



Tips for Working with Interpreters

Sign Language Associates is pleased to be working with you to make communication accessible between people who use sign language and those who use spoken language. The guidelines below are intended to help you better understand our practices. We are confident that you will ease right into the process with these tips!

- When the interpreter knows what to expect at your event, they'll be able to do a better job for you. SLA interpreters will arrive 15 minutes prior to the assignment start time. Information such as an agenda, a speech outline, or a summary of terminology will help the interpreter prepare.
- Lighting and sightlines are very important. It's usually best for the Deaf consumer when they can see the hearing person next to the interpreter. The interpreter may suggest optimal seating arrangements.
- While our ears can hear many different speakers at the same time, our hands can sign only one speaker at a time. We can see several people signing, but our voices can only represent one speaker at a time. It's helpful to have a ground rule of 'One speaker at a time'.
- Speak at a normal pace. If necessary, the interpreter will ask you to repeat something or to modify your pace. This ensures that the information we're interpreting is accurately conveyed.
- Since your meeting is with the Deaf person, you should speak directly to the Deaf person rather than asking the interpreter to "Tell him..." It may feel awkward at first when you see the Deaf person looking back and forth between you and the interpreter, but you should look at and speak to the Deaf person.
- Deaf people use their eyes to receive information and attend to whatever you're pointing out. Allow a few extra seconds for the Deaf person to look at both the interpreted message and other visual aids (computer screen, handouts, etc.) before moving on. Otherwise they'll miss one of the sources of information you've offered.
- The interpreter will always be about 3 - 8 seconds behind the presenter since she is analyzing the message. If you stop talking, watch for us to stop signing, and you'll know when we've completed your thought. Remember this when you're waiting for a deaf person to respond (i.e. deaf folks will not laugh at your jokes at the exact moment that the hearing folks will!).
- The role of the interpreter is to relay information between parties; we do not participate in your interaction. If you want to talk to the interpreter do so before or after the assignment. Otherwise these exchanges can become confusing if the interpreter tries to communicate for herself and interpret at the same time.