**How to use Sign Language Interpreters Effectively**

**Compiled by Leanne Cook for NCDB - TRI at WOU**

**Speak at your natural pace** but be aware that the interpreter may wait to hear and understand a complete thought before beginning to interpret. The interpreter will let you know if you need to repeat or slow down.

**Look at and speak directly to the person who is deaf or heard of hearing.** Do not say “tell him” or “tell her”. The deaf person will be watching the interpreter and glancing back and forth at you.

• Remember that when the interpreter speaks, he/she is voicing the words of the deaf

individual. The interpreter is not a participant in this interaction. Respond directly to the deaf person.

**Increase Eye Contact;** ASL is a visual language, and eye contact is much more important to deaf individuals than it is to hearing people. The best way to ignore someone signing is to look away from them! When addressing a deaf person, maintain much more eye contact than you would with a hearing person. The deaf person will probably spend some amount of time watching the interpreter, but will “check in” with you regularly, as much of the emotion behind your words can be transmitted visually.

**Respect their access to information** because a deaf person has the same right to information as anyone. If something is said that a hearing person in the room can hear, the interpreter will interpret it for their deaf client. Its relevance to the deaf person is not the issue: side conversations and even the audible side of phone conversations will likely be translated into ASL.

If there is something you feel should not be interpreted, be careful how you express it. Saying “Don’t interpret this…” will probably be translated before the sign language interpreter realizes what you are trying to say. If you have something to say you do not wish the deaf person to be aware of, step out of the room or *move beyond the interpreter’s earshot*. Extend the same level of courtesy to the deaf person as you would anyone else.

**It is usually best to position the interpreter next to you (the hearing person) or the person presenting the information**, opposite the deaf person. This makes it easy for the deaf person to see you and the interpreter in one line of vision.

**If you are handing out written materials during a presentation or meeting, please give a copy to the interpreter**. Remember to pause before giving your explanation of any visual aids so that the deaf person has time to see it, look back at the interpreter and still keep up with the information being presented.

**The interpreter is present to facilitate communication.** If you have questions about the deaf person or sign language, ask the deaf person directly and the interpreter will interpret your questions. The interpreter will not give advice or their personal opinion on anything that is discussed.

Compiled from:

Bareford, D. (n.d.). How To Use a Sign Language Interpreter. *How To Use a Sign Language*

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