



Starting Tertiary Education and Work



**Practical Guide
to Support
Communication**



Contents

1.	Introduction	Page 4
2.	Practical advice to support better communication	Page 5
	2.1 Factors that influence conversation	Page 5
	2.2 Understanding communication styles	Page 7
	2.3 Six steps to improving communication	Page 10
	2.4 Communication and repair strategies	Page 13
	2.5 How to apply communication strategies	Page 15
3.	Practical advice for communication online and on the phone	Page 18
	3.1 Tips to help build your confidence on phone and online calls	Page 18
	3.2 Rehab exercises for phone and online calls	Page 21



Introduction

Hearing and listening practise is an important part of the hearing journey that can help you get the most out of your implant. When you first start tertiary education or begin working, you may find yourself communicating with a wider and more diverse group of people. You may also find that you are expected to have conversations in new environments.

Focusing on communication as an area of rehab can help build listening skills and encourage self-advocacy. Increase self-confidence. As we become more and more digitally connected, the way we interact with each other has also started to evolve over time. Online meetings and video calls may require you to familiarise yourself with new online platforms. The good news, is that this mode of communication, along with text messaging and the wider availability of closed captioning during online calls has made communication more inclusive and accessible for people with hearing loss.

Contained within this guide are hearing exercises designed to build conversational confidence and practical advice to help support better communication. You will also find specific information to help you with phone conversations, and strategies to optimise your hearing on online video calls.

And, as always, we recommend speaking with your hearing healthcare professional or clinical team for a more tailored approach.

Supporting better communication

Different factors can influence understanding during conversation. These factors tend to fall into three main categories: Speaker, Environment and Listener. Here are some common influencing factors:

Speaker	Environment	Listener
<input type="checkbox"/> Accent	<input type="checkbox"/> Visual distractions	<input type="checkbox"/> Not interested in topic
<input type="checkbox"/> Looks away	<input type="checkbox"/> Auditory distractions, too much background noise	<input type="checkbox"/> Emotional state, feeling ill or irritated
<input type="checkbox"/> Hand covering face, mannerisms or gestures	<input type="checkbox"/> Poor room acoustics, echo	<input type="checkbox"/> Sound processor positioning
<input type="checkbox"/> Speaking too quickly or slowly	<input type="checkbox"/> Distance between the speaker and listener	<input type="checkbox"/> Communication style
<input type="checkbox"/> Speaking too loudly or softly	<input type="checkbox"/> Visibility of the speaker	<input type="checkbox"/> Self-confidence
<input type="checkbox"/> Facial hair, facial expressions or exaggerating lip movements	<input type="checkbox"/> Availability of assistive listening devices, wireless accessories	<input type="checkbox"/> Motivation to hear
<input type="checkbox"/> Chewing gum or food	<input type="checkbox"/> Lighting (dim or glaring)	<input type="checkbox"/> Speech reading ability

Exercise:

Reflect on each of the factors and determine what is and what isn't within the control of the conversation participants. For example, start with the Speaker category.

- **Accent:**
This is a factor that is not within the control of the participant. So, put an "X" in the box.
- **Looking Away:**
This is a factor that is within the control of the participant. So, put a "✓" in the box.
- **Speaking too loudly or softly:**
This is a factor that is within the control of the participant. So, put a "✓" in the box.

We will ask you to revisit this checklist in Exercise 5, so remember to keep a copy once you have completed it.

“Now that I have my hearing device, I am where I never thought I would’ve been - studying at University. I use the streaming from my Baha a lot to connect to my lectures. Being able to stream directly to my Baha helps so much when there is so much background noise happening in a classroom.”

Rylee, Cochlear™ Baha® System recipient



Understanding communication styles

There is a large body of research looking at how a person’s communication style can influence various outcomes. The goal of this guide is to provide you with strategies and the understanding to handle challenging communication situations confidently.

Before getting started, it’s important to consider how various factors can influence the communication style adopted in each situation, e.g. Relationship to the speaker, power balance, cultural expectations, environment and the topic of conversation¹.

The Observer

1 This communication style is adopted when it’s easier to take a step back. During conversation, you may choose to withdraw due to concerns that you will not be able to communicate well. Or, adopt a more observational role because you are worried that you might mishear and provide an inappropriate response.

This is not always negative. In some situations, stepping back and taking the time to listen can be very positive for fostering relationships. However, it’s important to recognise when to use a more directive or diplomatic communication style in order to take advantage of social, educational, or future vocational opportunities.

The Leader

2 This communication style assumes the role of the primary communicator and tends to be more directive to help guide conversation. You might use this approach where you have concerns about mishearing or providing an inappropriate response during conversation.

A positive aspect to this communication style, is that it gives you the opportunity to express your feelings and advocate for your needs. However, it’s important to know when this style is appropriate.

The Diplomat

3 This communication style can often result in more positive outcomes for both parties. A diplomatic approach to conversations encourages equal participation between conversational partners and may make it easier for you to express your feelings and advocate for your needs.

This communication style can also make it easier for you to ask for help from communication partners to reduce breakdown in conversation.

Exercise:

Here are three steps you can follow to help you reflect on your communication style. And remember, that communication styles can evolve over time, vary according to different situations, and can depend on who you are speaking with.

1 Go through the three different communication styles and think about how you generally interact with others during conversations. Then, select the category that you think best suits your communication style.

2 Next, think about whether your communication style is the same with all conversational partners, or if you adapt your style based on who you are speaking with. Think about situations where you are speaking with family, friends, colleagues and strangers. Does your communication style change based on the people that you are speaking with?

Refer to the table below and begin categorising your communication style with different partners by placing a “✓” in the appropriate box:

	Family	Friends	Colleagues	Strangers
Observer				
Leader				
Diplomat				

3 For this last step, think about why it’s important to develop the skills to be able to confidently communicate your hearing needs. To help you get started, we’ve listed some reasons below:

- Everyone has times when they don’t understand.
- The way we communicate can influence the impression we make on others.
- Sometimes, people with normal hearing are unsure of how they can help.
- Being able to confidently communicate your needs with different conversational partners can help open up opportunities socially, educationally, and professionally.



Six steps to improving communication

Here are strategies to help improve understanding during conversations:

1. Answering the question: “How do I see myself?”
2. Explaining your cochlear implant
3. Managing the environment
4. Identifying the current strategies used
5. Experimenting with new strategies
6. Phrasing for optimal results.

Adopting these strategies can help you become your own best advocate and increase your confidence. In the exercise below, are 6 steps to using these strategies and ways you can adopt them in daily life.

Exercise:

Answer the question: “How do I see myself?”

- 1 Consider how you identify your hearing loss. Specifically, do you identify with the terms “deaf”, “Deaf”, “hard-of-hearing”, “hearing impaired”, “hearing” or as having a “hearing loss?” Understanding how you self-identify will help you better communicate your needs.

Explaining your cochlear implant

- 2 We recommend developing a a one-to-two sentence description of the device/s that you use to help you hear. There may be situations where you are asked about your hearing loss. Being prepared may make it easier for you to talk about how your hearing device helps you.

Managing the environment

- 3 Think about settings and environments that are challenging for you. Consider how you are positioned in each situation and what you could do to make it easier to communicate.

Then, think about what to request that can support your hearing (e.g. preferred seating in lectures or choosing a quiet meeting room). The choices you make and your willingness to speak up can help improve communication in each environment.

Identifying your current strategies

- 4** What do you tend to do when you are struggling to hear during conversations? Make a note of some of the strategies you currently use. Most often, people with hearing loss rely on asking speakers to repeat as the primary strategy to repair communication breakdown.

However, most often this request is posed indirectly; for example, by saying “Huh?”, “Beg your pardon?” or something similar. This strategy is non-specific and you may find that it’s the least effective communication repair strategy, because speakers most often do nothing to change the manner in which they communicated the first time. We will go through more effective repair strategies in the next exercise.

Experimenting with new strategies

- 5** Instead of asking someone to repeat, use very specific requests that asks the speaker to alter their communication. For example, try the following:

- “Can you please lower your hand so that I can read your lips?”
- “Can we move into the light so that I can see your face?”
- “Can you please try saying the same thing in a different way?”

Some people with normal hearing can be unsure of how to respond when those with hearing loss do not understand. Remember, no one strategy works best for everyone. We encourage you to try new strategies in different situations, starting with familiar conversational partners. Try to keep track of strategies you have tried and make a note of those that work and those that don’t.

Phrasing for optimal results

- 6** This next strategy can be adopted once you are comfortable with step 5. Think about how you can phrase your requests to better achieve the result you are after. Below are the five ingredients for a successful request:

- Use “I” statements and try not to blame others.
- Make a specific request
- Explain why you are making the request
- Be courteous
- Express your gratitude

Step 5 uses the first two points, but once you are comfortable, try making more sophisticated requests which incorporate the final three points. It is important to explain why the request is being made because those with normal hearing may not know what to do. For example, they may not know that a person with a cochlear implant might read lips. It’s important to be courteous so the speaker will feel good about a request. Being appreciative increases the chances that the speaker will remember how they can help and they will be more likely to help the next time. Below are some examples of phrases that incorporate all five points:

- Instead of “You need to speak up, it’s too noisy in here” try “My cochlear implant helps me understand a lot better, but I still have trouble in noise – would you mind moving to a quieter place in the room away from the speaker?”
- Instead of “Can you move your hand away from your face” try “Excuse me James, can you please lower your hand? Thank you, that makes it easier for me to lipread and follow what you are saying.”

Communication and repair strategies

There are three different strategies that you can adopt to facilitate smoother conversation and reduce potential frustration. Try these strategies with family and close friends initially.

Once you feel more confident and comfortable using some of these strategies, we recommend educating fellow students and colleagues on how they can help facilitate better communication.

Clear speech strategies

1 Clear speech is when the speaker attempts to express every word and sentence in a precise, accurate and fully formed manner. Use of clear speech can improve hearing and understanding up to 20%².

The best way to encourage clear speech from others, is to ask them to speak at a “normal” speed. In fact, asking someone to speak at a normal speed is preferable to asking them to speak more clearly so as not to suggest that their speech was previously sloppy. Below are some clear speech techniques and phrases:

- When stating an opinion or making suggestions, start by saying “I think”.
- When changing a subject, you can try saying “Now I want to talk about something else.”

Anticipatory strategies

2 Preparation is key. Before entering a communication situation, it helps to be prepared by considering who will be there and what might be said. You may find it helpful to develop a list of anticipated vocabulary, names and dialogue for a particular situation and practise speechreading those words ahead of time.

Repair strategies

3 Repair strategies are ways to help ‘fix’ breakdowns in conversation and communication understanding. We recommend familiarising yourself with these strategies and how to request them.

- **Change environments**
Poor environmental conditions can have an impact on communication. Look at your environment and check if it has bad lighting, background noise and poor acoustics. For example, if you are having a conversation in a noisy room, you could try saying, “I’d love to hear what you have to say, but I’m having trouble here – would you mind if we moved to the corner of the room?”

- **Face each other**

Don’t be afraid to remind conversational partners to face you when communicating. This will give you more access to important visual cues and keep the speech directed at you. For example, try saying “James, I lipread best when I can see your face straight on. Thank you”.

- **Speak at a normal level**

If someone is yelling or speaking too loudly, speech can become distorted. Educating others plays a big role in improving communication, and there are ways to ask conversational partners to speak at an optimal volume. For example, try saying, “My implant makes speech loud enough for me. Thank you for trying to help me, but you can speak at a normal volume. It will be more helpful if you speak naturally.”

- **Repeat slower**

This is the single most effective strategy and quite similar to the one above. If a speaker is asked for a simple repetition, they will most likely repeat exactly the way they spoke the first time or speak louder and exaggerate their lip movements— neither of which is helpful. Instead, it’s better to ask that the speaker repeat more slowly.

- **Rephrase**

This is an effective, but underused, strategy. Often, when a speaker is asked to rephrase, they automatically choose words that are easier to hear and/or speech read. This is a more effective strategy than a repetition. You could try this repair strategy by saying, “I didn’t follow what you said; could you please say that in a different way?”

- **Use key words**

Communication is more effective when the topic is known. It is easier to predict what will be said next when a topic or key word of a conversation has been stated. For example, could try saying, “I am not able to understand what you are saying. Can you tell me the subject please?”

- **Confirm what you have heard**

Clarification is a great repair strategy. When you use this confirmation strategy, it demonstrates that you are interested in what the speaker has to say and are trying to understand. Try using this strategy when you have gotten a part of the conversation but are unsure of what was actually said. For example, you can start by saying, “Did you say....?”.

How to apply communication strategies

Now that you have a greater understanding of the key steps to improve communication and the different strategies to support conversations it’s time to revisit the table in the first exercise.

Speaker	Environment	Listener
<input type="checkbox"/> Accent	<input type="checkbox"/> Visual distractions	<input type="checkbox"/> Not interested in topic
<input type="checkbox"/> Looks away	<input type="checkbox"/> Auditory distractions, too much background noise	<input type="checkbox"/> Emotional state, feeling ill or irritated
<input type="checkbox"/> Hand covering face, mannerisms or gestures	<input type="checkbox"/> Poor room acoustics, echo	<input type="checkbox"/> Sound processor positioning
<input type="checkbox"/> Speaking too quickly or slowly	<input type="checkbox"/> Distance between the speaker and listener	<input type="checkbox"/> Communication style
<input type="checkbox"/> Speaking too loudly or softly	<input type="checkbox"/> Visibility of the speaker	<input type="checkbox"/> Self-confidence
<input type="checkbox"/> Facial hair, facial expressions or exaggerating lip movements	<input type="checkbox"/> Availability of assistive listening devices, wireless accessories	<input type="checkbox"/> Motivation to hear
<input type="checkbox"/> Chewing gum or food	<input type="checkbox"/> Lighting (dim or glaring)	<input type="checkbox"/> Speech reading ability

Exercise:

In the first exercise, we asked you to reflect on each of the factors and determine what is and what isn’t within the control of the conversation participants.

For this last exercise, we are asking you to look at this table again and consider if you want to change where the “X” or “✓” has been placed.

Where you have put a “✓”, think about different repair strategies you could use to address these issues and practise using the correct phrasing.





Practical advice for communication online and on the phone

Building confidence on phone and online calls

Getting comfortable with speaking on the phone and on video calls can take some time. It's important to remember that using the phone is a task that relies on the ability to understand what is often a very poor quality sound, and some people with hearing loss can find this extremely difficult.

But working on your hearing and listening rehab can go a long way toward building on the skills you already have. Below are rehab exercises you can do in the comfort of your home to build confidence.

Optimise your technology

- 1 Check that you are using the sound processor program and setting you hear best with before starting. If you are using external speakers for your listening exercises, set the volume at a moderate level and try not to use built-in laptop speakers – they tend to distort sound which will affect the quality and clarity of the speech.

Find a Rehab Partner

- 2 You will get the best results from phone rehab when you work with a supportive family member or close friend. This is especially important when you are doing practise phone call exercises. Begin with someone whose voice you are very familiar with. Try developing a script that you can role play with your rehab partner. This may be a good way to ease into things and help practise your listening.

Practise regularly

- 3** Listening practise should be broken up into short, but frequent sessions. We recommend practising for around 10 to 15 minutes per day, five days a week. We have shared some phone exercises you can do below. Alternate the days when you do rehab with a partner and when you do independent rehab.

Set and revise listening goals

- 4** You can track your progress by setting yourself some listening goals. You can set realistic goals with the help of your hearing healthcare professional. But remember not to put too much pressure on yourself, your goals can always be revisited over time and adapted.

Be an advocate and educate others

- 5** Don't be afraid to remind family, friends and colleagues about the phone and online call communication strategies that will make listening easier for you. For example, request that they speak clearly and at a moderate pace. If they are taking the call in an environment with a lot of background noise, ask if they can move to a quieter area or re-schedule the call to a time when they may be in a quieter setting.

For video calls, encourage others to face the camera so you get extra visual cues and to use headphones with a microphone, so their voice sounds clearer.



Rehab exercises for phone and online calls

Before getting started it is important to involve family or friends and get their support. Their encouragement can have a really positive impact on your progress. We also recommend setting up an appointment to speak with your hearing healthcare professional so they can help you set personalised goals.

Below are some simple exercises that you can follow to help make you feel more comfortable communicating with others over the phone and on online calls.

Develop a rehab plan

- 1 Before you get started on your phone rehab journey, speak to your audiologist or clinician. They will help determine the best rehab plan for you. The steps below are just ideas on how to get started.

Practise with a familiar speaker

- 2 Start by practising at home with a family member or someone that lives with you. Their voice will be most familiar to you and will make it easier for you to recognise what they are saying over the phone. Arrange to have five-minute calls with your rehab partner two to three times a week and choose a different topic to talk about each time. This will expose you to a wider variety of words and help expand your vocabulary. Remember to take the calls in different rooms of the house.

Video call with a familiar speaker

- 3 Video and online calls now play a big role in how we communicate. So, it's a good idea to explore making calls using video platforms. If possible, use the platform that you will be using most for your studies or work. Again, start by practising these calls with a familiar speaker. You may find that conversations using video calls are a bit easier to follow because of the additional information that comes from visual cues.

Check if the video call platform that you are using has options for closed captions. This will be especially helpful when you are first getting started, but when you are feeling a bit more confident, you can try switching these off.

Rehab with apps and websites

- 4 Another way to build your confidence with using the phone is to work on your auditory rehab. Try doing independent auditory rehab on the days that you aren't practising phone or video calls with your rehab partner. Speak to your clinician about any websites or apps they can recommend to help you get started. Remember, 10 to 15 minutes a day is all you need to do!

YouTube, audiobooks and social media

- 5 When you start to get more confident with doing phone or video calls with family members, it's time to move onto understanding less familiar speakers. A great way to get started is to listen to YouTube videos, TED Talks or audiobooks, as the content focuses mostly on speech without background music. Don't forget to turn on live captions if you need to. For more of a challenge you can watch clips that are being shared on social media platforms. When you are listening to the speakers, listen carefully and focus on distinguishing accents, recognising shifts in tone and pace of speaking.

Phone call with less familiar speakers

- 6 Once you feel ready for the next challenge, you can arrange to have a call with a slightly less familiar speaker. If you've never tried this before, it may take a bit of practise. This is also a good opportunity to practise your self-advocacy skills. Gently remind new conversational partners to speak up or slow down if you are having trouble understanding what they are saying.

Call a business with a simple enquiry

- 7 A great way to build confidence when speaking to new people on the phone, is to start by asking a simple question that you may already know the answer to. When you are the one making an inquiry, you are in control of the call and will have a good idea of what the response may be. For example, try calling a shop and asking them what their opening hours are. Before making the call, you can practise with your rehab partner at home. For example, "Hello, can you please tell me what time your store closes today?"

Celebrate your wins (even the small ones)

- 8 Dedicating time out of your day for listening and hearing practise requires commitment and using the phone or new online call platforms for the first time can be a bit nerve wracking for everyone. So, remember to celebrate your progress.

For more information on Cochlear resources to help support you, visit [cochlear.com](https://www.cochlear.com) or contact your local customer service team.

Cochlear Family

Hear now. And always

Cochlear is dedicated to helping people with moderate to profound hearing loss experience a world full of hearing. As the global leader in implantable hearing solutions, we have helped more than 700,000 people of all ages to hear and connect with life's opportunities.

We aim to give people the best lifelong hearing experience and access to next generation technologies. We collaborate with leading clinical, research and support networks to advance hearing science and improve care.

That's why more people choose Cochlear than any other hearing implant company.

www.cochlear.com

References

1. Jackson, D. D., Watzlawick, P., Bavelas, J. B. (2014). Pragmatics of Human Communication: A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies, and Paradoxes. United Kingdom: W. W. Norton, Incorporated.
2. Improving Understanding with Communication Strategies (What to do when you don't understand), Susan Binzer, November 2010, produced by Cochlear Ltd (FUN2041 ISS1 NOV10).

Please seek advice from your health professional about treatments for hearing loss. Outcomes may vary, and your health professional will advise you about the factors which could affect your outcome. Always follow the directions for use. Not all products are available in all countries. Please contact your local Cochlear representative for product information.

Views expressed are those of the individual. Consult your health professional to determine if you are a candidate for Cochlear Technology.

Cochlear™ Nucleus® implant systems are intended for the treatment of moderately severe to profound hearing loss. Baha implant systems are intended for the treatment of moderate to profound hearing loss Cochlear, Hear now. And Always, the elliptical logo, True Wireless, Nucleus, ForwardFocus*, Kanso and Baha are either trademarks or registered trademarks of Cochlear group of companies.