

You can affect the way you understand conversations by changing:

- **The environment**

- Try to have important conversations/meetings take place where:
 - the speaker is well-lit and facing you
 - the room is quiet
 - there is not much reverberation (echoing):
 - rooms with hard surfaces will have a lot of reverberation
 - soft materials like carpets and drapes will absorb the sound better

- **The speaker**

- You can ask/teach the people you talk to how to make it easier for you. You could ask them to:
 - Face you and not to cover their mouths
 - Slow their rate of speech
 - Use simple sentences
 - Be more specific in their referent and try to use less words like it, that, this, he, she, they, etc.
 - ex: "I love it!" gives you less than "I love that **chair**"
 - introduce the topic
 - ex: "Yeah, the weekend was good. But what about school? I'm so worried for our tests" gives you more context than "the weekend was good. what about our tests?"

- **Yourself!!!**

- You can use conversation strategies to understand the conversation.
- **Listen for key words**
 - Words can clue you into the topic
 - Referents (he, she, the, their) are easy to miss and can cause misunderstandings
- **Use a repair strategy** (2 kinds)
 - **Nonspecific**
 - ex: huh? or what?
 - usually result in someone repeating the same message
 - **Specific**
 - ask speaker to:
 - Repeat message (Can you say that again?)
 - Elaborate (ex: Tell me more)
 - Simplify message (You lost me, can you simplify that?)
 - Rephrase message (Can you say that another way?)
 - Give the topic/get information (Who went to the store? What was Tom doing?)
 - Confirm the message (Sally went riding?)

Keep in mind:

- **Everyone uses repair strategies; it is a normal part of conversation**
 - Some interruptions are part of normal conversation but too many can be frustrating to both speaker and listener
 - If you bluff (pretend you understood something when you didn't) you can come across as uncaring if your bluff gets caught
- When using a nonspecific strategy (huh, what), people will usually repeat their message.
 - **It is easier understand a message if it is restructured in some way instead of repeated**
 - These strategies can be effective and are considered minimally disruptive to the flow of the conversation (when not over-used)
- **Speakers may have a better response to you as a listener if you use specific strategies (what was broken?); you seem more competent and involved in the conversation**
 - You may feel more satisfied with conversations where you use specific strategies

So, strategies are important!! The best system would be to rely on several different strategies (both specific and nonspecific), depending on the context and the speaker. You will need to practice these strategies a lot to develop your own style, comfort level, and ability to decide which strategy will work best for each situation.

This information was adapted from:

Tye-Murray, Nancy. (1998). *Foundations of aural rehabilitation*. San Diego, CA: Singular Publishing Group, Inc.