

Sign Language Interpreters

Serving Deaf & Hard of Hearing Students

Interpreters serve all parties in a communication exchange, not just the deaf or hard of hearing student.



In the Classroom:

- **Speak naturally:** Speaking too slowly is as difficult to interpret as speaking too fast.
- **Talk in the first-person:** Speak directly to your student, not the interpreter. Use “I” and “you” rather than statements such as “ask her” or “tell him.”
- **Lag time:** Most interpreters follow at a pace about one or two sentences behind the person who is speaking, to put thoughts in context.
- **Class discussions:** Ask all students to raise their hands and be recognized before speaking. Wait until the interpreter has finished interpreting the entire chunk of information (i.e., a discussion question), so that the student has time to process the chunk of information and raise their hand to participate in the discussion.
- **Interpreters are not** teacher’s aids nor assistants. Unless specifically arranged, interpreters do not serve as tutors and are not responsible for the student’s attendance and classroom effort.
- **Teams:** Generally, a class over 90 minutes should be teamed, but the content and structure of the class must be considered. Teams are preferred for short, intense classes while a single interpreter may be sufficient if coursework is light (a lab, for example).
- **Plan breaks:** Interpreting is cognitively and physically challenging. Breaks are especially important when there is only one interpreter.
- **Videos:** Have all videos/films captioned: Many new ones are already captioned. Nevertheless, always check to make sure: 1) they are captioned; and 2) you know how to turn on captions if the media is “closed captioned.”

- **PowerPoints:** The visual learner cannot watch the interpreter and look at a PowerPoint at the same time. After introducing the PowerPoint, allow time for the student to focus on the screen AND the information conveyed.
- **Share course materials:** If possible, meet with the interpreter prior to the first class to share the class syllabus, text book, handouts, PowerPoints, etc.
- **Emails:** Include the interpreter on your email and online discussion group rosters.
- **Choose a good sight line:** Allow the student and the interpreter to choose the seat that provides the best visual path.
- **Working time:** Refrain from talking during written class work – students can’t work and watch an interpreter simultaneously.

Interpreting Tests:

English is a second language for most ASL users. It is well known that that language and structure of tests can present barriers to those who do not have a strong language base in English. Using an interpreter depends on what’s being tested. If the purpose of the test or activity is to measure content knowledge (e.g., the fall of the Alamo), a signed language-administered test should be considered. If the purpose of the assessment is to measure a student’s skill in reading, specifically decoding English text, then no interpreting of the test item should be provided. If the purpose of the assignment is to measure skills in written English expression, then no accommodation should be provided.

This Quick Tip was adapted from pepnet 2 (pn2) Fast Facts, funded by the Research to Practice Division, Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education (Cooperative Agreement #H326D110003).