

Hearing Impairments: Implications for Study in Higher Education

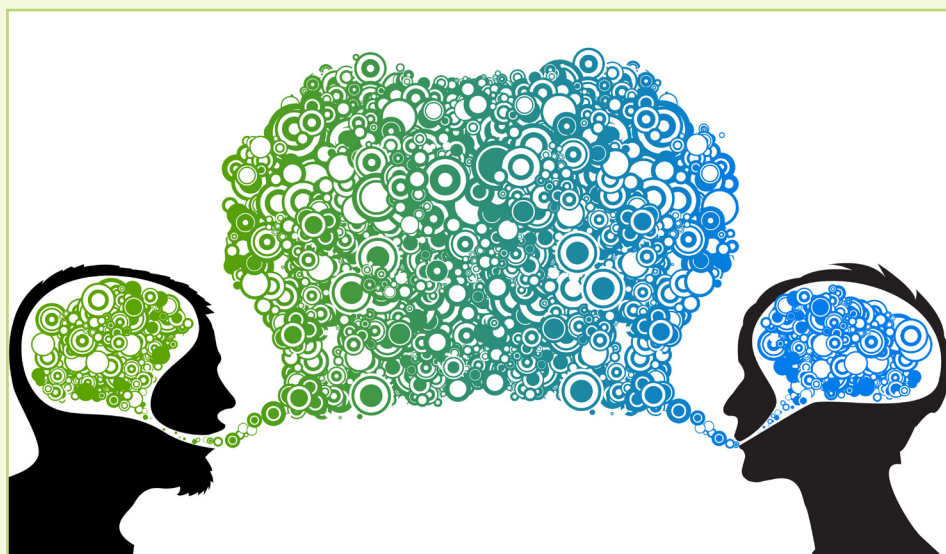
“People do not understand how much concentration it takes to lip-read and how tiring it is. It is very hard for me to concentrate on lip-reading and also to understand the concepts that are being spoken about – this is why it takes longer for me to grasp things.”

(Nicholson, 2007)

Going Beyond the Label

We often think of a hearing impairment in terms of the physical hurdle this presents linked specifically to the function of hearing being reduced or removed. However, “many of the consequences of a hearing loss or deafness, are, in fact, hidden” (Nicholson, 2007).

Factors such as tiredness caused by the intense concentration needed to lip read, or the stress and distraction caused by associated conditions such as Tinnitus can cause difficulties beyond those that are most apparent.



Practical Strategies for Working with Students with a Hearing Impairment

Learning environment and communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Whilst it is not always possible to alter the environment, it is useful to be aware of how the environment may impact on the student and check potential difficulties with the student so they can be adjusted if possible (e.g. lighting, background noise, seating arrangements). This may be particularly important if the student is lip-reading, so that this process is made as efficient as possible.• Many lecture theatres have been fitted with an induction loop which enables students using hearing aids to have direct input from the lecturer's microphone, thus eliminating background noise. Please ensure that the microphone has been turned on.• If a student is lip-reading, try to avoid standing with the light directly behind you (e.g. in front of a window) as this can cast your face in shadow and make it difficult to lip-read.• Speak clearly, but avoid speaking artificially slowly or with over-pronounced speech as this can negatively impact on precision when lip-reading.• Try to be aware that the interpreter always lags a little behind the speaker. Therefore, it is helpful to pause or speak more slowly when possible to ensure the interpreter is keeping up.
Contextualising learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Context can make the process of interpreting information through sign language or lip reading much more accurate and efficient. Providing clear indications (both verbal and visual) relating to the context or framework of a subject can provide vital signposting for a student and reduce opportunities for important information to be missed.• Providing students (and interpreters) with an outline of a lecture in advance can provide context. Similarly, providing new vocabulary in advance can be vital as new or technical vocabulary can be impossible to lip-read and signs for new terminology may need to be devised in advance.• In the same way, lectures which are divided into discernible 'chunks' can allow the student to compartmentalise and organise the information they are processing. If possible, it is really helpful to present information in small units - 2 or 3 pieces of information at a time, preferably in bullet points.
The importance of visual modes of learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "When the brain is deprived of input in one sensory modality, it is capable of reorganising itself to draw more heavily on other senses" (Beck, 2014). Therefore, visual modes of assimilating information are likely to be much more effective, not simply in terms of the necessity to see rather than hear information, but also because 'seeing' underpins the cognitive processes associated with learning (assimilating, processing and recalling information).
Group discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If working in a group environment, it can be useful to ensure that only one person speaks at a time so the thread of the conversation is easier to follow and digest.• It may be difficult for the student to easily discern questions or comments from the audience or group, so it may be helpful to repeat any contributions before responding to them to aid clarification.

With thanks to Dawn Nicholson, Manchester Metropolitan University (2007) and Douglas Beck (2014)