

☑ **Employment Issues for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Workers**

An estimated one in 10 American workers is hard of hearing, while some 357,000 others are classified as totally deaf. In 1997-98 alone, there were almost 24,000 students with some degree of hearing loss enrolled in colleges and universities across the United States.

Paul Geyer, an assistant professor of rehabilitation education and research at the Regional Training Center for Persons Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing at the University of Arkansas, has conducted extensive research on employment issues faced by deaf, late-deafened or hard of hearing workers.

"Tremendous strides have been made in public awareness of accessibility issues in the past decade because of the Americans with Disabilities Act," Geyer said. "But there's still a great deal of work to be done, especially in the area of equal rights to employment. Hearing loss is not as obvious a factor as a physical disability, but unfortunately, it's still just as powerful a deterrent to potential employers — one can't simply build a wheelchair ramp to make the problem of accessibility disappear."

"Unfortunately, the guidance offered to employers so far has done little to calm the anxiety and confusion experienced by supervisors, managers and human resource personnel as they struggle to deal with the day to day issues of deafness in the workplace," Geyer said. "With more research on this specific population, we can surely make a difference in the lives of the thousands of Americans with disabilities that keep them from working."

Geyer advocates the use of augmentative devices to make the workplace "reasonably accessible" to people with hearing difficulties and physical disabilities and insists that measures like these are not as difficult to implement as they often seem at the outset.

"Making a working environment hospitable to someone living with a disability is often as easy as purchasing a bit of additional software, electrical equipment or just providing a simple telephone device for the deaf (TTY)," Geyer said. "Usually, changes like these aren't nearly as expensive and technically frightening as employers often assume."

"It remains for us to debunk the myth that people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or living with a physical disability cannot function successfully as professionals in their field," Geyer continued. "With an effort to educate companies and corporations, those with disabilities can be included in nearly any pool of potential employees. It's that simple."



This material was summarized from a news release from the University of Arkansas. See here for the [Full Article](#). Paul Geyer is an associate professor, with the University's [Research and Training Center for Persons Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing](#), (501) 686-9691, pgeyer@comp.uark.edu



The Employee Selection Process:
Accommodating the Person Who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing

During the selection process, employers must determine if the deaf or hard of hearing applicant is capable of performing the essential functions of the job. It is critical to obtain an accurate picture of the applicant and his or her background, skills, and abilities to do the job. Typically this process involves two steps: screening written job applications and interviewing prospective applicants.

Some applicants who are deaf or hard of hearing may have difficulty in reading and comprehending written applications, especially those that are heavily loaded with complicated English phrases or unfamiliar terms. Appropriate accommodations may include such strategies as allowing the person to take an application and obtain their own assistance in filling it out, allowing more time for completion, or providing a sign language interpreter. When an applicant notifies you about their hearing loss, the simplest strategy is to ask the applicant what appropriate accommodations are needed.

Accommodations may also be required during selection interviews. Minimally, interviews should be sensitive to the range of communication abilities of persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. Simple accommodations may include conducting the interview in a quiet, well-lit environment that minimizes visual distractions. The interviewer must be willing to use the interviewee's assistive listening device, if one is used. Talk at a normal pace and at a normal volume. If asked, be willing to repeat questions, converse at a different pace or volume, or try other strategies like note writing. Avoid sitting in front of bright lights or windows which make it difficult to speech read.

If requested, use an effective professional sign language interpreter. When using the interpreter, speak directly to the applicant, not the interpreter. The role of the interpreter is to facilitate communication, not explain or participate in the interview. All information shared in the interview is confidential and will not be disclosed by the interpreter to other parties. Referrals for professional sign language interpreters may be obtained from public or private agencies such as the local vocational rehabilitation office, the state commission for the deaf, or by consulting the telephone directory.

If group interviews are conducted, it is important to speak with one person at a time. Be sure the deaf or hard of hearing applicant knows that the interviewer is speaking before the interviewer or other persons in the room speak. Remember, your goal is to obtain an accurate picture of the person's skills, experience, and capabilities to do the job--not to miss this information due to communication difficulties.



This material was drawn from [Working Effectively with Persons who are Deaf or hard of Hearing](#) a research paper from the [Research and Training Center for Persons Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing](#) at the University of Arkansas.



Enhancing Communication: On the Job Accommodations

Enhancing the performance of the employee who is deaf or hard of hearing does not necessarily have to be expensive or require a great deal of equipment. In many

instances, communication accommodations may be useful to all employees, not just those who are deaf or hard of hearing. The most important consideration is to identify the communication situations in which the deaf or hard of hearing employee is experiencing difficulty. The responsibility to improve or minimize communication barriers in these situations is equally shared by all persons in the workplace, those who are hearing, hard of hearing, or deaf. The following are examples of accommodations that could facilitate communication in a variety of situations:

Face to Face Situations

- Ensure that the office and/or work environment is adequately lighted.
- Consider placing the worker in a quieter environment if environmental noise interferes with communication.
- Arrange the work station in a way that the worker can readily see when someone is entering their office or work-site.
- Use assistive listening devices when needed.
- Use interpreters (oral and/or sign) when needed.
- Be aware of your personal habits that may serve as barriers to comfortable speechreading. Examples include hands in front of mouth, not directly facing employee, and chewing while talking.
- Encourage co-workers and supervisors to learn sign language by offering training classes

Interactive Distance Communication Situations

- Ensure the availability of Text Telephones (TTs are also commonly referred to as TDDs or TTYs), amplification devices, or other appropriate assistive listening devices (ALDS) to help facilitate communication between other employees or customers.
- Use state telecommunication relay services, where an intermediate person receives verbal information and types it to the person using a TT. The "800" toll-free phone numbers for these services are listed in local phone directories.
- Consider E-mail as a primary tool for intra and interoffice communication.
- Provide visual or tactile pagers for communication, instructions, and as an alerting system.
- Share information via networked computers.
- Use computer notetaking.
- Try FAX machines for intra or interoffice, and customer communication.
- Provide visual and auditory alerting devices on telephones and fire alarm systems

Group Situations

- Ensure that all rooms used for meetings or training are adequately lighted.
- Utilize assistive listening devices such as FM, infrared, loop systems, and/or closed-captioning decoders in meeting and training sessions.

- Try real-time captioning for meetings and training sessions (simultaneously captioning as speaker speaks).
- Caption video training materials.
- Use professional interpreters (oral and/ or sign) when needed.
- Use notetakers in meetings and groups.
- Consider "communication cops" at meetings (one person who monitors the meeting to ensure that only one person speaks at a time).
- Provide mentors and coaches.

Performance Evaluations

Performance evaluations are typically based upon a written review coupled with a face-to-face interview. If reading ability necessitates extra time, provide workers with written information in advance. Since barrier-free communication is critical, use multiple strategies as necessary to ensure success. Multiple strategies include use of professional interpreters (sign or oral), computers, ALDS, and other appropriate strategies.



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