

IS SPEECHREADING FOR ME?

.....FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. I am not very deaf, but the doctor says my hearing will not improve. Can I benefit from speechreading?

Yes, and so can your family and friends! Misunderstanding due to hearing loss makes life difficult for both the hard of hearing person and those they interact with. Speechreading can greatly improve communication.

2. I hear very well with my hearing aid. Why should I bother to learn speechreading?

Most hard of hearing people who learn to speechread cannot fathom how they managed without it. A hearing aid amplifies sound, including background noise. Speechreading helps you “fill in the blanks” in noisy situations and other difficult listening situations.

3. Should I start now, or wait until my hearing loss is really profound?

Start as soon as you can. Speechreading, like playing a musical instrument, improves with practice. The more you practice, the more proficient you will become.

4. Can an elderly person learn to speechread?

Of course, providing there is no marked mental deterioration. Learning to speechread is a positive solution to combating the isolation & loneliness caused by hearing loss.

5. Is perfect eyesight needed for speechreading?

Speechreading is not just a matter of watching a person’s lips. A good speechreader observes body language, facial expressions, tone of voice and context to understand what is being said. For people with less than good sight the holistic approach of speechreading is very helpful. Learning to focus on body language, facial expressions & the context of the conversation are the essential components of speechreading.

6. Everyone tells me I am a “natural” speechreader. Is there any need for me to take classes?

“Natural” speechreaders improve their speechreading skills when they attend classes. They are generally interested in the little extra tips they can pick up. From the point of view of the class, “natural” lipreaders can be very helpful because they can share their experiences with those who are still struggling to manage their hearing loss.

7. How long does it take to learn speechreading?

This varies. Some people retain their infant face watching skill into adult life. Many of these are “natural” speechreaders and come to class far advanced above the majority. Others are convinced that they are terribly deaf and incredibly stupid and so it takes a long time for them to believe in themselves. Generally, after a year, normal everyday conversation with family and friends is possible.

8. If I become proficient in speechreading, will it be just like not having a hearing loss?

No. Speechreading is dependent upon you being able to see the speaker's face clearly. Speechreading is designed to give you the skills needed to improve your understanding of conversation. It does not "fix" your hearing loss.

HOW CAN I LEARN TO SPEECHREAD?

9. There are different types of Speechreading courses. How can I tell whether the one I am being offered is any good?

It is impossible to say which type of course will suit an individual. The mere fact that it is a course would indicate that it was successful with some people. Teachers bring their personal experiences with hearing loss, their expertise and philosophy to the class. Most courses, prior to 1950, tended to teach lip-reading for a Silent World. The expectation was that most deafened people would ultimately lose so much of their hearing that they would have to rely entirely on their lip-reading. Since then, hearing aid technology has improved to the point where the vast majority of hard of hearing persons learn speechreading to augment their hearing aids – like a walking stick rather than crutches. In line with modern educational theory, the courses now tend to give a wider base of information and the term, speechreading, is used rather than lip-reading.

10. Can a "Do-It-Yourself" approach extend to learning speechreading? Can I get a book or books and teach myself?

Yes you can. Books, videos, DVD's & CD's can be borrowed from the library at Deaf & Hard of Hearing Society. However, since the purpose of the whole exercise is to improve communication, it is obviously much more beneficial to practice in real life situations. To try to learn alone is really only intensifying the problem of the "Lonely Loss". "Do-It-Yourself" as enrichment, or during holidays is fine, but otherwise "togetherness" is best.

Deaf & Hard of Hearing Society holds *Successfully Manage Hearing Loss* classes each spring and fall. Speechreading, management strategies and meeting other hard of hearing people are the highlights of this program.

11. I am still not clear what a course might do apart from instruction in the mechanics of Speechreading?

Many people feel that their doctor or audiologist is too busy, and don't want to bother them for further information about hearing loss. Speechreading classes can provide such information as well as a supportive atmosphere in which to discuss it.

The discussions allow the hard of hearing person to get to know his/her own problem and learn and practice positive coping strategies. He/she can learn how to make the best possible use of their hearing aid. Often a hearing aid is left lying in a dresser drawer because a proper orientation program has not been followed or because the aid was not properly fitted.

A course on speechreading shows you how to reduce fatigue, lessen strain and improve concentration. You will gain a new life-long skill and meet a wide variety of people.

This information has been adapted from information prepared by the Canadian Hearing Society