

## What is Cued Speech?

### Hearing Loss Association of America

*this paper is an introduction to one communication mode most often used with children who have hearing loss; however, adults with hearing loss have used it as well to facilitate communication.*

### The Original Purpose of the System

Dr. R. Orin Cornett, the creator of Cued Speech, developed the system in 1966 for the purpose of improving the poor literacy levels he saw occurring in deaf education around the country. By providing visual access to the stream of consonants and vowels of a language at a rate similar to speech, he felt children who are deaf or hard-of-hearing could acquire English in a way that American Sign Language and oral education are unable to provide.

Cued Speech is a mode of communication uses the mouth and hand to visually distinguish the building blocks or sounds of a spoken language, thus allowing for the clear transmission of language between two or more cuers. Hand shapes, hand placements, and hand movements combine with speech to clearly show the stream of consonants and vowels that represent the words and thoughts of a cuer.

English contains approximately 40 individual sounds. When we lose our hearing, it seems that we are expected to be able to learn to read lips and get the message that way. But anyone who has seriously tried to do this knows very well. Speechreading or lipreading is difficult because of the 40 sounds in English, each one has another that looks just like it on the mouth.

For example *mom* looks like *bob* or *pop* or *mop*; *sherry* like *cherry*; *eight* like *ace*. Some consonants are invisible on the mouth so words like *has*, *six*, *hug* and *hum* impossible to decipher.

Deciphering English on the mouth alone can be a struggle for children and adults. Cued Speech can help by providing visual clues for those confusing sounds. With one handshape the difference between look-alike or hard to see sounds (such as /k/ and /g/ can be easily shown, so you will know if the person said *back* or *bag*, *cold* or *gold*, *mail* or *pail*.

## **The Components of Cued Speech**

In cued English, consonants are represented by handshapes and vowels are represented by placements and movements. Basically, there are 25 consonant sounds are divided among 8 handshapes. For example, consonants on the same handshape each look different on the mouth. So /m/ and /f/ are cued with the same handshape but are easily distinguished by the mouth. The sound /b/ uses a different handshape to differentiate from /m/.

Similarly, vowels are grouped in different placements, with each group occurring at the same placement having different mouth shapes. For example /ee/ and /ur/ are cued at the corner of the mouth but look completely different on the mouth.

## **Putting the Components Together**

When you cue a word, the consonant handshape is placed at the vowel placement that follows it. To read a cued message one must look at the handshape, placement and mouth movement at the same time. This sounds harder than it actually is. Since the placements are all near the mouth and handshapes are cued at placements, all the components are next to each other.

## **Cues to Clarify Speech**

Now that you have a basic idea of how the system of Cued Speech applies to English and how the components are put together, perhaps you are wondering how long it takes to learn and if someone has to cue all the time. While it is true that to provide complete access to English all the time, you must see cues along with speech at all times, it is also true that you Cued Speech can be used in other ways.

For example, sometimes knowing only the first sound of a word makes lipreading possible. So for those new to cueing or who haven't gained much speed, a cue can clarify as needed. For instance if you see the questions "Where is Bob?" and you aren't sure if the person is asking about "mom" or "Bob", a simple indication of the first consonant with a cue would clarify the message immediately. When playing cards, was that an "ace" or an "eight" they were asking for? Cueing the final consonant /s/ or /t/ can clarify these words easily.

## **Learning How to Cue**

Children exposed to cueing during the critical time of language development, birth to age six, learn how to cue by being exposed to it. Just as most hearing children simply

hear English around them and begin to play with sounds as they babble, children who cue learn by being immersed in a visually language-rich environment.

For adults who want to apply this skill to a language they already know (spoken or written), the process is much more deliberate and the time it takes to achieve proficiency varies by individual. The system used to convey cued English has a given number of pieces to learn. The mouth movements and facial expressions used are ones you already use naturally in conversation with others. As you learn the pieces of the system and how they apply to English, you learn how to select the appropriate representation for your dialect of American English.

Dissecting the words you use to communicate into a stream of consonants and vowels is a task that some easily master. Others take longer to break words down into these small building blocks. Consonants and vowels do not always correlate with the printed word. Just as learning to spell in English can be a challenge (for example: *though*, *through*, *cough*, and *tough* do not rhyme, but *fare*, *hair*, and *tear* do), learning to cue can be challenging as well. You need to stop thinking in terms of spelling and start thinking in terms of target phonemes (what consonant or vowel sounds the letters are representing). For example, the following words all end with the phoneme /f/: *graph*, *if*, and *laugh*. These words all contain the short vowel /e/: *head*, *bed*, *said*, *says*, *friend*, and *guest*.

Your ability to accurately identify a stream of phonemes plays a large role in how long it will take you to develop cueing skills. Learning the pieces of the system takes some instruction and memorization and can occur in a short time frame. After memorizing the system and learning how to execute the cues, the next step is to build speed and fluency. These skills come with practice, repetition, and use. New cueders tend to develop a set of phrases they are comfortable using and then slow down when they encounter a word they have never cued before.

Cue camps and workshops that take place around the country are often the best place to learn how to cue. Teachers need to be certified by the National Cued Speech Association ([www.cuedspeech.org](http://www.cuedspeech.org)) in order to work at NCSA-cosponsored camps. This ensures that the information presented about the system, including its history, is taught consistently, no matter who the instructor is. At camps, you receive excellent instruction during the day with the added benefit of times outside of class when you see cueing in action in myriad ways (parent to child, friend to friend, deaf adult to hearing child, etc.).

This exposure aids in understanding how the mode of communication actually works and provides a realistic expectation that your speed will develop in time.

While having an instructor is best to ensure that you are executing the cues correctly and not acquiring any hard-to-break habits, you can learn to cue from a DVD or computer software. Contact Cued Speech Discovery ([www.cuedspeech.com](http://www.cuedspeech.com); 877-283-2030) for a catalog to see what resources are available. These products can be very useful after you have taken a class, to provide practice and reinforcement of newly acquired skills and knowledge.

### **Who Should Learn How to Cue?**

It takes two to tango and to cue. In order for Cued Speech to have the greatest impact on your communication, someone that you communicate with daily needs to learn how to expressively cue. You need to learn how to read them. Both need to learn the system and take time to practice. Learning to cue is similar to learning how to type, once you have learned the basics all you need to do is practice to get faster. As you learn to cue and cue read, you might find that it is easiest to use for clearing up misunderstandings, others may fall in love and want it all the time. If you find it helpful, you can request to have someone cue for you at doctor appointments, the theater, and anywhere else you need help understanding the information around you.

### **Resources for Cued Speech Materials and Instructors**

For more information about Cued Speech instructors and cuers in a given geographical area, contact the National Cued Speech Association or visit them online. The National Cued Speech Association has 11 regional representative<sup>1</sup> that help connect cuers across the country.

National Cued Speech Association

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For information on purchasing items that help you learn how to cue and practice cue reading, contact Cued Speech Discovery.

Cued Speech Discovery

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