There are two basic categories of hearing impairment: those who rely primarily on oral speech (generally identifying themselves as hard-of-hearing); and those who rely on sign language for communication (generally identifying themselves as deaf).

**For those who are hard-of-hearing**

**Get their attention.** Before you speak, say their name or gently touch their arm.

**Does the person have a hearing aid?** If they do, check they are wearing it and it is turned on.

**Face them and let them see your lips.** Speak clearly but don’t exaggerate as over-emphasis distorts lip movements.

**Don’t cover your mouth** or turn or lower your head as this will make your lips harder to see and blur the sounds you make.

**Position yourself.**

- Try to be within a large step of the person.
- Don’t stand in front of a window as light behind you can make it harder for the person to read your lips.

**Speak clearly.** Hearing aids typically make sounds louder but don’t make sounds clearer. If you are not understood, repeat your sentence as you said it the first time. If the person still doesn’t understand, rephrase it until you are understood, or write it down.

**Speak loudly** if necessary, but don’t shout. Shouting distorts sound and is painful to a person wearing a hearing aid. If you need to raise your voice, bear in mind the need for client confidentiality.
Speak slowly, but not too slowly. Give the person time to work out what you are saying.

Avoid background noise. Move to a quiet place if you can.

Use written information to back up your messages. Give out brochures and write down or highlight your main points.

Demonstrate. Show the person what you mean. Use your face, hands and body.

Pay attention to your non-verbal messages. Body language is a powerful component of communication. Pay attention to your facial expressions, posture and gestures.

Be patient. A person who is hard-of-hearing has to concentrate to understand information and may tire quickly. The ability to hear and understand is affected by fatigue, worry, distractions, illness and being made to feel a nuisance.

Teach-back: Confirm you have communicated successfully by asking the person to repeat back the main points in their own words. See the Checking Understanding sheet in this toolkit.

Multimedia requirements: Closed captions

Closed captions enable the soundtrack of a television program, television commercial, DVD, or video to be read off the screen.

Under Tasmanian Government policy, any multimedia productions such as DVDs, television commercials, television programs and videos developed for or by the Tasmanian Government must include closed captions. This is also a requirement under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992.

Unlike foreign language subtitles, which are a translation of the dialogue only, closed captions include additional elements of the soundtrack including sound effects and music. They are also coloured and positioned on the screen to help the viewer know who is speaking. Closed captions can be switched on or off by the viewer.

There is a number of captioning service providers in Australia.

More information

See the Speaking with people who are deaf sheet in this toolkit, which includes information about communicating with people who do not use verbal communication and rely on sign language and other non-verbal methods to communicate.