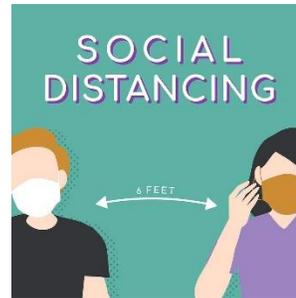




# How to improve communication when wearing face masks and social distancing

Covid-19 has changed the way we communicate with others. Wearing face masks and social distancing reduces one's ability to hear sounds and speech, making it difficult to hear especially in background noise. More importantly, face masks remove visual cues that are so vital in conveying emotion and context. Fortunately, there are ways to improve speech understanding so that communication does not need to be so frustrating!



Here are some tips for improving communication during Covid-19:

## Position and eye contact

- Always face the talker. Look at the eyes for non-verbal cues
- Sit close to the talker, but within a safe distance
- Do not have a conversation walking side by side with someone

## Lighting and visibility

- Communicate in good lighting, making sure your face is well lit
- Use a clear face shield to maximize visual cues

## Clear speech

- Speak slowly and clearly, and pause occasionally. Do not shout or over-articulate
- Rephrase your questions or comments rather than repeating the same words
- Use gestures and hand signs like “thumbs” up

## Background noise

- Close a door or window to reduce background noise
- Turn off all other noise sources

## Technology

- Rely on written communication (email, text) whenever possible
- Use captioning for videos and lectures
- Try smartphone apps to transcribe live speech. Check out Google Live Transcribe (Android only), Ava, Otter, and Live Caption

Lastly, if you find yourself struggling to hear others despite these increased efforts, you may have a hearing loss. Contact our Center (309-794-7358; [dorigarro@augustana.edu](mailto:dorigarro@augustana.edu)) if you have hearing problems and need help.



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Interested readers can find out more...

- 10 Tips for Managing Face Masks and Hearing Loss (<https://chcheating.org/blog/face-masks-hearing-loss-communication-tips/>)
- BBC's How Face Masks Affect our Communication (<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200609-how-face-masks-affect-our-communication>)
- NPR's How Face Masks are Leading to Communication Adaptation While Limiting Coronavirus Spread (<https://www.wuft.org/news/2020/06/01/how-face-masks-are-leading-to-communication-adaptation-while-limiting-coronavirus-spread/>)