

# FAQ for Faculty Working with Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students

In response to COVID-19, many people are wearing masks in the community. In addition, as of July 15th, 2020, Ottawa City Council has passed a temporary by-law to make masks mandatory in indoor public spaces. This presents challenges for everyone, especially for those who are deaf, hard of hearing and/or experience other communication issues. The FAQs section below outlines how masks can make it harder to communicate and offers guidance for more effective and improved communications.

## FAQ

**Can you suggest some tips for how to work with students who are hard of hearing or deaf? I am concerned that they might not be able to understand me when I am wearing a mask.**

1. Clear masks (a face mask with a transparent section over the mouth) are available for use by staff and students.

**Faculty:** If you have a student/s in your class who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, and if you have not been contacted by a CAL employee, please ask the student if they would like you and their classmates to wear clear masks. If they would like this please contact CAL at the email below and the employee will provide you with next steps.

**Students:** If you have not been contacted by a CAL employee, and you would like a clear mask, please do follow the instructions below:

- Clear masks are available for students and staff beginning **Tuesday September 1, 2020**.
  - E-mail inquiries may be made at: [callabmonitor@algonquincollege.com](mailto:callabmonitor@algonquincollege.com)
  - For further information, please see: [Return to Campus Website](#) and the [Mandatory Use of Masks Policy Addendum](#)
2. If possible, prepare some written communication beforehand. Sending an email or having a paper with information already laid out may assist the communication exchange. Written materials will help supplement your message and instructions.
  3. Face the student and make sure that they can see your face, even if you are wearing a mask.
  4. Use visual cues, such as raising your hand, to get the attention of someone who appears to have not heard you. Many people count on visual cues to help them communicate. A small hand gesture can let someone know you wish to speak with them.

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5. Use gestures. You don't have to be fluent or proficient in sign language to use simple gestures to be able to communicate with someone who has a hearing impairment. An uncomplicated gesture can be helpful in getting your point across.
6. Have access to a written form of communication to use in "real time," either pen and paper, a white board or text messaging by phone. This can help make your message clear while reducing frustration. Be sure to keep the messages straightforward and short; using bullet points can be helpful.
7. Ask the student directly what form of communication is most helpful/comfortable for them. Ask if there is something that will make your communication and interaction easier for them to process.
8. Ensure that the student has understood you by asking if they need clarification on any of the information discussed. If you have not been understood, rephrase rather than repeat your message if the student does not understand.
9. Make sure that there is good lighting in the room. The light should be on your face as opposed to behind you. If the light is behind you, it may make it difficult for the student to see your face and therefore read non-verbal cues.
10. Reduce background noise as much as possible so that students are able to focus and use their residual hearing.
11. If you feel it is necessary to remove your face mask in order to communicate with the person, move back in order to maintain a safe physical distance. Using a transparent face shield, from a distance, may also be an option.
12. Please be patient. It may take longer to communicate ideas and concepts when to person is unable to hear or see your face and you may both become frustrated. Keeping calm and persistent will contribute to a positive outcome.
13. Provide alternatives. If possible, provide students with other formats for your verbal information: i.e. posted written instructions, a closed-captioned video; supplemental accessible readings.

### **Are there any steps I need to take when I am meeting with a student who is hard of hearing/deaf or delivering a lecture virtually?**

1. Check that the student can hear you and has optimally set up their audio connection before beginning any appointment.
2. Use speech to text captioning, where available. Please check with Learning and Teaching Services (LTS) and/or Information Technology Services (ITS) for more information.
3. Check your video and audio settings and room lighting before beginning. Make sure that the light is on your face and not behind you.

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4. Be sure that you face the camera and that your face can be seen clearly throughout the entire appointment/presentation.
5. Do not cover your face with a microphone.
6. Follow-up. When appropriate, follow up with a short summary of main points and next steps, i.e. email, follow-up meeting.
7. Provide alternatives. Where possible, provide students with notes/outline of your lecture ahead of time, accompanied with alternate sources of lecture material, i.e. closed-captioned videos, supplemental accessible readings.
8. Provide platforms for synchronous/asynchronous questions and follow-up, i.e. chat feature, question and answer, office hours, group note-sourcing, etc.