

Hearing Better in Public Places

Understanding Assistive Listening, Telecoils, Bluetooth®, and Auracast™

Hearing in large areas such as theaters, churches, and large meeting rooms, or in places with background noise, can reveal some limitations of hearing aids. In such settings, you need different tools to assist your hearing. Just as you use binoculars to see distant objects and reading glasses to enlarge fine print, **Assistive devices and Bluetooth wireless streaming can provide the binoculars for your ears.**

Personal Bluetooth: You probably already experience the benefits of using Bluetooth connections between your hearing aids to adjust settings and listen to phone calls, music, audiobooks, podcasts, TV, or virtual meetings on your computer. Using Bluetooth to deliver audio directly to your ears provides a clearer, more personal listening experience.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) acknowledges the difficulty that some people with hearing loss have in understanding speech in public places. This law requires that, in venues where audio amplification is used, an **Assistive Listening System** be provided, that the technology be hearing-aid-compatible, and that it be offered to the public free of charge.

Assistive Listening Systems capture audio from microphones on a stage or lectern and deliver it directly to a person's ears, reducing the adverse effects of reverberation, background noise, and distance. This means you will hear audio in the venue with exceptional clarity.

You may encounter several types of assistive listening systems:



Hearing Loops can connect wirelessly to hearing aids via a telecoil. If this feature is built in, there's no need to borrow a listening device from the venue. Look for places that display the hearing loop logo with the letter **T** (which stands for Telecoil). To find the thousands of hearing loops used in the US: www.CenterforHearingAccess.org/state-lists

Auracast used as an Assistive Listening System, a new Bluetooth LE Audio technology.



Auracast is just beginning to appear in new hearing aids and in some consumer electronic devices (like TVs and Android phones). The adoption of Auracast in public places is expected to accelerate over the next 2-5 years. If you don't have Auracast built into your instruments, ask for a receiver with a neckloop or headphones. Auracast installations can be found

on Google Maps and

www.bluetooth.com/auracast/auracast-locations



FM/RF (Radio Frequency) or infrared-based assistive listening systems

send the audio from a movie, a play, or a lecture to a receiver. (See logo on right, note the lack of the letter **T**). To benefit, borrow a receiver from a service desk or ticket window. Ask for a neckloop instead of headphones if you own hearing aids with telecoils.



Neckloops are worn around the neck and connect wirelessly to hearing aids **via a built-in telecoil**. If you do not own hearing aids with telecoils or don't use hearing aids, you may use headphones. The telecoil can be turned on and adjusted via the hearing aid app on your smartphone.

While picking up an Auracast or FM/IR receiver with a neckloop may seem inconvenient, assistive listening systems can help you hear much more clearly during a religious service, lecture, movie, or play. Ask for them! You won't regret it.

To see how you can use assistive listening systems, www.tinyurl.com/ALS-Intro



If you enjoy travel, lectures, and frequently attend theater performances or religious services, **ADA-Access-Ready™ Hearing Devices** will provide you access to today's assistive listening systems and the future Auracast systems.

Using Assistive devices says that you know how to use the right tool for the job. Use your hearing aids for close-up listening and use Assistive Devices to enhance your hearing in large areas, groups, and noisy backgrounds. Hearing aids are more useful if they include:

1. **Bluetooth (for personal connection to your smartphone, listening to podcasts, etc.)**
2. **Built-in Telecoil or telecoil accessory (to access hearing loops & other assistive listening systems via a neckloop)**
3. **Bluetooth Auracast (a new Bluetooth LE audio connection to link to Auracast assistive listening systems that will become more common in the future)**

As an audiologist with many years of experience, I highly recommend you consider them.

Juliette Sterkens, AuD - jsterkens@hearingloss.org

Professional Advisor for Hearing Loop and Other Assistive Listening Technology with HLAA

Check out my 1+ million views TEDx talk: ["What You Don't Know About Hearing Aids."](#)