



Module 2: Communicating with hearing impaired clients

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Communicating with hearing impaired people is a partnership involving ears, eyes and feelings.

Aim

To raise awareness of hearing loss as a serious 'hidden' disability and to encourage use of tactics and techniques to assist in verbal communication with hearing impaired clients.

(Accordingly the module includes experiential content with considerable learner input.)

By the end of this module learners should be able to

- Understand some of the communication difficulties faced by hearing impaired aged care residents and other adult clients and why hearing impairment is a 'hidden' disability.
- Use basic tactics and techniques to help them communicate more effectively with their hearing impaired clients.
- Demonstrate an ability to paraphrase misunderstood sentences to help a hearing impaired listener, rather than just repeating the same statement.
- Understand that speech does not depend on hearing every word and the importance of visible speech sounds, non-verbal expressions and behaviours when attempting to lip read.
- Appreciate that lip reading is a challenging, often tiring and stressful activity, particularly where conversation moves unpredictably between members of a group.
- Appreciate that hearing is important to dementia sufferers.
- Understand and appreciate the importance of giving early attention to hearing loss as, with hearing, it's a case of 'use it or lose it'.

Related modules

- Module 1: Core skills for hearing assistance
- Module 3: Hearing assistance needs assessment and care planning
- Module 4: Hearing assistance implementation and evaluation

1. Hearing loss – a ‘hidden’ disability

Many communication difficulties which arise between a hearing impaired listener and a speaker are caused by a *lack of understanding*. Often this is due to widespread ignorance about this ‘hidden’ disability.

Teaching Aid 1: Video clip (if not used in Module 1)

Run time: 6 min 45 sec

Play the first section of Part A of training video *Hearing Assistance in Aged Care* from Module 1. Aged care residents talk about their experience of hearing loss and how hearing impairment has impacted on their quality of life.

Purpose: To expose learners to some of the communication difficulties faced by hearing impaired aged care residents and other adult clients and to help them understand why hearing impairment is a serious but ‘hidden’ disability.

Access: www.youtube.com/watch?v=O15xOkOkFVQ&feature

Exercise 1: Video focus questions (if not used in Module 1)

Learners to answer focus questions on *Hearing Assistance in Aged Care* video

Purpose: Learners to demonstrate their understanding of: the impact of background noise – number one enemy of hearing impaired people, which is likely to interfere with their easy participation in conversation; side effects of hearing loss; common behaviours that indicate a person may have a hearing loss; why getting used to a hearing aid is often difficult; and, how the saying “use it or lose it” applies to hearing.

Support materials:

Focus question handout (See Appendix 1)

2. Simulating hearing losses

Simulated hearing losses can give some idea of what it is like to be hearing impaired. However, listening to a simulation for a couple of minutes is **very** different to living with hearing loss twenty four hours a day, day after day. This will include times when a hearing impaired person really wants or needs to understand something but is unsure what is being said. Moreover a simulation cannot capture the on-going struggle just to hear, and missing out on small asides and quiet intimacies.

With those cautions listen to some audio files that simulate different types of hearing loss and/or the experience of tinnitus. Tinnitus is noises or ringing in the ears when no such external physical sound is present.

Hearing loss is an individual experience.

Understanding your client's type and degree of loss can be helpful in communicating effectively. (See Module 3 for further information)

Teaching Aid 2: Audio clips

Play audio files that simulate different types of hearing loss and/or the experience of tinnitus. Ensure the **normal** hearing audio file is listened to **after** the other files.

Purpose: To help learners to feel and understand how difficult it is to follow speech with a hearing impairment and possibly the distraction of tinnitus.

Time:

- Noise-induced hearing loss – an example for a 35-year-old (1min 3 sec)
- Tinnitus + Noise-induced hearing loss (1min 30 sec)
- More severe Noise-induced hearing loss (1min 35 sec)
- Age-related hearing loss – for an 80-year-old (1 min 15 sec)
- Normal hearing (5min 12 sec)

Access: www.nal.gov.au/hearing-loss-simulations.shtml

3. Tactics and techniques to assist effective communication

It can be difficult for people who have a hearing loss to communicate with those around them. Wearing an aid can help them reconnect with the world, but they also need patience and understanding from people speaking with them.

Teaching Aid 3: Video clip (if not used in Module 1)

Run time: 2 min 55sec

Play segment of training video *Hearing Assistance in Aged Care* from Module 1. The video addresses effective ways of speaking to someone with a hearing loss via a series of pictorial cartoons and comments.

Purpose: To provide learners with tactics and techniques to help them communicate more effectively with hearing impaired clients.

Access: www.youtube.com/watch?v=O15xOkOkFVQ&feature

Exercise 2: Video focus questions (if not used in Module 1)

Learners to answer focus questions on *Hearing Assistance in Aged Care* video.

Purpose: Learners to demonstrate their understanding of important tactics and techniques to use to help a hearing impaired person more easily understand what is said, and the key question to ask themselves if a hearing impaired person has difficulty understanding them.

Support materials:

Focus question handout (See Appendix 1)

The video emphasises that paraphrasing is an important skill. Paraphrasing (rephrasing) of misunderstood sentences can help a hearing impaired listener, rather than just repeating the statement in the same words – especially where consonant sounds are not heard clearly.

Exercise 3: Paraphrasing

Learners to try paraphrasing a number of sentences in 'real time'.

Purpose: To demonstrate that mastering the skill of paraphrasing takes practice.

Support materials:

Paraphrasing exercise handout (See Appendix 1) and example answers (See Appendix 2).

Exercise 4: Video role play**Run time:** 1 min 35 sec

Play the video while learners look for appropriate or ineffective use of communication tactics and techniques. Particular note should be taken of the message conveyed by the visitor (Basil) to the hearing impaired resident (Joan).

At the end of Joan's mystified response pause video and ask viewers to rapidly paraphrase the intended message.

Play the remainder of the video, then replay the video in full. Learners should then be asked to comment on techniques and tactics used in the conversations.

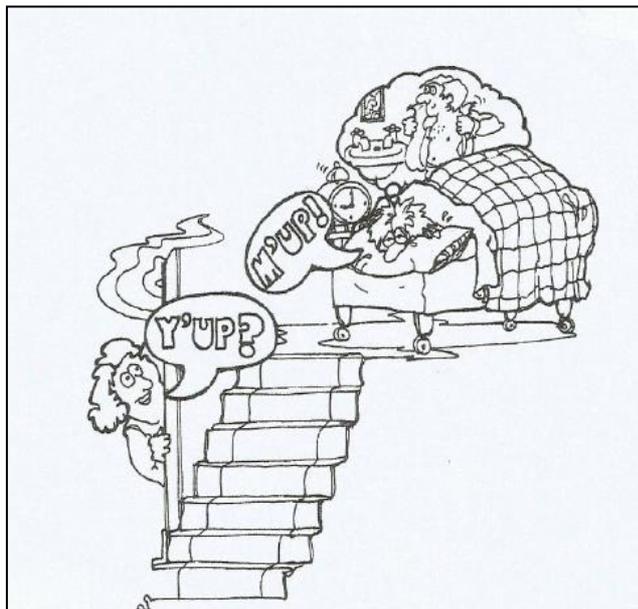
Purpose: Opportunity for learners to critique a conversation with a hearing impaired person.

Access: <https://vimeo.com/134592355>

4. Lip reading

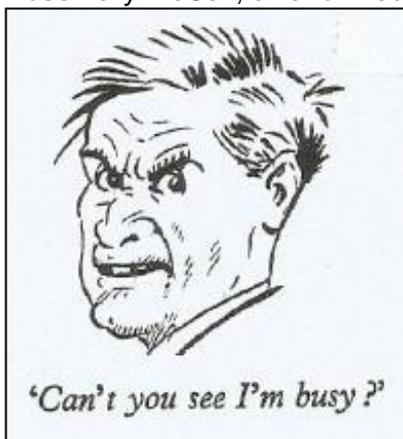
Understanding speech does not depend on hearing every word – our brains can fill in some gaps. Speech is not like writing turned into sound. A spoken message needs to be understood in context. For example, ‘Yup’ and ‘Mup’ can be recognised as a question and answer if the circumstances are known! ¹

Sight may help to augment hearing loss and vice versa. As people lose their hearing they may consciously or unconsciously learn to ‘lip read’ - at least to some extent. The art of **lip reading** and observation of other visual clues can be a valuable supplement to hearing aids.



Lip reading uses all available clues to understand what is said, including visible spoken consonants and vowels, non-verbal expressions and behaviours, along with any other available clues.

Rosemary McCall, a renowned English teacher of lip reading, put it this way:



“Because speech is a very rapid expression of thought (about 800 movements a minute) it is essential for eye and mind to work together. Alert to all possible clues, your powers of anticipation, intelligent guess work and quick imaginative intuition must be used. In fact, mentally you need to be both on the spot and a jump ahead at the same time!”²

No wonder lip reading is a challenging, often tiring and stressful activity and is particularly difficult where conversation moves unpredictably between members of a group. Learning effective lip reading late in life may be made more difficult by declining vision or cognitive ability and by other distracting conditions.

¹ B. Northwood (Ed.) 1975 *I see what you mean* BBC London p32

² R. F. McCall 1982 *A Word in Your Eye – Helps Hearing* South-East Regional Association of the Deaf UK (7th Ed.) p8, 10 – 11, 13 & 24

Lip reading, is an example of a communication challenge arising from hearing impairment.

Rosemary McCall states that *animated cheerful people are easiest to follow. So, be cheerful when speaking with hearing impaired clients.*



Exercise 5: Lip reading in front of a mirror

Purpose: To demonstrate that lip reading is a challenging and demanding skill which requires close concentration and much practice to master.

Support materials:

Lip Reading Mirror Exercise handout (See Appendix 1).

5. Dementia - importance of hearing

Alzheimer's Australia states that where a client is suffering from dementia:

*"It is important to check that hearing and eyesight are not impaired. Glasses or a hearing aid may help some people. Check that hearing aids are functioning correctly and glasses are cleaned regularly."*³

If a dementia sufferer who normally uses hearing aids shows signs of agitation check that the client is wearing their aids. Absence of normally heard speech and environmental sounds may cause distress.

As dementia progresses and verbal communication deteriorates awareness of emotions and sometimes music remain. It is therefore essential to smile, relax and be visibly pleased to be with a dementia sufferer, bearing in mind that communication is made up of three parts:

- 55% is body language which is the message we give out by our facial expression, posture and gestures
- 38% is the tone and pitch of our voice
- 7% is the words we use.

Experience has shown that it is often too late to *commence* use of hearing aids when someone is suffering from more advanced dementia. Sometimes clients in this situation may benefit from simple (and relatively inexpensive) personal communicator assistive listening devices but this often means that staff and visitors will need to manage the ALD during visits.

With the emphasis on care in home for as long as possible it is very important that clients are encouraged by staff and family home carers to act on hearing loss as early as possible and to encourage and assist with adaptation to use of hearing aids.

³ Alzheimer's Australia 2012, Communication, Caring for Someone with Dementia Help sheet

Appendix 1: Exercise Handouts

Exercise 1: Focus questions for *Hearing Assistance in Aged Care* video

Exercise 2: Paraphrasing exercise

Exercise 3: Focus questions for *Hearing Assistance in Aged Care* video

Exercise 4: Video role play critique

Exercise 5: Lip reading mirror exercises

Exercise 1: Focus questions for *Hearing Assistance in Aged Care* video

Focus questions	Answers
<p>What number one enemy of hearing impaired people is likely to interfere with their easy participation in a conversation – even with a mild hearing loss?</p>	
<p>What are some of the most unfortunate side effects of hearing loss?</p>	
<p>What are some common behaviours that indicate a person may have a hearing loss?</p>	
<p>Why is getting used to a hearing aid often difficult?</p>	
<p>Is it true that the old saying “use it or lose it” applies to hearing?</p>	

Exercise 2: Paraphrasing

Try paraphrasing the following in 'real time'

Sentence	Possible paraphrase
1. I don't have enough time	
2. They will have to take a cab to keep their appointment.	
3. Half of us are blind, few of us feel, and we are all deaf. (William Osler)	
4. I frequently can't remember.	
5. Susan doesn't have Jane's 'get up and go'.	
6. It was Joe who stole the money.	
7. You shouldn't listen to anything she says.	
8. The deaf were not seen as different as almost everyone signed.	
<p>9. A famous linguist was asked the difference between 'complete' and 'finished'.</p> <p>He responded: <i>If you marry the right woman you are complete. If you marry the wrong woman you're finished. If the right woman finds you with the wrong woman you will be completely finished!</i></p> <p>If you want a challenge, try paraphrasing this one! <i>A language expert was asked – what is the difference in meaning between the words 'over' and 'done'? After a brief pause he replied.....</i></p>	

Exercise 3: Focus questions for *Hearing Assistance in Aged Care* video

Focus questions	Answers
<p>What are important tactics and techniques to use to help a hearing impaired person more easily understand what you are saying?</p> <p>Remember: Practice is the key to applying these techniques.</p>	
<p>Are vowels or consonants more affected when high pitched speech sounds are not heard clearly?</p>	
<p>Are vowels or consonants more important in giving words their meaning?</p>	
<p>If a hearing impaired person has difficulty understanding what is said, what is the critical question to ask oneself?</p>	

Exercise 4: Video role play critique

While watching the role play video of a visitor (Basil) passing on a message to the hearing impaired resident (Joan) look out for appropriate or ineffective use of communication tactics and techniques. Particular note should be taken of the message conveyed.

Pause the video at the end of Joan's mystified response.

Rapidly paraphrase the intended message.

After watching the remainder of the video, and viewing it again in full, answer the following focus questions.

What was learned from the paraphrasing?

What techniques and tactics did Basil – and later Jess – use or fail to use?

Character	Answer
Techniques and tactics used appropriately by Basil	
Techniques and tactics that Basil failed to use effectively	
Techniques and tactics used appropriately by Jess	
Techniques and tactics that Jess failed to use effectively	

Exercise 5: Lip reading mirror exercises

Try the following mirror exercise suggested by Rosemary McCall

“*Written* thoughts are made up of letters of the alphabet which form words, with a tidy space between them. But when people talk they express thoughts in *sounds* – a very different matter! There are no tidy spaces between words which come out in a string, just like that; there is no spelling, no letters of the alphabet, *only* sounds. You can forget all about the alphabet. You look for the visual picture made by *sounds* as they are spoken.



When people talk you will see very rapid fleeting movements, even badly formed lazy speech, and you will need to pounce on the speaker's thought using *every* clue you can find.

Here are some visible *sounds*. Watch in the mirror as you say these sentences:

- Have some bread and butter with my special jam.
- Would you like a boiled egg for breakfast?
- Mashed bananas and cream are not really slimming.

Now try to say these sentences again without closing your lips. You can't, can you?

Now you have learned that whenever the *sound* of P, B, or M is made the lips have to close.

Because these three sounds look exactly the same on the lips, you need familiarity to give you the sense, e.g. you may see quite correctly 'Nib that in the mud', but your mind knows it is 'Nip that in the bud' simply because it makes sense.

Numbers are constantly used for times, prices, dates, etc. If you watch in the mirror while you count you will notice that some numbers look very similar and can easily be confused – 8,9,10 for example. Compare 13 and 30, 14 and 40, etc and notice that the visible difference is very small.”

Some speech sounds are also very difficult to lip read, for example⁴

- 'h' as in 'home'
- 'y' as in 'yard'
- 'a' as in 'cat'

⁴ L A Watson, 1956, *How to get the most from your remaining hearing* Maico Foundation Minneapolis p102

Appendix 2: Answers to Exercises

Exercise 2: Example paraphrases

Exercise 3: Focus questions for *Hearing Assistance in Aged Care* video

Exercise 4: Hearing assistance techniques used appropriately or ineffectively in role play video

Exercise 2: Example paraphrases

Sentence	Possible paraphrase
1. I don't have enough time.	<i>I have to rush.</i>
2. They will have to take a cab to keep their appointment.	<i>They need a taxi to get there on time.</i>
3. Half of us are blind, few of us feel, and we are all deaf. (William Osler)	<i>Every second one of us cannot see, hardly any are sympathetic, and none hear.</i>
4. I frequently can't remember.	<i>I often forget.</i>
5. Susan doesn't have Jane's 'get up and go'.	<i>Susan has less energy than Jane.</i>
6. It was Joe who stole the money.	<i>Joe took the money.</i>
7. You shouldn't listen to anything she says.	<i>Don't take any notice of her remarks.</i>
8. The deaf were not seen as different as almost everyone signed. ¹	<i>Most people signed so there was nothing special about people who could not hear.</i>
<p>9. A famous linguist was asked the difference between 'complete' and 'finished'.</p> <p>He responded: <i>If you marry the right woman you are complete. If you marry the wrong woman you're finished. If the right woman finds you with the wrong woman you will be completely finished!</i></p> <p>If you want a challenge, try this one:</p> <p><i>A language expert was asked – what is the difference in meaning between the words 'over' and 'done'? After a brief pause he replied.....</i></p>	<p><i>"If you wed a good woman you will be overjoyed. If you wed an unsuitable woman you are done for. If the good woman finds you with the unsuitable woman you'll be done over!"</i></p>

¹ In Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts from the 17th to early 20th century an exceptional high proportion of the population were profoundly deaf. Almost all residents used an efficient sign language.

Exercise 3: Answer to focus question on hearing tactics and techniques for *Hearing Assistance in Aged Care* video

Important tactics and techniques to use to help a hearing impaired person more easily understand what you are saying:

- First get the listener's attention
- Reduce or move away from background noise – turn off radio or television
- Face the listener directly – both sit or both stand, about a metre apart
- Don't shout – speak normally, if necessary a little louder. Shouting and impatience will worry and distract the listener.

Why doesn't shouting help people to hear more clearly?typically high pitch hearing loss leads to a loss/ reduction of consonants which makes understanding difficult

- A smile can reassure the listener
- Have light on your face – not shining in listener's eyes
- Keep your hands away from your face – let the listener see what you are saying
- Avoid waving your hands around – do not distract the listener
- Pointing to an object may give a clue as to what is being talked about.

If a hearing impaired person has difficulty understanding, the critical question to ask oneself is - **'What might I have done differently?'**

Other useful tactics or techniques to remember:

- In a group position yourself close to the others....
- If topic of conversation changes give a clue to what is being talked about [example]
-find another way of saying the same thing [paraphrase] – don't just repeat same words
- Sentences rather than individual words give meaning to speech. So – don't – speak – like – this...
- Have a pen and paper handy.... as a last resort

Remember – hearing aids are not a 'cure all' for loss of hearing

Exercise 4: Hearing assistance techniques used appropriately or less effectively in role play video

What techniques and tactics did Basil – and later Jess – use or fail to use?

Character	Answer
<i>Techniques and tactics used effectively by Basil</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Got Joan's attention and greeted her by name • Asked if he could turn off background music • Sat down as Joan was seated, and reasonably close to her • Positioned himself so that his face was illuminated and Joan wasn't looking into the light • Maintained eye contact with Joan (as culturally appropriate) • Paraphrased the message, and in a way that Joan would not feel responsible for not having understood it correctly in the first attempt • Used non-verbal communication appropriately e.g. relaxed and patient • When Jess arrived Basil placed a chair for her close to his so that Joan could easily look at them both
<i>Techniques and tactics that Basil failed to use effectively</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Request to turn off the music was rather hesitant • Did not express his message concisely in first attempt • Spoke a little too fast • Some distracting hand movements
<i>Techniques and tactics used effectively by Jess</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helped Joan understand the topic of conversation by pointing to the mobile phone (not entirely clear from video) and used her eyes to draw Joan's attention to the phone • Cheerful and smiling
<i>Techniques and tactics that Jess failed to use effectively</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spoke a little fast

Note: Joan demonstrated a couple of the tactics and techniques recommended in Module 4 for use by a hearing impaired person. She had positioned herself in the corner of the room with her back to the wall so that she would see an approaching visitor and not be startled by them. Joan asked a question when she did not understand Basil's message in which she included what she thought she had heard. This made it less likely that Basil would simply repeat what he had already said.