Teaching students with speech & language difficulties

General Information

Students with speech and language disorders can experience difficulties in one or more areas of functioning, including: pitch, loudness, articulation, syntax, phonology, or fluency. These difficulties may impact a student’s ability to participate in class discussions, make an oral presentation, and produce adequate written work. Requirements in computer programming, mathematics, and foreign language may also be affected. Commonly associated disabilities include: developmental language disorder, learning disabilities-language, deafness, aphasia, respiratory disorder, speech impairment, head trauma, and stuttering.

While each instructor knows the demands of his/her own class, the following questions may be considered so that classroom information is accessible to the student:

- In what ways can I objectively evaluate the student’s written work?
- Does this student use a voice output computer or other speech generation technology? Is this something that will be integrated into a traditional classroom setting or is it needed only during specific situations?
- What can I do to assist this student using American Sign Language (ASL) to practice standard English in nongraded situations and to interact meaningfully with other class members?
- Do I need to allow alternate formats for oral presentations?

Suggestions for Communication

- Most people with disabilities do not mind talking frankly about the disability. Understanding and awareness of the facts promotes acceptance and integration.
- Be patient and casual. It is OK to ask for repetition or clarification if the person’s speech is difficult to understand. Do not say you understand when you actually do not.
- Speak clearly and distinctly. Slow down the pace of talking. Speak in a normal tone of voice.

Academic Considerations

- To ensure understanding, consider individual sessions by appointment during office hours.
- During class, use more writing, less talking. Utilize overheads, chalkboard, and handouts for vocabulary.
- If the student is also severely hard of hearing, a sign language interpreter may be necessary.

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