



## Understanding people with speech impairments

*Achieving access for all*





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Some people have speech impairments that may make it difficult for you to understand what they are trying to say. They will be used to not being understood. However they will appreciate a genuine effort to understand what they are saying and reasonable attempts to satisfy their need. Some people may use a electronic voice, known as a Lightwriter, if they have had their voice box removed, which has a robotic sound to it.

- Be patient. The key is to listen carefully and concentrate on what the person is trying to say. As you become accustomed to their speech you will understand more. Patience, politeness and honesty are crucial.
- Concentrate fully on the person who is talking to you.
- Resist the temptation to interrupt and finish sentences for them.
- Try to ask questions that require short answers, or even a nod or shake of the head.
- If you do not understand at first. Politely ask them to repeat the sentence or phrase you don't understand. You may need to do this more than once.
- If you are still not certain, it is important to repeat and confirm what you believe has been said. The person then may only have to say yes or no.
- If you are talking to them over the phone it may be necessary to ask them to:
  - visit your office or arrange a home visit,
  - use e-mail, fax or text phone.
- If they have someone with them who may be used to their speech, politely ask if it is OK to seek their help.
- If all else fails ask the person if they could write down what they are trying to say.
- Never pretend that you have understood when you have not. This can lead to a range of embarrassing situations for you as well as the customer.