

Cued Speech = Visual Access to Spoken Language

Cued Speech for American English

Visually providing the building blocks needed for communication, language development, and literacy.



/d, p, zh/



/ee, ur/



/k, TH, v, z/



/aw, e, ue/



/h, r, s/



/a, i, oo/



/b, n, wh/



consonant alone



/f, m, t/
vowel alone



1/2" - 3/4" down
/uh/



/l, sh, w/



1" forward
/ah, oe/



/g, j, th/



/ay, oi/



/ch, ng, y/



/ie, ou/

Cued Speech

This mode of communication uses the mouth and hand to visually distinguish the building blocks or phonemes of a spoken language, thus allowing for the clear transmission of language between two or more cuers. Handshapes, hand placements, and hand movements combine with mouth movements to clearly show the stream of consonants and vowels that represent the words and thoughts of a cuer.

The Original Purpose of the System

Dr. R. Orin Cornett, the creator of Cued Speech, developed the system in 1966 for the purpose of improving the poor literacy levels he saw occurring in deaf education around the country. By providing visual access to the stream of consonants and vowels of a language at a rate similar to speech, he felt children who are deaf or hard-of-hearing could acquire English in a way that American Sign Language and oral education are unable to provide.

Cued American English

English contains approximately 40 individual phonemes. In cued English, consonants are represented by handshapes and vowels are represented by placements and movements. See the graphic on the left for the components of cued American English. Consonants on the same handshape look different on the mouth. Vowels occurring at the same placement also have different mouth shapes. When these handshapes and placements are paired with corresponding mouth shapes and facial expression, the basic building blocks of English (phonemes) can be expressed at a rate similar to that of spoken language. By providing access to this stream of consonants and vowels with additional information (facial expression, force of cues, head movement, etc.), Cued Speech conveys a rich language visually with all of its intricacies and nuances including laughter, surprise, anger, sarcasm, teasing, annoyance, indifference, joy, and so forth.

Learning How to Cue

Children exposed to cueing during the critical time of language development, birth to age six, learn how to cue by being exposed to it. Just as most hearing children simply hear English around them and begin to play with sounds as they babble, children who cue learn by being immersed in a visually language-rich environment.

For adults who want to apply this skill to a language they already know (spoken or written), the process is much more deliberate and the time it takes

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to achieve proficiency varies by individual. The system used to convey cued English is a closed set of information, containing the components you see on the left-hand side of the first page, in combination with mouth movements and facial expressions. The mouth movements and facial expressions are ones you already use naturally in conversation with others. As you learn the pieces of the system and how they apply to English, you learn how to select the appropriate representation for your dialect of American English.

Dissecting the words you use to communicate into a stream of consonants and vowels is a task that some easily master. Others take longer to break words down into these small building blocks. Consonants and vowels do not always correlate with the printed word. Just as learning to spell in English can be a challenge (for example: *though*, *through*, *cough*, and *tough* do not rhyme, but *fare*, *hair*, and *tear* do), learning to cue can be challenging as well. You need to stop thinking in terms of spelling and start thinking in terms of target phonemes (what consonant or vowel sounds the letters are representing). For example, the following words all end with the phoneme /f/: *graph*, *if*, and *laugh*. These words all contain the short vowel /e/: *head*, *bed*, *said*, *says*, *friend*, and *guest*.

Your ability to accurately identify a stream of phonemes plays a large role in how long it will take you to develop cueing skills. Learning the pieces of the system takes some instruction and memorization and can occur in a short time frame. After memorizing the system and learning how to execute the cues, the next step is to build speed and fluency. These skills come with practice, repetition, and use. New cuers tend to develop a set of phrases they are comfortable using and then slow down when they encounter a word they have never cued before.

Cue camps and workshops that take place around the country are often the best place to learn how to cue. Teachers need to be certified by the National Cued Speech Association (www.cuedspeech.org) in order to work at NCSA cosponsored camps. This ensures that the information presented about the system, including its history, is taught consistently, no matter who the instructor is. At camps, you receive excellent instruction during the day with the added benefit of times outside of class when you see cueing in action in myriad ways (parent to child, friend to friend, deaf adult to hearing child, etc.). This exposure aids in understanding how the mode of communication actually works and provides a realistic expectation that your speed will develop in time.

While having an instructor is best to ensure that you are executing the cues correctly and not acquiring any hard-to-break habits, you can learn to cue from a DVD or CD-ROM. Contact Cued Speech Discovery (www.cuedspeech.com) for a catalog to see what resources are available. These products can be very useful after you have taken a class, to provide practice and reinforcement of newly acquired skills and knowledge.