



AMERICAN
SPEECH-LANGUAGE-
HEARING
ASSOCIATION

AUDIOLOGY

Information Series

Tips for Improving Your Listening Experience

Many people with hearing loss believe their communication problems are just because of poor hearing. However, there are other factors that can cause a breakdown in communication.

These factors include:

- Heavy accent or poor pronunciation
- Background noise or dim lighting
- Unfamiliar topic
- Fatigue, illness, or difficulties with attention or language

Here are some strategies that can be learned and used to help reduce communication breakdowns:

Make communication easier from the beginning.

Tell others you have a hearing loss and ask the speaker to get your attention before beginning to speak and to alert you of a change in topic. Find a quiet, well-lit room for communication and stand or sit 3–6 feet from the speaker.

Fix communication breakdowns with repair strategies.

When you realize that communication difficulties have already occurred, tell the speaker about the communication issue. Simply saying “huh?” or “pardon?” is not going to work well. Instead, offer a suggestion to rephrase or simplify what has been said. Ask that the speaker repeat the part of the sentence that you did not get. It is best not to fake it and pretend that you understand when you do not! Doing this can increase the misunderstandings and result in everyone’s embarrassment.

Check what you heard by repeating the message back to the speaker. And if the conversation is full of important details, like medical appointments, ask the speaker to write down key information such as addresses, phone numbers, and appointment times.

Here are some more specific tips you can use when particular problems arise:

Problem: The speaker is difficult to understand.

Answer:

- Ask the speaker to speak slowly and not to shout at you.
- Ask the speaker to look directly at you and not to cover his or her face or look away. Seeing the speaker’s lips and expressions will help your understanding.

Note: Many people think that shouting at someone with a hearing loss will help the person understand better, but in fact this is not so. It can make understanding more difficult and unpleasant.

Problem: Background noise is loud.

Answer:

- Move to a quieter location.
- Pick a quiet restaurant and go at an off-hour when it will be less noisy.
- Turn off or move away from noise sources such as radios, televisions, or dishwashers.

Tip: Some restaurant reviews provide information on noise levels. Make use of these when choosing a restaurant.

Problem: Room lighting is dim.

Answer:

- Try to improve the lighting in the room, or find a room with good lighting. Sit with a window at your back facing the speaker. This makes it easier to see the speaker’s face.

Tip: Using lipreading and seeing facial expressions can increase understanding of speech up to 20% even for a person with no formal lipreading training.

Problem: Room acoustics are poor.

Answer:

- In your home, select floor coverings (such as carpets), window coverings (such as cloth draperies), and furniture (such as upholstered chairs and sofas) that absorb sounds. When dining out, select restaurants with sound-absorbing carpets, curtains, linen tablecloths, and booths. Avoid restaurants that have hard floors and bare walls.

Problem: The topic of conversation is unexpected or unfamiliar.

Answer:

- Ask the speaker or another listener to summarize the topic of conversation for you and to alert you when the topic changes.
- Ask a yes/no question.
- If possible, prepare for the conversation/meeting ahead of time by anticipating potential content and vocabulary that will be used.

NOTES:

Problem: You are dealing with fatigue, stress, and distractions, and it is difficult to pay attention.

Answer:

- Set sensible goals for yourself.
- Ask to have short breaks in meetings to prevent fatigue.

Seek out the services of an audiologist certified by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). Many offer formal communication training/audiologic rehabilitation. This training is designed to make you more aware of some of the issues summarized above and will help you to improve your listening and speechreading skills. This type of training can improve communication skills whether or not you wear hearing aids.

For more information about hearing loss, hearing aids, or referral to an ASHA-certified audiologist, contact the:



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