

Intelligibility Strategies

Intelligibility is a term used to describe how clearly or unclearly a person is understood by others. Speech is generally more intelligible to “familiar” listeners (those who know the person well) and speech is generally less intelligible to “unfamiliar” listeners (those who do not know the person well). A person with speech delays or a speech disorder will benefit from optimizing their behaviors by utilizing intelligibility strategies. These strategies can help a person achieve their optimal or best speech. Even people without any speech deficits will benefit from utilizing intelligibility strategies. Using these strategies can improve your communication exchanges and decrease communication breakdowns. Use the intelligibility strategies listed below to improve your communication interactions.

Intelligibility Strategies

(Communication strategies to help you achieve your **BEST SPEECH**.)

1. **Use precise articulation.**

Be sure you are saying all sounds in your words. Do not leave off beginning, middle, or ending sounds. Do not reduce clusters or blends. When producing consonant blends such as “sl” in slide, “fr” in frog, or “str” in strawberry, ensure you are producing all consonants within the blend clearly. Blends may fall within the word such as the “br” in the word “library”.

2. **Move your articulators.**

When you are talking, make sure you are moving your lips, tongue, and jaw. Do not keep your lips and jaw in a closed position because this can result in what is often described as “mumbling”. Your jaw will move up and down during speech production, but should not shift forward nor backward. If you are shifting your jaw forward or backward, you may be compensating due to some other factor. This “other factor” could be a variety of things, including, but not limited to, atypical oral structures, habit, restrictions, etc.

3. **Project your voice by turning up your volume.**

Use a volume that is loud enough that the listener can hear you clearly. Do not whisper and do not yell, but instead, use an appropriate volume so that your voice projects. Of course there will

be exceptions to this rule. Whispering can be used in quiet settings and yelling can be used outside or during emergency situations.

4. Use good eye contact.

Look at the person with whom you are speaking. Utilize good eye contact skills by looking at the person who is talking to indicate you are actively listening and maintain good eye contact when it is your turn to speak.

5. Use a slow, steady, and controlled rate of speech.

Make sure you are speaking in a slow, controlled way. Talking too fast can result in the listener not understanding you clearly. You can use pausing to help slow your rate. Where you would place punctuation in a sentence, is a natural place to insert a pause. Pause at a comma, pause at a question mark, pause at a period, and so forth. Remember to pause at punctuation.

6. Do not cover your mouth when speaking.

The listener receives a lot of communication information from your nonverbal cues. When you cover your mouth, the listener receives less communication information from you. This is where communication breakdowns can occur. Perhaps the listener interprets your speech as sounding like you are “mumbling” or “speaking too softly” to be heard. Face the listener and keep your hands, arms, or other obstructions away from your face.

7. Decrease distractions.

There are distractions that can create communication breakdowns. When working to communicate with another individual or a group, check your environment for distractions. If the situation allows for it, decrease the distractions within your surroundings. Some examples include, turn off running water, move to the same room as the listener, face the listener, move to a quiet location, move away from noisy areas, turn off the television or radio, stop using devices such as phones, tablets, or computers, and choose non-busy times of day to have in-depth conversations.