

Comprehensibility Strategies

What is comprehensibility?

Comprehensibility means making sense of the message no matter how it is conveyed. It depends on all participants in the conversation and can be made easier or more difficult by the environment.

Who should use these strategies? And when?

The strategies can be employed any time by individuals who have trouble speaking, trouble hearing or listening, or when the communication conditions are challenging.

Consider the environment:

- Reduce background noise and other (visual) distractions** (e.g., lighting)
 - When possible, face-to-face is best** to avoid the disadvantages of communication over a distance
 - Choose the time and place for important conversations** if conditions are not optimal
 - Use electronic communication solutions such as Skype and Facetime instead of the phone, when possible.** These systems allow the listener to see the speaker's face.
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Listener Strategies:

- Give your undivided attention** by moving closer and watching attentively
- Use the topic to help predict what is being said**
- Piece together all the information the speaker is conveying** through speech, gestures, facial expression, pointing, writing, and/or texting
- Signal to the speaker as soon as you don't understand** (if decided in advance)
- Avoid the least helpful question ever: WHAT!?!?!?!?!?**
 - **Repeat back the part you heard** "You want to go WHERE on Sunday?"
 - **Ask a clarifying question** "Do you want orange or apple juice?"

Speaker Strategies:

- Focus on how you are talking, what you are saying, & what you are doing!**
 - Speak slowly, clearly, and loudly
 - Pause briefly between each word
 - Maintain the appropriate intonation
 - Use all modalities: speak, spell, gesture, use facial expression, draw, text, etc.
 - Use complete but simple sentences, including the small words (e.g., "the" or "in")
- When a breakdown occurs, repeat exactly and then rephrase if necessary**, using more common and easily pronounced words, but make sure the listener knows you are rephrasing
- Get and keep the listener's attention**
 - Wait until the listener can see your face before starting the message
 - Identify the general topic (e.g, by pointing to objects or signaling topic change)
 - Use a previously identified turn taking signal to let the listener know you want to add to the conversation (e.g, raise your hand, tap on the table)
- Let conversation partners know how to help**
 - Do you want to be interrupted if the listener doesn't understand, or wait until you are done talking? How should the listener let you know they don't understand?
 - Should the listener guess what you're going to say and finish your sentence?
 - What is the back-up plan (writing, spelling)?