

Sign Language Interpreting



What is a sign language interpreter for the deaf?

Sign language interpreters are professionals. Their job is to accurately translate a spoken language, such as English, into a signed or manual language, such as American Sign Language, the native language of the deaf. The interpreter listens to the spoken message and interprets it into the sign language used by the deaf person. The translation can also go in the other direction. An interpreter may watch the signed language of a deaf person and translate the message into the spoken language of a hearing listener.

A sign language interpreter bridges the gap between two different languages or ways of communicating. The sign language interpreter makes it possible for signers and non-signers to work together.

When does a person need a sign language interpreter?

Interpreters may be requested whenever signers and non-signers must communicate. There are many settings where an interpreter is needed, including medical, health care, mental health, legal, educational, religious, performing arts, employment, social, and political settings. The American with Disabilities Act (ADA) now assures deaf people access to the interpreting services they need.

What type of training and certification do sign language interpreters have?

In the last 30 years the sign language interpreter has moved from being a helper to being a professional. In the past, many interpreters were hearing family members or friends of deaf people who could sign. Now, interpreters may have an associate's, bachelor's, or master's degree in interpreting. These degrees are granted by interpreter education programs at universities or community colleges. These programs consist of language and cultural coursework and training in language interpretation. Interpreters may be certified by the national Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) in Silver Spring, Maryland. They may hold certification in interpreting from English to American Sign Language. They also may have a certificate for *transliteration*. Transliteration is the translation of spoken English into a "manually coded" or signed English used by some deaf people.

What responsibilities does a sign language interpreter have?

Interpreters have a Code of Ethics in their profession that guides their behavior. They must interpret both English and sign language accurately and in a language best understood by the receiver. Interpreters may only accept jobs for which they are qualified. They may not express their own opinions or ideas while interpreting and may only interpret what the deaf and hearing communication partners sign and say. They must keep all information from an interpreting session confidential.

Interpreters may be employed full time in a work setting, such as a school or hospital. They may also act as free-lance or private practice interpreters, being paid on an hourly basis for their services.

Are there any other types of interpreters?

Hard-of-hearing or deaf persons who do not use sign language may use the services of an *oral interpreter*. Oral interpreters reproduce what a speaker has said by mouthing the message without audible speech. Their job is to produce a message that is easy for a deaf listener to lipread.

The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf also certifies oral interpreters.

For further information contact:

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