

Tips for Working with ASL Interpreters in Your Business

To get the most out of using an ASL (American Sign Language) interpreter in your large business' workplace (whether in-person or virtually), it's a good idea to educate yourself about what exactly an interpreter does and how they facilitate communication.

To avoid complicating the conversation or making the interaction uncomfortable, here are some basic tips recommended for working with a sign language interpreter in the workplace.

Learn how to interact with a D/deaf* person with an interpreter. Use the interpreter to engage the Deaf individual in conversation. Interpreters are there to facilitate a Deaf/hearing interaction. You can feel confident that the interpreter will enable the conversation to flow. Ensure you do not talk directly to the interpreter like the Deaf person isn't present.

Address the Deaf person directly, using singular phrases. This is the person you are having a conversation with. The interpreter is interpreting exactly what you say. If you say "tell them..." it just confuses the message. If you don't understand something that was said, ask the Deaf person, rather than the interpreter.

Some Deaf individuals may be able to communicate verbally, or have an alternative way of communicating or taking part in certain types of meetings or events. Always ask the person's preferences.

Plan ahead for ASL interpretation. Provide the interpreter as much information as possible, as far in advance as possible. This helps the interpreter be prepared for the topic that will be discussed and the situation—in-person or virtual. It is common to provide them with an agenda, including the length of time things are expected to take, attendees' names, and any acronyms that may be used.

Generally, if the meeting will be longer than one hour, two interpreters are required, as they will to switch off every 20 minutes. If there will be a

Reference:

¹We are referencing the terminology D/deaf at the start to make clear that we are in reference to individuals who identify as both Deaf with a capital D or individuals who do not use the capital D, throughout the duration of this resource, as it is often seen as more inclusive. For more information on this distinction, please visit: www.mtapractice.com/2017/03/02/capital-d-deaf/

presentation or notes, it is helpful to provide these to both the Deaf individual and the interpreter ahead of time.

Ensure the Deaf individual can clearly see the ASL interpreter. For a virtual meeting, make sure the Host “spotlights” the interpreter so they can always be seen by the person who needs the translation. Optionally, they can pin the person(s) speaking in the meeting to everyone, as well.

When in an in-person meeting, do not place the interpreter near the person utilizing their services. While it may seem like a good idea, they actually need to be positioned away from the Deaf individual, where they can clearly see them and understand what is being said. Instead, plan for them to sit or stand near the person who may be speaking the most.

Interpretation from one language (English) to another (ASL) takes time.

Ask those speaking to try to be aware of the speed at which they speak and try to speak slightly slower, to speak as clearly as possible, to not speak over each other, and to not over-enunciate words thinking it will help (it doesn't).

Try to avoid conversing with the interpreter during the professional interaction. Although you may wish to converse with them to be friendly, the interpreter is working when in your workplace. Their work requires focus and means they ought not be an active participant in the conversations taking place. If you have questions about how the process of interpretation works, you can ask the Deaf person. Try not to ask the interpreter about their job while they are working.

Confidentiality is a key aspect to interpretation. You don't need to worry about the contents of your business meeting or private event. Interpreters are held to a professional code of conduct, which emphasizes ethics and confidentiality. Most interpreting businesses can provide you with the details of this.

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This resource was adapted from:

Callis, L. L. (n.d.) *Working with a sign language interpreter: the do's and don'ts*. Maple Communications. Retrieved from:

<https://www.maplecomm.ca/resources/working-with-a-sign-language-interpreter-the-dos-and-donts/>

Hull, R. (2020, Nov 11) *10 tips for working with American Sign Language interpreters virtually*. The Independence Center. Retrieved from:

<https://www.theindependencecenter.org/10-tips-for-working-with-american-sign-language-interpreters-virtually/>

Kirkpatrick, K. (2016, Feb 16) *10 tips for using a sign language interpreter*.

National Institutes of Health: Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. Retrieved from: <https://www.edi.nih.gov/blog/communities/10-tips-using-sign-language-interpreter>

Potential funding supports:

[Work BC ATS](#) – Work BC's Assistive Technology Services provides equipment and devices to help individuals in the workplace. Can potentially offer some funds for ASL in the workplace. You must work with them directly.



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