

# Creating an ASL Study Aid for Introduction to Psychology: Meshing Four Constituencies to Make a Video Tape

*Anne Vinzel*

University of Utah, Salt Lake City UT

*Karen Wales*

Salt Lake Community College, Salt Lake City, UT

*Rusty Wales*

Utah Community Center of the Deaf, Salt Lake City, UT

## Abstract

This paper examines the process of making a videotape study aid for a university level Introduction to Psychology course with the eventual goal of transferring the material to a searchable CD ROM disk. The project was done as part of a Western Region Outreach Center and Consortia grant awarded to Salt Lake Community College and the Utah Consortium, a group of post-secondary institutions and other agencies that serve Deaf and Hard of Hearing clients. Four different groups were involved in the making of the videotape: Psychology Department consultants, Deaf consumers and actors, video production staff, and coordinators. Two coordinators worked with the other three groups to negotiate the material selected, how it was expressed, and the details of how the final video would look.

The rationale for making the video is that Deaf students face unique problems in classes that use extensive technical terminology. A Deaf student typically uses an interpreter during lectures, but may have to break his/her concentration on the lecture material to discuss with the interpreter how to sign various terms.

This videotape was conceived as a way to let Deaf students preview terms and concepts in ASL before they had to deal with them in lectures. It was also seen as a way to help Deaf students connect the ASL versions of technical terms to their written English equivalents, hopefully improving exam performance. It is expected that interpreters will want to study the tape ahead of time, making their preparation more efficient.

Three Deaf actors were used on the tape, signing in ASL from a script developed in consultation with the University of Utah Psychology Department. For the first one-hour tape, three sections of Introduction to Psychology which beginning students find most difficult—Abnormal Psychology, Physiological Psychology and Cognitive Psychology—were videotaped.

Extensive meetings with Psychology Department representatives, Deaf students and recent graduates, the Deaf actors and the video production people were needed to arrive at a product that took into account the requirements of the various constituencies. The paper discusses this process.

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*(The first speaker is Rusty Wales; he is Deaf utilizes an ASL-to-English interpreter)*

We have seen numerous Deaf people succeed in their colleges and in their careers as well. Few of them went on to successfully complete Ph.D.s.

There has never been a question in our minds in our professions in the field of deafness that Deaf people have equal ability to achieve anything in their ventures, as their hearing counterparts do. Deaf individuals exhibit the same range of intelligence as hearing people do; we know that. Likewise, Deaf people do have shortcomings and so do hearing people, you and me. How well Deaf students are prepared prior to their first year in colleges may be more unique than in any other groups. It is our job to examine this uniqueness and explore various ways to help Deaf students overcome this deficiency.

It is a fact that most local public educational systems leave Deaf students ill-prepared for the demands of vocational or college programs. One area of particular concern is English literacy skills. No matter if some Deaf students have worn hearing aids/cochlear implants and have had excessive speech training in their first 18 years of life, Deaf youths will *always* think and process language visually. Some students may have been more or less exposed to American Sign Language (ASL), the natural language of Deaf people. Others may never be exposed to ASL, yet they have shown some of the same struggles in mastering writing/reading and employing English. With this logic in mind, ASL is the language most readily understood by visual thinkers (Deaf individuals). ASL is a complete language that functions the way the visual mind functions. English, on the other hand, is an auditorally processed language that functions in the manner suited to the hearing mind. Written English is based on the way English *sounds* and is *spoken*.

The intent here is not to beat a drum advocating ASL but to help you to think like a Deaf person as if you have been deprived of thinking, processing, and articulating auditorally in your lifetime. When you open a college-level textbook in your first year at a college, you might find nothing but wordy or verbose text without pictures. You would want to peruse through many pages looking for some pictures to help you think visually. "Help!" may be a natural reaction of a Deaf student as a visual thinker on the first day at a college.

In a transition from a high school to a college, Deaf students are thrust into heavy verbal lectures where professors blah-blah, using big and nonsense vocabulary, all auditorally. Those Deaf students are expected by their parents, rehabilitation counselors, professors and everyone else to pick up big vocabulary as naturally as their hearing

classmates. This is not always the case. They really need direct interaction from their teachers or professors. Although interpreters play a vital part in college learning, a direct interaction between a Deaf student and his/her professor cannot happen even with an interpreter. A professor would have to sign directly to the Deaf student before this student can process information visually. Deaf students need instructors who can communicate with them directly in their language, understanding the linguistic and cultural differences of Deaf students in order to get the concept across. If instructors or the textbooks could share the same language (ASL) their students use, they would be empowered to create visually-accessible methods to help Deaf students understand the class subject much better.

We the staff of this Utah grant team have identified this issue and after some lengthy brainstorming and experiments, came up with this video project. It can be said that video is visual enough and very essential for a Deaf person to think and process a concept, particularly in a college setting. This video project may also be of benefit to an interpreter in a particular class to become familiar with certain high-technical signs used in interpreting. The goal here is obvious and is to help Deaf students be better prepared for studies on a college level. Keep in mind, this project is best suited to the early part of a semester, such as the first week of a class, *not* one night before a final exam!

*(Karen Wales, who is hearing, is speaking this next part. She utilizes an English-to-ASL interpreter).*

We decided to start with Introduction to Psychology as our pilot class for the video because it is a requirement or elective for many majors, because it has a large body of technical terminology, and because some of the technical terminology resembles everyday language but is used in very specific ways which confuse students. To begin, we interfaced extensively with a professor of psychology at the University of Utah who is very concerned about the quality of undergraduate education. He, along with advanced graduate students in the department, reviewed the scripts for the video to ensure psychological accuracy.

The scripts were written by a staff member at the University of Utah whose graduate degree is in Psychology and who has frequently taught Introduction to Psychology. This team of people

was consulted often as the script was written for three topics in Psychology 101, Abnormal Psychology, Physiological Psychology, and Cognitive Psychology.

After extensive research of available similar types of learning materials (video), we discovered and found only one series of videos that were of technical terms directed mostly toward interpreters (an NTID series of five videotapes). These tapes only displayed signed vocabulary (to create consistency for interpreters) and spoke the technical terms, rather than defining or giving examples. Therefore the purpose of the video was two-fold—first, to make something that would benefit and be useful for Deaf college students prior to and during the studying of the Psychology 101 course and second, for interpreters to assist them in their skill level for the benefit of interpreting to Deaf students and to increase consistency in technical signs used in psychology.

Once the script was written on paper in English it was time to find a group of Deaf consultants who would review the written script and agree with the signs and definitions in ASL. We also decided in the beginning of this process that Deaf individuals would be the “actors” for the visual video presentation. The Deaf consultants were crucial in the process of revising, editing and reviewing the written English script for the ASL presentation to be taped. We chose five Deaf individuals who had taken psychology, used their psychological backgrounds in their professions, were college graduates (with MA or BA degrees), and had excellent usage of English as well as being culturally Deaf. Of course, they were all fluent in ASL.

In the course of many meetings among the Deaf consultants, a strong consensus emerged about how to handle language and translation issues. One point of agreement about language was that if a given piece of technical psychological vocabulary was not in common use in ASL, it would be fingerspelled; new signs were not created for the purpose of this tape. All the Deaf consultants were in agreement with language, translation, and definitions into ASL. The Deaf consultants would consider in length how to express the precise meaning of a term in ASL. This “linguistic clarity process” evolved due to the concern they showed in truly understanding the original script material. The script was reviewed and changed three times before it was approved by the Psychology department.

The Deaf consultants were wizards at rethinking English psychology terms into ASL. Gross changes like eliminating examples that were more understood by “hearing” people were easy to achieve. The Deaf consultants prompted a number of changes, interpretations, and subtle nuances that improved the finish product. Specific examples were used more often to clarify concepts and helped the video work more like a narrative than a set of isolated definitions. The face to face interaction between the Deaf consultants and the script writer was a crucial part of the process.

The three Deaf actors in the video were chosen from our group of Deaf consultants. We consulted with them as to color of clothes and background colors, listened to their suggestions as to what would make the video as easy on the eye as possible. This greatly helped once the “shooting” of video began since they were involved in the translation of the script. Each Deaf Actor has their individual signing style, something we knew would be of value for the audience. The common thread was that all three actors were culturally deaf and were fluent in ASL. Their signing styles are unique which makes for ease and interest when watching this video. These Deaf Actors make the audience feel like they are being taught by professors. Their beauty is that the material is being presented in ASL by the individual not a third party.

Communication, communication communication was the key to the success of this video.

*(The final section is spoken by Anne Vinsel, who is hearing. She utilizes an English-to-ASL interpreter).*

Rusty and Karen have explained the part of our process that included recruiting the actors. I will begin where Karen left off by repeating “communicate, communicate, communicate” and add “then do it some more and don’t assume anything!” I thought I would use my time to provide you with some concrete examples of what I mean, and don’t worry—I’ll be sure to leave time for questions.

In a way, none of us had any background in doing something like this, but in another way we all had some connection to learning a large set of “big and nonsense” vocabulary. The first Introduction to Psychology class I taught was in 1975, and some things haven’t changed. My own motivation in this project was to help Deaf students get beyond a point where many students, hearing or Deaf, become stuck. They feel like they know the terminology, and they’ve looked at the book and

maybe memorized a few things, so if you just ask them “do you understand this concept”, they nod yes. But they don’t really understand the terminology enough to work with it, even to the level of an Introductory Psychology text. So that was my goal: to let students get beyond that nodding stage to where they understand something in at least a basic way, and can express that on an exam.

When I wrote the script, I tried to include lots of examples that would help students remember the concepts but that were still accurate from the psychology point of view. This was especially important in the section on Abnormal Psychology. It’s one thing to define what a delusion is in the abstract, but it is more helpful to give an actual example of a real kind of delusion somebody might have. If you just have the part of the definition that says “false thoughts,” you could get all hung up thinking “what’s false to one person might be true to another,” and you don’t really get the feel for what a delusion is. However, if you have an example such as “the person thinks she’s the Virgin Mary and is being persecuted by being put in this hospital because the government is trying to silence the mother of God,” that gives you a truer picture. Also, I’m a visual person, a painter and sculptor, and it always helps me to have a visual image to remember something. So, it was easy for me to understand that Deaf students would want something to visualize instead of a lot of cold “blah-blah.” All our actors were really concerned about conveying meaning, communicating to students, and they helped make the scripts better that way.

At the same time it was also my job to worry about keeping definitions and examples accurate from a psychological point of view. There was a lot of back and forth consultation between myself, Karen, the Deaf consultants, and the Psychology consultants. Karen counted three versions, but from my standpoint it was more like 800 e-mails and lots of meetings. One thing that was interesting and also a little funny was that the parts that the Deaf consultants found boring and suggested minimizing or eliminating were the exact parts that the Psychology Department consultants had expanded from my original draft.

One example was the *DSM-IV*, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, version 4, affectionately known as the Bible of Abnormal Psychology. Deaf consultants thought the section on the *DSM* was way too long and boring, and the Psychology Department thought it needed expansion. There were many compromises, needless to say.

Because I came into the project totally ignorant of ASL, I had originally assumed that the “translation” part would be straightforward, and the actors would just plug ASL signs into the technical terminology (yeah, yeah, I know better now). Rusty, Karen, and the Deaf consultants were very persistent (tactful, but persistent) in letting me know “it’s not that easy, we have to get together and figure this out, ask you questions about what you meant, etc.” My first clue was when one of the Deaf students got confused about how I was using the term “commitment” (as in “commitment hearing”). “Isn’t commitment a good thing? What all the girls want, you’re a serious person?” His question made me realize that I needed to clarify that part right away, but also cleared up a real mystery created by many generations of Introduction to Psychology students! “Oh, THAT’S what they were thinking commitment meant!” The problem with an introductory class is that if you’re in the field, you use jargon all the time in your everyday life, and you forget that the same English words mean something else to most people. The Deaf consultants were very good at spotting when that was happening and making me fix it. Working so hard for clarity was a part of the process I hadn’t even visualized at the beginning but was most valuable to the quality of the final product.

As we continue to do the rest of the Introduction to Psychology tutorial, that part will become more important. For me, it was very important to try to be flexible and learn as I went, even though I was juggling three different groups (Deaf, Psychology, and TV Production) and was coming from a third group (trying-to-be-helpful Advisors).

Another happy surprise for me as I learned a little about ASL was how efficient it is in terms of time. Having four dimensions to work with instead of one lets you put a lot of information in each unit. We discovered that a script that would take about 2 1/2 hours in spoken English took less than 90 minutes in ASL.

#### Working with consultants from the Psychology Department

The Psychology team needed to understand that ASL and written English are not the same; it’s a genuine translation need; also that the usual organization of information in textbook English might be inefficient or boring in ASL.

We operated through a professor who is very concerned about the quality of undergraduate instruction. He has been a connection to the Disability Services office for several years as a dual appointment with Undergraduate Studies, so a working relationship with our office was already in place. The professor contacted other professors and all-but-dissertation graduate students who specialized in the topics we were videotaping. These consultants reviewed the first draft of every section, and in one instance also reviewed two more drafts. We asked them to concern themselves with the following issues:

- accuracy and up-to-date quality of the information.
- appropriateness and clarity of the examples.
- representativeness of the terms for an introductory course.
- appropriateness of the level of explanation for introductory class.
- should there be more or less information for a given term.

### Working with TV Production People

It was obvious to me that our production and editing staff had never produced an ASL video before, but I was very mistaken in thinking it would be easier for them. Because no sound is needed and the remaining production should be the same, I thought it would be easier. There were quite a lot of things about the shooting that were new and different for the production people. For the shooting, although it was easier for the TV production not to have an “official” audio track, we wound up recording an unofficial “trash” audio track so that the editors could divide up the tape into coherent segments and properly insert the text (many thanks to Karen).

The set needed some experimentation, as well as the lighting. The production crew was only familiar with shooting situations where focus is needed on the upper body, such as a news anchor person.

In standard video production, medium and long shots are not “read” by a viewer for close detail, so although the camera people were accustomed to shooting a person from the waist up, they were not accustomed to shooting someone with rapidly moving hands where clarity of hand movement was critical. This required adjustments of positioning of the Deaf actors, adjustments in lighting and very exacting work by the camera operators.

One of the actors, Penny, who did the physiological section, had a naturally large signing space, and was also working with a large model of a brain some of the time. The production crew had to ask her to restrain her signing a little to leave room on the tape for other elements.

When the teleprompter was set at a speed appropriate for speech, the signing became ve..r...y.....s...l.....o.....w. ASL is so much more efficient than spoken English; the teleprompter operator had trouble keeping up with the script when it was run at the speed that worked for signing. Because we taped Rusty first, he was experimented on the most, but he was very patient and we only had to reshoot one section at the very beginning of the tape.

The biggest problems we had to work out when putting all the elements together were what sections to include in what proportions, and how fast to run things by the viewer.

All of our Deaf consultants were very clear that they wanted the actor large on the screen; then we had to juggle other elements. Originally, we made one giant mistake and asked the actors themselves how much information they wanted on the screen with them. Whoops! Since they had lived with the script for quite a while, they already knew this stuff and preferred a format where the text was on the screen at the same time they were. The WROCC site visitors and anybody who was viewing the tape “fresh” found that format too hard to follow. Luckily, this is one of the things we could fix in post production; so the tape you see here is the changed version and people think it is much easier to follow.

An interesting generational difference was that younger Deaf consultants expected to interact with the video more and were confident of their abilities with freezing text and taking notes from there. The somewhat older consultants wanted the text on the screen longer, not wanting to interrupt the flow of visual information. We compromised with ten seconds of screen time for text.

### Shooting the Video

Because we are hoping to eventually put this video onto a searchable, indexed CD, we realized early that we would need extremely high quality video. This was also the case because viewers would need to clearly discriminate among very subtle hand and finger actions, not ordinarily a major concern in video. We also needed to include a time code,

so that students could match the video to a written text index, thus saving them a lot of time if they just wanted to look up certain terms.

My original concern that there was too much information even in these three sections proved to be unfounded; ASL's spatial economy meant that material took a shorter time to sign than it would have taken to speak.

The actual shooting created unfamiliar situations for everybody. It is apparently more difficult to read from a teleprompter, watch for a floor director's signed directions and sign than it is just to read English aloud from a teleprompter. The speed at which it makes sense to set a teleprompter for spoken English is too slow for ASL signing. The (hearing) director was also dependent on a signing floor director to pass instructions back and forth. Camera operators are more accustomed to focusing on a person's face than on their signing space, and lighting that area is more critical than usual. Luckily, everybody in the process was patient and had a sense of humor. We were limited to one day of shooting, with about an hour of reshooting time available. Any other difficulties had to be fixed in post production.

One thing we found critically important for later editing was to have a "trash" sound track, narrating what the signing actor was saying. Because of the diversity of the actors' signing styles, there was a range of speed, pausing between terms, etc. This variability, while providing something for every viewer, did create difficulties in the post production. Most mistakes were corrected on the spot by reshooting; they were the usual kinds of video bloopers—the occasional snuffle, signing "is" instead of "is not", signing too slowly or too quickly. Only four significant errors snuck into the tape, and three were correctable.

### Post Production and Beyond

The biggest difficulty in postproduction (currently wrapping up) is one that is inherent in having a hearing person who does not sign edit ASL material. Editors are accustomed to having the sound track coincide exactly with the visual of the speaker on the screen; this was obviously not possible. The editor had several sessions with two different ASL users, one hearing and one Deaf.

These two ASL consultants noticed difficulties that had slipped by in the shooting, and were very creative in suggesting corrections. One problem

was solved by cutting and pasting from another signed sequence, a section that remained too slow was sped up by increasing the frames per second, text that had landed with the wrong signed sequence was corrected, and several quite complicated technical problems were fixed by the editor working with an ASL user. The major lesson for all of us was that postproduction is more complex than you think and that not everything is easy to fix after shooting. Working with ASL visuals was also a new experience for the editor; everyone involved needed to be flexible and creative. In the end, everything was correctable except for one stray non-dominant hand "shoo-ing" gesture that was impossible to reshoot because the actor had died shortly after the footage was made.

There were several limitations in this first video, including the fact that only the video production staff had made instructional videos before. If we had it to do over again, several changes could improve the final product:

- work more on making both form and content ASL friendly, while retaining accuracy.
- put actors' ASL glossed scripts on teleprompter if they'd rather, instead of using the English version.
- separate the functions of providing a trash audio track and watching for ASL errors; two ASL-using floor directors rather than one.
- insert a narrator to comment on structure (idea thanks to Deaf colleague hired after the taping was over) such as the mice in the movie *Babe*.
- pull in video examples from other sources that are accurate, for example clips from *Girl Interrupted*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, for abnormal psychology. It might be impractical to get permissions, but worth trying.
- build reshooting-after-reviewing-the-original-tape into the budget, even though it means resetting the stage and lighting and recalling the actors.

### Brief Autobiographies:

*William "Rusty" Wales* was born Deaf and attended the oral day school for his first six years. He then transferred to California School for the Deaf, Riverside, and six years later he gradu-

ated. Four years later he received a BA degree in Sociology from Gallaudet University. Rusty has been a teacher, curriculum specialist and project coordinator with the California State Department of Education for 16 years. In these years he has been involved in both types of educational settings, a residential school and mainstreaming program. He moved to Colorado to become a rehabilitation counselor where he was actively involved in coordinating school-to-work transition as well as preparing clients for college. Ten years in this business was long enough for Rusty, and so he moved on to becoming a Training Supervisor with a Telecommunication Relay Services center. Currently, Rusty is the Administrator of Utah Division of Services to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and he manages the Utah Community Center of the Deaf (UCCD) in Salt Lake City (see elsewhere in this paper about more information on UCCD). He has won a number of awards including the TV network/newspaper's Teacher Who Makes a Difference and the Colorado Rehabilitation Counselor of the Year awards. His short story, "Back to the Star" was published in *Deaf Esprit: Inspiration, Humor and Wisdom in the Deaf Community*.

*Karen Wales* has a MA degree from Gallaudet University in Rehabilitation Counseling. She has extensive experience in working with people who are Deaf and hard of hearing both as a classroom teacher and vocational rehabilitation counselor and placement specialist. Ms. Wales is currently the Program Director for BOOST, a customer service/computer skills training program for individuals with challenges and disabilities. She has been involved on a cooperative agreement with Salt Lake

Community College and the WROCC Grant to teach English as a second language to Deaf students and to assist in the development of our ASL Video for Introduction to Psychology.

*Anne Vinsel* has an MS in Psychology from the University of Utah. She has taught a variety of psychology courses at the college level since 1975. She had a career change, and is presently a painter and stone sculptor, and does free lance work in computer imaging. She presently works at the Center for Disability Services at the University of Utah as her "day job", and was asked to help with the WROCC video project by writing scripts, coordinating with the Psychology Department, and assisting with the video production and post-production.

#### About Utah Community Center of the Deaf (UCCD)

The Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing provides services designed to increase education, independence, and community integration of individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. It is housed at the state-owned facility affectionately called UCCD and it includes a 25,000 square foot building housing offices, classrooms, meeting spaces, lounge, kitchen, library, bookstore, gymnasium and technology center. The Center's services and activities include information and referral, educational classes and workshops, counseling services, recreation and leisure activities, equipment repair and installation services, interpreter program with training/certification/services, senior citizen activities, deaf youth and family activities, recreational activities for deaf/multiply disabled individuals and an independent living program.

