

How Do You Expect Me to Understand You If...

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We people with hearing loss are very fussy. Communication has to be just so, and if we don't get it the way we want or *need* it, we can get grumpy. Especially if we've explained it a million times to someone before. We do go easier on strangers, but if they are challenged by our requests, our good

humour is a time-limited offer.

So, let me put it very clearly, in every-day language, what good communication looks like for people – who through no fault of our own – have hearing loss.

How the heck am I supposed to hear and understand you, if you do the following?



1. You don't face me while talking to me. It's that simple: face me and talk, or face away and *don't* talk. If we can see each other's eyeballs, we can chat. If I'm looking at the back of your head, you better not be saying *words*.



2. You speak way louder than necessary, in the mistaken belief that “louder is better.” Because I need to use hearing aids, you think that speaking louder is good, right? Wrong. Here's the thing – I'm using technology that *already* bumps up the volume – and *too* much of a good thing can be

painful. And frankly, if you're bellowing at me, your lips are distorted and hard to read. I appreciate your efforts, but if I need you to speak up, in a noisy environment, for example, I'll let you know.

3. Your words trail off, turning your sentence into a cliffhanger. Am I supposed to *guess* what was supposed to come next? Sometimes it's hard enough to get what you *do* say, without having to take a stab at what you *meant* to say, or maybe decided not to say, or even just forgot. For example, when you say something like this: *So, Lulu and I went to see that new art exhibit downtown and we both...you know...* Then, just quiet air. As I'm listening hard to catch every precious jewel coming out of your lips, your voice gets fainter, so I lean in closer and closer ...and then the nothingness. You *do* see my problem, right?

4. You talk with your mouth full. Just as a reminder, peeps with hearing loss are speech readers. If you're talking, we are watching you, regardless of what else you're doing with your mouth. In addition to the visual horror of seeing food being chewed, it's challenging to understand, because words are formed differently when teeth are grinding through meat and tongues are sloshing around the mashed potatoes. If you would be so kind, please swallow the food and clean up the leftover bits from your teeth and lips – and then speak. I will do the same, so that we're fair-squarish.

5. Speaking of lips, you don't move yours much. Are there invisible magnets holding them together? What are you hiding? I've seen your teeth, they're good. So is your breath. I know it's hard to change how we speak, but could you use your mouth muscles a bit more so that I stand a better chance of telling the words apart?

Really, that's the main stuff. There's a lot more to good communication, but this is a good start. It comes down to just you and me – a person who can hear well and a person who can't – trying to have good conversations. I'm interested in what you have to say and I'm doing all that I can – being open about my needs and using technology – so if *you* can work on these few points, we'll have a much better chat.

Thank you. Truly, thank you.