

When do I need to hire a team of interpreters?

The answer to this question is not as simple as it may seem. There are many factors that influence how long one interpreter can interpret without experiencing a degree of mental and physical fatigue that increases the rate of interpreter errors and the risk of repetitive stress injuries.

According to the Standard Practice Paper published by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) titled “Team Interpreting”:

“The decision to use a team rather than an individual is based on a number of factors, including, but not limited to:

- length and/or complexity of the assignment,
- unique needs of the persons being served,
- physical and emotional dynamics of the setting,
- avoidance of repetitive stress injuries (RSIs) for interpreters.”

It is recommended that any class that is longer than one hour be considered for a team. There are some class situations that are longer than one hour that may be handled by one interpreter. These may include a three-hour computer lab class that consists of brief lectures using the remainder of the time on independent computer work. Another class may only be one hour, such as Public Speaking, where students routinely give presentations one after another that would require two interpreters. Whether to provide a team or not should be considered on a case-by-case basis looking at all of the factors.

Providing a team of interpreters when the situation requires is cost effective, especially when you consider the impact on the retention of skilled interpreters, the quality of the interpreting services, the possibility of repetitive stress injuries, and/or worker’s compensation lawsuits.

Additional information can be found on the following links:

NETAC Tipsheet: Interpreting. (pdf document)

NETAC Tipsheet: Interpreting and Biomechanics (pdf document)

NETAC Tipsheet: Hiring a Qualified Interpreter (pdf document)

RIT: Interpreting For Postsecondary Deaf Students

RID Standard Practice Paper: Team Interpreting (pdf document)

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