



# FOR TEACHING

*From the desk of the Teaching and Learning Scholar*



At this point in time, you've likely experienced some of the challenges of 'masked teaching.' Masks are hard to wear for long periods of time, may muffle speech, decrease overall volume, and prevent students from seeing facial expressions (Whitaker, 2020). For this Teaching Tip, I've co-authored with Dr. Lori Nelson to share her expertise in speech therapy to address some of the most common challenges of speaking while wearing a mask.

The following are some suggestions you may wish to try.

- For proper protection, be sure that you are wearing your mask correctly, avoid touching your face, and be sure to remove the mask correctly (CDC, 2020; State of Michigan, n.d.).
- Select a face mask that fits well but allows your face to move.
- Make sure the mask does not get inhaled into your mouth while breathing. This may occur more with certain types of fabric masks.
- Fabric masks tend to absorb more sound per Bottalico as quoted in Healthline (n.d.) so you may want to try using disposable paper masks instead.
- N95 and KN95 are two of the most effective disposable masks for COVID-19 and the variants.
  - The University is supplying faculty and staff with two KN95 masks this semester.
  - To place your order, log into to [MyNMU](#), select the Employee Services tab, then go to Safety Department Services, click PPE ordering, scroll to bottom and fill in the requested information.
- At the beginning of class perform a sound check and periodically ask for feedback about your communication with classroom and remote students (ask for a thumbs up) (University of South Florida [USF], n.d.; Whitaker, 2020).
  - Use a desk microphone in classrooms and stay near it.
  - Face the class when speaking. If lecturing while writing on a board, keep in mind your voice cannot be projected as well to the students behind you.
- Raise your speech volume by using your diaphragm when breathing and try to speak more slowly if students are not understanding your speech (USF, n.d.; Whitaker, 2020).
- Make an effort to more clearly enunciate by exaggerating lip, jaw, and tongue movements (USF, n.d.)
- Emphasize your facial expressions and body language to assist in making your point (USF, n.d.; Whitaker, 2020).
- If English is not your primary language, try practicing difficult to pronounce words before class (USF, n.d.).
  - Faculty whose primary language is not English may seek assistance if desired by contacting the NMU Speech and Hearing Clinic Director: Diane Jandron ([dsavolai@nmu.edu](mailto:dsavolai@nmu.edu)).
  - The Speech and Hearing Clinic is located in 1504 West Science.

- Frequently check for students' understanding by asking them to raise hands or use poll features.
  - Rephrase students' questions instead of repeating what you just said.
  - If you cannot understand a question from an ESL student, ask them to rephrase it.
  - Ensure visual forms of your message are available to students in addition to your auditory message. For example, provide definitions of key terms on PowerPoint slides and share slides in electronic handouts (USF, n.d.).

In my next Teaching Tip, I'll discuss ways to keep your eye glasses from fogging while wearing a face mask. The Center for Teaching and Learning staff and I are available to assist with all of your teaching and instructional technology needs. Please call 227-2483 for an appointment or email [ctl@nmu.edu](mailto:ctl@nmu.edu). To review upcoming professional development offerings, visit the [CTL calendar](#). Feel free to contact me for any questions or concerns [ctlscholar@nmu.edu](mailto:ctlscholar@nmu.edu).

## References

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021, February 16). *Use masks to slow the spread of COVID-19*. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>

Healthline. (n.d.). *Why a surgical mask may be better than a fabric mask for teachers*.  
<https://www.healthline.com/health-news/why-a-surgical-mask-may-be-better-than-a-fabric-mask-for-teachers>

The State of Michigan. (n.d.). *Coronavirus: Mask-up. Mask right*. Retrieved February 21, 2021, from  
[https://www.michigan.gov/coronavirus/0,9753,7-406-100997\\_100998---,00.html](https://www.michigan.gov/coronavirus/0,9753,7-406-100997_100998---,00.html)

University of South Florida. (n.d.). *Teaching with face masks*. Academy for Teaching and Learning Excellence. <https://www.usf.edu/atle/teaching/teaching-with-masks.aspx>

Whitaker, J. (2020, August 17). *3 tips on teaching while wearing a mask*. News at Indiana University.  
<https://news.iu.edu/stories/2020/08/iupui/inside/17-tips-for-instructors-professors-teaching-with-masks.html>