

Purpose: To determine whether a communication environment needs a *device* or *system*

Audience: Consumers and facility staff

Overview

People with hearing loss need increased clarity, not increased volume. To gain clarity, they need to listen to the audio that is:

- Captured from a microphone *close* to the speaker's mouth;
- Filters out background noise and overcomes poor acoustics; and
- Transmitted directly to a) their ears for those who do not wear hearing aids, as well as b) provides a connection with their hearing aids, cochlear implants, or bone-conducted devices ("hearing-aid compatible", e.g., the individual fully utilizes their prescription hearing aids and they are not asked to remove hearing aids or to use headphones).



Two Different Communication Environments

It can be confusing because the terminology is so similar: Assistive Listening **DEVICE** vs Assistive Listening **SYSTEM**. But their capabilities are quite different.

One-On-One Settings

Assistive Listening DEVICES, also called personal amplifiers

Provides hearing accessibility in personal, one-on-one settings, such as at home, in the car, during doctor visits and counseling sessions, communicating information at conference registration counters, and at parent-teacher conferences.

- **Consumer use:** In public settings, the consumer needs to request from the institution or business, usually 2-14 days prior to the appointment. The consumer may choose to bring their own device, but they cannot be required to do so.
- **Note:** An assistive listening DEVICE cannot be substituted for an assistive listening SYSTEM. Why? If a person sits in the audience, the microphone is not close to the speaker's mouth and picks up all the background noises, resulting in no clarity. Thus, it can worsen listening.
- **Americans With Disabilities Act:** [ADA Requirements, Effective Communication](#). This provides equal access at no cost to consumers.
- **More information:**
 - [Personal amplification devices](#)



Photo credit: Trihear Convo



Floor mat hearing loop. Photo credit: Audio Directions

Assistive Listening DEVICE vs. Assistive Listening SYSTEM: What is the Difference?

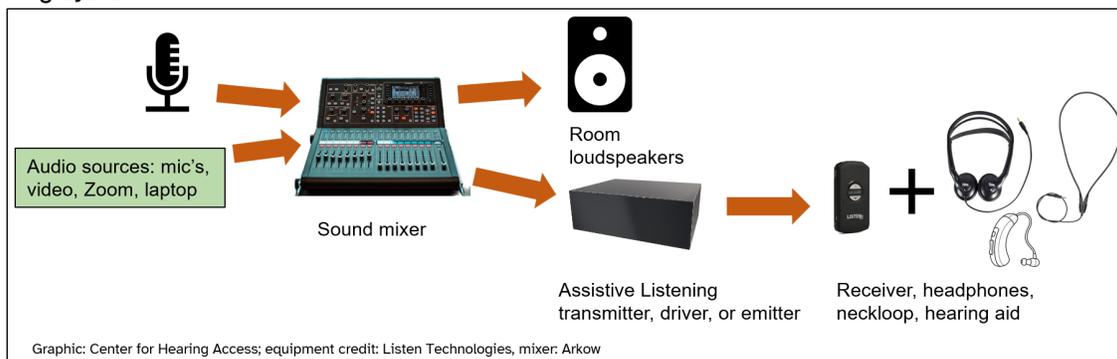
Meetings, Events, Performances (One-To-Many Listeners) Assistive Listening SYSTEMS

Provides hearing accessibility in rooms with sound systems, such as board meetings, town halls, lectures, performing arts, movie theaters, etc. Many people can use it simultaneously.



- **Consumer use:** Like a ramp for wheelchair users, the consumer does NOT need to request it prior to arrival. The system should always be turned on for programs, regularly verified to be working, the consumer equipment should be ready, and a direct-to-hearing aid option (via a neckloop) must be provided for FM/RF, infrared, and Auracast streamed assistive listening systems, as per the ADA law.
- **Note:** Sometimes receivers are called assistive listening devices.
- **Americans With Disabilities Act:** [ADA Standard 219](#) (webpage). This provides equal access at no cost to consumers.
- **More information:**
 - [Assistive listening systems](#) information for five technologies
 - [Americans with Disabilities Act](#) (ADA) standards for assistive listening (webpage and resources, including a 1-page summary)
 - [Places](#) where assistive listening systems are required under the ADA
 - [What do assistive listening systems sound like?](#) (1-minute videos)
 - [Hearing Loss and the Need for Assistive Listening Systems](#) (2 pages)

Essentially, the same audio mix sent to the loudspeakers is also sent to the assistive listening system. Also, acoustic performances can be mic'd and transmitted only through the assistive listening system.



About the Center for Hearing Access

Founded in 2024, the nonprofit Center for Hearing Access is a national advocacy and education initiative of The John G. Shedd Institute. We champion and educate consumers, facility staff, audiologists, and hearing instrument specialists about all ADA-compliant assistive listening systems and other strategies to increase access to theaters, libraries, conferences, government offices, healthcare facilities, courtrooms, places of worship, and other public and private spaces. Effective hearing access can be life-changing for people with hearing loss to maintain community engagement.

The Center for Hearing Access provides educational and informational resources and does not endorse any product, business, or service.

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