



Tips for working most effectively with a BSL/English Interpreter

What is the role of a BSL/English Interpreter?

Interpreters facilitate communication between British Sign Language users and hearing people who use spoken English, making sure it is a smooth process.

Interpreters must have excellent knowledge of the two languages and cultures. For example, they will receive information in BSL, process its meaning, then interpret it into spoken English.

You may think that sign language Interpreters may look very active with their hands, but in fact most of the work is going on in their heads.

They must listen carefully to, or watch the message, extract the meaning including cultural values, and processing all this is where the real hard work happens.

Tips to help you work most effectively with a BSL/English Interpreter

1. Ensure the Deaf person can see both the Interpreter and the speaker clearly, usually by sitting them [the Deaf person] opposite. It would also be difficult to see a person signing, if for example they are sat in front of a window. The Interpreter and Deaf person will be able to advise you on the best seating arrangements.
2. Ensure you speak clearly and at a normal pace. You might try to pause every few seconds in mid-sentence thinking this will 'help the Interpreter'. However, this is not the case as Interpreters do not translate word for word. For example, they might listen to a speaker, process the meaning of what is being signed and then convey the meaning into BSL.
3. When talking to a Deaf person, don't speak to the Interpreter to ask them to 'tell him/her...' It's much better to look at and speak directly to the Deaf person.
4. Ensure you consider the Interpreter and Deaf person's needs. For example, both will need regular breaks as Interpreting is hard work and Interpreters will need time to switch off and recharge. Similarly, the Deaf person receiving content via an Interpreter can be very tiring for them, so will also need breaks.

5. *In medical/ optician/ dentist situations where examinations need to be carried out, it is likely that for reasons of dignity, practicality or space constraints, that the interpreter will not be able to interpret during the examination. In this situation please give full information to the Deaf person before the examination takes place, explaining what will happen. If the lights will be switched off, please inform them as this cuts off all communication. Please refrain from talking throughout the examination as the interpreter is unlikely to have eye contact with the Deaf person until afterwards.
6. You may decide to give out handouts and ask the Deaf person to read through. However, remember it's not possible for them to listen and read the handouts simultaneously. Ensure that you stop speaking whilst you give time for the Deaf person to read through and understand. When they have finished reading, you can carry on speaking.
7. You may have booked an Interpreter for an event or a conference for example. Ensure your preparation such as PowerPoints or handouts are provided to the Interpreter before the event. This allows the Interpreter to read through and prepare themselves, feeling more confident and knowledgeable about the context. This means when they arrive at the event, they are ready to start interpreting. Also, ensure you give a copy of the preparation material to the Deaf person.
8. In a group situation, ensure that only one person speaks/signs at a time. If everyone speaks over one another, it will be impossible to interpret all the information.
9. If you have any videos to show, ensure they have subtitles.
10. You may ask the Interpreter for their personal opinions; however, they can't be actively involved in the conversation. In addition, please don't ask them not to interpret something you have said.
11. Sometimes Interpreters arrive and they have received no preparation beforehand. If you decide to have a brief before the event, ensure the Interpreter is involved so they can fully understand and be prepared for what is going to happen.