

## 6 Quick Tips for Teachers who Work with Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students

by Robert Gillies, Jimmy Gore, and Seth Gore

Many students who are deaf and hard of hearing are attending classes in schools and colleges where the typical communication between teachers and students is through speaking and listening. Some simple considerations by teachers and students alike will help to facilitate the integration of deaf and hard of hearing students in the classroom.

1. **Teachers should stand in close proximity to the sign language interpreter whenever possible.** This will keep the instructor and the sign language interpreter in the same line of sight for students who need the interpretation. Along the same lines, a deaf or hard of hearing student should be seated close to the interpreter for the best possible interpretation results. This usually means that the deaf or hard of hearing student should sit in the front of the classroom or close to it.
2. **Teachers should be mindful that there is lag time involved in interpretation.** This has two important consequences for the classroom. First, teachers should check in visually with the interpreter often during the class session because if there is an unusually long time lag or otherwise problematic explanation, the interpreter may have to signal the instructor. In this case, all that is typically needed is a short pause to allow the interpreter to complete the translation. An instructor who is attune to this possibility will be able to navigate it smoothly and comfortably when it comes up. Similarly, when a teacher asks for volunteers to provide an answer, for example, it is important to allow for the interpretation to take place before selecting the volunteer. Otherwise, the deaf or hard of hearing student cannot possibly have the opportunity to be the volunteer.

Second, discussions where various speakers chime in rapidly in succession, sometimes overlapping, can be hard for the interpreter to manage. The hearing students know the source of the comments or questions, but this knowledge will not be so apparent to the deaf or hard of hearing student, who relies upon the interpreter to identify each speaker. The teacher needs to be mindful of this and to establish communication norms that work for all the students in the class. For example, when teachers try to maintain the standard “only one person can speak at a time” rule, the interpretation will be more accurate and the deaf or hard of hearing student will be better integrated with the flow of the class.

3. **When there is communication (through the interpreter) between a hearing speaker and a deaf or hard of hearing student, the hearing person should give eye contact to the deaf or hard of hearing person, not to the interpreter.** This signals respect and fosters a better connection with the student.
4. **Teachers should be mindful that deaf and hard of hearing students need to keep their eyes on the interpreter in class, so taking notes and sometimes following lectures and discussions can be difficult.** Therefore, the teacher might select one of the hearing students to share his or her notes. It is also helpful for the teacher to reinforce the content of the class with a written outline of the main points of the session. Any visual supports are very helpful, as are kinesthetic activities.

5. **Teachers should consider ways to support deaf or hard of hearing students outside of class.**

Because American Sign Language is so different from English in terms of, for instance, syntax and the representation of time, and because deaf or hard of hearing students lack the aural and oral reinforcement that the other students enjoy, they often struggle with written English. It can be very helpful if the essential vocabulary and concepts are available to students and any support teachers before the regular class if possible, so that the deaf and hard of hearing students come to class with a better understanding of the content and context in which discussions and lectures take place.

6. **Teachers should take the opportunity to learn about the deaf community and culture.** The deaf community has a strong sense of identity and pride in its language and culture. Deaf students can offer much to any classroom, as teachers who learn about this culture and are sensitive to it can testify.

Keeping these considerations in mind will help deaf and hard of hearing students play a full part in their schools and colleges.

ROBERT GILLIES and JIMMY GORE are ESL teachers (Governor Baxter School for the Deaf and Gallaudet University, respectively) and SETH GORE is a designer. Together they created the “Grmmr” system, a visual learning approach that makes grammar obvious to the learner. This system has been recognized by the Fulbright entity, colleges, teachers, parents, and learners from around the world. Robert, Jimmy and Seth are currently working on releasing a new set of products and training. Explore their work at [www.green-bridge.org](http://www.green-bridge.org).



[www.LanguageArtsPress.com](http://www.LanguageArtsPress.com)