

Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Overview

Library professionals are often not aware that a person approaching them for assistance is deaf or hard of hearing until the person begins to communicate. Deaf people communicate in a variety of ways: speaking, writing, signing, gesturing, or a combination of these. People often assume that the deaf will use American Sign Language (ASL) or read lips. In reality, only a small number of those who are deaf know ASL, and few people are skilled lip-readers. Assistive technologies, such as one-to-one or wide-area assistive listening devices, public TTYs/text telephones, and videophones help facilitate communication. Videophones allow a translator to sign conversations to viewers. These items are economical, and some devices, like the videophone, are available with subsidies. Some patrons who are deaf may use a service dog. Hearing dogs alert people to sounds unique to their environment, for example, smoke alarms, stove timers, alarm clocks, sad or happy sounds of family and friends, ringing telephones, doorbells, and unusual sounds that may indicate danger or emergencies. Furthermore, service dogs watch for dropped items. Common requests that library staff members may expect are questions relating to local education options for children who are deaf or hard of hearing, information about a variety of hearing differences, and information how to cope with hearing loss. Patrons may also request accommodations people may need in order to enjoy participating in library programs.

Tips

- To get the attention of a deaf person gently touch a shoulder or get in the line of sight and wave or tap on the table or countertop.
- Position yourself for visibility, in a well-lit area.
- Look at and speak directly to the patron, not to an interpreter.
- Maintain eye contact at all times during the conversation. Don't look away at a computer screen or down at the desktop. Don't speak as you turn to retrieve materials. Although patrons may not read lips, they can get cues from facial expressions. These cues let patrons know when staff have stopped speaking, signaling that it is their turn to talk.
- Speak naturally—don't exaggerate, shout, or speak slowly.
- Use short sentences.
- Repeat, rephrase, or spell words if not understood. For example, patrons may not hear the word quarter, but they may hear twenty-five cents.
- Use gestures, write, or type back and forth on a computer, using a program like Word, to add clarity to communication.
- Instant Messaging (IM), texting, or other virtual reference services are accessible to people who are deaf or hard of hearing. If the library uses IM or virtual reference services, make an extra effort to market it to the deaf community.

- Train staff members who provide telephone services to receive and make calls using TTY or video relay services. Provide assistive listening devices, interpreter services, or real-time captioning services for public programs upon request.
- Provide print materials advertising the technologies and services that the library provides for patrons who are deaf and hard of hearing. Place these items where they can be easily seen.

Resources

- Gallaudet University Library: *Communicating in the Library with People Who Are Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing* All library staff will benefit from using the tips provided by Gallaudet University, which is the premier university attended by persons who are who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- [Friends of Libraries for Deaf Action \(FOLDA\)](#). FOLDA is a leader in the area of providing information to libraries and library staff with respects to deaf culture, programming for people who are deaf, sign language, assistive technology, and access to electronic information. Its earliest publication, *The Red Notebook*, remains a trustworthy tool for many readers.
- The World Federation of the Deaf www.wfdeaf.org is an international non-profit and non-governmental organization of deaf associations from 133 countries. The WFD works to ensure deaf people across the globe are equipped with the knowledge, tools and strategies to advocate for, achieve, and defend their rights.
- Communication Access Real-time Translation (CART) <https://dhcc.org/interpreting-services/cart/> is a service used by hard of hearing and deaf people to understand what others are saying, especially in meetings, classrooms, or large events. It is often referred as real-time captioning.