

How to make meetings more accessible for D/deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people

- If possible, find a place to talk that has good lighting, away from noise and distractions
- To make it easier to lipread, don't cover your mouth with your hands or clothing
- Make sure you are not sitting in front of a window or other back lighting. This is especially important for people on Skype/Zoom. Face and lips need to be clearly visible (not in silhouette)
- Speak clearly but not too slowly, don't mumble, and use normal lip movements, facial expressions and gestures
- Speak one at a time. Don't speak over each other
- Avoid jargon, unfamiliar abbreviations and British Council acronyms
- Try not to turn or look away while you are talking
- If someone is working with a sign interpreter, always remember to talk directly to the person you are communicating with, not the interpreter
- Ahead of the meeting, provide interpreters and captioners with background information and documents – e.g. names of attendees, agenda, meeting papers, speeches and explain common acronyms
- Schedule frequent breaks during meetings. Lip-reading is very tiring and sign interpreters and speech to text captioners also require regular breaks
- If in doubt – Ask!

Additional tips for video calls

- Allow plenty of time for testing the technology and access support
- At the start of the meeting, explain the access that is being available (interpreters &/or captioning), how it will work and introduce the people providing it
- Ask participants to mute themselves when they are not talking
- Have good lighting, and a plain background
- Check that the 'blur my background' feature is switched off, as this can make it difficult to see signing
- When speaking, give your name and ensure you pause for a few seconds before contributing to allow others to configure settings (e.g. change pins)
- Provide additional breaks. Signing in 2D is more tiring for both the d/Deaf person and the interpreter
- Automated live captioning using AI, such as in Teams, can be useful for one-to-one informal conversations, where you can allow for a degree of error.

- Speech recognition software relies on good quality sound. Accuracy is greatly improved if using a headset
- For more formal or larger meetings, as well as for live broadcast, a speech to text reporter is more accurate and therefore preferable

Why Zoom is the preferred digital platform

- Picture and sound quality are both good
- Can enlarge person signing so it's easier to see them (less tiring to watch)
- If it's a long meeting, you can have two interpreters who can see each other and support each other more effectively
- Captions can be personalised – you can make them larger/smaller
- Captions can be streamed into the meeting or you can choose to view them on a separate screen
- Seems to be more stable than other platforms

Sources and further information

Accessibility in Video Conferencing & Remote Meetings by Drake Music

Accessible Remote Working Guide for BSL interpreters, deaf and hearing participants by UCL's Deafness Cognition and Language Research Centre

Tips for working remotely when you're deaf (with BSL videos) by Jo Wootten

The Covid-19 pandemic and deaf participation in meetings in the academic workplace by Annelies Kusters, Robert Adam, Marion Fletcher & Gary Quinn
Acadeafic

Top Ten tips for accessible meetings by Jo Verrent, Unlimited

These posters from Action Deafness are a good visual reminder of the essentials

