Shifting to Remote Classrooms?
How to Make Online Learning Accessible for Deaf Students

In response to the spread of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19), colleges and universities across the country are telling instructors to teach classes online. As you plan to migrate classes to online...
platforms, consider the impact on access for deaf students.

**NDC is here to support** disability services professionals, faculty, deaf students, and service providers (interpreters and speech-to-text professionals) to ensure all students can access courses and other learning materials online.

**Anticipate Changes to Accommodations**

Flexibility during times of uncertainty is critical. Research shows only **half of deaf college students** file documentation or request accommodations. Let all students know that the switch to online classes is an opportunity to receive accommodations should they have any new needs or unexpected challenges.

Deaf students have different communication preferences and accommodations change across settings and context. When classes move from in-person to online, expect changes in accommodations as well.

Accommodations for synchronous (everyone online at the same time) versus asynchronous (at your own pace) style courses will also vary. For example, a deaf student that uses an assistive listening system in a small-classroom setting might need speech-to-text services (i.e. CART, C-Print, or TypeWell) in a virtual classroom.

**TIPS FOR DISABILITY SERVICES PROFESSIONALS**

- Notify faculty, deaf students, and service providers about protocols for re-evaluating accommodations if moving to online classroom environments.
- Consistent service providers are critical for deaf students. Work with providers to gain access to reliable high-speed internet, a private/secure area to provide services, headsets/microphones, laptops or tablets, and access to virtual platforms.
- Continued American Sign Language interpreting access for class lectures, whether pre-recorded or live streamed, is crucial for deaf students using sign language to communicate. Work with faculty,
service providers, and deaf students to support content access and participation in sign language to the greatest extent possible.

- Update request procedures for deaf students to submit last-minute changes to accommodations for courses and outside of classroom needs.
- Identify who within the disability services office can be contacted with concerns or to troubleshoot access issues in virtual classrooms.
- Engage service providers for ideas and strategies to ensure they can access online classrooms. (See Remote Interpreting and Remote Speech-to-Text Services)

**Ensure Providers Have Access to Needed Systems and Materials**

Service providers may not have access to an institution’s learning management system (e.g., Canvas, Blackboard, D2L) and other online resources without institutional credentials. Many service providers are independent contractors and are not provided an institutional email address.

Advance access to course materials allows service providers to adequately prepare. Additionally, testing virtual meetings to ensure audio and video is properly set up minimizes gaps in services later. In some cases the instructor may need to give direct access to the platform.

- Does your LMS allow any email address to be added or institution-only emails?
- How can outside emails be incorporated or can a generic service provider email be created to allow for login access?
- Does your LMS have a user role designated for service providers or can one be created?

Video conferencing platforms (e.g., Zoom, WebEx, Adobe Connect, Lifesize, GoToMeeting, etc.) vary in their features and limitations. Test various view options and features to ensure interpreters or real-time
captions are easily seen on screen, and that any other accommodations work properly.

- For interpreting services, does the platform offer selections to split screen view or pin a video in order to permanently keep the interpreter’s video feed on screen?
- For speech-to-text services, does the platform have the ability to connect and sync the real-time captions on screen?
- If the view is not conducive within the platform, are there other programs or equipment that can be considered for separately casting interpreters or captions? For example, providing an iPad to deaf students to cast interpreters through FaceTime, Whereby, Skype or other video software.
- Can live meetings and lectures be recorded in case there are issues with internet connection, technology, or accommodations?

DID YOU KNOW AUTOMATIC CAPTIONS ARE NOT CONSIDERED EQUAL ACCESS?

Research has shown video captions benefit everyone, including fluent English users, people with ADD/ADHD or learning disabilities, English as Second Language users, deaf students, and more.

Be wary of programs that provide auto-generated captions. This feature is not considered equitable access due to the high error rate this type of transcription typically produces. Automatic captioning transcripts are best used for captioning post-production videos, such as pre-recorded lectures, when corrections can be made and transcript can be time-synced to the video.

When captioned properly and following industry standards, your videos can be accessible to a wide range of students. See DIY captioning resources or contact a captioning vendor today.

Check Internet and Hardware Requirements
Internet and hardware equipment can also be another factor impacting remote access. Instructors, students, and service providers need to evaluate their own access to dedicated high-speed internet, quality webcams, and headsets/microphones. The goal is to ensure clear communication without interruption or choppiness in the connection.

Students who may rely on assistive listening devices in a classroom may need to consider streaming devices that connect the computer’s audio to personal devices (i.e., hearing aids and cochlear implants) or noise reducing headphones for clearer audio access.

- If students or service providers need additional devices or access to software, plan on allocating resources to temporarily loan equipment. Ask students and providers what devices they may have available for accessing online coursework (computer/laptop, tablets, smartphones, etc).
- For a more reliable connection, encourage all participants during video conference meetings to connect using an ethernet cable, rather than using a wireless connection. Discuss with deaf students and service providers to find strong internet connections if not available at home, especially for remote interpreting.

**TIPS FOR FACULTY**

**Work with Service Providers**

- Ensure service providers have access to your LMS and video conferencing platforms.
- Consider access to asynchronous discussions/chats and offer deaf students the ability to respond in their preferred communication mode.

**Transitional Class Content**

- Increase accessible visual content such as infographics, tables, charts, images, etc.
• If pre-recording lectures and submitting a request for the video to be captioned, write out any specific jargon or terminology to help speed up the captioning process.
• Find videos that are already captioned properly to minimize any delays in access (try DCMP, AmazonPrime, Netflix, Kanopy, Hulu, YouTube, etc.).

Remote Lectures

• Establish turn-taking and participation protocol (e.g. using the raise hand feature, chatbox, identify your name before commenting, etc.).
• Ask students to only turn on their video to ask a question. Limiting the number of participants on screen at a time you can increase the video quality.

Office Hours

• Establish regular check-in meetings with deaf students to verify their access to and comprehension of online content. If new accommodations are necessary, work with the deaf student and disability services office to update accommodation plans.
• When meeting face-to-face is not possible, consider different channels of communication such as email, phone, one-on-one video chats, texting, LMS chat features, and more.
• Familiarize yourself with relay services should deaf students call during remote office hours.

Many of these strategies can also be incorporated outside of the higher education context such as for business meetings or other events that may be moving to remote platforms.

If you have questions or need ideas about working with the range of deaf students, we are here for you! Contact us now or schedule an appointment with one of our access specialists.

Additional Resources

Gallaudet University “Ways to keep teaching and learning during a school disruption”
National Deaf Center “Remote Services Toolkit”

Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf “Standard Practice Paper: Video Remote Interpreting”

Department of Justice "ADA Requirements: Effective Communication"

National Center on Deaf-Blindness and Helen Keller National Center

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--See tips page for more info: nationaldeafcenter.org/listservtips
--Questions? Contact listowner at help@nationaldeafcenter.org
A Message from Naomi Caselli:

Tips that come to mind for teaching deaf students online, are:

1. If you are assigning people to a breakout group in Zoom, make sure the people in the room can communicate with one another and that an interpreter is in the right room (i.e., don't randomly assign breakout groups).
2. Use the "raising hands" function of Zoom so only one person talks at a time. Make sure interpreters are large enough on screen, and that their volume is on as needed.
3. Work with DAS to make sure asynchronously posted videos (including those posted by other students) are accessible (e.g., captioned, transcribed, and/or interpreted).
4. Please avoid switching to an entirely written format, if possible.