

## Hearing impairments

Most people with hearing impairments have some residual hearing. Only very small proportions have no hearing at all. People who are pre-lingually Deaf usually find it harder to acquire spoken and written language. Their language skills may not be as well developed as other people and their speech may be difficult to understand or they may prefer to use sign language. They may have difficulty with group discussions and extra care needs to be taken to ensure that they are included.

People may use speech, lip-reading, signing, a hearing aid or a mixture of these. Most deaf and hard of hearing students use lip-reading to some extent but this can be very tiring especially when the speaker is hard to understand. Only 30 to 40 percent of words can be lip-read clearly. Three quarters of lip-reading is guesswork and clear speech and contextual clues are vital for understanding. Some people use signing interpreters. Providing information by text rather than verbally will be helpful, as well as working in areas with no background noise. The use of TTY (teletypewriters), adaptive devices and other equipment can also be of assistance.

The National Relay Service (NRS) is an Australia-wide telephone access service which provides access to anyone, at no additional charge, in the wider telephone network for people who are Deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment. As a business you could ensure people with a speech or hearing impairment are aware that they can contact you through the NRS. You can also use the NRS to contact customers who have a hearing or speech impairment. For a Fact Sheet on this see:

[http://www.aceinfo.net.au/Resources/FactSheets/bus\\_numbers13.html](http://www.aceinfo.net.au/Resources/FactSheets/bus_numbers13.html)

Try to always speak distinctly, but don't exaggerate your mouth movements. Use a normal tone and rhythm of speech. Try re-wording what you have said if you haven't been understood. If working with a signing interpreter, speak to the person, not to the interpreter. Be aware that AUSLAN (sign language) is a complete language, like for example, Japanese.

## Etiquette for Communicating with people with hearing impairments

- To get a person's attention, gently touch the person on the shoulder or tactfully wave your hand.
- Make sure the person is looking at you when you speak to them.
- Be aware of room or window lighting and position yourself to ensure maximum light on your face.
- Look directly at the person and speak clearly, especially if the person wishes to lip-read. You may also want to speak a little bit slower. Do not exaggerate lip movements.
- Be flexible. If the person doesn't understand something, reword it instead of simply repeating it. Use notes or visual expressions/clues to illustrate what you are saying.
- You can always use a pad and pencil to communicate if it becomes necessary.
- Reduce unnecessary background noise – this can interfere with hearing aids and make communication difficult. Again you can always use a pad and pencil to communicate if it becomes necessary.
- Do not shout. It may not be necessary or appropriate. Ask the person how they would prefer to communicate. Ask if they can hear you OK.

Resource Guide for Travel Agents: Planning Holidays for People with Disabilities 2007".  
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- Ask short clear questions that require only short answers if possible.
- Don't refer to a deaf person as "deaf and dumb". Some people who are deaf can speak; others are "nonverbal" and use sign language.
- Relax and don't be embarrassed if you use terms like "Did you hear about....".
- Make sure the person has understood you. If not sure, write it down anyway.
- If there is a sign language interpreter present, face the individual when talking, not the interpreter.
- Position a signing interpreter so that he or she is near you and visible.

*Copied from: "Resource Guide for Travel Agents: Planning Holidays for People with Disabilities 2007".  
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