

Background

Speech-to-Speech (STS) is one form of Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS). TRS is a service that allows persons with hearing and speech disabilities to access the telephone system to place and receive telephone calls. STS enables persons with a speech disability to make telephone calls using their own voice (or an assistive voice device). Like all forms of TRS, STS uses specially trained operators – called Communications Assistants (CAs) – to relay the conversation back and forth between the person with the speech disability and the other party to the call. STS CAs are specially trained in understanding a variety of speech disorders, which enables them to repeat what the caller says in a manner that makes the caller's words clear and understandable to the called party.

Who Uses STS

Often people with speech disabilities cannot communicate by telephone because the parties they are calling cannot understand their speech. People with cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, Parkinson's disease, and those who are coping with limitations from a stroke or traumatic brain injury may have speech disabilities. People who stutter or have had a laryngectomy may also have difficulty being understood. In general, anyone with a speech disability or anyone who wishes to call someone with a speech disability can use STS.

Using STS

A special phone is not needed for STS. You simply call the relay center by dialing 711, and indicate you wish to make an STS call. You are then connected to an STS CA who will repeat your spoken words, making the spoken words clear to the other party. Persons with speech disabilities may also receive STS calls.

The calling party calls the relay center by dialing 711 or some other number and asks the CA to call the person with a speech disability.

Alternatives

Persons with speech disabilities may use a TTY to make a TRS call, but many such people have some type of physical limitation that makes typing into a text input device difficult. STS offers an alternative to a TTY or other text input device when the only other option would be not to communicate via telephone at all. Some STS providers also offer STS service for Spanish to Spanish callers.

Mandatory Minimum Standards for STS

The FCC imposes mandatory minimum standards on providers of all forms of TRS, such as ensuring user confidentiality, making service available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and answering 85 percent of calls within 10 seconds. The FCC also imposes certain additional requirements on STS providers. For example, STS CAs must remain with a call for a minimum of 15 minutes. In addition:

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Mandatory Minimum Standards for STS (cont'd.)

- An STS CA may, at the request of the user, retain information from a particular call in order to facilitate the completion of consecutive calls. The user may ask the TRS CA to retain such information, or the CA may ask the user if he or she wants the CA to repeat the same information during subsequent calls. The STS CA may retain the information only for as long as it takes to complete the subsequent calls.
- STS providers must offer STS users the option to maintain at the relay center a list of names and telephone numbers that the STS user commonly calls. When the STS user requests one of these names, the CA must repeat the name and state the telephone number to the STS user. This information must be transferred to any new STS provider.

For further information on the TRS mandatory minimum standards, and other types of TRS in addition to STS, go to

www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/trs.html.

Filing a Complaint with the FCC

If you have a problem with STS Relay Service, first try to resolve it with the provider. If you are unable to resolve it directly, you can file a complaint with the FCC. There is no charge for filing a complaint. You can file your complaint using the on-line complaint Form 2000C found on the FCC Web site at

www.fcc.gov/cgb/complaints.html. You can also file your complaint with the FCC's Consumer Center by e-mailing fccinfo@fcc.gov; calling 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice or 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY; faxing 1-866-418-0232; or writing to:

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20554.

What to Include in Your Complaint

The best way to provide all the information the FCC needs to process your complaint is to complete fully the on-line complaint Form 2000C. If you do not use the on-line complaint Form 2000C, your complaint, at a minimum, should indicate:

- your name, address, e-mail address, and phone number where you can be reached;
- whether you are filing a complaint on behalf of another party, and if so, the party's name, address, email address, day time phone number, and your relationship to the party;
- preferred format or method of response (letter, fax, voice phone call, email, TRS, TTY, ASCII text, audio recording, or Braille);
- that your complaint is about TRS;
- the name, address, and telephone number (if known) of the company or companies involved with your complaint; and
- a brief description of your complaint and the resolution you are seeking, and a full description of the equipment or service you are complaining about, including date of purchase, use, or attempt to use.

For More Information

For more information about STS Relay Service or TRS, or to learn more about FCC programs to promote access to telecommunications services for people with disabilities, visit the FCC's Disability Rights Office Web site at www.fcc.gov/cgb/dro. For information about other telecommunications issues, visit the FCC's Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau Web site at www.fcc.gov/cgb, or contact the FCC's Consumer Center using the information provided for filing a complaint.



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For this or any other consumer publication in an alternative format (electronic ASCII text, Braille, large print, or audio), please write or call us at the address or phone number below, or send an e-mail to FCC504@fcc.gov.

To receive information on this and other FCC consumer topics through the Commission's electronic subscriber service, click on www.fcc.gov/cgb/contacts/.

This fact sheet is for consumer education purposes only and is not intended to affect any proceeding or cases involving this subject matter or related issues.

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