

# *Communication Accommodation-* Best Practices for Arizona Law Enforcement



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA  
Police  
Department



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA  
SALT Center



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# What is a “Communication Accommodation”?

A communication accommodation is a voluntary flag in MVD records for individuals with developmental or acquired disabilities that may affect communication.

## **Who it applies to:**

Any Arizona resident with a disability that may impact verbal/nonverbal communication.

## **Examples of conditions that affect communication:**

Autism, hearing loss, traumatic brain injury, aphasia, PTSD, or other conditions.

## **How it works:**

- **Vehicle records:** When you run a plate/VIN, the return shows “Communication Accommodation.”
- **Driver/ID records:** When you run an ID/license, the return shows “Communication Accommodation.”
- **Visibility:** Only appears in law enforcement returns (not printed on licenses or IDs).
- **Voluntary & Free:** Can be added/removed via AZMVDNow.gov or at an MVD office.

# Recognition: What you may *observe*

## Digital Return:

“Communication Accommodation” in plate/driver query.

## In-Person Signs:

- Slow or slurred speech (may be related to stroke, brain injury, or nervousness).
- May not use spoken communication (i.e., not speaking).
- Limited eye contact and delayed responses.
- Repetitive movements such as rocking, tapping, hand-flapping, or pacing, these may be calming behaviors, *not* signs of aggression.
- Tone of voice may sound flat, monotone, or robotic.
- Facial expressions may appear reduced or mismatched with emotion.
- Speech differences such as stuttering, repeating words, or short phrases (e.g., “Going home. Here license.”).
- Standing unusually close or far away when outside the vehicle, often related to sensory or spatial differences.
- Use of other ways to communicate, such as tablets, picture symbols, written notes, or sign language.

# Examples of speech-generating devices:



## Recognize Communication Differences (before you assume impairment):

- Not all speech patterns indicate intoxication or noncompliance.
- Slow, slurred, or unusual speech can result from:
  - Neurological conditions (e.g., stroke, traumatic brain injury, Parkinson's disease)
  - Developmental disabilities (e.g., autism, cerebral palsy)
  - Hearing loss or use of communication devices

### Tips:

- If you notice slow, slurred, or unusual speech, calmly verify understanding instead of assuming impairment:
  - "I want to make sure I understand you, can you say that again or point if it's easier?"

# Response: Best Practices

## **Slow Down:**

- Slow your rate of speech by about 30% to allow for slower processing.
- Use short sentences (5–7 words).
- Pause 5-10 seconds before repeating instructions or questions.
- Avoid rushing through instructions.

## **Example:**

- Instead of: “Step out of the vehicle and walk toward me.”
  - Say: “Please step out... stop by the door... good.”
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## **Allow Processing Time:**

- There may be delays of 5–10 seconds.
- Do not interpret silence as defiance.
- Repeat calmly if needed.

## **Example:**

- If the person looks away or doesn't respond immediately, wait, then say:
  - “I'll ask again, please hand me your license.”
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## **Simplify Language - Avoid technical words:**

- Use plain, literal language.
- Avoid police or legal terms like “proceed,” “subject,” or “apprehend.”
- Look directly at the face of the driver

## **Example:**

- Instead of: “Exit the vehicle and proceed to the rear.”
- Say: “Please step out. Walk to the back of your car.”

# Response: Best Practices

## Offer Options:

- Give the driver two clear choices to support decision-making and reduce anxiety and confusion.

## Examples:

- “Is your license in your wallet or the glove box?”
  - “Do you want to answer out loud or write it down?”
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## Confirm Understanding:

- Ask simple check-back questions to ensure your message was received.

## Examples:

- “What will you do while I go back to my vehicle?”
  - “Can you tell me where you’re going to wait?”
  - “Can you repeat back what I said?”
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## Acknowledge the Accommodation:

- Say out loud: “I understand you requested a communication accommodation.”

## Ask how to help:

- “Is there anything I can do to make this easier to understand?”
- Show calm and patience. Non-verbal reassurance (steady tone, relaxed stance) goes a long way.

# Response: Best Practices

## Stay Flexible and Patient:

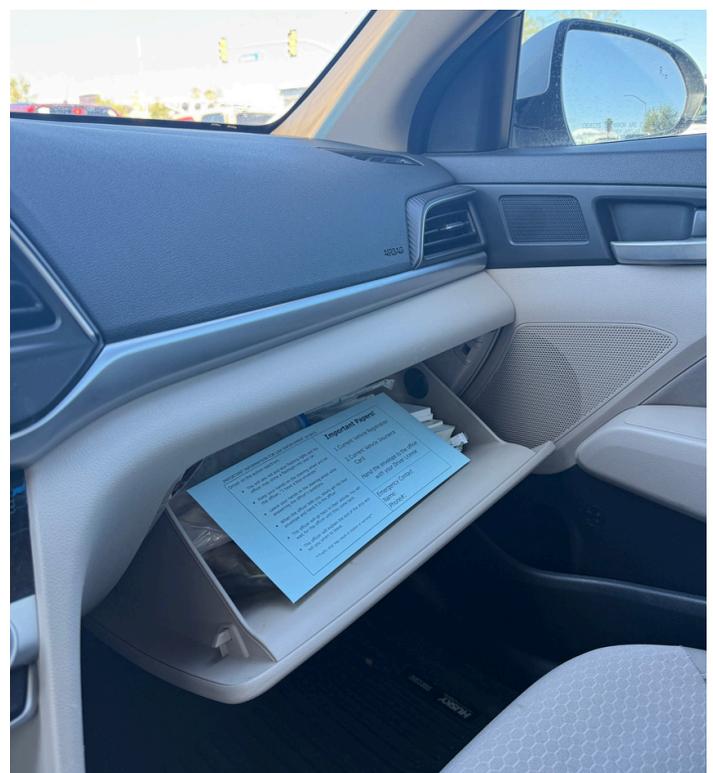
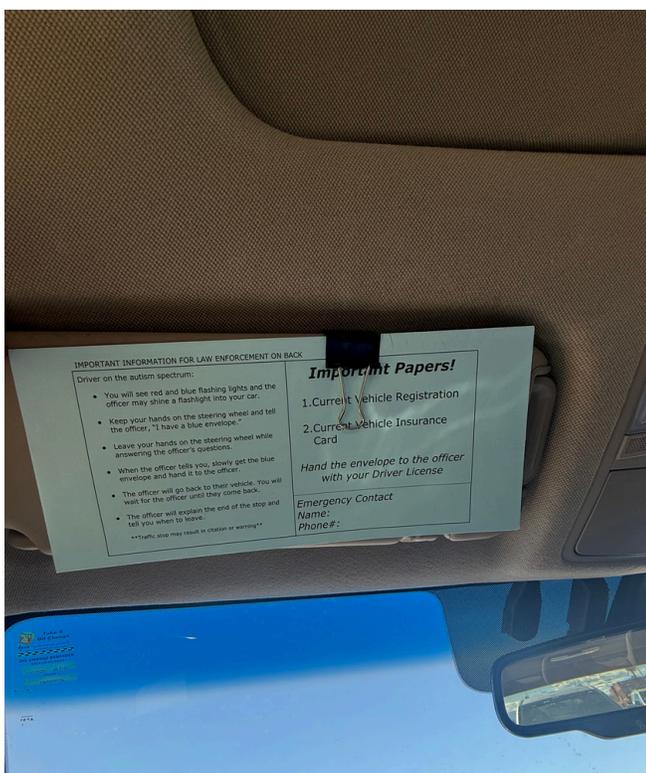
- Unusual behavior (e.g., avoiding eye contact, fidgeting, repeating words, not answering) may be disability-related, *not resistance*.
- Maintain standard safety procedures, but adapt communication.

## Examples:

- If the person covers their ears, turn sirens off or move to a quieter spot.
- If they're visibly anxious, speak slower and reduce rapid movement.
- If they hand you a Blue Envelope or accommodation card, use it to guide the interaction.
  - **More info on the Blue Envelope:** <https://azdot.gov/mvd/driver-services/blue-envelope-program-for-autistic-drivers>

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## Places the Blue Envelope can be stored:



# *What to Expect in a Traffic Stop-*

## **Visual Support for Drivers:**



### **The officer will:**

1. Tell you why they stopped you.
2. Ask for your license, registration, and insurance.
  - They may ask you to get out of your car.
3. Go back to their car, stay in your car and wait.
4. Come back to your car once they finish checking your information.
5. Tell you when you can leave.

### **During the stop, the officer will also:**

- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Use short, simple sentences.
- Give you extra time to answer (that's okay!).
- Stay calm and patient.
- Accept your way of communicating.

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### **You can:**

- Speak, point, or gesture.
- Write or type on your phone or device.
- Use pictures, symbols, or sign language.
- Keep this card with your registration and insurance.

### **Helpful phrases you can point to or say:**

- "Please talk slowly."
- "I need time to think."
- "Can I write it down?"
- "Please say it again."

### **Remember:**

- You have the right to communicate in the way that works best for you.
- Take your time, you don't have to rush your answers.
- The officer's goal is to help you stay safe, calm, and understood.



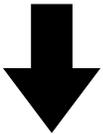
# *What to Expect in a Traffic Stop-* **Visual Support for Drivers:**



Pull over to a safe spot



Stay in your car



Put the window down and keep your hands visible



Hand over license, registration, and insurance



Wait in your car



The officer will come back



You may get a warning or ticket



Officer will tell you when you can leave