



Illinois State Board of Education

Special Education Services Department

Accommodations for Deaf or Hard of Hearing Students: Frequently Asked Questions and Advisory

This document is intended to provide non-regulatory guidance on the subject matter listed above. For specific questions, please contact the Illinois State Board of Education.

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Accommodations for Deaf or Hard of Hearing Students: Frequently Asked Questions and Advisory

Table of Contents

Introduction	Page 3
A. Frequently Asked Accommodation Questions	Page 4
A-1. Are students who are DHH entitled to accommodations?	Page 4
A-2. What helps determine necessary accommodations?	Page 4
A-3. Do my student’s accommodations stay the same throughout his or her educational career?	Page 4
A-4. Who is responsible for setting up and maintaining accommodations?	Page 5
B. Instructional Accommodations	Page 5
B-1. Use of an Interpreter	Page 5
B-2. Use of Visual Supports	Page 5
B-3. Captioning	Page 5
B-4. Videos with Sign Language	Page 6
B-5. Listening Checks	Page 6
B-6. Use of the Assistive Listening Device (ALD) System	Page 6
B-7. Checks for Understanding	Page 6
B-8. Extended Time on Assignments and Tests	Page 6
C. Environmental Accommodations	Page 7
C-1. Structure and Routine	Page 7
C-2. Reduced Noise	Page 7
C-3. Reduced Clutter on Walls and Surfaces	Page 7
C-4. Preferential Seating	Page 7
C-5. Adequate Lighting	Page 8
C-6. Reduced Clutter on Walls and Surfaces	Page 8

D.	Assessment Accommodations	Page 8
D-1.	Extended Time	Page 8
D-2.	Human Signer, Instructions in Sign Language	Page 8
D-3.	Access to Captions	Page 9
D-4.	Human Scribe	Page 9
D-5.	Access to Sign Language Videos	Page 9
D-6.	Special Equipment Connecting the Student’s Device to the Test Technology	Page 9
D-7.	Quiet Environment	Page 9
D-8.	Adequate Lighting	Page 10
E.	Resources	Page 10

Introduction

Students who are deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) may require classroom accommodations to gain access to important information and curricula in school. Students may need few or many accommodations depending on that student’s present levels of performance, type of hearing equipment (if any), preferred mode of communication, and other factors. The goal of accommodations is to allow the student access to curricula without decreasing the academic level or expectation of the student.

Several accommodations typically utilized by DHH students can also benefit the instruction of hearing peers and even the adults in the room! Utilizing classroom accommodations for everyone’s benefit is one approach to a Universal Design for Learning. It is important to note that accommodations do not lessen the expectation or academic level of instruction for students but help students access appropriate instruction.

Below you will find a list of classroom and assessment accommodations that students who are DHH might use. It is not an exhaustive list, and not every student will need every accommodation mentioned. Each accommodation is accompanied by a short explanatory statement of the accommodation’s benefit to a student with a specific need.

Many of the accommodations below require a certain level of forethought or conscious effort on the part of the teacher which can take practice. General education teachers should receive support from a DHH teacher or other team members. Students should also receive direct instruction in self-advocacy to ensure regular access to accommodations. While it is the teacher’s responsibility to be sure all accommodations are in place, students can also develop a reasonable level of responsibility in their education.

Please see the *ISBE Best Practices Guide for the Education of Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing* available on the [ISBE Webpage](#) for more information.

A. Frequently Asked Accommodation Questions

A-1: Are students who are DHH entitled to accommodations?

Students who are DHH and qualify for special education via an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or who have a 504 Plan are entitled to supports which allow them to access curricula. Accommodations are one such method through which educators can help students access instruction. Accommodations are meant to meet the needs of a student in a developmentally appropriate manner and do not lessen expectations or academic levels of the student. Given challenges with communication and accessing auditory information in the environment, accommodations are often required to help students access curricula.

A-2: What helps determine necessary accommodations?

The multidisciplinary team should utilize assessment and evaluation data to determine the student's present levels of academic achievement and function performance (PLAAFP) to inform the need for specific accommodations. Teams can consider hearing status, language development, preferred mode of communication, additional disabilities, family factors, and other aspects to add accommodations to the IEP. It is best practice to include educators and specialists with knowledge of the DHH population when creating the IEP for a student who is DHH.

Educators can utilize the Council of Chief State School Officers' (CCSSO) five-step decision making process to help determine the types of accommodations needed by the student.

[CCSSO: Accommodations Manual](#)

A-3: Do my student's accommodations stay the same throughout his or her educational career?

Some accommodations may be consistent for a student such as the use of an assistive listening device or a sign language interpreter; however, other accommodations may change based on the student's progress and changes in present levels of functioning. It is

important for teams to evaluate the effectiveness of accommodations throughout the school year and through the yearly review or re-evaluation process.

A-4: Who is responsible for setting up and maintaining accommodations?

Depending on the accommodation, it is typically the classroom teacher’s responsibility to ensure accommodations are available for students. It is a collaborative effort, however, to create, communicate, and maintain accommodations among general education teachers, teachers of the DHH, related service members, and other specialists. Some accommodations can be maintained by the student such as consistent use of the assistive listening device which enhances the development of self-advocacy and self-management skills.

B. Instructional Accommodations

B-1: Use of an Interpreter

Depending on the student’s preferred mode of communication, a sign language interpreter or Cued Speech transliterator may be required. This allows students to access information in the form which is most comfortable for them. Even students who do not rely solely on sign language can benefit from the use of an interpreter to clarify information and provide “extra” access.

B-2: Use of Visual Supports

Student who are DHH often rely on their sense of sight for information. Adding visual support for expectations, routines, designated classroom areas, items, etc. can help relieve stress and give easy access to students who can’t pick up on information shared auditorily. Adding visuals for young children also helps build vocabulary.

B-3: Captioning

As students use visuals in the environment to access content, captions can provide access to video or audio media. Using captions on video media is a skill the student may need to develop to access audio media throughout life. Even very young or pre-literate children can benefit from having what is spoken represented by the written word.

B-4: Videos with Sign Language

Sign language may be the student's preferred mode of communication. Using videos with embedded signing gives access.

B-5: Listening Checks

Many students cannot access sound if their devices are not working properly. Regular checks using the Ling Six Sound Test can identify if hearing devices have dead batteries, lost pieces, or other issues and can also enable students to learn to manage their own equipment. A listening check also allows the teacher to identify any issues connecting to assistive listening devices.

B-6: Use of the Assistive Listening Device (ALD) System

(Microphone for yourself and for peers who are speaking)

Some students use hearing aids or cochlear implants to boost listening abilities. This equipment will pick up almost everything in the environment indiscriminately, and sometimes the teacher or peers get drowned out by noises like fans or people walking in the hallway. Using an ALD that is connected directly to the speaker helps the student hone in on what the teacher or peers are saying. The microphone connected to the ALD can also become a "talking stick" item in your classroom so the student has access to peer comments and questions.

B-7: Checks for Understanding

Students who are DHH work very hard to listen or attend to the interpreter during instruction. Due to the effort required, students may miss something. Students also miss information if the teacher is talking with his or her back turned, if a peer has made a quiet comment, or if the teacher began speaking without getting the student's attention first. It is helpful to discreetly check with the student when giving directions or presenting new information. Get the student's attention and/or wait for the interpreter to be ready before you begin speaking.

B-8: Extended Time on Assignments and Tests

It might take time for students to process information via captioning, interpreters, or the written word back and forth between English and sign language or the preferred method of communication. It is helpful to give the student some extra time to allow for adequate processing time.

Give additional “wait” time for students to process information before beginning an assignment when directions or a response to a question were just provided.

C. Environmental Accommodations

C-1: Structure and Routine

Predictability is helpful for students who do not have regular access to all the information presented in the environment. If a student misses an auditory cue or a direction given via the interpreter, he or she can use compensatory skills such as awareness of a routine or expectations to help “fill in the gaps.” Additionally, structure and routine are appreciated by most students (and adults) to reduce anxiety.

C-2: Reduced Noise

Reduction of unnecessary noise in the environment helps the student focus on instruction as their devices are not able to “tune out” environmental sounds like fans, running cars, footsteps on tile, or the HVAC system in the classroom. Adding carpet or foam to the room helps lessen some environmental noise.

C-3: Reduced Clutter on Walls and Surfaces

Students who are DHH depend on visual information to understand what is going on around them. If there is too much clutter in the environment, it becomes too noisy and distracting much like playing loud rock music or allowing flies to buzz around while a hearing student is trying to learn.

C-4: Preferential Seating

Seating in proximity to the teacher during instruction might make listening easier and provide easier access to any information presented visually; however, preferential seating does not always mean at the front of the classroom. Some students who are DHH do best if they are seated in a place from which they can see everything happening in the room

and have clear lines of sight to important areas like the schedule, the board, the door, and the teacher.

C-5: Adequate Lighting

As students who are DHH rely on visual information, having adequate lighting is important. The student should be able to see classroom materials and the interpreter clearly. Typically, natural lighting and uncovered sources of light are preferred.

C-6: Flashing the Lights as a Signal

As students who are DHH participate in normal classroom activities, they may miss important signals which are meant to gain student attention to indicate the end of an activity/period, transition time, or an emergency situation. Quickly flashing the classroom lights serves as a clear signal for the student and is a cue used regularly in deaf culture. This is also a helpful signal for other students in the room if the activity is noisy and you need your class's attention.

D. Assessment Accommodations

D-1: Extended Time

It might take time for students to process information via captioning, interpreters, or the written word back and forth between English and sign language or the preferred method of communication. It is helpful to give the student some extra time to allow for adequate processing time.

D-2: Human Signer, Instructions in Sign Language

Students may need to access directions or test content in a different way than their hearing peers, especially if sign language is their preferred mode of communication. Allowing for a live signer can help the student understand test directions and other related directives especially if issues arise. Testing protocols for live signers can be accessed in the [Accessibility Features and Accommodations Manual](#) for the Illinois Assessment of Readiness (Appendix L, pages 206-208).

D-3: Access to Captions

Sometimes test materials are given via video or audio recording. Captions can help give access to that content.

D-4: Human Scribe

In some test content areas, it can be appropriate for a student who struggles with the mechanics of writing to use a human scribe. This is not an accommodation specific to DHH students, though DHH students may struggle with executive functioning skills such as putting thoughts on paper while “translating” thoughts from ASL to English structure.

D-5: Access to Sign Language Videos

Some test materials may have embedded sign language videos. Allow your student access to these videos if available. It might be prudent to review the videos beforehand to make sure they are of high quality and won’t cause confusion. Sometimes, however, the videos can be in very small boxes on the screen, making it more difficult to fully capture the signing especially if the student is testing on a small screen. A human signer in this instance may be more beneficial to the student.

D-6: Special Equipment Connecting the Student’s Device to the Test Technology

As within the classroom, students benefit from an ALD giving them a “direct line” to the key auditory information in the environment. You might connect the student to the testing platform via a cord or Bluetooth technology for direct access to auditory information embedded in the test.

D-7: Quiet Environment

As stated above, students can be distracted by environmental noise making it hard to focus on key auditory information. It is important to try to provide a quiet environment for the student. For example, tests taken in large group classrooms or auditorium environments may subject DHH students to distractions from other students, fans, HVAC systems, etc. A quiet environment may be a small group setting, a smaller space, or a room with carpeting.

D-8: Adequate Lighting

As stated above, students who are DHH need appropriate lighting to be sure they can access key visual information in the environment.

E. Resources

[Boys Town National Research Hospital: Classroom Accommodations for Children with Minimal or Mild Hearing Loss](#)

[Illinois State Board of Education: Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Deaf-Blind, Visually Impaired](#)

[Illinois Hands and Voices: IEP/504 Checklist: Accommodations and Modifications for Students Who Are Deaf and Hard of Hearing](#)

[Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center: Accommodating Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students in Schools](#)

[National Center on Deaf-Blindness](#)

[National Deaf Center: Testing Accommodations](#)

[Supporting Success for Children with Hearing Loss: Accommodations for Students with Hearing Loss](#)