



# Working with Auslan Interpreters

Practice and a little knowledge can assist in working effectively with an interpreter. The following points should be observed when using the services of an interpreter:

- Allow the interpreter to position themselves appropriately. Ask the deaf person and the interpreter as to seating arrangements. It is usual for the interpreter to be situated next to the speaker so that the deaf person can observe both people simultaneously, but this is not always the case.
- Speak directly to the deaf person, as you would to any other person. For example, say, “How are you feeling?” rather than “How is he feeling?” or “Ask him how he is feeling.”
- Focus your attention and eye gaze on the deaf person, not the interpreter, even if they are looking at the interpreter and not you.
- Speak clearly and at your usual pace and volume. It is easier for the interpreter to establish the context and a natural signing flow if you speak normally. The interpreter will tell you if it is necessary to change your pace. Do not pause and wait for the interpreter to ‘catch up’ after each sentence, this is not necessary.
- The interpreter is bound by their code of ethics to be impartial. It is inappropriate for them to answer questions with regards to their personal (or professional) opinion.
- Do not make asides that you don’t want interpreted - the interpreter is ethically obliged to interpret everything that the deaf person would have understood if he/she could hear spoken English.
- Give a little extra time for the deaf person to answer any questions you have asked, as there is always a time lag as the interpreter interprets from spoken English into Auslan. The degree of delay will vary with interpreters and the complexity of the material. This is especially important during group discussions
- Depending on the situation, an interpreter may choose to interpret consecutively – that is, they will not begin interpreting until you have finished speaking or signing. If this is the case, please speak or sign in short ‘chunks’ so that the interpreter can easily remember what you have said.
- Allow time for the deaf person to take notes or read any printed material - it is impossible to watch an interpreter and read/write at the same time

- Be aware that the interpreter will not be translating each spoken word into a sign. The interpreter is translating spoken English into Auslan (Australian Sign Language). Auslan is a language in it's own right and has a different sentence structure, its own grammar and idioms. The interpreter will be translating the meaning from one language into the other.
- Ensure participants speak one at a time. It is impossible to interpret more than one person at a time. Establish turn taking rules for speaking at the start.
- Try to spend time with the interpreter before you start. Explain any jargon or specialised language you will use. If possible, give the interpreter a copy of your notes when you book them so that they can be familiar with the topic and language. A copy of the agenda and the names and titles of participants would also be useful if these are referred to during the booking.
- Be aware that humour does not always translate well from one language to another. Many English jokes are based on a play on words or the humour lies in the way something is said. Do not be offended if the Deaf person does not laugh at these jokes.
- Relax! Deaf people and interpreters are used to working with people who have never worked with an interpreter before. It is normal to make mistakes in new situations. Just behave naturally and everything should go smoothly.

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