



# LANGUAGE ACCESS PROGRAM

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA OFFICE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

## Reference Guide: 16 Communication Tips for LEP/NEP Interactions



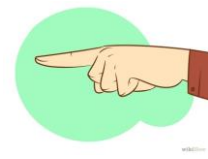
1. **Be friendly and patient.** Speaking a foreign language can be intimidating, so set a positive tone for the non-native English speakers you encounter.



2. **Try synonyms.** A listener may be familiar with different phrasing for what you are trying to say. If your listener does not seem to understand, find another way of saying it.



3. **Keep your mouth visible.** Seeing the way you form your words gives listeners context clues and helps them figure out what you are saying.



4. **Reinforce your words with gestures.** By pointing to something or demonstrating an action, you give listeners more ways to recognize your meaning.



5. **Keep it simple.** Complicated vocabulary is usually harder for a non-native English speaker to understand.



6. **Stick with standard pronunciations.** A non-native speaker may not recognize known words if you pronounce them in an unfamiliar way.



7. **Avoid baby talk.** Using baby talk will either make you harder to understand or come off as unprofessional.



8. **Pause between your words.** Non-native speakers of a language often struggle to distinguish where one word ends and the next one begins.



9. **Use straight-forward vocabulary.** Non-native speakers may get hung up on expressions they do not know, including fillers such as “um,” “like,” and “totally.” The same goes for abbreviations and slang.



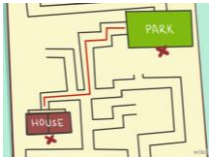
10. **Avoid contractions.** A non-native speaker may struggle to hear a contraction (consider “I can’t take you” versus “I can take you”). Using the long form (“I cannot take you”) provides maximum clarity.



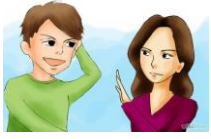
11. **Be aware of different cultural standards.** Norms vary around the world for touching, eye contact, and personal space, so give someone the benefit of the doubt if they come off as rude.



12. **Avoid turning up the volume.** Yelling at someone does not make them understand you any better. Speaking louder is offensive and embarrassing rather than helpful because unless you are in a noisy place, volume is not the issue.



13. **Get visual.** When spoken language fails, a picture, map, or written words may be effective.



14. **Avoid excessive corrections.** Unless you need a clarification or have been asked for language advice, corrections slow down communication unnecessarily and may cause non-native speakers to feel self-conscious.



15. **Avoid jumping to conclusions.** To make sure you are responding with the right information, hear the person out before making a reply.



16. **Get help.** Sometimes good communication means knowing when you need outside assistance. In these cases, find a bilingual colleague or call a professional interpreter.

Adapted from: <http://www.wikihow.com/Communicate-with-a-Non-Native-English-Speaker>