

# Interpreting

An interpreter's role is to facilitate communication and convey all auditory and signed information so that both hearing and deaf individuals may fully interact.

## The common types of services provided by interpreters are:

1. ASL Interpreting--Sign interpreting via the visual language of American Sign Language (ASL), which has linguistic features distinct from spoken English.
2. Sign Language/English Interpreting--Signing using elements of ASL with elements of English language structure and spoken English mouth movements.
3. Oral Transliteration--Silent repetition of spoken English with specialized techniques for visual clarification.
4. Cued Speech Transliteration--A system to represent elements of spoken English. Hand shapes and hand placements are used in different locations near the mouth to show English phonetic markers.
5. Tactile interpreting—Interpreting for persons who are blind as well as deaf by signing into the person's hands.

\*With all these service types, when deaf individuals do not use their own voice, interpreters may also provide spoken voice interpretation.

Regardless of what type of interpreting is used at your educational institution, interpreters associated with the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) are bound by a Code of Professional Conduct (CPC). Some principles guiding the professional behaviors of interpreters are:

- Interpreters adhere to standards of confidential communication.

- Interpreters possess the professional skills and knowledge required for specific interpreting situations.
- Interpreters conduct themselves in a manner appropriate to the specific interpreting situation.
- Interpreters demonstrate respect for consumers.
- Interpreters maintain ethical business practices.

(For an in depth explanation of the CPC, refer to <http://www.rid.org/ethics/code/index.cfm>)

## Things to remember when working with an interpreter:

The interpreter's job is to faithfully transmit the spirit and content of the communicator, allowing the student and instructor full access to the communication interaction. The interpreter's primary responsibility is to facilitate communication. Instructors should refrain from asking the interpreter to function as a teacher's aide, to participate in class activities, or to perform other tasks. Doing so may interfere with the quality of communication provided, compromise the role of the interpreter, and prevent full communication access for participants who are deaf.

Familiarity with subject matter will enhance the quality of the interpreted message. If possible, meet with interpreters before the first class to share outlines, PowerPoint slides, texts, agenda, technical vocabulary, class syllabuses, and any other pertinent information. If your class has an online discussion group or makes use of electronic media, be sure to include interpreters on the electronic roster.

Keep lines of sight free for deaf individuals to have visual access to information. In class, the interpreter will position himself or herself in direct line with you, the student, and any visual aids.

Interpreters process information cognitively before interpreting. The interpreted message, therefore,

will follow at a pace generally one or two sentences behind the communicator. Speak naturally at a reasonable pace to help facilitate an effective interpretive process.

Allow for this added processing time during class discussions. Ask students to raise their hands, be recognized, and then ask questions or give comments. This will allow the interpreter to finish interpreting for the current speaker and gives the student who is deaf or hard of hearing equal opportunity to participate in class. Encourage all students to wait until the teacher recognizes them before speaking or signing. The interpreter can only convey one message at a time.

Use “I” and “you” when you communicate with deaf individuals using an interpreter. Look directly at the person with whom you are communicating, not the interpreter. Use of third-party phrases such as, “Ask her” or “Tell him” can compromise the relationship between the instructor and student(s).

Avoid talking while students are focused on written class work. Students who are deaf require time to process visual aids and materials before returning their attention to the interpreter.

Receiving information visually without breaks can be tiring and cause eye fatigue. Plan strategic breaks so that both students and interpreters can enjoy a mental and physical break. Additionally, simultaneous interpreting requires the processing of new information while the information that was just communicated by the speaker is being delivered. For classes longer than one hour in which only one interpreter is available, a mid-class break is essential.

Captioned films and videotapes allow the students direct visual access to the information. Uncaptioned

materials are inaccessible to students watching interpreters, as the students cannot attend to both the interpreter and a constant stream of visual media. The same is true for YouTube or any information presented in an audio/visual or multimedia manner.

Some deaf students may request alternative testing procedures. If the test has either an oral or written format (essay, multiple choice, or fill in the blank), the student may prefer to have the interpreter translate questions into sign language. Arrangements for this kind of testing should be made by the student and instructor, and communicated to the interpreter **BEFORE** the test. This will provide the interpreter ample time to prepare.

More information about the role and function of interpreters can be obtained from the national organization of professionals who provide sign language interpreting, the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, in Silver Spring, Maryland.

*For more information on how to contact professionals in the interpreting field, as well as other topics covered by the PEPNet Tipsheet series, visit PEPNet's website at <http://www.pepnet.org>.*

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