

Section VI
Student Preparation for College

Skill Building Innovations to Help Today's Students Become Tomorrow's Employees¹

Steven E. Boone

Rehabilitation Research and Training Center for Persons who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing
University of Arkansas, Little Rock

Heidi Lefebure

Postsecondary Education Consortium Outreach Coordinator
University of Arkansas, Little Rock

Abstract

This paper is focused on skill building resources designed to help deaf and hard of hearing persons obtain the skills needed to enter and succeed at work. The paper overviews innovative materials related to job interviewing and obtaining job accommodations. These materials are based upon research conducted at the University of Arkansas Rehabilitation Research and Training Center for Persons who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (RT-31). For additional information regarding these resources and related activities of the RT-31, readers are encouraged to contact the authors.

Most persons can benefit from focused resources designed to help them succeed in different stages of the employability process — career preparation, job entry and placement, and job maintenance and advancement. The University of Arkansas Rehabilitation Research and Training Center for Persons who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, has conducted twenty years of applied research into the employment enhancement needs of persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. This paper focuses on skill building resources designed to help deaf and hard of hearing persons obtain the skills needed to enter and succeed at work. The

paper overviews innovative materials related to job interviewing and obtaining job accommodations. Each of these areas are of significant concern to persons who are deaf or hard of hearing and their service providers.

The Job Interview

The job interview is a primary strategy used by virtually all employers as a mechanism to collect information critical to hiring decisions. In the interview, applicants are asked to provide information that confirms or expands the employers knowledge of the applicant and his or her job qualifications. The key to interview success is clear communication—understanding the interviewer's questions and expectations and marketing your skills and qualifications for the job.

Learning to interview is a concern of all job applicants. Every job seeker could benefit from learning how to succeed in the interview. The interview process is especially challenging for job seekers who are hard of hearing or late deafened. Persons who experience hearing loss early in life can, like individuals without hearing loss, benefit from learning the skills necessary for successful interviewing. Similarly, those who experience hearing loss later in life often face changing jobs. Many have never interviewed as a person with

¹The research leading to this publication was conducted by faculty of the University of Arkansas Research and Training Center for Persons who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, which is funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research of the U.S. Department of Education. The opinions contained in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the University of Arkansas or the U.S. Department of Education.

hearing loss, and thus, face additional challenges and can benefit from relearning these skills.

Recognizing these concerns, we have conducted a number of studies to identify needs, develop materials or resources directed toward these needs, and then validate the usefulness of these materials in producing enhanced employment outcomes. The database underlying this resource has included late deafened and hard of hearing consumers as well as programs that provide employment related services to these individuals. Over 800 persons were involved in these studies.

The data clearly indicated that consumers needed assistance in learning how to succeed in the interview. For example, when asked to rate the impact of hearing loss in interviews, consumers indicated that hearing loss had moderate impact and made it difficult to demonstrate and market oneself. This impact was felt across all aspects of the interview, from the initial phone or face to face contact with the company until the end of the interview and requesting follow-up. Each step of the interview process was moderately difficult due to the impact of hearing loss. Consumers wanted assistance or resources to learn how to present themselves in the interview (Boone, Scherich, & Berkay, 1997). This need was also recognized by service providers. Sadly, other research conducted by our center has found that many programs do not have adequate materials and resources to meet these needs (Boone & Watson, 1999).

GET-IT: An Interview Training Resource for Job Applicants with Hearing Loss

Recognizing these needs, we designed *GET-IT*, a curriculum that focuses on the job interview skills desired by employers as well as the unique problems faced by applicants who are late deafened or hard of hearing. Gaining Employment Through Interview Training was based upon well validated procedures to assist deaf persons to learn interviewing skills developed at our Center. Our goal was to develop materials that are presented in accessible formats. The resulting curriculum includes a Trainers Manual, Consumer Learning Materials, and a 72-minute closed-captioned video that includes narrated guidelines and sample interviews modeled by persons who were late deafened or hard of hearing.

The *GET-IT* curriculum includes nine key lessons that correspond to the structural parts of the typical job interview. These lessons include:

- Orientation to the Interview
- Greeting the Person at the Front Desk
- Meeting the Employer for the First Time
- Answering Questions Confidently
- Asking for Important Information
- Offering Information
- Closing the Interview
- What If You Are Not Asked
- The Complete Interview

In addition to these lessons, the Curriculum includes an assessment instrument designed to help applicants to pinpoint problems and weaknesses as well as extensive appendices of vocabulary and sample responses for interview questions.

Each lesson follows the same format. Initially, a narrator describes the specific skills that are targeted by the lesson. This discussion is followed by examples of persons exhibiting these skills. Subsequently, learners are asked to practice the skills they are observing on the video in roleplays. Finally, homework “application” exercises are described to help learners to apply the skills they have learned. The curriculum may be used individually but is most effective when in small groups. Group members are invaluable in providing feedback on ways to improve interview performance.

Each lesson specifies the exact content needed based upon expectations of the employer. For example, in “Meeting the Employer for the First Time” applicants learn to:

- Greet the Interviewer
- Smile and shake hands
- Thank the Interviewer for meeting
- Request room accommodations
- Make small talk
- Use the Interviewer’s name
- Sit quietly
- Make eye contact, and
- Explain your communication needs.

The rationale for each of these skills is clearly described, modeled and practiced to ensure learning. Data indicates that the process is an effective way to learn these skills.

AcCOMModate! Communication Accommodations at Work

Our Center is currently developing an interesting, interactive way to learn about workplace accommodations—a multimedia program called *AcCOMModate! Communication Accommodations at Work*. Past research conducted by our Center found that many workers who had recently experienced hearing loss were unsure about how to identify and request appropriate communication accommodations. Furthermore, surveys of these workers' employers also found an overall lack of knowledge about accommodations.

These two findings resulted in the development of a text-based computer program called *Job Accommodations Curriculum* (Sherich & Berkay, 1995). Workers who were hard of hearing or late-deafened reviewed the program. While the resource was viewed as useful, most of these individuals felt the curriculum could be substantially improved through inclusion of multimedia demonstrations of accommodations, images, graphics, and, where possible, videos of people using various accommodations. Toward this goal, we successfully applied for and were awarded a knowledge and dissemination grant from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research.

Thus, the *AcCOMModate* resource is being developed. This program can be used on either MAC or PC platforms, and we believe it will be useful to a number of audiences. Service providers will be able to use it with consumers they serve and to educate employers. Consumers themselves can use it as a self-help program. Employers may use it to educate other employees. Postsecondary institutions may find it useful for both new students and those about to graduate and join the workforce. Users can work through one or all of the sections included in the program.

AcCOMModate has been set up with a teleconference format - a setting we hope will be familiar to most users. In the Introduction, the "agenda" topics for the teleconference are described. Topics include:

1. What is an Accommodation?
2. Identifying Accommodation Needs (8 Situations)
3. Choosing An Accommodation
4. Marketing Your Request

This section also provides a brief overview of how to use the program with more in-depth explanations in the help section. To begin the curriculum, users simply click on the topic where they wish to begin.

Throughout the program, users will notice that everything spoken is captioned. To the right of the captioning are two control arrows for scrolling the text forward and backward. When the text is scrolled manually, the video portion is also reset.

Topic 1, *What is an Accommodation?*, introduces users to definitions of accommodations and their benefits. Four primary categories of accommodations are covered: equipment, support personnel, job restructuring, and workplace modifications. This looks very similar to most teleconferences—there are actually participants shown seated in the first row. From time to time, these individuals will be making comments or posing questions.

On the big screen, a moderator, video or other information may be presented. As before, whatever is spoken—whether from the moderator or video which might appear on the big screen, or comments from the other participants—is also captioned. Users have complete control over where they are in the program, and what they want to see happen. The remote control on the right side of the screen indicates which topic is currently being explored, allows access to the other three topics, as well as provides the familiar keys: stop/pause, play, reverse, and fast forward. To the right of the four participants is a computer monitor under the desktop. This computer monitor is utilized in Topic 2, *Identifying Your Accommodation Needs*.

The perspective is as though the program user is accessing the computer under the desktop. Users are provided the opportunity to explore accommodation possibilities for eight categories of workplace situations including: receiving instructions/talking with your supervisor, performance evaluations, department meetings, in-service training, work-related social functions, socializing with co-workers, working with customers or the general public, and alerting devices. Once a situation is chosen, users are led through a series of questions to which they answer yes/no based on their personal perspectives and experiences. These questions are related to a variety of aspects for the chosen situation. Answers to these questions lead to the development of a list of potential

accommodations that may assist the individual. Users may print the lists as they appear or wait until multiple situations have been completed to print a summary list.

The third topic, *Choosing a Preferred Accommodation*, is presented by Maxwell Gadget. Maxwell provides some comic relief for users while providing very useful information. He introduces six steps for individuals to use when choosing appropriate accommodations. These steps help narrow the list of potential accommodations to specific accommodations that best fit the workers' situation.

Marketing Your Request, which is Topic 4, provides guidelines and examples of effective ways to approach employers with an accommodation request. Two types of requests are discussed. The first type is requesting simple accommodations, such as moving to a quieter place or using available assistive technology. The second type is requesting formal accommodations which involves a supervisor or someone else in order to get the accommodation, such as purchasing assistive technology or changing job duties. Several vignettes are included which demonstrate how to put the steps into practice. The last portion of this section also discusses how to deal with denied requests.

This multimedia program also includes a glossary that may be accessed at any time to obtain more information or an explanation of a specific accommodation. Throughout the program, users may see a term or phrase in the captioning which is highlighted in red. By clicking on the highlighted item, the glossary is accessed. Users may peruse the glossary whenever they like and simply pick specific terms from the listing. Along with the text definition, often a graphic or short video is included to help better describe the term or phrase. Many definitions also have related concepts listed enabling users to delve further. The information presented may be printed, or users may return to the previous screen.

Closing

We sincerely hope that these resources provide information in an engaging manner. The *GET-IT* curriculum is currently available. Contact the authors or visit our website for ordering information. We urge you to check our website from time to time to see when the final *AcCOMModate* product is available. The Center's web address is: <www.uark.edu/deafrtc>.

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