

Effective Use of an Interpreter

The following are guidelines to help you maximize the effectiveness of a sign language interpreter in your classroom. Feel free to discuss these guidelines or any other questions you may have with the interpreter assigned to your class.

1. The interpreter signs everything that she/he hears. Comments directed to the interpreter while she/he is working will be interpreted to the students.
2. The interpreter sometimes voices what the deaf or hard of hearing student signs. When the interpreter speaks, she/he is speaking as the student, in first person.
3. Speak directly to the student in the first person. Speaking in third person adds to the distance between the teacher and the student that the interpreter is trying to reduce.
4. Realize that interpreting does not just involve signing. It may involve writing down a list of numbers or pointing to visuals. Feel free to discuss with the interpreter, before or after class, any questions you may have on any interpreting decisions that were made.
5. Realize that lighting and sight lines are important in any interpreter in any interpreting situation. Please notify the interpreter beforehand if you plan on shutting off the lights. The two of you can then plan for adequate lighting so that the interpreter can still be seen by the student.
6. The interpreter will usually position herself/himself where the student can see the interpreter, the teacher and any visuals. This means the interpreter may follow you around the room. Please wait for the students' attention to be directed to the appropriate place before continuing a lecture.
7. Let the interpreter know in advance when a movie, filmstrip, or video will be shown. Please check all videos prior to class for closed captions.
8. Realize that the student is not able to watch the interpreter and take notes at the same time. Note taking arrangements may need to be made.
9. When using visual aids wait until the interpreter catches up and directs the student's attention to the visual aid before continuing the lecture. Remember that the students cannot attend to the interpreter and another visual (book, handout, overhead, etc.) at the same time.
10. Realize that the interpreting process requires processing time. This means that the interpreter will always be at least a few words behind the speaker. Do not expect an immediate response from a student after a question.
11. The interpreter is not a direct participant in the situation. Trying to involve the interpreter in the conversation while the interpreter is working detracts from the interpreter's effectiveness.
12. Please provide the interpreter with any textbooks or handouts given during class.
13. Realize that an interpreter can only interpret for one person at a time. Class discussions or small group work often need to be moderated with this in mind.
14. Educational and behavioral management of the students in class is the responsibility of the teacher.
15. Ongoing consultation between the teacher and the interpreter is essential to ensure that the learning environment is maximally accessible to all students.

The following ideas were generated by a group of deaf and hard-of-hearing seniors in their last semester at John Hersey High School. They wanted to share their observations of things that made them feel both comfortable and uncomfortable in their classes. We hope it will provide you with some food for thought, and that you can use these ideas to make your classes more comfortable places where their successors can learn and grow.

Kudos to the teachers who:

- Introduce and explain the role of the interpreter at the beginning of the course – or give the interpreter the opportunity to do so.
- Ask the students who are deaf or hard of hearing where we would prefer to sit.
- Ask us questions in class, or involve us in discussions, just like our hearing peers.
- Speak clearly and loudly enough to be easily heard, at least by the interpreter.
- Make regular eye contact with us, especially when we are asking or answering a question.
- Put new or technical vocabulary on the board or overhead, explain their meanings and uses in more than one way.
- Seat the class in a circle whenever possible so we can see everyone clearly.
- Add some humor or excitement to their classes.
- Identify who is talking, and always make sure only one person talks at a time.
- Use captioned films or video tapes whenever possible.
- Take the time to work with us individually, and as much as possible without depending on the interpreter – write, point, go the extra mile to relate to us directly.
- Learn and use some sign language.

Complaints about the teachers who:

- Focus too much attention on the students who are deaf or hard of hearing and make us feel 'different'.
- Go so fast through information we can barely keep up with the interpreter.
- Let several people talk at once, or let the speakers switch so fast we can't keep track of who said what.
- Make jokes about hearing loss or sign language.
- Talk while you expect us to be reading or copying something.
- Use lots of technical vocabulary without spelling it or writing it where we can see it.

- Talk while you're writing on the board or standing in the back of the room where we can't see your face.
- Fill in the entire class period with lecture or films that require non-stop visual attention – our eyes tire out much faster than your ears.