

Interpreter Guidelines for Meetings, Workshops and Events



Communicating through an interpreter at your event calls for some communication guidelines that may be new to you. The interpreter has information to assist you in this regard and can be called upon to consult as to the effective use of their service.

Direct communication. When speaking with deaf people, one should address the deaf person directly, and the message will be conveyed accordingly.

Visual line of communication. Because deaf people must have visual contact with the interpreter, it is important not to block this line of sight. Adequate lighting is necessary for viewing the interpreted message. Where lighting has been designed for your event, consult with the lighting designer or tech crew to ensure adequate lighting for the visually presented message.

One sight line. In order for deaf people to follow the action of the event, it is necessary for the interpreter to sit or stand near the focus of attention. Place speakers, media, and the interpreter along one sight line.

Process time. The interpreter finishes communicating in sign language a few seconds after the speaker. Deaf people, therefore, cannot respond immediately after a speaker has finished. In discussion situations, it is important to allow for this "lag" time so that deaf people can fully participate in the discussion.

One message at a time. The interpreter can convey one message at a time after indicating the speaker. It is important, therefore, that only one person be speaking/signing at a time.

Allow for breaks. Interpreting can be very tiring, both to do and to watch. Several factors including pace, density of material and type of activity will influence the need and timing of breaks. Consult with your interpreter in advance regarding the timing, length, and frequency of breaks.

Pre-event preparation. Providing printed and audio materials, outlines, and notes prior to the event enables the interpreter to anticipate and clearly convey your message. We also ask that if you have any questions about working with an interpreter, please speak to the interpreter before the event begins to discuss any questions you may have. **It is best to avoid any interaction with the interpreter once the event has begun in order to avoid any disruption during the event.**

Event Tips with Interpreters

Some Tips for Working with the Interpreter

Meet with the interpreter beforehand.

Clarify unique vocabulary, technical terms, acronyms, jargon, seating arrangements, lighting and other needs.

Provide interpreter with any written materials ahead of time.

Room Set-Up

Reserve seats for the DHH participants. DHH participants may still choose to sit elsewhere.

Provide a clear view of the speaker and interpreter. The interpreter should be stationed for clear sight line by the deaf participants.

This helps the participants to pick up visual clues and the speaker's facial expressions.

Use as many visuals as possible (board, PowerPoint, graphics).

Provide paper copies of your presentation for the deaf participants.

In small group discussions, consider using a circle or semi-circle seating arrangement instead of a theater style arrangement

Lighting

Provide good lighting so the interpreter can be seen.

If lights will be turned off or dimmed, be sure the interpreter can still be seen clearly (use spotlight or small lamp to direct light toward the interpreter).

Do not stand in front of a window as it throws your face in shadow and makes your face hard to see.

Adjust blinds and drapes for best light.

Talk Directly to the DHH Person

Maintain eye contact with the DHH person.

Avoid directing comments to the interpreter (i.e. "Tell him..." or "Ask her..."), respond directly to the DHH person. Talk through the interpreter.

If you do not understand the DHH person, ask the interpreter to voice what the deaf person said.

Speak Naturally

Speak at your normal or slightly slower pace.

Interpreters will ask you to slow down or repeat if necessary.

Stay in one area. Avoid pacing. Face the audience. Use overheads instead of the blackboard. Interpreters listen for concepts and ideas, not just words, to render an accurate interpretation.

Do not cover your mouth.

Avoid Private Conversations

Whatever the interpreter hears will be interpreted.

Do not ask the interpreter to censor any portion of the conversation.

Ask the DHH person directly if they are following the conversation.

Turn-Taking

An interpreter can only accommodate one speaker at a time. Encourage the group to follow this rule.

If you are facilitating a group discussion, be aware that the interpreter will be several seconds behind.

Pause before recognizing the next speaker to allow the interpreter to finish with the current speaker.

Avoid Asking the Interpreter for Opinions or Comments Regarding the Content of the Meeting

Interpreters follow a code of ethics which requires impartiality and confidentiality with all assignment related information.

Do not assume the interpreter has prior knowledge of the deaf person or will be interpreting future appointments.

Provide a Short Break Every Hour, Particularly if the Interpreter is the Sole Interpreter

interpreting is mentally and physically taxing.

Do not expect the interpreter to interpret during these breaks.

The consumer needs an "eye break" as well.

Interpreter Availability at the Event and Using Them

If an interpreter is available at the event, use them when you are talking to the DHH person. Even if you interact with the deaf person without sign language in everyday situations, it is culturally appropriate to ask the interpreter to meet with you and the DHH person to ensure comfortable and stress-free communications. This is especially true at all Deaf events where you might be the minority. There are cultural norms of expected behavior and communication and it is considered courteous to make use of the interpreter.

Role and Function of the Interpreter

Role of the Interpreter

Makes communication possible between persons using different language modes

Acts as a communication link

Like a phone, doesn't add information

Does not alter the message

Bound by Code of Ethics

Must interpret everything that is said or signed

Includes phone calls and comments made in deaf person's presence

Do not ask the interpreter to keep anything private from the deaf person

Function of the Interpreter

Allows for more direct communication.

Improves communication accuracy to avoid misunderstandings.

Decreases frustrations.

Raises the "comfort level" of those interacting.

Facilitates more complete communication, so that both individuals feel free to ask questions and offer more in-depth explanations. Saves time.