

Overview

Students who are deaf or hard of hearing are continuing to explore academic opportunities in the college setting. They often are seeking to participate alongside their hearing peers rather than settling for alternatives to foreign language requirements. Frequently, both student and staff are unsure how to achieve successful access and accommodations for these courses. Effective approaches are determined on a case by case basis taking into consideration a variety of factors, including the student's accommodation needs, available resources, and the purpose of the course in the overall academic program for the student.

An open and honest discussion among all parties involved is a sound first step. Oftentimes being able to talk over the concerns at hand and brainstorm ways to alleviate potential barriers goes a long way toward arriving at an effective solution. To start, here are some essential aspects to consider:

Why is the student taking the class?

Is there a foreign language requirement to be fulfilled? Or is the student taking the course for personal enrichment, to enhance readiness for a specific career path, or in preparation for traveling?

Has the student taken any foreign language courses in the past?

If the student has experience learning foreign languages, formally or informally, he or she may have an idea about what worked well. Also, the student may have an idea of what accommodations would be most effective in the classroom experience.



Is the student an auditory or visual learner?

Does the student prefer to use his or her residual hearing through use of hearing aids or a cochlear implant? Or does the student prefer to use speech-to-text or interpreter services in the classroom setting? Establishing whether the student is likely to use residual hearing and speech or if the student will use a visual means of receptive and expressive learning will guide discussions about accommodations and strategies.

For auditory learners, accommodations such as assistive listening devices, preferential seating, closed captioning or speech-to-text services can be considered to provide the student access to the course content. For visual learners, accommodations such as speech-to-text services or sign language interpreting services may be most effective in ensuring access.

The following strategies can be considered for either type of deaf learner, auditory or visual:

- Use visual cues and prompts to aid in learning or memorization
- Make explicit connections between print/text and spoken or auditory content
- Accompany auditory materials or content with visual resources such as transcripts
- Display information learners can take in with their eyes while the instructor is speaking



How can barriers based on learning style be addressed?

Examining the course requirements and materials used can be a way to mitigate potential barriers. Additional strategies for anticipating such barriers include:

- Contacting the instructor or department in advance to inquire about course requirements and materials.
- Scheduling a meeting with the instructor and student prior to the first day of class to establish a relationship and shared understanding of the student's goals
- Having dialogues regarding how the student will meet or participate in the speaking and listening component of the class as well as potential alternatives for specific assignments. Some students may use their own voice when participating in class while others may use sign language and fingerspelling as the interpreter voices their responses.
- Encouraging everyone to remain flexible. Accommodations may not always work as desired at first and it may be necessary to find a successful fit through trial and error.

Tips

It is important to remember that students who are deaf or hard of hearing should have an equal opportunity to participate in foreign language courses, just like their hearing peers. While achieving equitable access to this type of course can seem daunting, effective outcomes can be achieved through brainstorming and creative problem solving.

Resources

<https://www.nationaldeafcenter.org/foreign-language-classes>

<http://theinterpretersfriend.org/terp4/Spa.html>