



The Helm

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When should I get an interpreter?

Interpreters facilitate communication between hearing and Deaf individuals during public tours, public hearings and other group situations such as meetings or presentations, or whenever communicating with a Deaf individual about detailed, lengthy, or complex information.

What is the role of the interpreter?

An interpreter's role is strictly that of a communication "tool." It is the responsibility of an interpreter to relay communication between two parties via sign language and voice. Interpreters sign everything that is said and say everything that is signed. Per the Code of Ethics for interpreters, the interpreter is not permitted to voice personal opinions or enter the conversation.

Where do I go to get an interpreter?

Check your area for agencies that "broker" interpreters. This can be a more efficient way to find an interpreter. The agencies can match interpreter skills to the particular assignment and individual who has requested an interpreter. You may also establish your own list of interpreters and contact them directly.

What information do I need to give to the interpreter service?

- Date, time, location and expected length of the assignment.
- Type of situation (public tour, health services, legal proceedings, highly technical language, etc.).
- Names of interpreters with whom the Deaf or Deaf-Blind individual prefers to work (Many Deaf and Deaf-Blind individuals prefer to work with specific interpreters, based on their different skills and individual communication needs.)
- Particular communication needs the Deaf individual has noted, e.g., American Sign Language (ASL), Pidgin Signed English (PSE), or Signed Exact English (SEE). Others may prefer an oral interpreter. Also, it is important to consider that some Deaf-Blind individuals prefer a "tactile interpreter." Simply ask the Deaf or Deaf-Blind individual.

The interpreter service will seek to match the skills of the interpreter with the requirements of the situation.

When do I need to get two interpreters?

If a meeting or event will last more than an hour and a half, it is recommended to have two interpreters. It is difficult to interpret for more than an hour and a half. If the meeting, class, or lecture will take longer, two interpreters will work on a rotating basis. Interpreters rotate every 15-20 minutes in order to remain fresh and provide effective, accurate communication.

How much will it cost to have an interpreter?

Fees can vary dependent upon the type of interpreting required (office meeting, legal proceedings, or

medical appointment) and the interpreter's certification level and experience. Fees are hourly, but some interpreters may have a 2-hour minimum charge. In addition, mileage, travel time, and parking costs may be charged. Fees should be agreed upon by you and the interpreter or referral service before the service is performed; fees should not be discussed with the Deaf person.

How do I alert customers and clients that interpreter services are available?

If you have arranged to have sign language interpreters at a public meeting or hearing, or other public event, you can display the following symbol on your meeting notice or event flyer:

[Available on-line: www.gag.org/resources/das.php]



Because it can take some time to make arrangements for interpreters, you will need to know ahead of time if interpreters are needed. For a public meeting or event, you may include a statement on your notice or flyer such as "Sign language interpreters will be provided upon advance request. Please contact us at least two weeks before this event." [Note: If an individual misses a deadline given, you must still make an effort to get an interpreter, and often will be successful even with short notice.]

Working with an Interpreter: Some Tips

Before the meeting starts, it is helpful to meet with the interpreter to explain what will be covered. Provide the interpreter with copies of the agenda and/or other print materials for review and to follow as the meeting progresses. Ask the interpreter about any additional needs, such as a glass of water, a straight back chair, etc.

When setting up at the beginning of the meeting, the interpreter and Deaf or Deaf-Blind individual will work with you to figure out the best positioning for each of you to ensure effective and comfortable communication.

Treat the interpreter as a professional. Introduce the interpreter to the group and explain why he/she is attending. The interpreter should be given the same privileges as the other group members, for example, lunch or other meals provided.

Speak directly to the Deaf or Deaf-Blind person, not the interpreter, when using the interpreter to communicate with a Deaf or Deaf-Blind person. For example, say "Do you have anything you would like to add?" rather than "Does he/she have anything to add?"

Speak clearly, in a normal tone, and at a normal pace. If there is a problem with keeping up, the interpreter or the Deaf /Deaf-Blind person may ask the speaker to slow down or repeat a word or sentence for clarification.

Direct eye contact. While direct eye contact is valued particularly in one-to-one meetings, direct eye contact on the part of the Deaf/Deaf-Blind individual is not always possible as the individual will need to watch as the interpreter signs.

Remember that the interpreter is a few words behind the speaker. Give the interpreter time to finish so that the Deaf/Deaf-Blind person can ask questions or join the discussion.

Permit only one person to speak at a time during group discussions. It is difficult for an interpreter to follow several people speaking at once. Ask for a brief pause between speakers to permit the interpreter to finish before the next speaker starts. It can be helpful to ask people to raise their hands and wait to speak after they have been recognized. Also, if a Deaf-Blind individual is at the meeting or event, it is appropriate etiquette for effective communication for each participant to state her or his name before speaking so the Deaf-Blind individual knows who is talking.

Schedule breaks during the meeting. Following a sign language or oral interpreter for a long time is tiring for a Deaf/Deaf-Blind person and for the interpreter. Talk with the interpreter about when to take periodic, brief breaks.

Provide good lighting for the interpreter. If the interpreting situation requires darkening the room to view slides, videotapes, or films, auxiliary lighting is necessary so that the Deaf/Deaf-Blind person can see the interpreter. If a small lamp or spotlight cannot be obtained, check to see if room lights can be dimmed but still provide enough light to see the interpreter.

If it is a lecture or large group setting, solid color backgrounds are helpful for platform interpreting.

As a final courtesy, thank the interpreter after the service has been performed. If there have been any problems or misunderstandings, let the interpreter or referral service know. Also, ask the Deaf/Deaf-Blind person if the service was satisfactory. It is a polite gesture to inform the referral service of your satisfaction with the interpreter.

One Last Note ...

American Sign Language (ASL) is a language in its own right, with its own grammar, syntax and structure which includes using body and facial expression. It is important to realize that you are dealing with two different languages and that it may be necessary to rephrase or repeat your point. Examples are helpful to use for clarification.

Some information in this handout is based on excerpts from the following:
Through an Interpreter, Rochester Institute of Technology and the U.S. Department of Education
Use of Interpreters, Abused Deaf Women's Advocacy Service (ADWAS)

<http://www.metrokc.gov/dias/ocre/c-interp.htm>