

*They face obstacles,  
but their strength of spirit and resolve keeps them on course  
to achieving their college education.*

***Listening to  
Students with Hearing Limitations***

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## Listening to Students with Hearing Limitations...

*“I feel like faculty and staff do a pretty good job....*

*I don’t expect help, and anything I’ve received, I’m grateful for. (There is this one staff member who) is one in a sea of people who cares. I give her credit for that.”*

—29, female, tendonitis since 15 (has progressed into trigger finger), loss of hearing, depression and anxiety.

*“I have a learning disability, am hard of hearing in the right ear, with a hearing aid. I sit in front and read lips.*

*I think it’s harder for us because we’re singled out indefinitely and have to do all this work on top of learning to get our services. It’s difficult. I think they should make it easier on students. I don’t think SSWD has been very supportive.*

*One of the challenges for me is when an instructor is giving an assignment, I want to do it correctly. So I use the Writing Center and go back and make sure I have the assignment right. Because of my disability, I learn a little slower, so it takes me a little longer than other students.*

*I feel that SSWD has been very helpful and informative (with the accommodations given).*

*It’s a little scary when you first come here. I come from a smaller community college. Instructors are so busy, not as approachable, so it’s harder to ask for assistance so I don’t really approach as much because you feel like they think, ‘you’re a senior—you should know that by now.’*

*I feel that Sac State is very good at trying to get students involved, it’s just that some of us have jobs or other things that keep us from attending. I just wish that the Sac State Writing Center had longer sessions for walk-ins.”*

—male, 28, gay, single, transfer student, senior, learning disability-auditory processing disorder.

*“I find it hard to hear. Maybe it’s my age, but it’s become a real problem. My notes aren’t good in class. Some instructors need a microphone.”*

—No student specifics given

*“I have a disability in hearing.*

*I love college. The people are very nice. I am learning a lot.”*

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## **Students with Hearing Limitations**

According to the Hearing Loss Association of America:

48 million Americans have significant hearing loss.

1 in 5 American teens experience some degree of hearing loss.

2 to 3 out of every 1,000 children in the country are born with a detectable hearing loss in one or both ears.

In the realm of education, 50% of a classroom discussion may be missed due to even mild hearing loss in a child in K-12 learning, and this finding likely carries into the college setting. The National College Health Assessment by the American College Health Association reported that 1.9% of college students reported having deafness or hearing loss (Spring 2020).

Hearing problems can be temporary or permanent, and may range from partial hearing loss (e.g., loss of hearing in one ear, decline in hearing of both ears) to almost entire or complete hearing loss (deafness). Other hearing difficulties are possible, too, such as Tinnitus, a chronic ringing of the ears, which also causes headaches, similar to migraines, that last for hours. You can be born with hearing loss or it can occur in childhood or adulthood. Causes include: birth complications, infection and illness, injury to the ear, loud noise, exposure to certain toxins, some medication side effects, and aging. Genetic factors may also cause hearing problems, although it should be noted that the great majority of children who are deaf were born to hearing parents.

While different people will have different preferences, typically the best terms to use include: “Student who is Deaf or deaf” for a student with profound hearing loss (with the first letter of the term capitalized or not depending on the degree to which the student identifies with Deaf community), “person who has hearing loss,” or “person who is hard of hearing” (for someone who communicates with speech). In the plural, “the Deaf” or “Deaf community” are often used to show identification or solidarity with folks who share a culture and language (sign), which is why the capital “D” is used.

### ***Here at Sacramento State***

Some students’ hearing problems may be such that they are eligible for accommodations as they pursue their higher education. According to the California State University Policy for the Provision of Accommodations and Support Services to Students with Disabilities, one of nine categories of disabilities established for reporting purposes in the California State University system is: “Deaf and Hard of Hearing: Limitation in the hearing process that impedes the educational process and necessitates accommodations, support services, or programs.”

At Sacramento State, there are 27 students who are deaf or hard of hearing as a primary disability, according to the Fall 2020 Census. Depending on the individual student’s eligibility, SSWD accommodations may include: Interpreters, note-takers, assistive listening devices, real-time captioning in class, and open- or closed-captioned videos and films. Some students may have the accommodation of an individual (FM) system, with the professor wearing a microphone and transmitter which transmits and amplifies the professor’s voice directly to the student’s individual receiver.

## What We Can Do

Students who are hard of hearing or deaf may lipread or use hearing aids or interpreters who sign, or some combination thereof in their daily life activities.

In the realm of college, however, where the lecture is the prevalent mode of instruction, a student with hearing loss faces significant challenges to learning.

In addition to providing all accommodations required for the student with hearing disabilities, below you will find further suggestions for the classroom setting and beyond for students with hearing limitations.

### 1. For students with partial hearing loss:

Reduce any background noise when speaking to the student or lecturing that may make things harder for students with partial hearing loss or that can be amplified by a student's hearing aid, such as side conversations or loud voices outside the room. You may want to switch locations, when possible, if the acoustics are problematic.

Keep in mind that some may have hearing loss in one ear only, which is why such students may receive preferential seating for maximum hearing in the classroom. In conversations and smaller group meetings, try to be mindful in positioning yourself if the student makes this known to you.

Remember that your voice may be critical to students with partial hearing loss:

Use a clear voice and good projection (but don't shout or over-enunciate because that distorts speech and may offend the student).

Don't let your voice peter off at the end of sentences or points.

Speak at your natural pace unless the student appears to need you to or directly asks you to slow down.

Be aware that softer or higher-pitched voices can be especially hard for some to hear.

Understand that in addition to your voice, other forms of body language are important to fuller understanding for students with hearing loss. Particularly helpful are facial expressions that indicate feeling, natural gestures that enhance meaning, and eye contact on the student you are calling on or listening to in class or other situations.

Don't assume someone with hearing loss has understood you if you are given a nod in yes, no, or acknowledgment. It's possible that person misunderstood, or understood only partially or even none of what you were communicating, but is reluctant to admit that. If what you are saying is important, use an open-ended question so that you can more fully gauge from the student's response if the message was received correctly.

The next sections provide suggestions for students with partial or complete hearing loss who lipread or read sign language from an interpreter. (Please note, however, that not all people who are deaf learn sign language, and some may not know how to lipread well or at all.)

2. For students who lipread (sometimes called speechread):

Make sure you are near enough for the student to see you. You might need to step closer in one-on-one situations or see if the student would like to sit at the front of the room nearer to you in class.

Keep the area of your mouth visible (e.g., not covering your mouth with your hand) and free of distractions (e.g., chewing gum, heavy mustaches). In large classrooms or at events, presenters should try not to let a microphone hide their mouths.

Make sure the room is as well-lighted as possible, and avoid standing in front of a window or glare of a light source (backlighting that obscures the student's view of you).

Make sure that you have the student's attention on you before you begin speaking to them or start class lecture, if possible. Depending on whether you are in the classroom or in interaction, it is appropriate to gesture, wave your hand in the student's peripheral vision (not in their face) or tap the shoulder, or ask a companion or nearby classmate of the student to gain their attention.

Try to face the student directly at all times. In class, try not to talk with your back turned (to slides or the board) or angle your body away from the student (to address one side of the classroom).

Keep in mind that some words are easier to lipread than others, so rephrasing what you want to say in different ways can be helpful as a matter of course or in instances of confusion.

Understand that in addition to mouth movements, other forms of body language are important to understanding for students with hearing loss. Particularly helpful are facial expressions that indicate feeling, natural gestures that enhance meaning, and eye contact on the student you are calling on or listening to in class or other situations.

3. For students who use interpreters:

Speak to and look at the student directly in one-on-one conversation, not to the student's interpreter.

Place yourself where the interpreter can hear you clearly, with minimal background noise or distractions, and speak as you naturally would. Interpreters will let you know if you need to change anything to facilitate their signing.

Know that interpreters will try to interpret everything said in the classroom by both instructors and students, and as much of the environmental sounds or other auditory information as possible.

Offer both the student and the interpreter any hand-outs to the class that you are discussing in the lesson to facilitate signing of important points and terminology. Getting these early to the student and interpreter is even more helpful because key terminology is laid out for easier identification and signing.

Don't go too fast through slides, because learning the information on slides will take longer for the student using an interpreter.

Leave a light on during films so that the student can see the interpreter signing the auditory content.

Don't let anyone hinder the interpreter signing to the student (e.g., talking to the interpreter or asking questions about signing, having the interpreter pass along hand-outs down a row, etc.).

Keep in mind that following and using sign can be tiring for the student because it is a lot harder than simply listening (it is also taxing on interpreters, which is why they often work in pairs to alternate).

#### 4. In class lessons:

Use as many visual aids as possible when lecturing, such as handouts, slides, or use of the board when presenting key points. Similarly, write down on the board important class announcements such as room changes, special events, and assignment due dates, rather than simply relaying this orally. Interpreters don't always catch everything, and students might miss things, too, in lipreading, reading sign or captioning of a lecture, or trying to capture auditory information with partial hearing loss. Visual content, therefore, is key to ensuring full learning of information presented orally.

Provide hand-outs and other readings of class content in advance for the student to look over before the lesson. The student who is lipreading, looking at the interpreter, or reading captioning of what an instructor is saying cannot simultaneously look down to read the print material being referenced. Summarizing or describing what you have on handouts before you make points in relation to that reading is also helpful in this regard. Remember, also, not to talk to the class at the same time you are having the students read something.

Keep in mind when demonstrating something that some students with hearing loss will have difficulty watching both the demonstration and any verbal directions or description in accompaniment if they are also lipreading or looking at an interpreter or following captioning. A repeat demonstration or greater verbal description prior to the

demonstration would be helpful in this regard. Instructors can provide a written demonstration summary, also.

Plan ahead with clips or films to be shown. Captioned videos should be used in classes with students with hearing loss, and benefit other students, too.

Ensure any auditory web content or material has captioning, as well.

5. In class discussion:

Remember that there is often lag time between you finishing your point and the signing of it by the interpreter or captioning of it for the student to read, so try to pause for a bit before posing a question to the class or calling on a student.

Repeat or paraphrase other students' questions or comments in the class when the student with hearing loss is unable to see to lipread and/or hear them, if the student has partial hearing loss.

Sit in a semi-circle, if possible, which can be especially helpful for seeing everyone who contributes to the discussion for the student who lipreads. Subtle gestures to indicate who is speaking may also be appreciated.

Consider electronic discussions as a complement to the class discussion. This is a realm where students with hearing loss are especially likely to contribute freely and fully.

6. In group work and group projects:

Have everyone sit in a circle where the student can better see (if lipreading) and hear the others in the group (if partial hearing loss).

Caution students to speak one at a time (not all at once) and at a steady pace (not too fast) to help the student who lipreads or uses an interpreter or captioner to follow along and participate more easily.

Be aware that some hearing aids and assistive listening devices may pick up noises and discussions in the whole room, and the student may find it more difficult to follow their own group's discussion as the volume of the class increases and the multiple voices can be distracting.

Consider online group collaboration as an option or supplement. Again, online communication may be especially conducive to the student's best collaborative work.

Get their group project off to a good start by helping groups to build a foundation of support for one another and a structure where individual group member's skills, abilities, traits, and roles in the group are utilized and valued.

7. In written work:

Be aware that some students with hearing limitations may sometimes have difficulties with written work. If the student's primary language is sign language, which has its own rules for grammar and syntax, this makes English a whole new language to master; indeed, some would call it their second language. Moreover, the many differences between sign language and English (e.g., the use of tenses, adjective placement, plural form, meaning variations) may confuse the student and hinder the learning process. The student may also unintentionally use some of these characteristics of sign in written assignments.

8. In test situations:

Ensure that any instructor review of the material, advice regarding the exam, or instructions for taking the test given orally are also clearly relayed to the student with hearing limitations so they have that same benefit as the other students (e.g., the interpreter is there to sign, the information is captioned or written for the student).

Have any exam accommodations in place for the student: If the student has been approved for testing accommodations, then for on-ground exams, the tests should be made available for the student in the Testing Center. Online exams might require creation of extended time for the student, and instructions for how to do this are found in Canvas.

9. In presentations:

Keep in mind that students with hearing limitations may have speech impairment as well, due to the inability to hear their own voices clearly. Students who are deaf may talk little to not at all depending on how severe their hearing loss is and when it first started. Students may choose to sign to their interpreter who voices the speech, or give the speech themselves orally or orally accompanied by sign. Some students will not speak or know how to sign, and then the student's speech may be read by a reader. Discuss with the student. Presentations are already nerve-wracking enough for students without the added worry of these types of logistical concerns, so try to discuss ahead of time with the student what they would like.

Advise and assist all students in the class who will be presenting using clips to use captioned material accessible to all students, such as their classmate with hearing loss.

10. In fieldwork or field trips:

Discuss in advance all aspects of performing the fieldwork or experiencing the field trip in order to anticipate where the student might encounter barriers; implement accommodations and/or make adjustments as needed.

With regard to student accommodations: Please note that students will give professors an official approved accommodation letter from SSWD and at that point those accommodations for the student's disabilities are required. If professors feel any of the accommodations constitute a fundamental alteration of their course, they should consult with SSWD to discuss their concerns and potential alternatives for access.

With regard to the suggestions here for any student with hearing loss: You might want to remind yourself every single time you are about to enter a classroom or meeting with the student until practices such as these become customary. While some of the suggestions may seem to be primarily common sense, sometimes the things that should be entirely evident can fall to the wayside due precisely to that fact. In the classroom or other situations, it might also be helpful to glance often at the student as a reminder to yourself and a way to double-check that you are doing what you need to make things as conducive to the student's learning needs as possible.

(With appreciation to all who work with students with disabilities on our campus,  
including Services to Students with Disabilities, for assistance.)

## Campus Resources

### ***Services for Students with Disabilities (SSWD)—***

Offers a wide range of support services to ensure students with disabilities have equal access and opportunity to pursue their educational goals. Application instructions are provided on the website for students with mobility or other physical disabilities, blindness/visual impairment, psychological disorders/cognitive disabilities, learning disabilities, and ADD/ADHD, and students who are deaf/hard of hearing. Services and accommodations for students may include, but are not limited to: specialized educational materials, adaptive equipment, adaptive computer training and use, note-taker services, testing accommodations, consultation with faculty for students with special academic needs, library assistance, disability management advising/counseling, on-campus housing accommodation, and graduate and professional program assistance and information referrals. Students with questions and faculty with inquiries or wanting to make a referral are welcome to contact or come by the office for more information.

Location: Lassen Hall 1008

Phone: (916) 278-6955

[SSWD Website](https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/services-students-disabilities/) <https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/services-students-disabilities/>

### ***Assistive Technology Lab (ATL)—***

Provides technological services to students with disabilities referred by SSWD counselors/specialists, including: a lab with alternative access to computers for students with disabilities to work on coursework and a training room for students to receive instruction on the adaptive technology appropriate to the student's disability (such as screen magnification and reading, scan/read programs). The ATL also provides consultation and assistance to faculty to convert course textbooks, syllabi, exams, class web content, slides, and handouts into alternative formatted instructional materials for students (such as Braille).

Phone: (916) 278-7915

ATL Computer Lab: Academic Information Resource Center 2011

ATL Training Lab: Academic Information Resource Center 2010

### ***Maryjane Rees Language, Speech and Hearing Center—***

Offers speech, language, and hearing services for people with communication challenges and/or cognitive disorders, including but not limited to: hearing loss, reading disorders, speech sound disorders, stuttering, cleft palate, voice disorders, and conditions associated with stroke, brain injury, concussion, progressive disorders, and other neurological impairment. Services are free to all, and those interested may get further information on the website, call, or stop by.

Location: Folsom Hall (7667 Folsom Blvd.) Room 2203 Phone: (916) 278-6601

[Center Website](https://www.csus.edu/college/health-human-services/community-services/language-speech-hearing-center.html) <https://www.csus.edu/college/health-human-services/community-services/language-speech-hearing-center.html>

***TRiO Student Support Services Program (through SSWD)—***

Provides to students with disabilities, who meet TRiO eligibility requirements and are in need of academic support to better stay and succeed in college, services that include: supplemental instruction, tutoring, adaptive equipment, readers, note-takers, proctors and test arrangements, specialized instruction materials, individualized counseling, transition coaching, assistance with graduate school admission, and more.

Location: Lassen Hall 1008

Phone: (916) 278-6955

[TRiO Website](https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/services-students-disabilities/student-resources.html) <https://www.csus.edu/student-affairs/centers-programs/services-students-disabilities/student-resources.html>

***Counseling (Student Health and Counseling Services)—***

Helps students to cope with such things as stress, academic difficulties, cultural adjustment, relationship issues, anxiety, depression, bereavement, post-traumatic symptoms, questioning sexuality and coming out, eating disorders, addiction and alcohol abuse. The privacy and confidentiality of all who use Counseling Services is maintained fully within the bounds of law and professional ethics.

Location of Counseling Services: The WELL, Second Floor      Phone: (916) 278-6461

Location of Urgent Care Clinic: The WELL, First Floor

[Counseling Services Website](https://www.csus.edu/student-life/health-counseling/counseling/) <https://www.csus.edu/student-life/health-counseling/counseling/>

*Students in an immediate crisis* should contact 911 or the Suicide Hotline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

Students with urgent concerns who would like to see someone right away may walk in to receive counseling at the Urgent Care Clinic (WELL, First Floor) any time during its hours of operation or call to speak with the After Hours Nurse at: (916) 278-6461.

Students who want to receive counseling or explore if counseling is right for them may schedule an appointment by calling or coming in Counseling Services, or going online through the Patient Portal. This typically begins with a consultation appointment, where the student can talk about their concerns and receive support and feedback. Many students find that they feel better and their needs are met in just one session. Students who want to continue counseling may choose individual counseling in follow-up single session appointments (to meet their needs in the moment) or short-term individual therapy (more than one session with the same mental health clinician). Students may also join group therapy (with five to ten other students).