

# The Meaning and Practice of Audism

## An audist attitude can be compared to other forms of discrimination

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Audism is a term used to describe a negative attitude toward deaf or hard of hearing people. It is typically thought of as a form of discrimination, prejudice, or a general lack of willingness to accommodate those who cannot hear. Those who hold these viewpoints are called audists and the oppressive attitudes can take on a variety of forms.

### Understanding Audism

The term *audism* was first coined by Tom Humphries in his 1977 doctoral dissertation titled "[Communicating Across Cultures \(Deaf-Hearing\) and Language Learning](#)." In it, Humphries defines it as, "The notion that one is superior based on one's ability to hear or to behave in the manner of one who hears."

Audism has been picked up at many other times over the years. Among those who have explored this attitude in great depth was Harlan Lane. His book, the "Mask of Benevolence: Disabling the Deaf Community," is primarily about audism. While Humphries took an individual approach to the idea of hearing privilege, Lane looked at the broader scope of communities and society as a whole.

The Gallaudet University Library offers a poignant quote from Lane. It reads, in part, "in short, audism is the hearing way of dominating, restructuring, and exercising authority over the deaf community. "

### Forms of Audism

Audism can be found in many different forms in various parts of society. It may affect someone's work, education, living circumstances, or simply be infused in casual conversation. Yet, it's also pointed out quite often that both hearing and deaf people can have audist attitudes.

Among the ways that audism can be witnessed are:

- The refusal or failure to use [sign language](#) in the presence of a sign language-dependent person, even though you know how to sign.
- Disparaging a deaf or hard of hearing person for a weakness in verbal language, even if they are strong in sign language.
- Insisting that deaf and hard of hearing people conform to the hearing community.

- An unwillingness to accommodate someone's auditory needs.
- Lowering expectations in regards to education or work abilities because they cannot hear.

It's also important to note that audism does not necessarily refer to people who may not be familiar with deaf culture. As the authors of [the Deaf Choice website](#) point out, if you are not familiar with the deaf community, you may not be expected to know all the finer "rules" established within it to be considered polite.

Instead, the audist label is used most often for those who do have knowledge of deaf culture but choose, for one reason or another, to ignore or defy it. As with any form of discrimination, the intent must be considered when discussing audism.

## **Audism and Deaf Culture**

The deaf community has a certain pride that is often defined by [deaf culture](#). Understandably, audism often makes its way into the conversations of that community. Just as you can find themes of racism or sexism in culture, you can find audist themes within deaf culture.

For instance, a number of people who have encountered audist attitudes have written about them in books, plays, poetry, and other venues. It is also a common topic for [deaf student](#) newspapers and researchers interested in the societal and cultural aspects of the community.

Likewise, organizations that advocate on behalf of the deaf community often take part in the fight against audism. The [Canadian Association for the Deaf](#) notes that audism occurs at all levels of society and finds it as unacceptable as any other form of bigotry. The [National Association of the Deaf](#) in the U.S. also includes "the elimination of audism, linguism, racism, and other forms of discrimination" in their statement on community values.

## **A Word From Verywell**

Audism is as real as any other form of discrimination and its impact can be felt just as deeply by deaf and hard of hearing people. It's a good idea for everyone to do their best to remain sensitive to the issue. Educating yourself about deaf culture is one way that you can help.

SITE: <https://www.verywellhealth.com/deaf-culture-audism-1046267>