

Teaching the Deaf to Drive
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Driver's Education is a course, provided privately or through the school system, instructing and educating individuals on the laws and procedures of driving. It is a program offered to most individuals, including the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. However, it is important for driver's education instructors and teachers to realize that deaf individuals have unique styles of learning, and they must be aware of how to lead these students.

The state of Texas requires that, once a student reaches the age of fifteen and has completed six hours of drivers education course work, they are eligible to apply for their permit. In order to receive a permit, the student must go to the Department of Public Safety and take the mandated test. Once the test is passed and the permit is received, students are able to drive with an adult over the age of 21. Completion of driver's education coursework and driving times are still required once the permit has been given. Students must also have their permit for six months, and reach the age of sixteen before a license can be issued. These requirements also extend to Deaf students; however, different forms of instruction are needed. There are no limits placed on a license once a Deaf person has passed their driving test. However, if a person is profoundly Deaf they

are required to record information about their hearing loss on the Provisional License Application Form (Teaching).

Deaf drivers are not considered a safety hazard on the road because deafness is not considered a disability that affects driving ability. In fact, insurance companies feel that deaf drivers are safer than hearing drivers (Teaching). This could be because deaf people rely on their vision, are extremely acute, and are not distracted by external noise. With this in mind, deaf students should be given equal opportunity to take drivers education courses as their hearing peers. Driving instructors, teachers of the deaf, and interpreters need to be knowledgeable in teaching deaf students how to drive. They must be able to teach drivers education content in a way that is understandable for their unique learning style.

Until recently, driver's education was primarily offered in local high schools for attending students. This was helpful for the deaf because interpreters and teachers of the deaf were available to interpret and assist during class instruction. However, this has slowly begun to change. Driver's education is gradually being taken out of schools and replaced by privately owned companies. This has become a problem within the deaf community because it hinders deaf individuals from obtaining a license. "Since many public schools no longer offer driver's education, convincing private driver's education schools to provide interpreters has become a recurrent issue. (Deaf, 2003). Because of the high cost of hiring an interpreter, privately owned companies are reluctant to do so. Driver's education instructors for these companies are not trained in sign language, forcing deaf students to read lips and rely on their residual hearing. This becomes mentally draining for deaf students, because they have to pay extremely close attention to

the information being presented. In turn, this causes deaf individuals to shy away from these types of programs. In order for deaf individuals to feel comfortable in driver's education classrooms, instructors need to be aware of the way they present their information.

If interpreters are not hired by privately owned driver's education schools, instructors need to be trained on how to teach deaf students how to drive. While instructors are not required to learn how to sign, there are many things the teacher can do to compensate for their lack of sign. Here are some strategies that drivers education instructors should implement in their daily lesson plans, to supplement their teaching:

- Place deaf student in an area where he/she can clearly view the instructor
- Be aware of body position in relation to the deaf student
- Provide outlines and handouts
- Reduce excess sound
- Purchase an auxiliary audio enhancement device
- Be aware of one's choice in words
- Speak slower and concentrate on producing and annunciating words
- Use general signs, for example: thumbs up or thumbs down (Cox).

Before the student begins driver's education, it is important for the driving school to assess the student in terms of speech reading, type of hearing loss, amplification devices used, and whether or not they have been mainstreamed (Cox). Once the instructor receives information regarding the deaf student in his/her classroom, they can better determine how to accommodate and modify lesson plans. When instructors make seating

arrangements and classroom layouts, it is very important that they make sure the deaf student is able to see the instructor and other teaching tools (Cox). If the student is unable to see the instructor, it will be very difficult for them to rely on their hearing and speech reading abilities. In order to help facilitate the child's speech reading it is necessary for the instructor to be aware of his/her body positioning. The teacher should never turn away from the student, or place hands in front of the face. It is also a good idea for the instructor to stay away from windows, because they let in excess light that may make it difficult for the student to read the teacher's lips (Cox). Since deaf individuals are visual learners, it is important for teacher's to supplement their lessons with handouts and outlines. This helps the students familiarize themselves with what is going to be taught throughout the course of the day, and also helps them comprehend new vocabulary (Cox). For children that have some residual hearing, it is important to reduce excess sound from large surface areas. This can be done by carpeting the floors and placing fabric on the walls. It would also be a wise investment to purchase an auxiliary audio enhancement device, which helps amplify sound for the hard of hearing (Cox). Driver's education instructors are not required to learn how to sign, however, the use of common signs and gestures can help enhance learning. Some of these signs include: thumbs up, thumbs down, high five, etc. Since the English language is full of double meaning words, it is important for instructors to choose their words wisely. They should choose words that are straight forward and to the point, and are not easily misinterpreted. For example, "do not hug the curb," could be interpreted as do not literally hug the curb (Teaching).

Teachers and instructors of the deaf need to teach students to have a place in society, and become active citizens (Read, 1997). Learning how to drive helps in living an active and independent life. “Mobility limitations can cause significant problems in the location and sustenance of competitive employment, engagement in leisure activities and attempts to become self sufficient” (McGill, 2001). Individuals that are able to attend driver’s education and receive a license are more likely to possess independence and take responsibility for the outcome of their own lives. This is why it is necessary for driver’s education schools to be knowledgeable in how to train deaf students. Instructors should take responsibility in their classrooms, and promote learning among students. Without passionate instructors, deaf students will feel neglected and dependent on others.

In order to find additional information regarding this topic, here are some recommended websites:

- <http://www.txdps.state.tx.us/>
 - This is the Texas Department of Public Safety website. It provides users with information regarding all aspects of driving. This is the organization that one must go through, in order to obtain a permit and license.
- <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/deaf/sfd13.html>
 - This is the Deaf Services portion of the Texas Education Agency website. The TEA ensures that the “highest quality of education is delivered to Texas drivers.” It provides information regarding recent academic Deaf issues and outcomes, including driver’s education. One can also become certified as an interpreter through the T-STAR program, and interpret for driver’s education courses.

- <http://www.imtd.org.uk/Teaching%20Deaf%20People%20To%20Drive.pdf>
 - This website is a handbook for driving instructors, teaching them how to work with Deaf students. It teaches them how to communicate with Deaf students if there is not an interpreter present. Finally, it gives them simple signs and hand movements that indicate controls such as; gear changes, steering, mirrors, clutch, accelerator, etc.

There are also many different associations and organizations that drivers education instructors can belong to. Some of these associations include:

- <http://www.adtsea.org/adtsea/>
 - This website represents the American Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association. It provides information regarding drivers education curriculum, instructor training, events related to drivers education, and new education laws.
- <http://www.nad.org/site/pp.asp?c=foINKQMBF&b=91587>
 - This website represents the National Association of the Deaf. It provides individuals with information regarding deaf related issues, current events, and outcomes. Legal rights and advocacy issues are also addressed through this association.

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Peer Review for Rebecca Whitefoot
Completed by Amber Richards

Introduction: 23/25

Tips of Teaching the Skill: 49/50

The Nuts and Bolts: 23/25

The paper was well written. This would be a great teaching tool because it is informative, yet easy to understand. There were several spelling and punctuation errors, but the content was excellent. I like that the paper discusses misconceptions about deaf individuals and driving, and also tells what modifications deaf individuals need in order to learn. The websites are also helpful.

Rebecca Whitefoot-Peer Review of Julie Herring

Introduction- 24pts.
Tips of Teaching Skill- 50 pts.
The Nuts and Bolts- 20 pts.

I really enjoyed reading your paper and I learned so much from it! It was very detailed and you found a lot of good research for your paper. It was well organized and I could tell you put a lot of effort into it. Great job!

Rebecca Whitefoot-Peer Review of Julie Jackson

Introduction-20pts.
Tips of Teaching Skill- 45 pts.
The Nuts and Bolts- 24 pts.

I really enjoyed reading your paper and I learned so much from it. I think that it is great to teach Deaf children internet skills. Learning how to use the internet is a vital skill to know in the 21st century.