

# Supporting home language access using Cued Speech

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Cued Speech is a system that manually codes the phonemic patterns of spoken languages for visual accessibility. Since its inception, this system has transitioned from a support for speech reading to the current use of home language and literacy development. While controversial in some sectors within the field of Deaf education and the Deaf Community, cueing provides families with a method to visually supplement home languages through two approaches: partnering with a spoken language or a bilingual-bimodal approach.

## Questions and answers for families

### What is Cued Speech?

Cued Speech was developed by Dr. Orin Cornett at Gallaudet College (University) to address first-year deaf and hard-of-hearing (DHH) students' English literacy skills. Dr. Cornett wondered how DHH students were accessing sound-based English to acquire literacy (i.e., reading and writing). He reasoned if there was a visual system for the spoken phonemic code of English, then the acquisition of print literacy would be more accessible. Thus, Cued Speech was born.

Cued Speech is a system of handshapes representing sounds (phonemes) of spoken language. The entire system of any spoken language can be learned within an 8–12 hr training. Daily consistent use can result in fluency in less than a year. The Cued Speech system has been adapted to over 60 languages, allowing multilingual families to provide visual access to each one. If desired, any phonological language can be supported by cueing.

### How can families use Cued Speech to support language acquisition?

Families can learn to cue their home language, which allows them to provide visual access to an auditory-based language. Cueing allows families to provide visual access to their home language, supporting the development of a first language (L1). As a result, the child enters school ready to learn and receives instruction in English and/or ASL (L2/3) with the foundation of the L1 from the home.

### How does Cued Speech address language deprivation?

The key to avoiding language deprivation is to ensure your child develops a foundational language (L1) thus allowing them to

enter school with a developed language base, ready to learn academic content. Cueing can provide early visual exposure to the spoken language of the home and provides immersion during the critical language period. Infants and toddlers exposed to language via cueing learn and internalize that language's code.

### How does Cued Speech fit into a Bilingual-Bimodal approach?

A Bilingual-Bimodal approach emphasizes using ASL and written/spoken English for instruction of academic content. Transition to print is supported in ASL with cueing being used to visually show the patterns of the phonological components of spoken language. Cueing provides a pathway to internalization of those patterns that assist in breaking the code of written language. Communication at home can continue to be reinforced by cueing and/or signing since the child has acquired a foundational language.

### How can Cued Speech support early reading and writing skills?

Cueing allows for the “sandwiching” of spoken and signed languages. No matter the child's first language (e.g., home language, English, or ASL), early literacy in phonologically based spoken languages can be “sandwiched” with cueing. This means that families may read in ASL and re-read with cueing so that the phonemic code is visible in the same way the code is audible while speaking. Families using listening and spoken language may choose to only cue part of the printed code to emphasize specific phonological properties (e.g., rhyming words, word endings, alliterations) as a method to visually highlight acoustic information or to fill in missing phonemes (sounds) that are not audible with or without hearing assistive technology.

### Can Cued Speech support my child in learning a foreign language?

Absolutely! No matter the first language of a DHH learner, cueing can be used to access foreign language learning. Just as all language learners must learn a new system of phonemes and vocabulary, cueing can be used to switch between languages. For example, an ASL user would receive English-based instruction visually in ASL. Similarly, the foreign language instruction would

be provided visually via cueing using the code of that language. Interpreters (and teachers!) can be trained in the cues and do not need to know the language to transliterate the message. They only need the awareness of and ability to pair the cues and sounds.

## Implications

Cueing can be used as a method to support home language (L1) development in partnership with either a bilingual-bimodal (ASL, Deaf Culture) approach and/or with a spoken language approach. In both cases, the ultimate goal remains: to provide families with tools to quickly and accurately provide visual access in the home language so that children arrive at school with the language foundation necessary to be successful with literacy and curriculum. Ultimately, the goal is not to replace or deny support of either bilingual-bicultural or spoken language approaches, but rather to provide a home language that is fully accessible to families who

are either learning a signed language, signed system, or listening and spoken language system.

## Further Reading

1. Bouton, S., Bertoncini, J., Serniclaes, W., & Colé, P. (2011). Reading and reading-related skills in children using cochlear implants: Prospects for the influence of cued speech. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, **16**(4), 458–473. <https://doi.org/10.1093/deafed/enr014>.
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3. LaSasso, C. J., & Metzger, M. A. (1998). An alternate route for preparing deaf children for BiBi programs: The home language as LI and cued speech for conveying traditionally-spoken languages. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, **3**(4), 265–289. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.deafed.a014356>.