

Sign Language Interpreting In the Classroom

Introduction

Students who are deaf or hard of hearing often require classroom accommodations so they can understand and learn the material presented. Some individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing prefer communicating through sign language as opposed to writing, lip reading, or if the individual possesses residual hearing, possibly using a device to amplify sounds.

When sign language is the preferred form of communication, the services of a Sign Language Interpreter may be arranged for the student. This comes as a reasonable and useful classroom accommodation to help the student learn and understand course content. Therefore, it is important for both students who are deaf or hard of hearing, and instructors who teach these students, to know how to utilize the services of an interpreter effectively.

Effective use of interpreting services requires an accurate understanding of the Interpreter's role and responsibilities, as well as your own role and responsibilities as instructor when an Interpreter is present in your classroom. Listed below is a brief definition of the Interpreter's job, followed by suggested guidelines that can help make the teaching process go smoothly for you, the Interpreter, and most importantly the student.

For more information on interpreting in the classroom or on teaching students who are deaf or hard of hearing, please contact Disabled Students Programs and Services (DSPS). **Erika Martin**, the DSPS Deaf and Hard of Hearing Coordinator, can be contacted if you need any assistance at:

emartin@msic.edu or 951-487-3306.

Description

A Sign Language Interpreter is a trained professional who facilitates communication and conveys all auditory and signed information so that both hearing and deaf individuals may fully interact.

The Interpreter is bound by a code of ethics, which includes keeping all material interpreted strictly confidential. In addition, Interpreters are to maintain the integrity of the message, always conveying the content and spirit of the speaker. The Interpreter's mission is to facilitate communication; he/she should neither add nor delete any information at any time. Due to the specific nature of the Interpreter's role, it is important not to ask the Interpreter for his/her opinion or to perform any tasks other than interpreting.

It is also important to keep in mind that sometimes, depending on the length of the class, more than one Interpreter may be present. Typically, any class over two hours requires the services of two interpreters who will take turns interpreting, usually at 20-minute intervals.

Guidelines

- **Helpful Hints to Remember Before Using Interpreting Services-**

Acknowledge Interpreter's Role: Remember that the Interpreter is in the classroom to facilitate communication for both the student and instructor. As mentioned above, he/she should not be asked to run errands, proctor exams, or discuss the student's personal issues. He/she should not participate in the class in any way independent of the student or express personal opinions.

Use Captioned Materials: Captioned DVD's or videos are REQUIRED to allow the student direct visual access to the information. If you need assistance with this, please contact your department chair well in advance of the planned showing of the video.

Establish Interpreter's Location: The Interpreter and student will discuss where the Interpreter should be located in the classroom to provide the greatest benefit for the student, and minimal distraction to other class members. Keep lines of sight free for visual access to information. In class, the Interpreter will attempt to position himself/herself so the deaf or hard of hearing student can see both the instructor and any visual aids.

Consider Classroom Arrangement: For interactive situations, circles or semi-circles work best for students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Share Lecture Content: Familiarity with the subject matter will enhance the quality of the interpreted message. If possible, meet with the Interpreter to share outlines, texts, agenda, technical vocabulary, class syllabus, and any other background information that would be pertinent.

- **Helpful Hints to Remember While Using Interpreting Services-**

Speak Directly to the Student: The Interpreter is in the classroom to facilitate communication for both the student and instructor, speak directly to and maintain communication with the student. The Interpreter may request clarification from you and/or the student to ensure accuracy of the information conveyed.

Spell Out Technical Words: It is helpful to have technical terms or jargon relating to a particular discipline or concept spelled or written out. Either on the board, an overhead projector, a class handout, or with some other visual aid.

Speak at a Reasonable Pace: Interpreters normally interpret with a time lag of one or two sentences after the speaker because interpreters must first process the information before relaying it. Speak naturally at a modest pace, keeping in mind that the Interpreter must listen and understand a complete thought before signing it.

Use "I" and "You" References: The Interpreter will relay your exact words. Use personal references such as "I" and "You" when communicating with individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. Avoid speaking of the individual in the third person; phrases such as "ask her" or "tell him" can be confusing.

Encourage Communicating in Turn: It is important that only one person speak or sign at a time. The interpreting process only allows one person to communicate at a time. Therefore, encourage students to wait before speaking or signing until you recognize them.

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.

Recognize the Need for a Note taker: It is difficult to take good notes while lip reading or watching a Sign Language Interpreter. Therefore, a note taker to assist the student who is deaf or hard of hearing is a reasonable accommodation in these instances. For note taker policies see the DSPS office.

Allow Ample Time for Questions: During class discussions or question/answer periods, give the student an opportunity to raise his/her hand, be recognized, and ask questions through the Interpreter. Making time for questions allows the Interpreter to finish interpreting for the current speaker and enables the student who is deaf or hard of hearing to participate in class.

Repeat or Paraphrase Questions and Responses: When questions are asked, be sure to repeat or paraphrase questions before a response is given. Likewise, responses should also be repeated or paraphrased.

Incorporate Strategic Lecture Breaks: Plan periodic breaks so that both student and Interpreter can get a rest from the rigors of interpreting. For the student, receiving information visually without breaks can be tiring and cause eye fatigue. For the Interpreter, relaying information to the student while simultaneously processing new information from the speaker can create mental and physical strain. For classes longer than 50 minutes in which only one interpreter is available, a 5-10 minute mid-class break is essential.

Other Pointers for Effective Teaching

Expectations: Although many students with disabilities need accommodations, expect these students to perform at a level commensurate with their peers. Do not have a special grading scale or other criteria for them. Do not alter or water-down your curriculum for that individual.

Guided Notes on the Web: Providing students with guided notes that they can access through the Web prior to class can assist them with focusing on the appropriate material. It will help them to learn more effectively in the classroom as well as take better notes.

Collaboration

Do not hesitate to call your DSPS office (Menifee ext. 5305 or San Jacinto ext. 3306) to arrange for a three-way meeting between you, the DSPS Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Coordinator, and the student to work out any issues and to collaborate on the best instructional strategies for the student.

Additional Resources

Gallaudet University: <http://www.gallaudet.edu>

“Gallaudet University, located in Washington DC, is the only liberal arts university in the world designed exclusively for deaf and hard of hearing students.” Site offers information on the campus, academic programs, and latest research.

The National Association of the Deaf (NAD): <http://www.nad.org>

“The NAD, established in 1880, is the oldest and largest constituency organization safeguarding the accessibility and civil rights of 28 million deaf and hard of hearing Americans in education, employment, health care, and telecommunications.” Site offers information regarding issues related to deafness including “information on deaf people, sign language, and legal rights.”

The Postsecondary Education Programs Network (PEPNET): <http://www.pepnet.org>

“PEPNET is the national collaboration of the four Regional Postsecondary Education Centers for Individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing. The goal of PEPNET is to assist postsecondary institutions across the nation to attract and effectively serve individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing.” Site offers information regarding the four Regional Centers, current news and events, a listserv to ask questions and share experiences, and online training for education professionals.

The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID): <http://www.rid.org>

“RID is a national membership organization of professionals who provide sign language interpreting/transliterating services for deaf and hard of hearing persons.” Site offers information regarding interpreting including hiring/working with an interpreter, and interpreting standards.

The United States Department of Justice, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

homepage: <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/adahom1.htm>

Site includes information regarding disability rights and laws, ADA questions and answers, and a list of ADA publications.

Fast Facts: <http://ada.osu.edu/resources/fastfacts/>

The Fast Facts for Faculty publications (listed below) are information briefs designed to help college and university instructors improve the climate and quality of education for students with disabilities. This publication is funded by the U.S. Department of Education under grant #P333A020033-03.