

Signstation – Question and Answers

(<http://www.signstation.org/>)

Q&A Interpreters

What are Interpreters?

An interpreter is a bilingual person who uses two languages fluently and who is trained to receive a message in one language and to relay it in the other.

Sign language interpreters work with Deaf people?

Yes, a sign language interpreter listens to speech and then produces the same meaning in sign language; he/she also can watch a Deaf person signing and then produce that message in spoken language.

The sign language interpreter is able to bridge the gap in communication between Deaf and hearing people.

Does an interpreter have special training?

Yes, not only are they expected to undergo training in BSL and in English but they must also complete training in the process of interpreting itself before they can be registered as *Junior Trainee*, *Trainee* or *Members of the Register of Sign Language Interpreters*. You can learn more about this on the website of the Association of Sign Language Interpreters <http://sign-lab.org/ASLI/howto> or if you live in Scotland, www.sasli.org.uk

Does this mean they can charge professional fees?

Yes, it is a lengthy training and it has become a service profession. Depending on the nature of the assignment, its location, the amount of time involved and the level of qualification of the interpreter, there are different fees. You should always discuss these costs in advance of booking an interpreter in order to avoid misunderstanding.

Are there any rules or regulations to which interpreters adhere?

Yes, there is a Professional Code of Conduct that interpreters agree to uphold. (http://www.asli.org.uk/asli_policies.htm or <http://www.sasli.org.uk/downloads.html>) The code requires interpreters to be impartial, to respect client confidentiality and sets out the complaints and disciplinary procedures.

Are there many interpreters out there?

Interpreter demand far exceeds supply. There is a chronic shortage of appropriately qualified British Sign Language/English Interpreters.

If I only need an interpreter for the morning, do I pay for a full day?

Interpreters tend to use a fixed system: either a minimum three-hour booking system, a half-day booking system or a full-day booking system. This may be affected by the

distance they have to travel. You should discuss your precise needs as far in advance as possible.

So how do I find an interpreter?

There is an association of interpreters www.asli.org.uk and in Scotland, www.sasli.org.uk. There is also an awarding body who carry out examinations and they also operate contact lists of registered interpreters www.cacdp.org.uk. You may also find that there are local and national agencies such as SLIC www.slic.co.uk

Is the booking of an interpreter a simple business?

There are agencies whom you can contact who will take the hard work out of it for you, but charge a little more. Remember that the demand for interpreters is great and they are seldom available at short notice. Try to allow yourself at least two weeks in advance of the appointment.

Do interpreters just arrive and do the job or is there something I can do to help beforehand?

In order for your event, meeting, presentation or training course to be supported effectively, preparation materials should be passed to the interpreter, in good time. Sometimes this is not possible and the professional interpreter will have to try to adapt. However, the process will be much smoother, and the outcomes are more successful, when the interpreter is appropriately prepared.

Is it important to place the interpreters correctly in the room?

It is; they need to be able to see and hear proceedings clearly and, importantly, be seen and be heard.

If an interpreter comes to a meeting, does that solve all the problems of communication?

Not quite. The process is not perfect.

First of all two languages are never exactly the same in the way they describe events and emotions. Their grammars are different and especially the idioms they use, are unique to each language. So “over the moon” in English does not translate directly into British Sign Language (BSL) – its meaning would appear something like “jumping for joy”. Phrases like “water under the bridge”, “shot himself in the foot”, “water off a duck’s back” do not translate very well into BSL. And there are many idioms in BSL which do not translate well into English.

Secondly, when the interpreter hears what someone says, he/she has to process the meaning to understand it – often what someone says is not that clear.

Thirdly, at the same time, the interpreter has to begin to transfer the meaning into sign language – to use his/her hands and body to make a new message. When this happens most interpreters are working into their second language and their choice of signs to use is that much harder.

Fourthly, the Deaf person has to reverse the process in receiving and understanding the signing and linking it to whatever has just been said.

Since all of this takes time, the Interpreted message is behind the rest of the conversation.

Appointing an interpreter, does not solve all of the problems in communication but it is a major step towards including all parties in the conversation.

Are there any simple tips to improve the process?

Yes ...

Make sure in the meeting, that only one person talks at a time.

Make sure the interpreter's vision is not obscured ie do not walk in the line of sight of the interpreter.

Speak at a normal pace - do not speak too fast and do not to slow down your speech (this actually makes it much more difficult!)

Look at the Deaf person or the audience not the interpreter (that tends to slow down your speech).

Don't ask the interpreter for his or her view, during the interpreting.

Address the Deaf person directly, not the interpreter.

The interpreter should have a break every 30 minutes. If there are two interpreters working together, this time can be extended.

Try to explain acronyms, or technical names as you go along – insider information may not be available to the interpreter in advance

Remember that the interpreter may be working up to 10 seconds behind the speaker, which means that a Deaf person would receive the signed message that much later than the hearing people. That is why a Deaf person may be laughing at the joke 10-15 seconds after everyone else.

Remember to allow the Deaf person to make a contribution to the discussion – since the interpreter is a little behind the flow of the speech, it is often the case that the Deaf person finds it difficult to break into the spoken exchanges.