

WHAT IS LIPREADING?

It is the art of observing and interpreting the movement of lips, tongue and jaw. Facial expression helps to convey meaning. Most of the elements of speech present particular visual 'pictures'. Not all the elements of speech can be seen, i.e. it is difficult to see a 'k', 'g', or 'ng' being made, and nothing can be seen for an 'h', but these elements can be guessed by the context. Most words have at least one 'clue' element visually, which will help you to realise what is being said.

Another point to be considered is the fact that the visual 'picture' may be presented by different sounds (e.g. 'ch', 'j' and 'sh' look the same) but the context nearly always prevents confusion. Remember that spelling in the English language does not necessarily correspond to the pronunciation.

Lip reading and using the hearing you possess (probably with a hearing aid) should be complementary. Feeling how the movements are made by yourself when speaking helps you to know what to look for in others when they are speaking.

Although your attention will be drawn to analysing the visual picture presented by the speech organs, you must aim for quick recognition of whole phrases: try to follow the main thought, to understand the gist of what the person is saying. This will help you to guess the words that are not so easy to catch. Lip reading has been called 'intelligent guesswork'.

You will be helped if you know the subject of the conversation. Don't be afraid to ask someone what the subject of a conversation is.

We are all capable of a certain amount of 'natural' lip reading. For example you will probably be able to read quite easily some everyday words or phrases. Watching the news readers without sound is a good way of learning. More than one helper is an advantage, as you will be presented with slightly different visual patterns of speech with different people.

Practising in front of the mirror is very valuable. It is better with all practice at home to have short regular sessions, rather than longer more infrequent ones. Remember to feel as well as watch the movements.

Other people with whom you come into contact frequently, e.g. in the family, can help you by not shouting, by not over-exaggerating the movements of the mouth to much, and by not splitting the sentences up oddly: it is easier to grasp what is being said if natural phrasing is used. The normal rhythm of speech should not be altered even if the words are said a little slower than usual. A fast speaker may be asked to slow down a little.

The limitations of lip reading

By no means do all people speak clearly – you will have difficulty lip reading such people.

Lip reading is limited by poor sight, poor lighting and by distance. If the face is turned away too much you cannot see the facial movements – sometimes this is unavoidable.

Lip reading is more difficult if more than one person is taking part in the conversation with you – you cannot usually anticipate who will speak next, and may consequently miss parts of the conversation.

Within these limits, however, lip reading is of great value.

Remember to breathe and to blink when you are lip reading! To strengthen the eyes, eye exercises have been suggested, e.g. rolling the eyes. Blinking eases eye strain.

Have your eyesight checked frequently – newer glasses may help you to focus better on the face.

Sit with your back to the light and have the light shining on the face of the person who is speaking to you. If necessary don't be afraid to ask the person to change places with you at the table for example.