

# Working Effectively with an Interpreter

## Frequently Asked Questions



The communication between two people who use different languages is typically facilitated through the use of an interpreter. An interpreter enables the accurate transmission of information, preventing potentially costly or dangerous errors or misunderstandings.



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CANADIAN HEARING SOCIETY  
SOCIÉTÉ CANADIENNE DE L'OUÏE

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## Frequently Asked Questions

The following are the most frequently asked questions about working with an interpreter:

### **Do I need to speak/sign slowly?**

- Speak/sign at your natural pace.
- The interpreter will let you know if you need to repeat something or slow down.
- It is important to take turns in a conversation to allow the interpreter to process the information, understand it, and put it in the appropriate grammatical structure of the language into which they are interpreting.
- In meetings, we recommend someone keep a speakers list to ensure effective turn taking.

### **Where do I look? Who should I speak to?**

- The hearing person should look at and speak directly to the Deaf person and listen to the interpreter.
- The Deaf person will glance back and forth between the person speaking and the interpreter.

### **Where should I stand or sit?**

- The best position for the interpreter is to stand/sit next to the hearing person, opposite the Deaf person. This allows the Deaf person to clearly see both the interpreter and the person they are meeting with.



## **What seating arrangements are best in group situations?**

- Semi-circle seating arrangements are best for discussion formats. This enables the Deaf person to see what is happening around the group (e.g. who is speaking).
- For conferences or performances, the interpreter should be on stage and a seating area near the front should be reserved for Deaf participants.
- Reserved seating should offer clear sightlines to the interpreter(s).
- For a large stage, a solid, dark coloured backdrop is recommended.

## **What preparation material does an interpreter need?**

- The interpreter needs to become familiar with the information that will be discussed in order to prepare how best to interpret the information into each language.
- The assignment coordinator (or interpreter) will ask for information about the assignment and request materials to review several days/weeks in advance.
- The more people involved in the assignment and/or the more complex the material, the more information the interpreter will require.
- Materials requested can include agendas, speeches, topics and names, technical vocabulary, handouts, PowerPoint slides and background information.

- Meeting with the interpreter 15 to 30 minutes before the assignment begins is highly recommended. This brief meeting is an opportunity to clarify information and to ensure that the visual and auditory set-up of the room is adequate.

## **Can I trust an interpreter will keep information confidential?**

- Yes, the interpreters employed by the Canadian Hearing Society follow the Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Canada's (AVLIC) Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Professional Conduct. Interpreters must remain impartial and keep the content of all assignments and preparation materials in strict confidence. AVLIC's Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Professional Conduct can be found online at [www.avlic.ca](http://www.avlic.ca).

## **Do I need visual aids?**

- Handouts or overheads can be a tremendous help to both the interpreter and to the participants of a meeting/presentation.
- Visual aids enable people to see the English/French that is associated with the ASL/LSQ interpretation, while acting as a convenient reference for issues being discussed.
- It is important to remember that it is not possible to simultaneously follow the ASL/LSQ interpretation and look at visual references. Pausing periodically allows Deaf participants the opportunity to look between the interpreter and the visual reference, as well as allowing participants time to absorb the material.



## **Other considerations:**

- Adequate lighting is important for all participants to see each other and interpreter(s) clearly.
- Lighting should not be too dim or too bright to prevent eye strain for both interpreters and Deaf consumers.
- Visual distractions in the background or foreground are not recommended. They make it difficult for the person who is signing and interpreters as they must work harder to concentrate.
- If slides or movies with or without captions are to be shown, ensure the interpreter is sufficiently lit.
- Meeting venues should be physically comfortable, with adjustable chairs with good back rest (without arms).
- If water or other refreshments are provided to people at the meeting/event, please consider the interpreter when arranging quantities.

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### **Why are two interpreters often required?**

The interpreting process is very demanding. Two languages with very different grammar, nuances, and cultural inferences are being interpreted. Numerous factors can affect an interpreter's ability to concentrate and give a clear interpretation, including:

- familiarity (or lack of) with the topic being discussed
- meeting dynamics (e.g. the number of people, type of meeting)
- environmental conditions (e.g. background noise, inadequate lighting, people speaking at the same time)
- length and intensity of the assignment

Research indicates that after about 20 minutes, the mental process and quality of the interpretation decreases. This is true of any language interpreter. Therefore if an assignment is over two hours in length, or under two hours, but deemed to be extremely complicated, two or more interpreters are assigned.

- One interpreter will actively interpret for 15-20 minutes while the other provides support, monitoring the clarity of the interpretation and watching that no information is missed. The interpreters will switch, continuing this pattern until a break occurs.
- Interpreters and Deaf participants require periodic breaks in order to maintain focus. Breaks re-energize interpreters and help them maintain a high standard of interpretation. It is important to discuss the break plan with the interpreter(s) and Deaf participants.

## **What is a professional Deaf interpreter (DI)?**

Professional Deaf interpreters are fluent in ASL or LSQ (native language users) as well as non-standard forms of ASL or LSQ. Deaf interpreters are invaluable in that they are members of the same cultural community as your Deaf patient/client/consumer.

Deaf and non-Deaf interpreters (hearing interpreters) work together as a professional team to facilitate the communication process, an example:

The DI interprets between the Deaf participant and the Non-Deaf (hearing) interpreter, who then interprets to the hearing participant. The following are situations where the expertise of Deaf interpreters may be required:

1. Those involving Deaf children.
2. When the Deaf person uses a non-standard form of ASL.
3. If the Deaf person is extremely ill or has physical restrictions or cognitive limitations.
4. For mental health assessments and/or treatment.
5. In court and other legal settings.



## How to contact us:

Ontario Interpreting Services  
Canadian Hearing Society

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### Mission

Founded in 1940, the Canadian Hearing Society is the leading provider of services, products, and information that remove barriers to communication, advance hearing health, and promote equity for people who are culturally Deaf, oral deaf, deafened and hard of hearing.

### Vision

A society where all people are respected, have full access to communication, and are able to participate without social, economic, or emotional barriers.

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OIS was founded in association with  
the Ontario Association of the Deaf



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