

How to Use an Interpreter



When working with an interpreter, either in spoken language or in American Sign Language (ASL), professionals should:

- **Request interpretation services as early as possible.** Two weeks or more in advance notice is a business standard for non-emergency interpreting needs.
- **Brief the interpreter.** Prior to or at the beginning of the appointment, give the interpreter background, names of participants in the appointment and general topic. This information can be included in the interpreter request.
- **Speak directly to the student, parent or client.** Communicate directly with the student, parent or client as if the interpreter were not there. There is no need to say "tell them that..."
- **Speak naturally, not louder or unnaturally slower.** Speak at a normal pace and volume. The interpreter may not begin interpreting immediately after you begin to speak. Interpreters will ask you to slow down or repeat items if necessary. You should pause before beginning to speak to make sure you have given the interpreter time to finish interpreting the previous concept.
- **Do not make assumptions about understanding.** A person nodding their head as you explain something may not mean they understand, but rather indicate they are trying to follow the conversation. Check for understanding by asking open ended questions.
- **Everything you say will be interpreted.** Whatever the interpreter hears will be interpreted. If you feel the interpreter has not interpreted everything, ask the interpreter to do so.
- **Explain specialized vocabulary, jargon or acronyms.** Specialized vocabulary may be unfamiliar to an interpreter. Spell out acronyms and abbreviations to be sure the translation can be understood without professional knowledge or experience.
- **Plan for extra time in your session.** When you are working with an interpreter, the conversation often takes longer compared to one where both parties use the same language. Concepts and vocabulary used in one language may not have an equivalent and may need to be described.
- **Be mindful of pacing.** Interpreters will actively manage pacing as needed. They will ask participants to wait or interrupt if a message needs clarification. They may also make suggestions to pause after presenting visual information to give the visual language users time to note it before an explanation is given.
- **Be mindful of taking turns.** Allow time between speakers for visual turn taking. Speak one at a time with no side conversations. Identify who is speaking when participants are in different locations.
- **Check in with the client to determine that services provided were effective.** Do this either in person at the end of the assignment or through another avenue post assignment to continue to build on successful interactions.

The Art of Interpretation



"The art of simultaneous interpreting has little to do with word-for-word translation. Rather, it is to know when to slow down, abstract from the speaker's words to be able to produce an elegant translation."

Roman Koshkin, *Testing the Efforts Model of Simultaneous Interpreting: An ERP Study, 2018*

For additional Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education resources, visit: [in.gov/health/cdhhe](https://www.in.gov/health/cdhhe).

