

# How to Enjoy the Movies or Live Theater with Hearing Loss

By Shari Eberts

People with hearing loss are often nervous about going to the movies. They fear they won't be able to understand the dialogue over the booming soundtrack, so they often wait for a film's digital copy that they can watch in the privacy of their own home with the captions on. The same goes for attending live theater. With theater ticket prices on the rise, some people with hearing loss wonder why they should risk spending money on a show they might not understand.

But times are changing. Most movie theaters now provide free captioning devices, and many live entertainment theaters, particularly on Broadway, are improving the hearing access of patrons with hearing difficulties. So, note these tips to enjoy movies and theater shows to the fullest.

- Movie theaters frequently offer free captioning devices.

Find theaters with caption readers at [CaptionFish.com](http://CaptionFish.com). Enter your location to search by theater or movie times, or simply ask at your local theater. Most large chains now offer caption devices for all shows. Go to the information booth or concessions stand to borrow one and return it at the end of the movie.

Most caption devices have an OLED display attached to an adjustable support arm that fits into the cup holder of your seat. The screen is small, but the captions are clear. Privacy-visors prevent the captions from bothering others while the bendable arm lets you position the captions in a spot that works for you. Some movie theaters offer captioned glasses that display the captions in the front of you as you watch the movie.

Be sure the device works before the movie begins. Most previews are now captioned, which is a good way to test if the captions are legible and the flexible arm is rigid enough to keep the screen in place. Arrive early so you have time to exchange a broken device for a new one before the movie starts. Inform the manager when there is a problem with a device so it can be fixed for the next user.

- Live theater is expanding its accessibility options.

At live performances, there are many options for hearing enhancement. An infrared headset is the most common



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assistive device. Some theaters often offer FM systems as well. With these, you connect either by plugging in headphones or linking directly to your hearing aid via the telecoil setting. You may need to line up to get these devices so plan on arriving at the venue early.

Newer technologies like hearing loops are growing in popularity because of the excellent sound quality. It also allows people with t-coil-enabled hearing aid or cochlear implant to tap into the loop directly. No other device is required.

If you don't have a t-coil enabled aid, explore hearing loop receiver earphones that can be used to tap into a hearing loop. You will probably need to remove your hearing aids to use these earphones.

Captioning options are also becoming more common in live theater. Open captioned shows are spectacular, but limited to specific performances during a production's run. Open captioning provides real-time captioning in sync with the live action. Captions appear on a display board usually located at one side of the stage. To see captioned performance schedules, visit the website of the non-profit group, TDF ([www.tdf.org](http://www.tdf.org)).

Another innovation in captioning is GalaPro, a smartphone app that provides captioning for any performance of a Broadway show after the first four weeks of the run. The captions are displayed on your phone rather than on a screen next to the stage, so be sure to charge your phone's battery in advance. The captions are not real-time as with an open captioned performance, but are preset to display using lighting cues. Reported synchronicity is 95 percent. New delivery methods including glasses and better options for holding the phone for easier viewing are currently being explored.

With so many choices available, people with hearing loss no longer need to avoid the movies or live theater performances. 



**Ms. Eberts** is a hearing health advocate, writer, and avid Bikram yogi. She serves on the board of trustees of the Hearing Loss Association of America. She has an adult-onset genetic hearing loss and shares her story in her blog, [LivingWithHearingLoss.com](http://LivingWithHearingLoss.com).