

# Tips for Successful Communication - Working With Sign Language Interpreters

## For Teachers, Presenters, and Meeting Facilitators

*The primary reason people request interpreting is so that they can have the best communication possible. Following are some tips to maximize the benefit of using interpreting services.*

Three key factors:

- ▶ American Sign Language (ASL) is a visual language.
- ▶ ASL and English are two different languages.
- ▶ The goal is clear communication, which takes time.

### VISUAL CONSIDERATIONS

*Because ASL is seen rather than heard, visual distractions such as lighting and positioning become factors.*

**Please direct your remarks to the deaf person(s) rather than the interpreter.** When you make eye contact with the deaf person and speak in the first person, you show respect.

**Assist the interpreters in positioning themselves close to the speaker or visual presentation.** If the people using the interpreting have both the presenter and the interpreter in view, they get more information than if they must glance back and forth between the two. Often this means positioning a chair close to the presenter or facilitator. Make sure not to stand between the interpreter and the deaf people.

**When you hand out reading materials, allow silent time for reading.** Because deaf people cannot both read and "listen" (with their eyes), save your comments and participant questions until after they read the material.

**Get everyone's attention before demonstrating.** If you plan to show a task, wait until all eyes are on you. This may take a moment as interpreting requires extra time for processing information and rendering a translation. When the interpreter finishes interpreting what you just said (about a three second delay), the deaf people can pay full attention to your demonstration.

**Wait a few seconds before calling on participants for a response to your questions.** Ask your question, then pause before calling on students. Allowing time lets the interpreters finish interpreting what you just said. Then the deaf participants can finish

watching the interpretation of what you just said. They can then have as equal of a chance as the other participants to respond.

**Be aware of lighting.** Avoid standing in front of windows as backlighting glare interferes with sight. If you show slides or videos, please leave an area lighted near the screen so the deaf participants can see the interpreter and get the dialogue *and* the visual presentation.

## CLEAR COMMUNICATION TAKES TIME

*Admittedly speaking through an interpreter, takes more time than talking to someone who speaks your native language. However it takes much less time than writing notes, asking the deaf person to read lips, and relying on guess work.*

**Know that reading lips is a hit and miss method.** Even people highly skilled at reading lips, get only one third of what you say. So more than half of reading lips is guess work. A person who usually reads lips, may request interpreting for a group activity as looking from speaker to speaker becomes impossible due to the interactive nature of a group. Also groups tend to be noisier than one-on-one interactions creating background noises that interfere with hearing aids and other assistive listening devices. Not all deaf people read lips. For a person, deaf from birth, never having heard a spoken language, trying to guess what a person is saying from looking at their lips is an insurmountable task.

**Speak one at a time in a group.** Designate someone to facilitate and call on people when they raise their hands. Deaf people cannot identify who is speaking by auditory means. They also "hear" (via the interpreter) what people say a few seconds later than the non-deaf people present. So if people are talking over each other, the Deaf person has no way of identifying who is speaking, the interpreter cannot interpret all of the threads of conversation, the deaf person cannot interject over the cacophony, and the interpreting breaks down. Taking turns, raising hands, and speaking one at a time benefit the whole group, not just the deaf participants. Less assertive people get a chance to participate, and all ideas and questions are shared with the entire group.

**Make sure interpreters get written handouts.** This way they can follow along with the group and interpret your discussion of the handout more clearly.

**Relax.** Clear communication is mostly common sense. If you are unsure whether the communication is working, ask the deaf people. Often they are savvy about interpreting, as they are frequent consumers of this service. The interpreters or the deaf student will ask for clarification or slight adjustments if needed (to the lighting or seating or for you to repeat something you said).