

# Accessibility for Deaf Learners

## *What Classroom Teachers Can Do to Help Deaf Students Learn*

### Use visuals

Teachers can take advantage of the visual way most deaf students learn by presenting as much information as possible in visual ways. These methods will also help many of the other students in the classroom as well.

### Limit conflicts between visuals and interpreting

While visuals are helpful to deaf learners, the students will not get the full benefit if they have to divide their attention between the visual and the interpretation. Anytime hearing students are asked to use both their eyes and their ears at the same time a conflict between visuals and interpreting is created for deaf students. For example:

- ◆ Demonstrations
- ◆ Handouts
- ◆ Charts, diagrams and maps
- ◆ Videos



However, the teacher can make these kinds of activities accessible for deaf students simply by separating the visual from the explanation of it. The teacher can explain the demonstration they are about to do and then demonstrate it silently. Or, the teacher can give the students a few minutes to study a visual before or after discussing it. For videos, it can help if the video is captioned.



### Set up a system for notes

Deaf students cannot watch the interpreter or look at visuals while taking notes. At the same time, they need the notes to study the information presented. The teacher can arrange for student volunteers to take notes that are shared with the deaf student. The teacher can also provide copies of handouts, overheads and other visuals for the deaf student to use as a reference for understanding the instruction and when studying, ideally prior to instruction.

### Control classroom communication dynamics

When teachers set the pace for an activity, such as a class discussion, they need to keep in mind that the time required for the process of interpretation will create a delay for the deaf student. If a discussion is fast paced, the deaf student may never be able to participate because of this delay. Similarly, if a teacher is asking for volunteers to answer questions, the deaf student may never volunteer because another student is answering while the question is still being interpreted. Regular pauses can help level the playing field for deaf students. Teachers can force pauses into a discussion by requiring students to raise their hands and be acknowledged by the teacher or the current speaker before sharing their comment. Teachers can also pause after they ask questions before selecting a student to answer, giving the interpreter time to interpret the question and the deaf student time to decide whether they want to volunteer an answer.

