

Deaf Related Information Packet

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What is an American Sign Language (ASL) Interpreter?

Can anyone who signs be an interpreter?

The biggest misconception by the general public is that anyone who has taken classes in American Sign Language (ASL) or Signed English or knows the manual alphabet is qualified to be an interpreter. A signer is a person who may be able to communicate conversationally with deaf persons but may not necessarily possess the skills and expertise to accurately interpret or function as an interpreter. To become an interpreter, it is necessary not only to be bilingual and bicultural, but to have the ability to mediate meanings across languages and cultures, both simultaneously and consecutively. This takes years of practice and training.

What is the difference between interpreting and transliterating?

Interpreting is the cultural and linguistic transmission of a message from ASL to spoken English, or vice versa. Transliterating is the transmission of a message from spoken English to a visual, manually coded version of English.

What is the role of an interpreter?

It is virtually impossible to be both an active participant and a neutral communication bridge between deaf and hearing persons. For this reason, it is not within the realm of the interpreter's role to advise, edit, advocate, teach, or participate while in the interpreting situation. The interpreter must faithfully transmit the spirit and content of the speakers. Deaf and hearing persons using interpreter services have the right to control the communication interaction and make their own decisions and mistakes.

Do interpreters specialize in certain areas?

Interpreters may have expertise and special training in some areas and not others. For example, some interpreters work primarily in medical settings, while others work mainly in court and legal settings. Familiarity with the subject and vocabulary is crucial for effective interpreting. Can any interpreter work in courts or for police situations? No, only interpreters deemed qualified may interpret in court or police situations.

Can deaf people become interpreters?

Yes. The professional term is "relay," "intermediary interpreter" or "certified Deaf interpreter." The deaf interpreter works in conjunction with the hearing interpreter. There is a growing need for relay interpreters in critical situations such as court proceedings or psychiatric evaluations or situations where the deaf consumer relies on visual-gestural means to communicate.

(source: MA Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing at www.state.ma.us/mcdhh)

Suggestions for Effective Use of Interpreters or Transliterators

Do I need to speak slowly?

Speak at your natural pace, but be aware that the interpreter/transliterator must hear and understand a complete thought before signing it. The interpreter will let you know if you should repeat or slow down. Turn taking in the conversation may be different from what you are used to. This is due to the lag time required for the interpretation process.

Should I look at the interpreter/transliterator?

Look at and speak directly to the Deaf person. Do not say "tell her" or "tell him." The Deaf person will be watching the interpreter and glancing back and forth at you.

Where should I stand or sit?

Usually it is best to position the interpreter/transliterator next to you (the hearing person), opposite the Deaf person. This makes it easy for the Deaf person to see you and the interpreter in one line of vision.

What about group situations?

Semicircles or circular seating arrangements are best for discussion formats. For large group situations such as conferences or performances, be sure to reserve a "deaf participants and their friends" seating area near the front for clear visibility of the interpreter.

Do I need to meet with the interpreter/transliterator prior to the assignment?

Meeting with the interpreter/transliterator fifteen to thirty minutes before the assignment begins is helpful. It is especially helpful at large conferences or meetings where a fair amount of participants are expected. If possible in advance of the assignment, provide the interpreter/transliterator with materials such as a brief outline, agenda, prepared speeches, or technical vocabulary, and background information on activities such as showing film, role playing, and meditation exercises.

Do I need any special visual aids?

Visual aids such as xeroxed handouts or writing on a chalkboard can be a tremendous help to both the interpreter/transliterator and the Deaf person, insuring correct spelling of technical vocabulary or names. Remember to pause before giving your explanation of the visual aid so that the Deaf person has time to see it, look back at the interpreter/transliterator and still "see" everything you said.

Are there any suggestions on lighting?

Interpreters/transliterators and hearing speakers should avoid standing with their backs to windows, bright lights or busy colorful designs. These backgrounds make it difficult to see and receive a clear message. A solid, dark colored backdrop or background is recommended. If slides or movies are to be shown, make sure the interpreter/transliterator is visible. A flexible arm desk lamp can be used as a spotlight, or a dimmer switch is often sufficient.

Often two interpreters/transliterators are referred to one assignment, why is that?

- The interpreting/transliterating process is very demanding. Two interpreters/transliterators will often be assigned for any job over an hour and half in length. Interpreters/transliterators working as a team will allow communication to flow smoothly, therefore minimizing distractions to the meeting process. In this interpreting/transliterating situation, one interpreter/transliterator would be actively interpreting/transliterating for 20 to 30 minutes while the other is providing backup to the active interpreter, then switching. If only one interpreter/transliterator is assigned to a job that lasts over an hour and half, consider taking breaks at convenient times to allow the interpreter/transliterator to recover the appropriate quality of interpreting/transliterating.

- Sometimes an intermediary or relay interpreter who is deaf will be requested in addition to one or more hearing interpreters/transliterators for court proceedings, legal situations, competency evaluations, mental health treatment and medical settings. A skilled, hearing interpreter/transliterators who is not a native user of American Sign Language may determine that s/he is unable to interpret accurately for a deaf or hard of hearing person who uses natural or unusual gestures, or a mixture of gestures, American Sign Language, Signed the Deaf person and the hearing qualified interpreter/transliterators to ensure total accuracy of information and details between deaf and hearing persons.

Can I ask the interpreter/transliterators about the Deaf person or sign language?

The interpreter/transliterators is present to facilitate communication. If you have questions about the deaf person or sign language, ask the Deaf person directly and the interpreter/transliterators will interpret your questions.

Can I ask the interpreter/transliterators about the field of interpreting?

Yes. The interpreter/transliterators is one of the best resources about the interpreting field; however, all questions should be asked before or after the interpreting/transliterating assignment so that the interpreter/transliterators is then finished with the actual interpreting/transliterating and is free to converse with you.

(source: MA Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing at www.state.ma.us/mcdhh)

Guidelines for Effective Communication with Deaf, Late-Deafened, and Hard of Hearing People

BEFORE THE CONVERSATION STARTS:

Ask the person what is the best way to communicate with her or him.

Get the person's attention. For a deaf or a late deafened person, a wave from a distance or a gentle tap on the shoulder is usually sufficient. A hard of hearing person may also benefit from this procedure, but calling the person's name may also help.

Keep your face and mouth visible—don't turn your head or cover your mouth.

Remove gum, cigarettes, food, or other objects from mouth. Speechreading is easier if the speaker's mouth area is free of objects.

Be sure your face is adequately lit.

Be aware of light sources. Windows or other bright light sources can create shadows on your face. This can make speechreading or watching signing more difficult.

Face the person directly when speaking.

Talk directly to the person—not to the interpreter, the CART reporter or companion. Negotiate comfortable conversation space.

Only one person should speak at a time.

Use an interpreter or assistive listening device/CART if appropriate.

If assistive listening device/CART or Interpreter Services are not available, use paper and pen to assist with the communication process if needed.

Reduce background noise or move to quieter location.

Maintain eye contact. Eye contact facilitates direct communication.

DURING THE CONVERSATION

Speak clearly and at a moderate pace.

Use normal volume.

Use facial expression and gestures when appropriate. These "clues" can fill in missing gaps or help with the "tone" of your message.

(source: MA Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing at www.state.ma.us/mcdhh)

Assistive Technology

What is a TTY?

A TTY is a device that looks like a small portable typewriter with a keyboard and a display screen that enables deaf and hard of hearing people to see what is being typed through a coupler that holds the handset of a telephone. The TTY enables a deaf or hard of hearing person to use the telephone in a visual manner rather than the auditory mode of the telephone.

You may encounter three different terms referring to this portable telecommunication device: TTY, TDD, or text telephone. TTY is the original term which began to be used when access to the telephone was first provided for deaf people through the use of the Western Union Teletypewriter, originally used for provision of telegraph service. This initial access to the telephone was obviously vitally important to deaf people - a first step to freedom in a sense -, and the term "TTY" took on that importance also. Many deaf people still prefer to use the term "TTY" because of its expression of heritage and because it is easier to pronounce, fingerspell, and speechread. For these reasons, most Deaf people continue to use the term TTY although the newer term TDD or Telecommunication Device for the Deaf is very frequently used in many places. A still newer term "text telephone" has begun to be used. However, the precise meaning given to this term is not yet standardized. Frequently "text telephone" is used to refer to both TTYs and adaptation of a computer to accept TTY calls directly; at other times it is used to refer to the TTY or portable telecommunication device only. In summary, the use of the term TTY is encouraged to refer to portable telecommunication devices for the deaf.

What are Assistive Listening System(s) (ALS)?

Assistive Listening System(s), (ALS), are sound amplification equipment specifically designed to facilitate improved reception of speech. ALS are especially useful for hard of hearing people, some late deafened adults and deaf people with some residual hearing.

What are Captions?

Like subtitles, captions display spoken words as printed words on a television screen. Unlike subtitles, captions are specifically designed for deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers. They are carefully timed and placed to identify speakers, on- and off-screen sound effects, music and laughter.

Open and Closed Captions

Open captions can be viewed on all television sets, without a decoder or a built-in decoder chip. Closed captions are hidden data within the television signal that must be decoded before being displayed on the screen. For years, viewers had to purchase a set-top decoder box to access the captions. Fortunately, the federal Television Decoder Circuitry Act, passed in 1990 and implemented in 1993, mandates that all televisions with screens 13 inches or larger include a built-in decoder chip, thus greatly increasing accessibility.

Alerting/Signaling/Paging Devices

This category covers a broad range of products that alert a deaf or hard of hearing user to the sounds in the environment through the use of various signal devices and alarms. Doorbells, telephones ringers, kitchen timers, crying baby alarms, or smoke alarms in the home or in large areas such as hotels and places of employment are alerted through the use of flashing lights, amplified audible sounds, vibratory/tactile or a combination of the three modes.

What is CART Service?

Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) Services are provided by court providers who have additional training and/or experience in realtime reporting and in aspects of providing translation for deaf, late deafened and hard of hearing people. The CART provider types into a stenographic machine which is connected to a computer. The computer, using special software

translates the stenotype shorthand into English which is simultaneously displayed on a computer monitor or can be projected onto a large wall screen.

Who uses CART services?

CART service enables communication access for deaf and hard of hearing persons who are competent in English, both written and oral, and who either (a) are not able to use ASL interpreters, sign language transliterators and/or oral interpreters in general or (b) do not choose to do so in the particular situation. In general, persons who choose to use CART service are late deafened adults, oral deaf persons and some hard of hearing persons.

(source: MA Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing at www.state.ma.us/mcdhh)

What are Alpha Numeric Pagers?

They are two way communication pagers and have a built-in keyboard so you can send and receive email messages, write notes to other pagers and even retrieve information via the Internet.

What are Cochlear Implants?

Cochlear implants are electronic devices which are implanted in the cochlea and designed to provide useful hearing and improved communication ability to individuals who have profound hearing losses and are unable to achieve speech understanding with hearing aids. They do not restore hearing to "normal."

(source: Northeast Technical Assistance Center at www.netac.rit.edu)

The cochlear implant controversy

Within the Deaf Community, specifically among individuals who are born deaf and use American Sign Language as their preferred mode of communication, there exists a high level of controversy and resistance to cochlear implants. Their concern lies within their cultural pride and the belief that deafness is not something to be cured. It should be understood, however, that the Deaf Community generally understands and supports the choice to receive a cochlear implant when the individual is late-deafened, that is, having become deaf as an adult.

(source: Northeast Technical Assistance Center at www.netac.rit.edu)

Introduction to American Sign Language

Many people mistakenly believe that American Sign Language (ASL) is English conveyed through signs. Some think that it is a manual code for English, that it can express only concrete information, or that there is one universal sign language used by Deaf people around the world.

Linguistic research demonstrates, however that ASL is comparable in complexity and expressiveness to spoken languages. It is not a form of English. It has its own distinct grammatical structure, which must be mastered in the same way as the grammar of any other language. ASL differs from spoken languages in that it is visual rather than auditory and is composed of precise handshapes and movements.

ASL is capable of conveying subtle, complex, and abstract ideas. Signers can discuss philosophy, literature, or politics as well as football, cars or income taxes. Sign Language can express poetry as poignantly as can any spoken language and can communicate humor, wit, and satire just as biting. As in other languages, new vocabulary items are constantly being introduced by the community in response to cultural and technological change.

ASL is not universal. Just as hearing people in different countries speak different languages, so do Deaf people around the world sign different languages. Deaf people in Mexico use a different sign language from that used in the U.S. Because of historical circumstances, contemporary ASL is more like French Sign Language than like British Sign Language.

ASL was developed by American Deaf People to communicate with each other and has existed as long as there have been Deaf Americans. Standardization was begun in 1817 when Laurent Clerc and Thomas H. Gallaudet established the first School for the Deaf in the U.S. Students afterwards spread the use of ASL to other parts of the U.S. and Canada. Traditionally, the language has passed from one generation to the next in the residential school environment, especially through dormitory life. Even when signs were not permitted in the classroom, the children of Deaf parents, as well as Deaf teachers and staff, would secretly pass on the language to other students. ASL is now used approximately one-half million Deaf people in the U.S. and Canada.

Since the late 1800's, Deaf people have been discouraged from using ASL. Many well-meaning but misguided educators, believing that the only way for deaf people to fit into the hearing world is through speech and lipreading, have insisted that deaf children try to learn to speak English. Some have gone so far to tie down deaf children's hands to prevent them from signing. Despite these and other attempts to discourage signing, ASL continues to be the preferred language of the Deaf community. Far from seeing the use of sign as a handicap, Deaf people regard ASL as their natural language which reflects their cultural values and keeps their traditions and heritage alive. ASL is shaped by the culture of Deaf Americans.

(source: VISTA, Sign Language Series, Signing Naturally, Student Workbook, Level 1, Cheri Smith, Ella Mae Lentz, and Ken Mikos, Dawn Sign Press, San Diego, 1988)

Brief History of Deaf America

In 1817 Laurent Clerc, a Deaf teacher from the National Royal Institution for the Deaf in Paris, came to the United States to help Thomas H. Gallaudet, a hearing American, start America's first School for the Deaf in Hartford, Connecticut. Clerc brought from the Paris school a highly effective teaching method using Sign Language, the language of Deaf people.

Graduates of the Hartford School went on to establish similar residential Schools for the Deaf in other states. Many Deaf people became teachers of the Deaf and Sign Language was the language of instruction in the classroom. Then in 1864, the first university for the Deaf (now Gallaudet University) was established by a charter signed by President Lincoln.

Late in the 19th century the tide began to turn against Deaf people and their language. In 1880, the International Congress on Education of the Deaf in Milan, Italy adopted a resolution banning the use of Sign Language in teaching deaf children. The "oral method" of teaching gained momentum; speech and lipreading became the primary educational goal. Deaf people were discouraged from entering the teaching profession, and Sign Language was no longer permitted in the classroom.

Also in 1880 the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) was founded in Cincinnati, Ohio. This organization brought Deaf people together from around the country to work for their common interests and fight discrimination in schools and workplaces. Around the turn of the century, because of a growing concern that American Sign Language would be lost, the NAD established a fund used to make a series of films in Sign Language. One of these films is George Veditz's *Preservation of Sign Language*. Over the years, the NAD has fought public ignorance of deafness, underemployment of Deaf people, discrimination against Deaf people who were denied driver's licenses, discrimination against Deaf teachers, double tax exemption for Deaf people, and the strictly oral method in education of the Deaf.

The years from 1900 to 1960 could be considered the "Dark Ages" of Deaf history. What sustained the community during this period of strong oralism and lack of social understanding was the Deaf clubs. Local clubs provided a place where Deaf people could congregate to socialize, share the latest news, organize around political issues, plan events and outings, and in later years, watch captioned films. The clubs nourished the sense of group loyalty and community, maintained the culture, and preserved the cherished language.

In 1901 the National Fraternal Society of the Deaf (NFSD) was formed to provide insurance to Deaf people. Initially providing burial benefits to members, the "Frat" expanded to include life, sickness, and accident insurance, and later fought discrimination against Deaf drivers in getting automobile insurance.

Throughout the years of the First World War and the depression, attempts to improve Deaf people's lives were not given priority, as was true for most minority groups. During the 1940's however, the NAD was successful in getting the Civil Service Commission to revoke a ruling against Deaf printers, making lucrative positions available to many Deaf people. During World War II, many Deaf people became "soldiers on the assembly line," performing a large variety of jobs and demonstrating that the abilities of Deaf people can contribute to any work force.

The 1960's ushered in an era of change, as evidenced by the following milestones: Teletypewriters for the Deaf (TTYs) were invented by a deaf man in 1964, and began to take hold during the 1970's. Later, with the invention of telecaption decoders, television too became accessible to deaf people.

- The National Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf was founded in 1964, leading to increased respect for, and greater proficiency within, the profession.
- The first linguistic study of American Sign Language was published in 1965. The study was made by William Stokoe at Gallaudet and had great impact on continued research and recognition of ASL.
- The educational philosophy of "Total Communication" began to gain acceptance, and signs were again permitted in the schools.
- The National Theatre of the Deaf first toured in 1967, spreading awareness and appreciation of ASL throughout the world.
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (often called the civil rights act for disabled people) was finally signed into law in 1976. This law requires that any institution receiving federal funds be accessible to all disabled people. Sign Language interpreting services began to be provided at many colleges around the country, as well as in hospitals, courtrooms, government agencies and various workplaces.
- In 1979, when the movie *Voices* was produced featuring a hearing performer in the role of a Deaf character, Deaf people staged a successful boycott of the movie in several cities, forcing the distributor to withdraw the film from the market. Since then, Deaf performers have become more visible on television, stage, film, and Deaf people are more often hired to perform in Deaf roles.

In recent years, there has been increased academic acceptance of American Sign Language in colleges and universities. There has also been a growing recognition of Deaf culture by the general public. Deaf individuals are beginning to attain decision-making positions where they can make a difference in the lives of Deaf people. The "Deaf President Now" rally at Gallaudet University in the spring of 1988 drew widespread support not only from members of the Deaf community, but from many people in all walks of life. What happened at Gallaudet that fateful week was the culmination of a people's struggle to break the chains of paternalism. This struggle for Deaf rights and self-determination continues. The protest at Gallaudet is seen by many as the beginning of a new chapter in the life of Deaf America.

(In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed. This law gave unprecedented access for people with disabilities by providing provisions for government services, public accommodations, and the workplace to provide assistive technology or communication access to services for Deaf people.)

(source: VISTA, Sign Language Series, Signing Naturally, Student Workbook, Level 1, Cheri Smith, Ella Mae Lentz, and Ken Mikos, Dawn Sign Press, San Diego, 1988)

Deaf Community, Culture and Identity

Deaf Culture and Deaf Community

Many Deaf people in the U.S. do not consider deafness as a physical condition; rather, they see it as an ethnic identity. Those who accept this identity see themselves as members of a proud and distinctive subcultural group known as the Deaf Community. The Deaf Community is composed of people who use ASL as their primary means of communication; in addition, the Deaf Community, like any other subcultural groups, adheres to certain particular social norms and values that are passed from generation to generation.

(source: MA Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing at www.state.ma.us/mcdhh)

Deaf Identity

The Deaf community has common labels for identifying who they are. These labels have strong connotations, which assist other members of the deaf community in understanding where that particular member stands within the community. Offered here are definitions of certain terms used by the Deaf community, but with a twist, the words are defined from "deaf-world's perspective." They do not define themselves based on the degree of hearing loss, like the majority of the hearing community does, instead, they focus on the individuals themselves and what communication method they prefer to use and other behavioral and cultural values and norms. For this reason, it may be different from the standard definition that people are accustomed to understanding.

Common terms used within the Deaf community:

deaf. Within the Deaf community, the word "deaf" refers to the audiological level or degree of hearing loss. It also is used as a generic term, as in the phrase "deaf and hard of hearing people", to refer to all people with a hearing loss regardless of which language they use to communicate and/or their cultural identify.

Deaf. This term specifically represents members of the collective Deaf community who share a common language (ASL) and common values, norms, and behaviors. They often celebrate and cherish their deafness because it affords them the unique privilege of sharing a common history and language. They do not look at themselves as people who have lost something (i.e. hearing) but as people with a beautiful language that emulates any other language.

Hard of Hearing. This term is often used to refer to people with a hearing loss who don't fit into the standard "Deaf" category. These people may or may not use ASL, but they generally feel more comfortable within the hearing community. There are several ways that the deaf community determines whether they feel a person is Deaf or hard of hearing, but the important thing is how individuals feel about their own identity.

Hearing Impaired. This term is often used by the media and the general hearing society to refer to people with a hearing loss. But within the Deaf community, this term is likened to an insult because it fails to appreciate the cultural and linguistic privileges shared.

Deafened. It can be very traumatic for individuals who spent the majority of their lives as hearing to either suddenly or progressively lose their hearing. These individuals face unique challenges in finding new ways to communicate effectively with their family, friends, and colleagues. Some may eventually, albeit in limited ways, become involved with the Deaf community.

(source: Northeast Technical Assistance Center at <http://www.netac.rit.edu/>)

Helpful Websites

American Sign Language

ASL Access
www.aslaccess.org

HandSpeak: A Sign Language Dictionary Online
www.handspeak.com

Deaf Community, Culture and History

About.com Guide to Deafness/
Hard of Hearing
deafness.about.com/health/deafness/

Deaf Resource Library
Karen Nakamura's comprehensive list of Deaf related websites
www.deaflibrary.org

History Through Deaf Eyes Exhibit
depts.gallaudet.edu/deafeyes/

Rochester Institute of Technology Libraries
wally.rit.edu/internet/subject/deafness.html

Education

Communication Options for Children Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing
www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/parents/commopt.htm

Deaf Education website
www.deafed.net/

EDEN-Electronic Deaf Education Network
www.bradingrao.com/

Organizations

Alexander Graham Bell Association for The Deaf, Inc.
www.agbell.org

American Society for Deaf Children
www.deafchildren.org

The Caption Center
www.wgbh.org/caption

Gallaudet University
<http://news.gallaudet.edu/gtm/>

National Association of the Deaf
www.nad.org

National Deaf Education Network and Clearinghouse
clerccenter.gallaudet.edu/clearinghouse/

National Fraternal Society of the Deaf
www.nfsd.com

National Institute on Deafness And Other Communication Disorders Information Clearinghouse
www.nidcd.nih.gov/

National Technical Institute for the Deaf
www.rit.edu/ntid

Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc.
www.rid.org/

Self Help For Hard of Hearing People, Inc.
www.shhh.org

Telecommunications for the Deaf, Inc.
www.tdi-online.org

USA Deaf Sports Federation
www.usadsf.org

Parents, Children and Families

Beginnings for Parents of Children Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing
www.beginningssvcs.com

Hands and Voices
www.handsandvoices.org

Hearing Exchange
www.hearingexchange.com

Where do we go from Hear?
www.gohear.org/