

# Improving the Language and Learning of Students Who are Deaf

Teaching students who are deaf or hearing should mean linking both language and content learning. Since students must learn both the language used in and the content of the courses they take, teachers must be able to teach them the language, reading and writing of their subject area. This tipsheet discusses ways to adapt the content of a course so that students who are deaf or hard of hearing can learn from the ideas of others and put new ideas into their own words. Here are some suggestions:

## The More Ideas are Discussed and Presented Engagingly, the More Students Will Learn

- Before beginning class, have students summarize the ideas of the prior class, then relate those summaries to the goals of the current class.
- Break students into small groups to review homework assignments. This jumpstarts their memories and gets them using the language they are learning.
- Make ideas come alive through drama. If students are studying the catalyst role of enzymes, act out how these enzymes “grab” amino acids to assemble proteins!
- Use blackboard diagrams to illustrate “pictureable” ideas and label them or use pre-selected images from the Internet to illustrate a point.
- Use analogies for comparisons. If measurement conversions (inches to centimeters) are being taught, first use monetary conversions (dollars to dimes) to reinforce the idea of changes in form but not amount.
- List and refer to key concepts and vocabulary on the blackboard during class. Use visually projected notes when possible, pointing to key words and phrases.
- Give students more time to manipulate ideas through discussion before assigning writing tasks. Jot down key ideas on the board that they might want to think more deeply about for a particular assignment.

## Reading Across the Curriculum: The More Students Understand Others’ Writing, the More They Will Learn

- Give a brief overview of a reading before assigning it, jotting down key words on the board that students will encounter. If the reading is a narrative, write character names and roles on the board.
- Give students reading guides for difficult sections of texts. Include comprehension questions as well as short explanations of key words and background references.
- Consider giving students partially filled-in outlines of assigned pages. Vary these outlines—first, give major ideas and ask students to fill in the details; next, give details and ask them for the major ideas. For new vocabulary, include language that surrounds key words in a text-- if a key word is *majority*, include its surrounding words *opinion of the court* as in *the majority opinion of the court* to allow students to see how words “go together,” or chunk, which will help in remembering them. Mention what part of speech the word is, making sure that it fits how the word is being used in the example.
- Show students how to “mark up” text by underlining and writing side-notes and questions, using either a computer or a document camera connected to an LCD projector that projects onto a whiteboard.
- Visually project as much text as possible using the methods mentioned above. Using your index finger, point out new vocabulary and its linguistic context (the surrounding phrases or clauses). Encourage interpreters to stand or sit as close to the text as possible. Read difficult portions of text aloud, modeling strategies readers use.

Show how meaning builds from prior to present text and how readers predict meaning and keep reading to test predictions.

- All reading assignments should have a companion writing assignment. Require students to re-read and re-write unsatisfactory assignments after they have benefitted from class discussion.

### **Writing Across the Curriculum: The More Students Create Their Own Ideas in Writing and Integrate the Ideas of Others, the More They Will Learn**

- Give students more writing assignments, perhaps shorter pieces as opposed to one or two longer ones.
- Create writing assignments that engage writers, such as response papers and position papers.
- Analyze models of good student writing, showing students exactly what is expected. Talk explicitly about how the authors crafted their pieces and then name their works in memorable ways so that they can be referred to again for other writing assignments. Say things like, “Notice how this quote perfectly fits after its lead-in.”
- Suggest networked programs such as Blackboard’s Discussion Board, where students might be assigned exploratory writing before formal writing. Select well-done exchanges to be viewed in class the next day. Encourage students to cite this more casual writing in their later assignments, giving credit to the student-author.
- Show students how to cull information from their readings to address an essay topic and to organize these citations into an outline. It is much easier to follow a student’s chain of thought in a rough outline than later, when it may get lost in a tangle of prose.
- Encourage multiple drafts of written work and respond to each draft.

### **A FLUENCY, CLARITY, CORRECTNESS**

approach might be tried this way:

- Response to Draft 1: Mention whether the assigned topic was addressed, if enough information was provided, if it was well ordered and relevant. Point out unclear language.
- Response to Draft 2: Continue to ask questions that will address remaining issues of development and coherence. Continue to point out unclear language.
- Draft 3: Consider using a writing tutor to edit the piece based on the grammatical needs of the student. Writing tutors need to be fluent in the language of the student and skilled in teaching grammar in a consistent way. An X-Word Grammar approach might be tried. For more information about X-Word, visit: <http://xwordgrammar.pbworks.com>. Some thought might be given to instituting this approach program-wide.
- Consider ending each class five minutes earlier so that students can write what they learned during the session and note any questions. Students could read these notes aloud at the beginning of

These suggested practices will help students improve their language skills by strengthening their understanding of new ideas through language, reading and writing. The more opportunities students are given to “talk,” read, and write about their new learning, the more they will indeed learn.

See if your institution would consider linking courses in pairs or clusters, connected by themes, so that students’ language, reading, and writing about a particular theme can be enriched by the different teachers’ unique perspectives.

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