



DEAF  
SERVICES  
UNLIMITED



## In-Person Interpreting Tips

### 10 Tips for Using a Sign Language Interpreter

A sign language interpreter's role is to facilitate communication between signed and spoken languages.

1. Look at and speak directly to the person who is Deaf. Face the person, don't look at the interpreter. Yes, sign language can be fascinating to watch, but you are having a conversation with the person who is Deaf.
2. Be yourself; use your ordinary language and speaking style. Speak in the first person, just like you are having a normal voice-to-voice conversation with a person. Avoid such phrases as "Tell her," and "Explain to him."
3. You may be used to watching an interpreter during the service when the interpreter stands in front, facing the audience. Interpreting conversations is different in that the interpreter will position him/herself next to you, so that the person who is Deaf can glance at you both, picking up your non-verbal cues.
4. Speak in your normal tone, at your normal pace. The interpreter will tell you if you need to pause or slow down. If you use a word that the interpreter is unfamiliar with, he or she may ask you to clarify.
5. Give the interpreter a copy of presentations and any other materials ahead of time. When distributing agendas, minutes, or other written materials, offer one to the interpreter as well.
6. If you are using written notes, or speaking from a presentation, it is helpful to offer a copy to the person who is Deaf and the interpreter.
7. If you lower the lights during part of the service, maintain enough light so that the interpreter can still be seen.
8. Be aware that the interpreter must interpret everything that is said. Don't ask the interpreter to refrain from interpreting some of what you say.
9. Try to avoid personal conversations with the interpreter during the professional situation. He or she is working as a means of language-transmission, not as a participant.
10. Relax. If you are unsure of the appropriate way to proceed in a particular situation, just ask. Conversing, through an interpreter, with a person who is Deaf, can be very comfortable. It is such a natural process; you may find yourself forgetting that there is an interpreter.