

How To.....

Get the Most Out of College

A Peer Guide to Self-Advocacy and Transition for the College Student Who's Hard of Hearing

Though there's certainly no such thing in life as a guarantee, I hope that if you take anything from this guide it will be this:

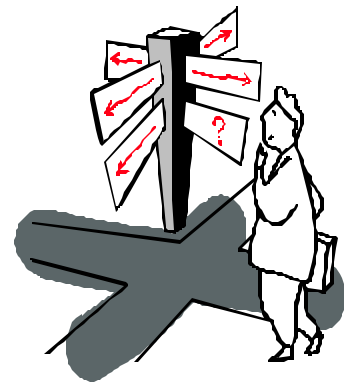
With the right attitude and the appropriate resources, you CAN Survive and Succeed in College. Come Prepared, Be Pro-Active, Stay Positive and show the world that the only boundary to success is the extent of your imagination.

Introduction

Change is tough for everyone. But for students with a hearing loss, change can be daunting. The transition from high school to college is certainly no exception.

After four years of high school, the pieces were finally starting to fall in place. Through all those awkward moments and embarrassing questions, at last you've found your niche. But just as you release a sigh of relief, society flips a switch and it's back to square one.

And it gets worse. This time around, your parents are restricted to the sidelines and, depending on your college's disability service programs, the only advocate you have is yourself. Not to mention that you're competing with hundreds of students for the attention of a single overwhelmed professor. So, then, how can you avoid looking like the character to the right on the first day of classes?



"College can be confusing"

Without further ado, I present ... The Three P's:

come **Prepared**
be **Pro-Active**
stay **Positive**

Coming Prepared

Documentation and research aside, the most important preparation does not come with paperwork.

In high school, maybe you were able to get by without assistive technology. Or maybe you never truly understood your hearing loss or your needs because it was your parents' job to understand, to question, and to advocate.

Yet, as a first year college student you will be entering an environment that fosters and encourages absolute independence. In other words, what your parents did behind the scenes in high school you will have to do yourself day-after-day in college.

More than ever before, knowing about your hearing loss and embracing assistive technology is simply essential to your success in a post-secondary environment. (See *Resource Guide* for article) For many adolescents, the first and most difficult step towards this independence is acknowledging the realities of hearing loss. Though there are certainly resources (see *Resource Guide*) that you can consult for guidance, accepting your hearing loss is ultimately a decision that only you can make.

Knowing your Hearing Loss

Despite the fact that a hearing loss can pervade just about anything and everything we do on a daily basis, a surprising majority of high school and college students with hearing loss know little to nothing about the nature of their hearing loss or the assistive services available. Thus, for many college students, finding the proper accommodations for their needs is like navigating blindfolded.

If you find yourself lost in the driver's seat, here's what to do:

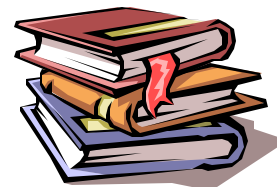
1. Visit your audiologist. He or she can help you understand the nature of your loss (i.e. if it's conductive, sensorineural, or mixed). Through a audiologic assessment (a hearing test), your audiologist can also pinpoint the severity of your loss and the areas of greatest vulnerability. Armed with detailed information documenting your loss, you will now be able to choose more intelligently the appropriate assistive services.
2. Hit the books. A thorough and relatively inexpensive way to learn from professionals about hearing loss, available technology, and coping strategies. (Consult *Resource Guide* for recommendations).
3. Join a support group. Self-isolation can be dangerous. Joining a local HLAA chapter or online support group provides you with a community that understands your problems and can help you find solutions.



“An unprepared student”



“Visit your Audiologist”



“Hit the Books”

Knowing Your Rights

Less than one percent of high school students with a hearing loss receive any form of accommodation from their public districts.ⁱ Well, simply put, this is illegal.



“Search for Support”

A Guide to
Disability
Legislation

High schools are required to provide for students with a hearing loss any reasonable services in the form of a Section 504 plan or an Individual Education Plan (IEP). These services are guaranteed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which secures the rights of disabled children to a "free and appropriate education" (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment.

For those readers who are high school students, if your school is not complying with this legislation despite your efforts to help them understand your needs, contact the [U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights](#) or the [U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education](#) and Rehabilitative Services (See Resource Guide for Detailed Contact Information).

However, in the post-secondary arena, the student, not the school, is responsible for ensuring his or her own accommodations. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973) and Title II of the ADA protect disabled college students from discrimination, yet they do not force schools to provide FAPE. In other words, your prospective college or university is legally bound only to supply those accommodations necessary to ensure that you are not discriminated against on the basis of your disability.

In addition, your post-secondary school is not obligated to actively seek you out. If you wish to be accommodated you **MUST** make your hearing loss known to the appropriate school administrators.

Though this might seem a little disappointing, let's make it clear that if your loss merits accommodations you are still ensured access to the appropriate technology and services (see 'Be Pro-Active' section for examples).

Furthermore, since you will be living on campus, the school is required to provide accommodations (i.e. visual smoke detector) for your dorm room and in all public on-campus locations.

IDEA (1975)

- Requires state schools to provide a FAPE.
- Secures funding for IEP's
- Covers all students until date of graduation

Section 504

No person with a disability can be denied access to any federally funded program on the basis of disability.

ADA

Extends Section 504 to include employment, educational institutions, and transportation providers.

Choosing the Right College

For any high-school senior, finding the college that fits your personality and can accommodate your needs is all about doing research and asking questions. With this in mind, develop a list of about 20 schools and rank them based on location, academics, campus life, etc. Then, go online and learn the specifics. Ask yourself if you're looking for a large state school or a close-knit, community oriented college; are you interested in language arts, technical sciences, performing arts, etc. Once you've narrowed your list down to 10 or 15 schools, start asking questions.

It is at this point that you should start inquiring about disability services. If you don't know which question to ask, start with these:

1. What is the school's policy for determining the accommodations that a student needs?
2. How do I request accommodations?
3. How can I establish eligibility? what documentation must I provide?
4. What services, specifically, can this school provide me with?
5. Are there any support services for students with disabilities? for students with a hearing loss?
6. Has the school been evaluated for ADA compliance?
7. What is the school's grievance (complaint) policy?
"Making Your Education Happen."

Ideally, after your campus visits you will have narrowed the list to about 8-10 schools.

What to Look for on a College Tour

- Amplified pay-telephones
- TTY's
- Assistive listening devices in classrooms and theatres
- Well-lit classrooms, dining halls, and dormitories.
- Accessible Emergency equipment; including phones and fire alarms.

***Make sure to schedule a meeting with the school's disability services personnel when you plan your campus tour.

Resource Guide: "Making Your Education Happen."

Documentation

On a more tedious note, in order to qualify for disability accommodations you must complete all required documentation forms. Documentation regulations vary from school to school, so contact your prospective university as soon as possible to eliminate the possibility of any delays in accommodation.

Required documentation is likely to include many or all of the following:

- A diagnosis of your current disability;
- The date of diagnosis;
- How the diagnosis was reached;
- The credentials of the diagnosing professional;
- How the disability affects your daily life;
- How the disability affects your academic performance. **

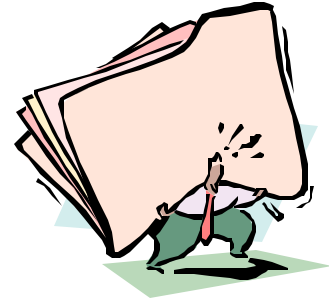
Generally, your audiologist or ears/nose/throat (ENT) doctor is responsible for preparing your documentation. Also, note that an IEP or 504 plan from high school may help colleges identify appropriate accommodations, yet neither is considered a substitute for official documentation.

Being Pro-Active

No amount of preparation can pave the way for accommodation or accomplishment without the fuel of a pro-active, vigorous approach in class and in life.

The Administration

When you first arrive for orientation, before you even enter a classroom, visit the disabilities services office. If you have a 504 plan or an IEP from high school, make sure the office coordinator gets a copy. At this point you need to sit down with a qualified representative from the office and start to map out both the nature of your needs and extent of your accommodations.



“Get your documentation out of the way early; it’ll be a load of your back”

**** Source listed in Resource Guide: “Know Your Rights and Responsibilities.”**

In the classroom, the most commonly prescribed services are Assistive Listening Devices (ALD's). Unfortunately, most disability service representatives are relatively uniformed when it comes to ALD's for hard of hearing people. With that in mind, consult the list to the right for a basic overview of common ALDs and how they work.

If necessary, you should also have access to note-takers, sign-language interpreters, and real-time captioning. (see Resource Guide for more information).

In Class ...

Get to Know your Teachers

Initially, many professors are uncomfortable teaching and accommodating students with disabilities. However, know that their ignorance is more a product of inexperience than of disdain or inflexibility.

With that in mind, be pro-active in educating your teachers. Though all of your professors should be notified, in advance, of both your hearing loss and the services you will receive, you should take the time with each of them to explain, in your own words, the nature of your loss and how it is best accommodated. No matter how subtle, if there are ways to make in-class learning less burdensome, share them with your teachers! More often than not, your professors are just as desperate for assistance as you are. Consult the table at right for a few "tricks of the trade."

If, during a class lecture, you completely lose the thread of discussion, don't panic! Ask your professor or your peers to repeat themselves or, perhaps, to turn in your direction. If it gets to the point where you feel like you're just along for the ride, schedule a meeting with your professor outside of class.

Assistive Listening Devices

FM Systems:

Sounds are transmitted through FM radio waves from a microphone to a receiver connected to the hearing aid.

Infrared Systems:

Transmits sound from microphone to receiver through invisible light

Induction-Loop option:

Audio-loop worn around neck of listener or wired to a table that transmits sound to telecoil in aid; Compatible with FM and Infrared systems.

Tips for Classroom Communication

- Arrange for a note-taker, so you can concentrate on listening and speech-reading
- Request real-time captioning or instructor-notes for all in-class films
- Request CAN/CART/C-PRINT™ (note-taking options)
- Request extended time for test taking.

Out of Class ...

Any college student, present or past, would insist that academics are merely a fragment of the whole collegiate experience. In fact, many would claim that their most cherished moments and memories were out of class and, more accurately, not within sight of an academic building.

Just as you can succeed in the classroom, you can succeed in Greek organizations and school clubs, in sports and community service. Explore all that your school has to offer! College can serve as a launching pad, yet first you must embrace participation.

Like any student, follow your interests. Every college offers a broad variety of organizations ranging in topic from culture and religion to politics and athletics. *Get Involved!* Look at these activities as a way to educate your peers; talk to them about your disability and suggest ways they can help you feel included.

If you don't know where to start, visit your school's activities office for information and guidance.

Troubleshooting

If, for any reason, you aren't receiving the assistance that you're entitled to, act immediately! Often, however, your problem will not require a formal complaint, so try to start with an informal inquiry. As a guideline, adhere to the following progression:

1. Talk with your disability services representative.
2. If no immediate change ensues, follow up with a letter to the disability services director, sending copies to your academic advisor and the ADA compliance representative for your school.
3. Talk to your professors about the problem.

Tips for your Friends

- Make eye contact; try not to turn away during conversation.
- Eliminate unnecessary background noise (radio, TV, etc.)
- Enunciate, don't mumble.
- Speak more slowly.
- If asked to repeat, don't repeat word for word: if it was difficult at first, it might still be difficult the second time.

4. College professors are often quite powerful and administrators are more likely to listen to them. If the professor is part of the problem, confront him or her and be reasonable. Grievances are often just misunderstandings blown out of proportion.
5. Follow your school's grievance policy; though schools often fail to advertise such a policy, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act requires that one exist.
6. Set a deadline for compliance. Within a two-month period, if your school refuses to provide you with the services you deserve, then it's probably time to consider withdrawing or legal action.

Staying Positive

There will be times when coming prepared and being pro-active will simply not be enough. Even with the latest technology and thorough accommodations, you will still miss words. And those missed words will leave you to stumble through an unfamiliar situation or to endure an embarrassing pause. At these moments of unforeseen weakness and vulnerability, you must focus on staying positive.

In a stressful or frustrating moment, you can either give in to anger and resentment or persist through patience, resolve, and maybe even a little bit of humor.

In all honesty, your success in college and in life will depend overwhelmingly on your ability to persevere. This is not to say, however, that you must 'do it alone.'

Campus support groups for hard of hearing or disabled students can provide a fantastic medium through which you can express your frustration and your fears. Use support groups to learn about accommodation techniques or to find answers to questions about dorm life or trouble-shooting.

Most importantly, look to support groups for emotional support. Though you will certainly make friends from all walks of life at college, take comfort in knowing that these groups provide a permanent community, one that understands your struggles and appreciates your efforts.

Conclusion

Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you have imagined.

-Henry David Thoreau

In 2003, I was introduced to a high school senior who had excelled in a rigorous prep-school environment despite a profound, bilateral hearing loss that necessitated the services of a full time sign-language interpreter. When I asked what advice she had for her hearing peers and teachers wishing to accommodate her, she responded that it is not pity that she seeks, but friendship.

For too long, too many have dismissed a hearing loss as a misfortune - a curse - to be pitied and forgotten. For generations of hard of hearing children, this attitude has generated a glass ceiling, both in the minds of the children and in the eyes of their peers, which few have cleared. direction and then, within yourself, you can find the substance of courage.

Only with courage and direction is it possible to reverse decades of misunderstandings and neglect. It is my hope that you will look to this guide for your sense of direction and then, within yourself, you can find the substance of courage.



“Reach for the Stars”

ⁱ Flexer, Carol Ph.D. [How the Student with Hearing Loss can Succeed in College: A Handbook for Students, Families, and Professionals](#). Alexander Graham Bell Association fro the Deaf. Washington: 1996. Page 6.