
Working with DHH Students

Working with students who are deaf or hard of hearing (DHH) is like working with any other group of students; it can be both challenging and rewarding. Whether working with an entirely DHH group (e.g. MSAD) or individual students, follow some simple tips to enhance your teaching and their learning.

General tips:

- Speak slowly, but not ridiculously! Remember, someone is paying special attention to what you say and someone else may be trying to lip read.
- Make sure that the area behind the interpreter is free of distractions and bright light. In the IC, close blinds as necessary.
- Address the person to whom you wish to speak, not the interpreter. For example, do not look at the interpreter and say “Ask her if...” but instead look at the student.
- Some interpreters follow a code of ethics that allows them to act only as an interpreter and they will not help in general management. Others, especially those who have been with the students for awhile and know them well, will help out with management and teaching. Also, some interpreters will follow you around, and some the students.

On the trail:

Don't switch the students' focus frequently. Focus more on individual discoveries than showing the entire class something.

Pay special attention to other senses such as smell and touch. Have students smell coneflowers and bergamot or touch feathers and bark.

Don't be afraid to use some signs that you know! The students and teachers will love it (see back for some useful animal signs).

Allow extra time for finger spelling of unique terms. Think of spelling out
a-q-u-a-t-i-c m-a-c-r-o-i-n-v-e-r-t-e-b-r-a-t-e-s.

Plan for extra time to group students back together and also plan not to do this often. Use the time that you have everyone's attention wisely and effectively.

Relax! The students, whether DHH or hearing, are used to all of the things that might make you uncomfortable and are also probably used to some awkwardness from other people, so have fun and don't worry! Also, do not be self conscious about using the words like *hear*. “Has anyone *heard* of ...” It's a colloquialism and not considered offensive.

Some Useful Animal Signs

Note: Signing is more than just using signs; it's also about expression. Think of how you might sign skunk if saw one in the distance, versus seeing (or smelling!) one up close.