

Goodness, where did that year go? It's 2019, and the second term of the teaching year has begun.

I hope you enjoyed your Christmas – and remembered to use your checking strategies? These are useful every day but particularly important when you're socialising. First – and most useful – is to ask a closed question, one with a simple yes or no answer. "Did you say to meet at nine o'clock?" "No, I said ten o'clock." Nine and ten look very similar on the lips, so it's a good example of something worth checking.

Other checking strategies include asking someone to repeat what they've said. If, after three repeats, you still haven't got it, then ask if they can rephrase it. Or you can try using gesture (such as clarifying a number by holding up however many fingers) and, if all else fails, asking the speaker to write down what you're not getting.

Lipreading is an inexact art; we can't just look at lips and read them like a book! We need to make use of facial expression, body language, context and knowledge of the subject before we can put two and two together. We also use our knowledge of the rhythm of language. English is a 'stresses'

language, and we know where those stresses are. Don't think that you'll be able to lipread what the Queen is saying to her family on the balcony of Buckingham Palace, and always, *a/ways* take any lipreading-interpreted items in the newspaper with a pinch of salt (they use a panel of lipreaders and, even then, it really can't be relied on as being accurate).

Lipreading is an inexact art; you can't read lips like a book

I was reminded of this, recently, when taking part in some research. To assess my lipreading skills, I was shown a face onscreen mouthing sentences, just once, with no expression, or context. It was impossible! This highlights a fundamental misunderstanding of lipreading. It's like assessing someone's reading ability by giving them a passage of text without any punctuation and about two-thirds of the letters missing; no one would ever see that as a fair test.

In a Lipreading and Managing Hearing Loss class, we teach you the shapes that are easy to see

(like f and v), and those that are less easy, like s, k, and g. We'll help you to 'read' the face (such as raised eyebrow and slight tilt of the head for a question), and put all those things together, along with what questions to ask to give you context, like: "What are we talking about?". Your lipreading will improve, and so will your confidence.

As part of the Managing Hearing Loss class, we'll discuss audiograms and what they reveal, so you can keep an eye on the status of your hearing loss. We'll look at devices that can help, particularly as new and developing technology is such a rapidly evolving field. Finally, we can help you source useful organisations, including where and how to get the right communication support if you need it. So, remember, it's not just about lipreading – it's an all-round course to help you make the most of the hearing you have, in the most effective way. Joining a class could be the best New Year's resolution you'll ever make.

Go to ATLA's (Association of Teachers of Lipreading to Adults) website for details of free taster sessions and to find a lipreading class near you: atlalipreading.org.uk

Molly Berry, lipreading tutor and Chair of ATLA, would like a word...

MORE
than lipservice

