



Consumer Guide

Telecommunications Relay Service

Telecommunications Relay Service is a telephone service that allows persons with hearing or speech disabilities to place and receive telephone calls. TRS is available in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. territories for local and/or long distance calls. TRS providers – generally telephone companies – are compensated for the costs of providing TRS from either a state or a federal fund. There is no cost to the TRS user.

How does TRS work?

TRS uses operators, called communications assistants (CAs), to facilitate telephone calls between people with hearing and speech disabilities and other individuals. A TRS call may be initiated by either a person with a hearing or speech disability, or a person without such disability. When a person with a hearing or speech disability initiates a TRS call, the person uses a teletypewriter (TTY) or other text input device to call the TRS relay center, and gives a CA the number of the party that he or she wants to call. The CA places an outbound traditional voice call to that person, then serves as a link for the call, relaying the text of the calling party in voice to the called party, and converting to text what the called party voices back to the calling party.

What forms of TRS are available?

There are several forms of TRS, depending on the particular needs of the user and the equipment available:

Text-to-Voice TTY-based TRS is a "traditional" TRS service using a TTY to call the CA at the relay center. TTYs have a keyboard and allow people to type their telephone conversations. The text is read on a display screen and/or a paper printout. A TTY user calls a TRS relay center and types the number of the person he or she wishes to call. The CA at the relay center then makes a voice telephone call to the other party to the call, and relays the call back and forth between the parties by speaking what a text user types, and typing what a voice telephone user speaks.

Voice Carry Over allows a person with a hearing disability, but who wants to use his or her own voice, to speak directly to the called party and receive responses in text from the CA. No typing is required by the calling party. This service is particularly useful to senior citizens who have lost their hearing, but who can still speak.

Hearing Carry Over allows a person with a speech disability, but who wants to use his/her own hearing, to listen to the called party and type his/her part of the conversation on a TTY. The CA reads these words to the called party, and the caller hears responses directly from the called party.

Speech-to-Speech Relay Service is used by a person with a speech disability. A CA (who is specially trained in understanding a variety of speech disorders) repeats what the caller says in a manner that makes the caller's words clear and understandable to the called party. No special telephone is needed.

Shared Non-English Language Relay Services - Due to the large number of Spanish speakers in the United States, the FCC requires interstate TRS providers to offer Spanish-to-Spanish traditional TRS. Although Spanish language relay is not required for intrastate (within a state) TRS, many states with large numbers of Spanish speakers offer this service on a voluntary basis. The FCC also allows TRS providers who voluntarily offer other shared non-English language interstate TRS, such as French-to-French, to be compensated from the federal TRS fund.

Captioned Telephone Service is used by persons with a hearing disability but some residual hearing. It uses a special telephone that has a text screen to display captions of what the other party to the



conversation is saying. A captioned telephone allows the user, on one line, to speak to the called party and to simultaneously listen to the other party and read captions of what the other party is saying. There is a “two-line” version of captioned telephone service that offers additional features, such as call-waiting, *69, call forwarding, and direct dialing for 911 emergency service. Unlike traditional TRS (where the CA types what the called party says), the CA repeats or re-voices what the called party says. Speech recognition technology automatically transcribes the CA’s voice into text, which is then transmitted directly to the user’s captioned telephone text display.

IP Captioned Telephone Service combines elements of captioned telephone service and IP Relay. IP captioned telephone service can be provided in a variety of ways, but uses the Internet – rather than the telephone network – to provide the link and captions between the caller with a hearing disability and the CA. It allows the user to simultaneously both listen to, and read the text of, what the other party in a telephone conversation is saying. IP captioned telephone service can be used with an existing voice telephone and a computer or other Web-enabled device without requiring any specialized equipment. For more information regarding IP captioned telephone service, visit <https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov/hc/en-us/articles/203515890-IP-Relay-Service>.

Internet Protocol Relay Service is a text-based form of TRS that uses the Internet, rather than traditional telephone lines, for the leg of the call between the person with a hearing or speech disability and the CA. Otherwise, the call is generally handled just like a TTY-based TRS call. The user may use a computer or other web-enabled device to communicate with the CA. IP Relay is not required by the FCC, but is offered by several TRS providers. For more information regarding IP Relay visit <https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov/hc/en-us/articles/203515890-IP-Relay-Service>.

Video Relay Service (VRS) – This Internet-based form of TRS allows persons whose primary language is American Sign Language to communicate with the CA in ASL using video conferencing equipment. The CA speaks what is signed to the called party, and signs the called party’s response back to the caller. VRS is not required by the FCC, but is offered by several TRS providers. VRS allows conversations to flow in near real time and in a faster and more natural manner than text-based TRS. Beginning January 1, 2006, TRS providers that offer VRS must provide it 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and must answer incoming calls within a specific period of time so that VRS users do not have to wait for a long time. For more information regarding VRS visit www.fcc.gov/guides/video-relay-services.

711 Access to TRS

Just as you can call 411 for information, you can dial 711 to connect to certain forms of TRS anywhere in the United States. Dialing 711 makes it easier for travelers to use TRS because they do not have to remember TRS numbers in every state. Because of technological limitations, however, 711 access is not available for the Internet-based forms of TRS (VRS and IP Relay).

For more information regarding 711, visit www.fcc.gov/guides/711-telecommunications-relay-service.

Mandatory minimum standards for TRS

TRS providers must offer service that meets certain mandatory minimum standards set by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). These include:

- The CA answering or placing a TRS call must stay with the call for a minimum of 10 minutes to avoid disruptions to the TRS user (15 minutes for STS calls);
- Most forms of TRS must be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week;
- TRS providers must answer 85 percent of all calls within 10 seconds (but there are different answer speed rules for VRS);
- TRS providers must make best efforts to accommodate a TRS user's requested CA gender;



- CAs are prohibited from intentionally altering or disclosing the content of a relayed conversation and generally must relay all conversation verbatim unless the user specifically requests summarization;
- TRS providers must ensure user confidentiality and CA's (with a limited exception for STS) may not keep records of the contents of any conversation;
- The conversation must be relayed in real time;
- CAs must provide a minimum typing speed for text-based calls and VRS CAs must be qualified interpreters;
- For most forms of TRS, the provider must be able to handle emergency (911) calls and relay them to the appropriate emergency services;
- Emergency call handling procedures have been established for all kinds of TRS.

Users of Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) service, also can access relay services by dialing 711.

Don't hang up!

Some people hang up on TRS calls because they think the CA is a telemarketer. If you hear, "Hello. This is the relay service..." when you pick up the phone, please don't hang up! You are about to talk, through a TRS provider, to a person who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, or has a speech disability.

Filing a complaint

You have multiple options for filing a complaint with the FCC:

- File a complaint online at <https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov>
- By phone: 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322); TTY: 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322)
- By mail (please include your name, address, contact information and as much detail about your complaint as possible):

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20554

For more information

For more information about FCC programs to promote access to telecommunications services for people with disabilities, visit the FCC's Disability Rights Office website at www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/disability-rights-office.

Accessible formats

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