

How to Use a Sign Language Interpreter

You may be thinking of using a sign language interpreter for the first time or you may have used one before and want to know a little more. The guidance below should help things to go as smoothly as possible.

The interpreter's job is to facilitate communication between users of English and American Sign Language. It is not the interpreter's job to give opinions, advice or to support either side. Occasionally, an interpreter may interrupt proceedings to clarify what is being said or signed.

- Please be aware that any assignment over two hours will usually require two interpreters
- Please send the interpreter any relevant documents - for example, agenda papers prior to a meeting, allowing time for the interpreter to prepare
- For lengthy and complex appointments please allocate time for breaks. Research has shown the optimum period for interpreting is twenty minutes and then ideally a short break is required. Any longer than this and the quality of the interpretation will begin to suffer. We also have to consider the danger of our interpreters suffering from Repetitive Strain Syndrome (RSI). Furthermore, watching an interpreter for a long period of time can also be very tiring.

Positioning

Ideally, the interpreter would sit opposite the Deaf person, as near to the main speaker as possible. Try to avoid sitting the interpreter or Deaf person in front of a window or distracting background.

Whom do I address?

Speak directly to the Deaf person. However, the Deaf person will mainly focus on the interpreter. Signed responses from the Deaf person will be voiced by the interpreter as "I" or "we" - those are not the views of the interpreter themselves.

USEFUL INFORMATION

It is important to make sure that only one person speaks or signs at a time.

Please allow time for Deaf people to look at visual materials such as slides and papers before discussing them, allowing time also for the Deaf person to take notes if they wish.

The mental processing for interpreting from one language to another requires takes time. You may notice a slight delay or that the interpreter is a little bit behind the speaker or signer.

Remember the interpreter will interpret everything that is said or signed (even audible/signed asides.)