



# Tips for Improving Conversation in Noisy Environments

Communication problems happen for many reasons.

It may be from hearing loss, or other factors, including

- having background noise or distractions;
- changing topics of conversation often;
- covering the mouth while talking;
- problems with attention;
- being in dim lighting; and
- being tired or ill.

Here are some ways for speakers and listeners to help reduce communication difficulties:

## Tips for Speakers

- Get the listener’s attention before beginning to speak.
- Find a quiet, well-lit room for conversation.
- Do not block your mouth when speaking.
- Stand or sit 3–6 feet from the listener.
- If the listener does not understand what you said, rephrase or simplify the statement.

## Tips for Listeners

- Tell others that you have a hearing loss.
- Ask the speaker to write down key information such as addresses, phone numbers, and appointment times.
- Check what you heard by repeating the message.
- Ask the speaker to repeat only the part that you did not get. It is best not to pretend that you understand when you do not.
- If you are having difficulty hearing what is being said, tell the speaker about the problem. Saying “Huh?” or “What?” does not let the speaker know which part you did not hear.

Here are some problems and solutions you can use when having trouble in conversation:

**Problem: You are having difficulty understanding what someone is saying.**

Possible solutions:

Ask the speaker to do one or all these things:

- Speak slowly.
- Say the phrase in a different way.
- Use short sentences.
- Look directly at you and not to cover their face or look away. Seeing the speaker’s lips and expressions will help your understanding.

Tip: Many people think that shouting makes it easier to understand; but, in fact, it can make understanding more difficult and unpleasant for the listener.

**Problem: Background noise is loud.**

Possible solutions:

- Move to a quieter location when possible.
- When dining out, ask for a table away from the kitchen or bar area to reduce crowd noise.
- Pick a quiet restaurant.
- Go to stores and restaurants at times when they tend to be less crowded and noisy.
- Turn off or move away from noise sources such as radios, televisions, or dishwashers.
- Make an appointment with your audiologist to discuss technology options and hearing assistive equipment that can help reduce background noise.

Tip: Some reviews provide information on noise levels. Use these reviews when choosing a restaurant. Also, call ahead of time to reserve a quiet table, if possible.

**Problem: Lighting is dim.**

Possible solutions:

- When possible, turn on more lights in the room or move to a room with good lighting.
- Sit with a window at your back facing the speaker. This makes it easier to see the speaker’s face.

Tip: Lipreading and seeing facial expressions can increase understanding of speech. Not all sounds of any spoken language can be seen on the lips of a speaker. For example, according to the Centers for



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Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), only about 40% of sounds in the English language can be seen.

**Problem: Room lacks sound-absorbing features.**

Possible solution:

- In your home, decorate with items that absorb sounds, such as carpets and rugs, drapes and curtains, and upholstered chairs and sofas.

**Problem: The topic of conversation is unexpected or unfamiliar.**

Possible solutions:

- Ask a yes/no question.
- If possible, prepare for the conversation/meeting ahead of time by requesting a written outline or printout of information and topics of discussion.

**Problem: You are tired or distracted, and it is difficult to pay attention.**

Possible solutions:

- Ask to have short breaks in meetings to prevent fatigue.

Notes:

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For more information and to view the entire Audiology Information Series library, visit [www.asha.org/aud/pei/](http://www.asha.org/aud/pei/).

- When possible, set meetings for a time when you feel more focused and have more energy.
- Seek out the services of an audiologist certified by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). Audiologists may recommend formal communication training and audiologic rehabilitation. This training is designed to make you more aware of the issues summarized above and will help you improve your listening and speechreading skills. This type of training can improve communication skills.

You are not alone. Many listeners, with or without hearing loss, ask for a speaker to repeat what was said from time to time. The tips in this handout will help you in your daily conversation needs.

**Be sure to ask an audiologist for additional tips for effective communication in noisy environments.**

[Find a certified audiologist on ASHA ProFind online directory.](#)

Content contributed by audiologist Rohit Ravi, PhD. For more information about balance problems, preventing falls, hearing loss, hearing aids, or referral to an ASHA-certified audiologist, contact:



**ASHA**  
American  
Speech-Language-Hearing  
Association

2200 Research Boulevard  
Rockville, MD 20850  
800-638-8255

Email: [audiology@asha.org](mailto:audiology@asha.org)

Website: [www.asha.org](http://www.asha.org)

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**American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)**

2200 Research Boulevard, Rockville, MD 20850 \* 800-638-8255