



Ensuring Successful Classroom Communication – Interpreters

- **Speak directly to the deaf student, not to the interpreter.** A common mistake is to say, “Tell her...” or “Ask him...” Instead, make eye contact with and speak directly to the deaf student as though the interpreter is not present. This shows the student respect and helps develop the student/instructor relationship.
- **Expect lag time:** Wait for interpretation and response before continuing to speak.
- **Deaf/hard-of-hearing students may or may not speak for themselves.** Even if sign language interpreters are present, the student may choose to speak for him/herself when commenting or responding to questions in class.
- **During class, the speaker and interpreter should both be in the student’s line of sight.** Interpreters may ask you where you are sitting or standing in order to be seated near you. Make sure you do not stand between the interpreter and the deaf student.
- **Keep in mind that the student must try and watch you as well as watch the interpreter.** This is not always an easy task. Lecturing from the front of the room rather than walking around the room can help, as can ensuring that you face the class as much as possible and speak at a moderate pace.
- **Provide any class materials and handouts to interpreters, and do this in advance whenever possible.**
 - Advanced copies of lecture notes, technical terms, hand-outs, speeches, audio recordings, song lyrics, websites, PowerPoint slides, and other materials will help orient the deaf student and allow the interpreter to better prepare to translate the class content.
 - For complex material, interpreters often have to prepare outside of class just as students do.

- **If you plan to read something aloud in class, provide the student and the interpreter with a copy before you begin** (preferably in advance of class).
 - When reading aloud, people often tend to speak faster than normal. This may affect the interpreter's translation of the material. If possible, try to slow down a bit when reading.
 - You should also be aware that translation into ASL without seeing the written copy may affect the student in terms of the expectation for any exercise associated with the reading.
- **To get a deaf person's attention when an interpreter is not available**, use a hand motion or wave in their field of peripheral vision.

Working with Deaf Students and Interpreters in Lab Settings

Often professors in the sciences have safety concerns about having deaf students and interpreters in lab settings. In fact, deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals are no more or no less susceptible to safety issues in the lab than other students. Here are a few things to consider in order to ensure an effective and safe learning environment for all.

- **Most deaf students have had some prior science background, so they are familiar with the setting.** The student is a great resource in determining what will work best in your lab setting.
- **The deaf student should have a lab station that provides an unobstructed view of the instructor.** The student must be able to see any instruction and demonstration that occurs. The interpreter must be able to hear and see all instruction as well.
- **Interpreters may ask for clarification so that they can interpret concepts, tasks, and procedures more clearly.** However, the interpreters are not instructors, and should not be relied on to explain concepts or show the student how to do procedures in the lab.
- **It is helpful if the professor can meet with the student and interpreters before the first lab in order to discuss logistics.** This meeting should take place in the actual lab so that everyone can agree on best physical placement of student and interpreters, as well as any other concerns.
- **Interpreters prepare ahead of time so that they fully understand what will happen in the lab on a particular day.** Please make sure that interpreters have any relevant handouts, lab assignments, and lab workbooks, as well as access to any websites that will be used.
- **If students are required to wear special safety gear, such as lab coat, goggles, gloves, etc., such gear should be provided to the interpreters as well.** Interpreters will not work in the lab without appropriate protective gear.
- **Interpreters usually work in teams of two for classes of more than one hour.** In some labs, one interpreter may be sufficient.
- **When there is an interpreter team, only one interpreter will be working in the vicinity of the deaf student at any given time.** The second interpreter will wait off to the side until it is his/her turn to interpret. Interpreters will be cognizant of what's happening in the lab so that when they alternate it will not be disruptive or hazardous to others in the lab.
- **Sometimes deaf students may be comfortable communicating one-on-one or individually with the professor or the other students.** In this case, the interpreter will remain within sight line to be called when needed, but out of the way until called.
- **Interpreters will work dynamically with student and professor to modify communication and logistics as needed during lab times.** Ongoing communication is critical to ensure safety for all.

If any questions or concerns arise that cannot be resolved through communication with the student and interpreters, contact William Woods University Director of Student Accessibility Resources by email Selena.Meints@WilliamWoods.edu or phone 573.592.1194.