

















Cues of 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/	/uh/
	<small>move 1/2" - 3/4" down</small>
	
/l, sh, w/	/ah, oe/
	<small>move 1" forward</small>
	
/g, j, th/	/ay, oi/
	
/ch, ng, y/	/ie, ou/

Cued Speech for American English

The system of Cued Speech used in the United States to convey the cued language, Cued American English, was developed to make the more than 40 phonemes of spoken American English visible to children who are deaf and hard of hearing. Phonemes are the building blocks of any language that, when combined, make up the syllables and words of that language; in English, phonemes are consonants and vowels. A cue is a handshape or hand placement in combination with the corresponding mouth shape that visually represents a consonant or vowel. When cueing, consonants are represented by handshapes, and vowels are represented by placements and movements. Consonants on the same handshape, and likewise vowels occurring at the same placement, are each distinguished by their different corresponding mouth shape. (See the graphic cue chart on the left to see the cues for American English.) When these handshapes, placements, movements, and corresponding mouth shapes are combined, every phoneme of a consonant-vowel language is conveyed visually.

The Original Purpose of the System

Cued Speech was designed to overcome the problem of inaccessibility to spoken language encountered by deaf and hard of hearing children. Dr. R. Orin Cornett developed the Cued Speech system in 1966 to improve the poor literacy levels he saw in deaf education due to deaf children's unclear and/or distorted access to English. Recognizing that rapid early verbal language growth rarely occurred in prelingually deaf children through traditional sign language and listening and spoken language (referred to as "oral/aural" at that time) methods, Dr. Cornett sought to develop a convenient and easy-to-learn method of communication for use in the home, classroom, and elsewhere to provide an accurate and complete visual representation of traditionally spoken language for deaf children.

Cued American English

When the cues for American English noted above are complemented by facial grammar (expressions) and head and body positions/movements in communication, the complete visual language of Cued American English is conveyed, a rich language that is phonemically and linguistically identical to traditionally spoken English with all its intricacies and nuances, including humor, surprise, anger, sarcasm, teasing, annoyance, indifference, joy, and so forth. Cueing enables users of a traditionally spoken language (e.g. parents, caregivers, family members, friends, teachers, colleagues and clinicians), regardless of their hearing level, to communicate visually in real-time communication with deaf or hard of hearing children and adults.

Learning How to Cue

Children exposed to cueing during the critical years of language development, birth to age six, acquire cued language naturally through consistent exposure throughout their daily experiences. Just as most hearing children acquire spoken language by hearing it used with and around them and begin to play with sounds as they babble, deaf and hard of hearing children acquire cued language by being immersed in a visually cued language-rich environment and begin to play with cues in a similar manner. Deaf and hard of hearing children who are exposed to Cued American English consistently develop age-appropriate English language skills.

For adults (deaf, hard of hearing, or hearing) who want to learn to cue a language they already know (spoken or written), the process is more deliberate, and the time it takes to achieve proficiency varies by individual. As people learn the parts of the cueing system and how they apply to English, they learn how to select the cues for their dialect of American English. Identifying the appropriate consonant and vowel combinations is easier for some than others. Additionally, consonants and vowels do not always correlate with the printed word. Deaf and hard of hearing cuers, like most of their hearing peers, think in terms of conveying the consonant and vowel phonemes of language and not how words are spelled. For example, the following words all end and are cued with the same phoneme, /f/: *graph*, *if*, and *laugh*, as they are pronounced with the same phoneme; similarly, these words containing the short vowel /e/: *head*, *bed*, *said*, *says*, *friend*, and *guest* are cued, as they are spoken, with the same phoneme. Deaf and hard of hearing children who cue thus learn to spell alongside their peers in school by applying the same learned rules.

Becoming Fluent

An individual's ability to accurately identify phonemes plays a large role in how long it will take to develop expressive cueing skills. Learning Cued American English takes some instruction and memorization, which can occur in a short time frame (12-20 hours). 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. After memorizing the system and learning how to execute the cues, the next step is to build fluency to match conversational speed. Building fluency comes with practice, repetition, and use. Generally, it takes six months to one year of consistent cueing to cue accurately at conversational speed. However, it is more important to cue consistently and accurately than quickly, especially with young children.

Where to Go for Support

Cue camps, as well as virtual or in-person classes and workshops, that take place around the country are often the best places to learn how to cue. Teachers need to be certified by the National Cued Speech Association in order to teach at NCSA-sponsored classes and camps. This ensures that the information presented about the system, including its history, is taught consistently, no matter who the instructor is. At camps, learners receive excellent instruction during the day with the added benefit of times outside of class when cueing is in action in myriad ways (parent to child, child to adult, friend to friend, deaf adult to hearing child, etc.). This exposure demonstrates and reinforces how the mode of communication actually works and provides a realistic expectation that speed will develop in time.

While having an instructor is best to ensure that one is executing cues correctly and not acquiring any hard-to-break habits, self-paced online instruction is available at Cue College (www.cuecollege.org). The Cue College CS100 course is free for parents who are new to learning how to cue. Cue College also provides excellent learning resources in their Cue Store for families and professionals to practice and reinforce their newly acquired cueing skills and knowledge.

More information about cueing is available at the NCSA website, <https://cuedspeech.org>, and by contacting info@cuedspeech.org. Families who sign up for a free NCSA DCLP Parent Kit at <https://cuedspeech.org/advocacy-services/dclp/> will also receive free access to the Cue College CS100 course.

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