

# Creating Access: Foreign Language Classes

**TS**  
Tip Sheet

## Overview

Deaf students are continuing to explore their academic opportunities in the college setting. They often seek to meet their foreign language requirements alongside their hearing peers rather than settling for alternatives. Frequently, both students and staff are unsure how to achieve successful access and accommodations for these courses. Effective approaches are determined on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration a variety of factors, including the student's accommodation needs, available resources, and the purpose of the course in the overall academic program for the student.

An open and honest discussion between all parties involved is a sound first step. Oftentimes, being able to talk over the concerns at hand and brainstorm ways to alleviate potential barriers goes a long way toward arriving at an effective solution. To start, here are some essential questions to consider:

### **Why is the student taking the class?**

Is there a foreign language requirement to be fulfilled? Or is the student taking the course for personal enrichment, to enhance readiness for a specific career path, or in preparation for traveling?

### **Has the student taken any foreign language courses in the past?**

If the student has experience learning foreign languages, formally or informally, he or she may have an idea about what worked well. Also, the student may have an idea of what accommodations would be most effective in the classroom experience.

### **Is the student an auditory or visual learner?**

Does the student prefer to use his or her residual hearing through the use of hearing aids or a cochlear implant? Or does the student prefer to use speech-to-text or interpreter services in the classroom setting? Establishing whether the student is likely to use residual hearing and speech or if the student will use a visual means of receptive and expressive learning will guide discussions about accommodations and strategies.

For auditory learners, accommodations such as assistive listening devices, preferential seating, closed captioning, and speech-to-text services can be considered to provide the student access to the course content. For visual learners, accommodations such as speech-to-text services or sign language interpreting services may be most effective in ensuring access.

The following strategies can be considered for either type of deaf learner, auditory or visual:

- Use visual cues and prompts to aid in learning or memorization
- Make explicit connections between print/text and spoken or auditory content
- Accompany auditory material or content with visual resources such as transcripts
- Display information learners can take in with their eyes while the instructor is speaking



**NDC**  
National Deaf Center  
on Postsecondary Outcomes

## How can barriers based on learning style be addressed?

Examining the course requirements and materials used can be a way to mitigate potential barriers. The following are additional strategies for anticipating such barriers:

- Contact the instructor or department in advance to inquire about course requirements and materials.
- Schedule a meeting with the instructor and student prior to the first day of class to establish a relationship and shared understanding of the student's goals.
- Have a dialogue regarding how the student will participate in the speaking and listening component of the class, as well as potential alternatives for specific assignments. Some students may use their own voice when participating in class while others may use sign language and fingerspelling as the interpreter voices their responses.
- Encourage everyone to be flexible. Accommodations may not always work as desired at first and it may be necessary to find a successful fit through trial and error.

It is important to remember that deaf students should have an opportunity to participate in foreign language courses, just like their hearing peers. Achieving equitable access to this type of course can seem daunting, but effective outcomes can be achieved through brainstorming and creative problem solving.

## Related Resources

- Interpreting for Foreign Language Courses: A Case Study With Spanish by David Quinto and David Bar-Tzur:  
<http://theinterpretersfriend.org/terp4/Spa.html>
- Deaf Students in the Foreign Language Classroom: Collaboration to Make It Work by Amy A. Free in RID's *Views* (July 2007):  
[www.tinyurl.com/VIEWSJuly2007](http://www.tinyurl.com/VIEWSJuly2007)

Additional resources on this subject may be available at [www.nationaldeafcenter.org/resources](http://www.nationaldeafcenter.org/resources).



This document was developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, OSEP #HD326D160001. However, the contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government.

© 2019 National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes, licensed under Creative Commons BY-NC-ND 4.0 International

Additional resources can be found at [www.nationaldeafcenter.org](http://www.nationaldeafcenter.org)