



Teaching Tips When Working with Students Who Use ASL and the Role of an ASL-English Interpreter

Think Visually

- Be as visual as possible when presenting information by using the board, handouts, graphics, overheads, copies of lecture notes, closed caption videotapes, etc.
- Deaf students learn best via the visual mode. Try to avoid talking while students are being asked to do other things such as looking up pages in the textbook or working on the computer. Students can't read (i.e. look for a page number) and watch the interpreter at the same time.

Maintain Same Expectations

- It is important that you expect Deaf/hard of hearing students to perform at a level commensurate with their peers.
- Call on Deaf and hard of hearing students to answer questions and participate in class just like any other student.
- Adhere to the same classroom policies for Deaf students as you would for other students regarding tardiness, absences, participation in class and general expectations.
- For example, if you see a Deaf student signing in class, it is considered the same as a non-Deaf student talking. Deal with it in the same manner.
- If the student is not watching the interpreter and you wish for her/him to pay attention, let the student know this directly.

Referencing

- When pointing to something on the board, computer or a map, hold your pointer in place longer than normal.
- A pointer allows the student time to change his/her focus from the interpreter to the board and see what is being referenced.

Expansion

- When discussing certain concepts, give examples of what the concept refers to.
- For example, when discussing how people make assumptions about other people give examples of what you are referring to. "When you hear that someone is a policeman you assume s/he will have certain characteristics such as xyz."

Reading

- Be aware that translation into ASL without seeing the written copy may affect the student in terms of the expectation for any exercise associated with the reading.

- American Sign Language (ASL): Linguistically, ASL is a separate language from English with its own syntax and grammar.
- If you plan to read anything to the class, please make a copy, an overhead transparency, or a power point for the Deaf student so s/he can better follow along. Then use a pointer to guide the student's eyes while you read.
- If possible, we ask the speaker to try to slow down when reading to allow the interpreter to keep up.

Testing

- Alternative testing may be necessary for some students. If the test has a written format (essay, multiple choice or fill in the blank), the student may prefer to have the interpreter translate some or all of the questions.
- If the student wishes to do this, s/he should first talk with the teacher to get approval. However, students don't always know they need the test interpreted until they see it. Accommodations of this nature should be requested by the student and arranged with the instructor and the assessment center (whenever necessary).

Turn Taking

- The interpreting process only allows one person to communicate at a time.
- Encourage all students to wait until the teacher recognizes them before speaking.
- Having one person speak or sign at a time will help the interpreter facilitate the exchange of ideas without the interpreter losing information.

Lighting

- Provide adequate lighting.
- If you plan to darken the room to show visual aids, be sure the Deaf student can see the interpreter.
- Sometimes opening the door or blinds to let light in can be sufficient.
- Check with the student to see how much lighting needed.

Consider Classroom Layout

- To allow students who are Deaf or hard of hearing equal opportunity for interaction with their peers, circle or semi-circle layouts are most optimal.
- Be mindful not to stand between the interpreter and the student.
- Because the student would like to watch the teacher, the interpreter will sit/stand as close to the teacher as is comfortable.

Language

- Linguists have proven American Sign Language (ASL) to be as complex, structured, and powerful as any spoken language, and many Deaf people take great pride in their mastery of it.
- Many Deaf people are bi-lingual as they know both ASL and English (mainly written English).
- ASL is included in the same category as French or Spanish: as a language that is different but equal to English.

The Role of an ASL-English Interpreter

The use of an ASL-English interpreter can be a reasonable and appropriate academic accommodation for students who are Deaf or hard of hearing. For students whose preferred method of communication is Sign Language, interpreting services can help them to learn and understand the content of the course. Therefore it is

important for both the student and instructor to know how to effectively use an interpreter to get the maximum benefit.

Language Facilitator

- The interpreter strictly adheres to a code of ethics, which includes keeping all material/information interpreted strictly confidential.
- The interpreter's role is to facilitate communication; he/she will not add or delete any information.
- It is important that the interpreter remain impartial to what is being communicated, therefore the interpreter should not be asked for his/her opinion or comments or asked to perform any tasks other than interpreting.

Teaming

- Depending on the length of the class there may be more than one interpreter present.
- As a general rule, any class lasting over 2 hours requires the services of two interpreters who will take turns interpreting; either at 20-minute intervals (which is ideal) or they will split the class.
- If the interpreters takes turns every 20-minutes, one will be interpreting and the other will be working as a backup.

Share Lecture Content with Interpreter

- Familiarity with the subject matter will enhance the quality of the interpreted message. Therefore, whenever possible please share (*before class*) with the interpreter outlines, texts, agendas, technical vocabulary, a class syllabus, videos and any other information that would be helpful.

Use of Note Taking Services

- It is impossible for the student to watch the interpreter while simultaneously taking notes from the lecture.
- Some students may use a peer note taker as an appropriate accommodation. *Please ask for a volunteer from your class to take notes for the student.*
- The student may choose to use carbonless copy paper for note taking or notes may be copied after each class. It is also helpful to provide the student with a copy of handouts, lecture notes, and other visual information whenever possible.

Speak Directly to Student

- Look at the student when communicating with her/him.
- Address the student directly. Avoid using phrases with the interpreter such as "ask her" or "tell him". The interpreter will interpret this third-person address accurately and this may confuse or offend the student.
- If you have questions about the student or about Sign Language, ask the student and the interpreter will interpret.
- If there is something you feel should not be interpreted, be careful how you express it. Saying, "Don't interpret this/that..." will probably be interpreted before the interpreter realizes what you are trying to say. If you have something to say that you do not wish the student to be aware of, step out of the room or move beyond the interpreter's earshot.
- Outside class time communication with the student can occur through email, phone or meetings (an interpreter can be requested for meetings).
- Addressing the interpreter directly is acceptable when it relates to the communication in the class. If you do address the interpreter directly, know that the interpreter may first interpret what you say, then answer you by simultaneously signing and speaking.

Spell out Technical Words

- It is helpful to have technical terms or jargon spelled out visually either on a board, overhead projector, a class handout, etc.
- Spelling them out verbally will help the interpreter when s/he fingerspells the words into ASL.

Speak at a Reasonable Pace

- Interpreters normally interpret with a production delay of one or two sentences after the speaker because they must first process the information before relaying it.
- Speak naturally, at a modest pace.
- At times the interpreter may interrupt you to ask you to slow down or repeat so that he/she can deliver the message effectively.

Allow Ample Time for Reading

- The student cannot read and watch the interpreter at the same time.
- Avoid talking while students are focused on written work or overhead projections/multimedia presentations.

Repeat or Paraphrase Questions and Responses

- Be mindful of repeating or paraphrasing questions and/or comments that are made in class before a response is given.
- Likewise, responses should also be repeated or paraphrased.

Incorporate Strategic Lecture Breaks

- Plan periodic breaks so that both the interpreter and student can get a rest from the rigors of interpreting.
- As a general rule, for classes longer than 50 minutes in which only one interpreter is present, a 5-10 minute break is essential.

Understand the Sight Line

- The interpreter may stand or sit next to you. This enables the student to follow the interpreter and the instructor at the same time (keeping them both in their line of sight).
- If you move about the room, the interpreter may move with you as to stay in the same line of sight.
- During videos, it is important for the interpreter to be up next to the screen so that the student doesn't have to divert their eye gaze too far.

Communication with Interpreter

- Please communicate with the interpreter before or after class (not during) as the interpreter is not a participant in the situation.
- Please let the interpreter(s) know of any class schedule changes.
- If you plan to let class out early and another interpreter is scheduled for the second half of class, please let the second interpreter know.

Please direct all student’s attention to the document titled “Tips for all Students When Working With an ASL/English Interpreter” at the following link:

<https://www.rockvalleycollege.edu/StudentServices/DisabilityServices/Interpreting-and-Captioning.cfm>

If you have any questions or would like additional information on ASL-English interpreters in the postsecondary environment, contact me or anyone in Disability Support Services.

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