

# 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. American Sign Language (ASL) Interpretation – a visual-gestural language with linguistic features distinct from spoken English.
2. Sign Language Transliteration – A signed, visual system incorporating elements of ASL with mouth movements and elements of English language structure.
3. Oral Transliteration – silent repetition of spoken English with specialized techniques for visual clarification.
4. Cued Speech Transliteration – A system of speech movements of English supported by handshapes and hand placements representing English phonetic markers.

All of these services may also require the interpreter to vocalize for the student who is deaf and does not use his or her own voice.

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 Ethics. Principles guiding the professional behaviors of interpreters are:

- Interpreters/transliterators shall keep all assignment-related information strictly confidential.
- Interpreters/transliterators shall render the message faithfully, always conveying the content and spirit of the speaker, using language most readily understood by the person(s) whom they serve.
- Interpreters/transliterators shall not counsel, advise, or interject personal opinions.
- Interpreters/transliterators shall accept assignments using discretion with regard to skill, setting, and the consumers involved.
- Interpreters/transliterators shall request compensation for services in a professional and judicious manner.
- Interpreters/transliterators shall function in a manner appropriate to the situation.
- Interpreters/transliterators shall strive to further knowledge and skills through participation in workshops, professional meetings, interactions with professional colleagues, and reading of current literature in the field.
- Interpreters/transliterators by virtue of membership in or certification by RID shall strive to maintain high professional standards in compliance with the Code of Ethics.

## 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 in 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 the subject matter will enhance the quality of the interpreted message. If possible, meet with the interpreter before the first class to share outlines, texts, agenda, technical vocabulary, class syllabus, and any other pertinent information.

Keep lines of sight free for 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. Also, encourage the 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 classwork. Students who are deaf require time to process visual aids and materials before returning their attention to the interpreted message.

Plan some strategic breaks so that both student and interpreter can enjoy a mental and physical break from the rigors of the situation. Receiving information visually without breaks can be tiring and cause eye fatigue. 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 are strongly recommended to allow the student direct visual access to the information. If you are planning to show a movie or use other audiovisual materials that do not have captioning available, inform the interpreter beforehand so that arrangements can be made for lighting and positioning.

If the deaf individual(s) are not present when class begins, the interpreter may wait a few minutes for late arrival. The interpreter may be needed at another assignment and may leave if no deaf individuals are present after 10-15 minutes.

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 with 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/transliterating services, 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 Web site at <http://www.pepnet.org>.*

For more information, contact:  
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