

Information sheet, hearing impairment

Tips for faculty members and advisors

Students with a disability or chronic illness have special needs which cannot always be recognised and interpreted at first sight. This information sheet is intended to provide you with specialist knowledge for open and sympathetic communication in your dealings with the students concerned, and to contribute towards understanding and improving the situation of students with impairments.

Diagnosis and functional description

Hearing impairment is used as the umbrella term for all forms of impairment in connection with hearing: deafness, hardness of hearing, deaf-blindness, hearing loss (classified under ICD-10: H91). There are various degrees of hearing impairment.

Many of those concerned are equipped with hearing aids or hearing implants (cochlear implant) today. Hearing is an essential part of our lives; our communication is based on it. It is all that much more important to ensure corresponding support. Hearing impairment is an invisible impairment. Accordingly, the barriers of people with hearing impairment have to be clarified with care. Thus, people who were born deaf, for example, face different challenges from people who were born with a sense of hearing but went deaf after language acquisition.

Effects in the academic environment and on academically relevant activities

- Students with hearing impairments do not only hear less well; as a rule, they also experience restrictions with regard to communication, for hearing aids are merely aids, and not a replacement for a healthy ear. Therefore, students with hearing impairments usually take longer to grasp communication contents than people who can hear well.
- Students with hearing impairments particularly depend on information not being communicated exclusively acoustically. Therefore, you should make use of didactic diversity and ensure that what you communicate always appeals to two senses, i.e. do not only use acoustic media but also visual ones such as PowerPoint, lecture notes, the blackboard, overhead projectors, etc.
- It is helpful to visualise what you say in the form of graphs, facial expressions, gestures, and to write new technical terms on the blackboard or on transparencies.
- The major lecture rooms at ETH Zurich are equipped with audio induction loops. These enable people who wear hearing aids to receive interference-free audio signals such as lectures in classrooms wirelessly through their hearing aids. As soon as the faculty member uses the microphone that is in place, the signals are transmitted accordingly. For this purpose, people with hearing aids require a transmitter with a neck strap, which ETH Zurich's Multimedia Services (MMS) make available free of charge.

- For students with hearing impairments, it is crucial that they themselves can choose a seat that is ideal for them. For this reason, students with hearing impairments choose a seat in the lecture room at the beginning of the semester and put a reserved place card on it. Students like to draw faculty members' attention to where they sit so that faculty members can take this into consideration when they choose the direction in which to project their voice.
- Please speak at a normal volume and at medium speed, and enunciate well, but not excessively so. It helps if you turn your face towards the student with the hearing aid, for clearly visible lips make reading easier.
- Avoid simultaneous explanation and demonstration. People with hearing impairments are unable to look at something and follow speech at the same time. Give them a little time to either look at the object or read the transparency before you start commenting on them.
- Background noise causes interference (please shut windows, ask people in the room to be quiet, etc.).
- In group work, small group sizes are helpful. It is recommended that a small room should be used and that the seating arrangement should be rectangular or circular. As a rule, people with hearing impairments bring along a pen or a microphone which they can place in the middle of the table to transmit what the other group members say directly to the hearing aid.

Effects on performance assessments

Students who are affected by a hearing impairment have the option of submitting an application for special arrangements with regard to **performance assessments** (information at www.ethz.ch/disability).

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the staff at the Counselling and Coaching Centre. [Contact persons – student portal | ETH Zurich](#).