

National Center on Low-Incidence Disabilities

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Process Information for Assessment of Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Step I: Initial Conversations : *Converse with Students, Parents, Teachers, and Others*

1. Gather information from many sources and allow comprehensive information to guide the assessment.
2. Ask what people want to learn from the assessment.
3. Speak with the students you are assessing, parents, teachers, the interpreter who works with the students (Teachers of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (TOD), general education teachers, audiologists, speech-language-pathologists, etc). Each person may hold unique knowledge about students due to his or her particular area of expertise.
4. Siblings may have valuable insight to offer. Keep in mind that if students use a form of manual communication, (American Sign Language, Signed Exact English, etc.) interfamilial communication may be limited. However, much information related to behavior across functioning can be learned.
5. Useful *questions to address during conversations* (See Resource Page)

Step II. Preliminary Observations

1. It is important to understand students functioning in a variety of environments.
2. Spend time observing students in different settings. (i.e. general education classroom, special education classroom, lunch time, recess, physical education, art, music, etc.).
3. Observe students during different times of the day to observe patterns of behavior, energy level, fatigue, alertness, etc. (i.e., possibly the best time of the day and the worst time of the day).
4. Conduct direct observation of students' behavior that will allow you to focus on specific concerns stemming from conversations and observations.
5. Don't assume that behaviors observed are due to the hearing loss. (See Resource Page)

Step III. Developing A Plan

1. Incorporate the information and form a complete picture of students to determine which test is most appropriate.
2. If the initial plan for testing does not elicit accurate information, be willing to

- alter your plan.
3. After students with hearing loss are qualified for services, dismissal is rare. Assessment becomes the basis for educational planning only.

Test Selection

- Basals and ceilings can mask language/skill gaps. It may be necessary to test beyond the usual guidelines.
- Include typical school tasks and concept tests in assessment process to supplement results from standardized tests. (See *Alternative Assessment* in the Resource Page)

Special Materials/Accommodations

- Hard of hearing students may require the use of an amplification system. If the system is installed in the classroom, test there if possible. If the system is portable, try to use the students' daily equipment.
- Secure interpreter if needed. Procedure for this varies per school system.
- Ensure that all personal aids are in use for testing (hearing aids, cochlear implant, glasses, etc.).
- Be aware of eye fatigue. Constant visual attention is required for manual communication, which is extremely taxing and can prematurely tire the students.
- Remember that students who use an interpreter must look at the interpreter to access communication. Visual attention cannot be focused on the interpreter and the materials at the same time. (i.e., pointing to page and talking at the same time.)
- Use all accommodations and modifications during the assessment that are used in the classroom.

Preparations Before Scheduling the Evaluation

- Make sure vision and hearing reports are up-to-date.
- Become familiar with amplification equipment so the equipment is functioning optimally during assessment.
- Prior to testing, a hearing check should be performed by a trained professional in the room where the testing will occur. This will help to ensure proper functioning of the equipment in the testing room and will illuminate any adverse effects of ambient, or background, noise.
- Don't rush the assessment process. Plan considerably more time for the assessment and provide ample time for rapport-building before beginning assessment.
- Make every attempt not to test students during their preferred activities.
- Using an interpreter is an awkward paradigm if you are not used to it. Practice interactions using an interpreter prior to the assessment if needed. Being at ease with this process will increase the fluidity of communication, and the comfort of students. Flaws in this process could

be confounding factors in the testing results.

Testing Room

- Schedule to work in a room for testing that will maximize the students' use of vision and residual hearing.
- Room should be well lit with direct lighting behind the students.
- Ensure clear visual access to the examiner and the interpreter (if applicable).
- Limit background noise for hard of hearing students. Be aware of the humming of lights, AC vents, hallway traffic, etc. Hearing check will help to judge amount of interference.
- Limit movement within the students' sight. Students with hearing loss are highly aware of movement, as it is used as the primary method of gaining attention. Flickering lights, vents blowing something hanging from the ceiling, movement outside of the room, or extraneous movements of the examiner may be highly distracting to students.
- Keep doors and windows closed.
- Be aware of and sensitive to glare issues as it will accelerate eye fatigue (shiny testing materials, examiner's glasses/jewelry, etc.).

Step IV: Administer Appropriate Formal Assessment Measures

1. Consider all accommodations and recommendations specific to the students.
2. Choose a test that included deaf and hard of hearing students in the normative sample, or has a separate set of norms for this population when possible. Don't assume norms are comparable. (See Resources Page)
3. Be aware that for students who use manual communication, specific test scores may be invalid due to the modality change (this is all forms of sign language). However, the students' responses to individual test items may provide much diagnostic information (See Resource Page).

Opening Test Preparations

- Ensure amplification system is operating. If it is not functioning, and it is a standard accommodation for the students, the testing should be postponed until properly functioning equipment is available.
- Ask students if their accommodations/modifications are correct or if something needs to be changed.
- Respond to students as people and use common sense.
- Clearly explain the purpose of testing to decrease stress.

During Testing

- Detailed instructions may take longer to explain. Rely on feedback from students to ensure proper understanding of instructions.
- Ensure students' understanding of the directions by using a moderate

- amount of practice items if needed.
- Keep materials not in use out of sight.
 - Praise students' efforts frequently and use an upbeat tone of voice and a smiling face. Be sensitive to fatigue and take breaks as needed. It is very tiring to visually attend without any breaks. It can also be tiring for students who may need to fully concentrate to fill in the auditory blanks.
 - Avoid giving unintended visual cues, especially eye gaze.
 - Speak naturally. Exaggerating mouth movements or speaking too loudly may hinder speechreading. Mustaches or other facial hair may also hinder speechreading.
 - Face students directly and be sure they are looking at you when you begin to speak to them. If using an interpreter, students will need to look at the interpreter as you continue speaking.
 - Sit 2 to 3 feet from students to facilitate accurate speechreading.
 - Avoid looking down when speaking.
 - Avoid extraneous hand movements that may interfere with students' attention. Remember, movement is the primary way to gain the attention of people who have hearing loss.
 - Remember that students cannot look at testing material and examiner/interpreter at the same time.

After Testing

- Walk students back to class. This increases students' confidence in the process and decreases apprehension about performance.
- Take session notes immediately after testing.
- Be aware that while observations during testing are important, students will be more like themselves in familiar settings.
- Record any difficulties, accommodations, and modifications that occurred during testing.
- Thank students for cooperating, and inform them of the next step (test again, meet with teacher and/or parents).

Step V: Post Testing Conversations

1. Reading past reports may be helpful at this point in the process. Prior to this, too much focus on past reports may inappropriately influence a comprehensive assessment.
2. Discuss findings with people from initial conversations. Ask them if your results reflect their perceptions of the students.

Step VI: Re-Assess, if necessary

Initial assessment measures may indicate more specific areas of concern.

1. Consult with a colleague or refer the students to other professionals for a more detailed evaluation if needed.
2. Use non-verbal subtests or alternative assessments during follow-up.

3. If results do not reflect an accurate picture of students, consider referring students to, or consulting with, a specialist.

Step VII: Report Findings and Plan Collaboratively

1. Interpret findings and communicate them with the multi-disciplinary team, parents, and the students who were tested.
2. Keep in mind that tests do not diagnose in and of themselves. They serve as indicators and hypothesis generators. Work collaboratively with team members to identify strengths and needs that will ultimately contribute to practical accommodations, modifications, and/or supports for the students. Simply reporting scores is not helpful.
3. If test scores must be qualified, use ranges of performance rather than scores.
4. Make suggestions for practical classroom solutions based on findings.
5. Follow up on suggestions.