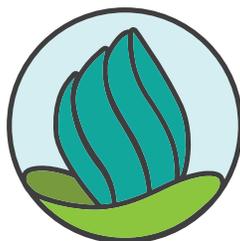


# Tutoring Deaf Students



**NDC**  
National Deaf Center  
on Postsecondary Outcomes

## Overview



Tutoring is an important academic support service for students. All students, from low-achieving students to high-achieving students, can benefit from tutoring.<sup>1,2</sup> Tutoring strengthens academic outcomes across a range of subjects and contributes to more positive attitudes toward learning.<sup>3,4,5</sup>

## Why Tutoring Is Important for Deaf Students

Tutoring can be a crucial source of academic support for deaf students, filling in instructional gaps and providing extra instruction where needed.<sup>6,7</sup> Deaf college students may miss information in class lectures even with appropriate accommodations, such as American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters or speech-to-text services.<sup>6,7</sup> Deaf students use tutoring not only to improve study skills and course grades, but also to increase their understanding of lectures, improve their reading and writing skills, and clarify class notes.<sup>8</sup> Deaf students in mainstream settings may have limited opportunities for peer-based learning through dialogue and can benefit from a structured approach to dialogue-based learning outside of the classroom. A tutor can provide opportunities for learning through conversations.<sup>9,10</sup> As deaf students transition from high school to college, they can take advantage of tutoring services that provide individualized instruction, personal connection, content-specific information, and tailored learning strategies.<sup>6,7</sup>

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## Effective Tutoring Strategies

Tutoring's effects are strongest when sessions are structured and occur over a short period.<sup>2,3,4</sup> Structured tutoring involves specific guidelines, lessons, and materials.<sup>4</sup> For example, tutoring for developing literacy might focus on specific literacy skills like decoding and thinking skills for reading and planning writing.<sup>11,12,13</sup> Additionally, it is effective for tutors to provide students with scaffolding and feedback.<sup>12,14,15</sup> As deaf students often face communication barriers to learning in the classroom, tutoring can provide clarity and clearly outline challenges and solutions related to their learning.<sup>8</sup>

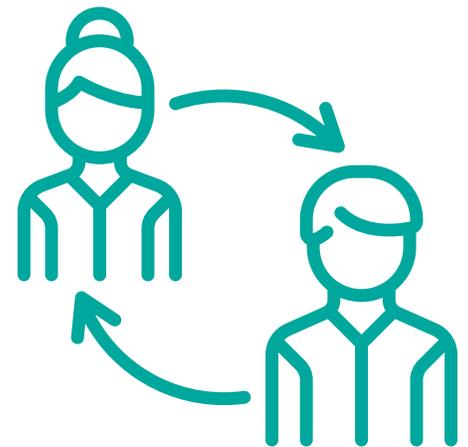
Deaf students value tutors who actively involve them in the tutoring process.<sup>8,16</sup> Learning environments where students use accommodations such as speech-to-text or interpreting services may reduce deaf students' active involvement in learning for many reasons, such as processing lag time for service providers. Tutoring can create opportunities for more active learning outside of the classroom to strengthen outcomes.<sup>17</sup> Examples of active learning include argument analysis, role playing, and the application of concepts to real-world situations.



## Tutors

Tutors can be professionally trained or volunteers and are typically peers of the same age or older student peers. It's important to consider the identity and cultural background of the tutor and the student. Deaf students often prefer tutors who are familiar with deaf culture.<sup>8,18</sup> Pairing tutors and students with similar gender identities appears to be effective for tutoring.<sup>2</sup>

**Peer tutoring** is widely used in educational settings, and it has positive effects on learning for both the tutor and the student receiving the tutoring.<sup>2,3,5</sup> Peer tutoring can be an effective strategy even if the tutor or student has low academic ability.<sup>2</sup> Research suggests that peer tutoring works better for high school and college students than for younger students.<sup>2</sup> Peer tutoring also appears to benefit students with disabilities more than students without disabilities.<sup>19</sup> Deaf peer tutors can also provide role modeling and mentoring for deaf students as they navigate educational environments.<sup>20</sup>





It may or may not be appropriate for **interpreters** to serve as tutors for deaf students. For example, in secondary settings, educational interpreters often take on additional duties like advocacy and tutoring for deaf students. In postsecondary settings, however, interpreters do not provide academic support.<sup>21</sup> After all, even if ASL interpreters are fluent in both English and ASL, they may not have the content area knowledge necessary to tutor. New deaf college students may need an orientation to this change in the interpreters' role.

## Remote and Computer-Assisted Tutoring

Due to accessibility challenges, deaf students may need to consider remote or computer-assisted tutoring options.

Deaf college students view **remote tutoring** as a viable option that is, in terms of experience, comparable to in-person tutoring.<sup>22</sup> Remote tutoring can offer deaf students more choices with regard to time, location, communication modality, and tutors.<sup>22, 23, 24</sup> This flexibility can benefit both the student and their institution. Remote tutoring platforms that integrate educational materials and offer various communication options promote active learning and increase student engagement, which offsets the potential technical problems.<sup>24</sup>



**Computer-assisted tutoring** is widely used in the general population, with promising results.<sup>5, 25, 26</sup> However, there is little research on computer-assisted tutoring for deaf students, and the accessibility of computer-assisted tutoring programs varies. Computer-assisted and remote tutoring programs need to examine accessibility, or the lack thereof, for deaf students.

## Hiring and Scheduling Tutors

When identifying tutors for deaf students, it's important to think about **content knowledge, fluency in the language of instruction, fluency in the student's preferred mode of communication, and knowledge of bilingual/bimodal instructional strategies.** For remote tutors, it is also important to consider technical competence and ability to use a variety of online platforms.<sup>24</sup>



Effective educators of deaf students are sensitive to **communication preferences.** Students who use sign language prefer tutors who use sign language fluently.<sup>16, 18</sup> For deaf students who communicate verbally, it is important to make sure that the physical space and lighting allow for effective communication. Easy communication, whether spoken or signed, can encourage deaf students to take advantage of tutoring. Student preferences need to be considered, with frequent check-ins to see whether modifications are needed.

Designing tutoring programs for deaf students involves thinking about access. When direct access is not immediately available, deaf students are often unmotivated to sign up for tutoring.<sup>27</sup> How easy it is to request tutors is an important factor in program effectiveness. It's important to collect student feedback to evaluate program effectiveness and identify areas for improvement.

## Tutoring Strategy Takeaways

<b>Active Involvement</b>	Involve deaf students in the tutoring process and engage them in active learning—for example, argument analysis, role playing, and the application of concepts to real-world situations.
<b>Direct Instruction</b>	Give clear and consistent feedback about students' work and learning strategies.
<b>Clear Communication</b>	Allow students to determine their preferred communication approach, check in frequently, and adjust as needed.

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