



**Nick Oliver**  
Writer

**The recent announcement, that Sandi Toksvig was stepping down from hosting *The News Quiz* on BBC Radio 4, had me recalling the time I was fortunate enough to land a guest-writer slot on the show a couple of years ago.**

I needed to organise a lipspeaker for communication support at the writers' meetings and eventually managed to do so, having jumped through all the hoops of the Access to Work scheme.

My experiences of requesting, and using, the services of a lipspeaker had not, up to this point, been a resounding success. Years earlier I'd done a writing course at a college, which arranged its own lipspeaker. This turned out to be a chap who was okay but always seemed to be on holiday; and a few replacements, including a woman who looked like Noddy Holder from the pop group Slade.

It's always difficult getting used to lipreading someone new, but far more so if you get totally distracted and find yourself spending most of the lesson trying to remember the lyrics to *Cum On Feel The Noize*.

More recently, I applied to volunteer in the media department at the 2012 London Olympics and duly received an email inviting me to an interview. I mentioned to the person dealing with my application that I'd need a lipspeaker and received a reply stating that:

"We don't actually provide lipspeakers but I will ask the person interviewing you to talk clearly".

This somewhat 'laid-back' attitude to the importance of



The replacement looked like Noddy Holder from Slade

communication support surprised me. If I was a British Sign Language user, and had requested a BSL interpreter, perhaps I would've received an email saying "We don't actually provide BSL interpreters, but we've got a bloke who's quite good at Charades." As it transpired, I ended up withdrawing my application for other reasons, and I've since discovered the information I was given was incorrect and lipspeakers were, indeed, used during interviews.

My stint at the BBC went much more smoothly. The lipspeaker I booked was fantastic, very reliable, and even helpfully popped out at lunchtime to get me a nice sandwich, which, with writing deadlines looming mid-afternoon, allowed me to continue working. According to the packaging, the sandwich - cheese and tomato - consisted of a 'new recipe'. I couldn't help wondering just what exactly the old recipe for this cheese and tomato sandwich was, but one would hope bread, cheese and tomato featured prominently.

Would I recommend using a lipspeaker? Definitely. If possible, try and meet before starting work, to discuss things and to get familiar with their mouth movements and working methods. And, whatever you do, banish all thoughts of 1970s glam-rock bands.

**Nick also writes under the name Nick Vincent - to find out more about his work, see [www.nickvincent.moonfruit.com](http://www.nickvincent.moonfruit.com) and follow him on Twitter @nickvincent\_uk**