

Best Practices for Teaching While Wearing a Mask

There are many evidence-based practices that will help professors overcome the perceived barriers to teaching and learning in masks.

Not all masks have the same effects on how well one's voice carries. The N95 masks and clear plastic masks decrease the ability of the hearer to perceive high-frequency sounds to a greater extent than cloth masks, and simple paper masks decrease audibility the least (Corey, Jones, & Singer, 2020). Clear plastic masks, however, provide some benefits, including increased comprehension for persons with hearing loss (Atcherson et al., 2017). This is the case because perceivers can view visual cues, including lip movement and facial expressions. For this reason, this type of mask is also a good choice for instruction in language. Clear plastic masks may be requested as needed from one's department or college office.

Speech is more audible toward the sides of masks than directly in front (Rudge, Sonneveldt, & Brookes, 2020); thus, microphone placement next to the side of one's face rather than directly in front of the mouth should increase speech perception. When using a clear mask (or any other type), a lapel or lavalier microphone, which is often the type used in the TU classroom, can considerably improve audibility.

In order to determine whether or not your assigned classrooms have lapel/lavalier microphones, go to this link: <http://webapps.towson.edu/classroomtechnology/virtualtour/>. Next, find and click on your classroom. Upon reaching your classroom's page, look for this: "Video Conferencing *: Universal" and "Capture and Recording *: Universal" This terminology indicates that this room has a lavalier microphone. Department Chairs should consult with their Classroom and Computer Lab Technologies (CCLT) persons and/or their college- or department-level technology staff prior to purchasing microphones. A list of CCLT personnel and access to technology support may be found on the OTS CCLT page: www.towson.edu/cclt

Additional tips (Goldin, Weinstein, & Shiman, 2020) include:

- Speak somewhat more slowly and a little bit louder than you otherwise would.
- Work consistently to reduce noise (shuffling papers) and other distractions in the classroom.
- If a student discloses hearing loss, consider using a clear mask.
- Concentrate on being even more engaging with students than you have before, in order to keep their attention.

In closing, I would like to paraphrase our colleague Dr. Elizabeth Neville, who suggested recently in a FACET webinar that we view masks not as a barrier but rather as a tool that permits us to get together

to teach and learn. As we work through the next few weeks with students, let us be open to comparing experiences with each other so that we may develop our own sound practices that will continue to support high-quality teaching and learning at Towson University.

References

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- Goldin, A., Weinstein, B., & Shiman, N. (May 2020). Speech blocked by surgical masks becomes a more important issue in the era of COVID-19. *Hearing Review*. <https://www.hearingreview.com/hearing-loss/health-wellness/how-do-medical-masks-degrade-speech-reception>
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