

# YOU CAN GO TO THE MOVIES WHEN YOU HAVE HEARING LOSS

By Shari Eberts

GOING TO THE MOVIES CAN BE CHALLENGING FOR PEOPLE WITH HEARING loss. The soundtrack is often deafeningly loud but the dialogue is too soft, making it hard to follow the plot. You can't really ask the actors to repeat themselves, and your companions get annoyed when you ask "What did he say?" a hundred times during the film. I have a hearing loss, and perhaps not surprisingly, my family rarely went to the movies, waiting for the new releases to become available for home use where we could watch them with captions.

But recently my son has been asking to go to the movie theater. He is getting older and wants to enjoy his favorite action flicks, such as the latest "Star Wars" movie, on the big screen. Who can blame him?

I didn't want to miss out on the experience (and I do love a big-screen "Star Wars" movie myself), so I experimented and found a way to enjoy going to the movies again. It has become a regular Sunday afternoon activity for our family.

There are two important elements: noise-canceling headphones to block out the overly loud soundtrack, and caption readers to enhance the dialogue.

## Noise-Canceling Headphones

I love my noise-canceling headphones and use them often when I travel on airplanes, at concerts, and even at Disney World. They not only help protect my ears, but also help me cope with situations that I find disturbingly loud, even if the decibel level is within normal limits.

At the movies they work great! They not only ratchet down the volume, but when I use the noise-canceling feature, the background noise recedes and the dialogue is much easier to understand. This works well at loud Broadway shows too, where the music can sometimes overpower the voices.

In the case of the latest "Star Wars," a small flick of the noise-canceling switch and I was able to hear the rebels' calls for help over the diminished roar of the Empire's fighter planes. Excellent.

## Caption Readers

Many movie theaters already offer caption readers, ahead of new U.S. Department of Justice legislation to require them (see "New Captioning Rules for the Big Screen," far right), and in my experience most of the time they work quite well. There are two basic types of caption readers that I have seen. The most common I've encountered is Dolby CaptiView, which according to its website "consists of a small OLED display on a bendable support arm that fits into a theater seat cup holder."

The screen is small, but the captions are clear and easy to read. Built-in privacy visors prevent the captions from bothering those seated around you.

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The adjustable arm lets you position the viewer anywhere you like. I try to center it at the bottom of the screen like my closed captions at home. The captions often work for the previews, but not for the ads.

The second type is Sony Access glasses. I have only used these once, and the captions were blurry so I could not read them. I should have exchanged them for a different pair, but they felt so heavy on my face, I wasn't sure I wanted to wear them anyway. Other people I know use them frequently with success, so I may need to give them another try.

A website called captionfish.com easily finds theaters with captioning for you. Enter your location and you can then search by theater or movie times. Or simply ask your local theater—with perhaps a gentle reminder about the new compliance rules that should be in place by next year's summer movie season. —



The former chair of HHF's board of directors, Shari Eberts is the founder of livingwithhearingloss.com, where this originally appeared, and sits on the board of the Hearing Loss Association of America.

## Loops in New York City's Public Spaces

New York City may be the first major city to pass legislation requiring hearing loop technology in public spaces. According to the bill, public assembly areas that are being constructed or renovated using city funds must install hearing loop technology.

A hearing induction loop uses wires connected to a sound system and looped around (surrounding or crisscrossing) a room to transmit sound electromagnetically to telecoils in hearing aids and cochlear implants. This allows hearing device users to hear announcements and music directly and clearly, without interfering background noise, and already optimized to their hearing.

"Hearing loop technology makes such a radical difference in the ability of so many to participate fully in public life, and I'm proud that as a city we have moved to making it not just a priority but a requirement in our public investments," says the bill's sponsor, New York City Council Member Helen Rosenthal of Manhattan. It is estimated it will affect nearly 300 projects in the city.

## New Captioning Rules for the Big Screen

The U.S. Department of Justice issued new rules, effective in January 2017, for movie theaters to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act by providing closed captioning for movies. Movie theaters must provide captioning and alert the public that they have the equipment and staff to assist in using it. This only applies to theaters that show movies in a digital format, and these theaters have until June 2018 to come into compliance. In addition, the theaters must stock a minimum number of captioning devices based on how many screens they have, ranging from four devices for one screen to 12 devices for 16 or more screens.

For references, see [hhf.org/summer2017-references](http://hhf.org/summer2017-references).

## Share your story:

Have you tried captioning technology during movies or hearing loops in entertainment venues? Tell us at [editor@hearinghealthmag.com](mailto:editor@hearinghealthmag.com).

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