

Many of the points relating to teaching strategies constitute good practice for all students, whether deaf or hearing, but they are particularly helpful to ensure that deaf students can participate fully and gain maximum benefit from your teaching.

Bear in mind that different teaching situations require different strategies to ensure that students have full access to information. It is often necessary to be adaptable.

Each deaf student is different. Do check with your student(s) which strategies would be most helpful.

Working with electronic notetakers or British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters.

Some students will use an electronic notetaker (real time or remote typist) or a Sign Language Interpreter (SLI). Specialist notetakers need to take breaks during long lectures and it is important to discuss this, and the use of other aids, before a teaching session. Do give the notetaker an opportunity to clarify items if necessary and remember to leave any complex or specialised information you display, such as numbers, formulas or specialised terms, on show for longer.

Tips

- Avoid jargon and abbreviations, unless you have given the full definition.
- Allow plenty of time when using visual aids as it will not be possible for the deaf person to study visual aids, and to lipread or watch the SLI at the same time.
- Deaf students need time to process questions or comments in English, so do allow for a short time delay in their responses. This is especially important if they are using a SLI or a notetaker.
- Ensure that lighting is good enough for the SLI to be seen.
- Check the positioning of any equipment that is being used, such as overhead or digital projector, so that it can be seen clearly by all.
- The deaf person should be seated where she/he can see you easily and clearly. Ideally, the student should have his/her back to windows or strong light sources.

For lipreading, it is useful to know the following....

Context

Before starting a discussion or changing the subject let the deaf person know the topic being discussed, perhaps by writing up the title on the board.

Lipreading is much easier when the subject area is known.

Content

Try to use plain English and explain technical/theoretical words and phrases. It is better to speak in complete sentences rather than single words or phrases and if the student doesn't understand, rephrase rather than repeat.

Pace

Try to allow a little extra time for the deaf student to assimilate information and respond before going on to the next stage. Break the session up so that the deaf student is not lipreading for long periods at a time.

Contributions

Questions and contributions from elsewhere in the room may not be heard, so it is helpful to repeat the question before going on to answer it.

Lectures

Lectures are a common and generally productive medium of teaching within a university context. As a predominantly verbal medium, however, deaf students may find the lecture format difficult.

Deaf students (and deaf students with notetakers) may need to juggle up to four aspects of a lecture – the board, the lecturer, the notetaker/interpreter and their own notes. This can be very challenging. Some deaf student may need to lipread, and if so they will primarily focus on your face.

Tips

- Speak clearly and naturally at a reasonable pace.
- Try not to cover your mouth or obscure your face.
- Avoid walking around the room or nodding your head too much.
- Try not to stand with a light or window behind you.
- Make every attempt to face the class at all times.
- Pause or stop speaking when writing on the board or flip-chart as you will have your back to students.
- Try to maintain eye contact when talking to a deaf student individually. Give additional visual clues by using facial expression and gesture.
- Don't shout - this distorts lip patterns and makes you harder to lipread!
- If students make contributions to discussions, please ensure that questions or comments are repeated or paraphrased by the lecturer in a clear voice.
- Where appropriate use a microphone to enable deaf students to access as much spoken information as possible. Always ensure that guest speakers are informed of their need to wear microphones. If the microphone system or induction loop is broken do report this to Disability Services.
- Ensure that seating arrangements are suitable by asking your student at the start of term.
- Lecture notes, summaries or handouts in advance should be given as this will help students establish what the basic content of each lecture is. This is important since deaf students may not hear all of the information in a lecture.
- Always provide important information in written form and provide a glossary of terminology to assist students in understanding the lecture content.

Seminars

Seminars are an essential space for student contribution and discussion. However deaf students may have difficulties accessing all aspects of the discussion. Lipreading requires great concentration. Clear speech and contextual clues are vital for understanding.

Tips

- Provide students with an outline of the topics of discussion in advance. This allows deaf students to prepare and understand more of the context of the discussion.
- Use short sentences rather than single words. Always provide unfamiliar terms or new concepts in written form.
- Ask open-ended questions, not those that require a yes/no response. This will enable you to check that the student has understood the question.
- If a student is having difficulty understanding, consider re-wording rather than repeating what you have said.
- Allow only one student to speak at a time.
- Encourage other students to speak clearly and not to whisper or cover their mouths.
- Indicate which student is speaking and repeat or re-phrase comments or questions from students.
- Check if the deaf student has a favoured side when talking to them. For example, they may be deliberately trying to position their good side towards you.
- Don't single out deaf students, put them on the spot or discuss their requirements in front of a group.

Size

The optimum size of group for a deaf person is between 6 and 10. If a group is bigger than this it is unlikely that people will be near enough to lipread and following contributions to discussions becomes more complicated.

Try to be flexible with the timetable to ensure that, as far as possible, any deaf students are members of smaller groups.

Vital Information

Ensure that verbal information such as

- room changes
- cancelled sessions
- assignment deadlines

....are written down and understood.

Seating

- Arrange the room in a circle or horseshoe shape so that the student can see everyone.
- Make sure no one is silhouetted against the light.
- The student may like to sit next to the lecturer as comments will be addressed that way, or alternatively next to a notetaker so that he or she can pick up on missed discussion and follow changes in subject. If they are working with a SLI then they will need to be seated opposite the speaker, with the interpreter seated next to the speaker.

Chairing

Allocate a Chairperson for each seminar/discussion. You should ensure that this person controls the discussion, encourages members to speak up and prevents unnecessary interruptions when people are speaking. It is particularly important in open discussions that other students take turns in speaking and give the student who is deaf time to look in their direction before starting to speak.

Make a rule that all contributors must raise a hand before they speak and that only one person speaks at a time.

Equipment

If the student is using a radio microphone or loop system, please remember that all contributors to the discussion will need to speak into the microphone. Ensure that this is known to the group before discussion starts.

Videos

Use subtitled videos wherever possible or contact the DWS for details on how to obtain a transcript of the commentary. If SLIs or notetakers are being used, they will also need to see a copy of the video in advance.

General Points

- Encourage **social inclusion** for deaf students e.g. opportunities should be made for hearing students to receive deaf awareness training.
- Students may require **additional tutorials** after the session to clarify/explain concepts. An SLI or a notetaker may need to be booked in advance for this session.

Room bookings

When booking lecture and tutorial rooms please make sure that the rooms have an induction loop.

It would also be useful to consider if the room has space to allow a semi-circle pattern of desks. If this is not possible deaf students will miss significant parts of the discussion.

Avoid rearranging classes - what might be considered reasonable notice for the average university student, might be rather short notice to arrange notetaking cover/SLI.

Assessed work

Being deaf increases the time and effort they spend on many daily activities, as well as on activities related to their studies. Be aware of this if a student is making a request such as extra time for the completion of essays and worksheets.

For British Sign Language (BSL) users it is important to note that English is their second language and that can bring difficulties with written English. Those born deaf have never heard the spoken word and cannot relate easily to spoken English. Consequently, they may struggle to understand written English.

Students can often read around subjects that are covered in tutorials or lectures because they have missed a significant amount of verbal information. Some general guidance regarding reading materials and focused reading would be useful (Directed Reading List).

Checklist

Things to provide for deaf students - in advance wherever possible.

- Copies of handouts and lecture notes.
- Handouts which outline key points.
- Lists of new technical terms/vocabulary.
- Directed Reading List.

These steps allow deaf students to obtain correct spelling and meaning, to contextualise the content of lectures and prepare for the session, particularly regarding new vocabulary.

Field Trips

Special provision may have to be made for students on field trips or placements. A student who copes well with lipreading in a lecture theatre may be quite unable to manage without further support when on a windy beach or moor or in a noisy factory.

Be flexible and talk through the possible options and solutions with the student well in advance to avoid problems.