

TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT (LEP) INDIVIDUALS



Be patient and friendly. Speaking a foreign language can be intimidating, so set a positive tone for the non-native English speakers you encounter.



Try Synonyms. A listener may be familiar with different phrasing for what you are trying to say. If your listener does not seem to understand, find another way of saying it.



Keep your mouth visible. Seeing the way you form your words gives listeners context clues and helps them figure out what you are saying.



Reinforce your words with gestures. By pointing to something or demonstrating an action, you give listeners more ways to recognize your meaning.

EASY!

Keep it simple. Complicated vocabulary is usually harder for a non-native English Speaker to understand.



Stick with standard pronunciation. A non-native speaker may not recognize known words if you pronounce them in an unfamiliar way.



Avoid baby talk. Using baby talk will either make you harder to understand or come off as unprofessional.



Pause between your words. Non-native speakers of a language often struggle to distinguish where one word ends and the next one begins.



Get visual. When spoken language fails, a picture, map, or written words may be effective.



Use straight-forward vocabulary. Non-native speakers may get hung up on expressions they don't know, including fillers such as "um," "like," and "totally." The same goes for abbreviations and slang.



Avoid contractions. A non-native speaker may struggle to hear a contraction. Using the long form provides maximum clarity (i.e. "I can't hear" versus "I cannot hear").



Be aware of different cultural standards. Norms vary around the world for touching, eye contact, and personal space, so give someone the benefit of the doubt if they come off as rude.



Avoid turning up the volume. Yelling at someone does not make them understand you any better. Speaking louder is offensive and embarrassing rather than helpful because unless you are in a noisy place, volume is not the issue.



Avoid excessive corrections. Unless you need a clarification or have been asked for language advice, corrections slow down communication unnecessarily and may cause non-native speakers to feel self-conscious.



Avoid jumping to conclusions. To make sure you are responding with the right information, hear the person out before making a reply.



Get help. Sometimes good communication means knowing when you need outside assistance. In these cases, find a bilingual colleague or call a professional interpreter.

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