

FAQs
Frequently Asked Questions of:

Professors/Instructors

Who exactly is this person in my classroom signing next to me? Is he or she a student volunteering to do this for the deaf student?

The staff or freelance interpreter employed by your university or college is a professional sign language interpreter. Interpreters come from varied backgrounds. Some of them have received degrees in Interpreting – Associate’s, Bachelor’s, and/or Master’s. Some universities offer interpreter training programs, and you may even have some interpreting or American Sign Language students in your classroom. Other interpreters may not have degrees in the field but have studied interpreting on their own and may have even grown up around people who are deaf who used American Sign Language. These interpreters have had many years of experience in the field and can become certified.

Certified? In what?

The field of interpreting is represented by an organization called the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc. (RID). This is the only national association dedicated solely to the professional development of interpreters and transliterators. RID plays a leading role in establishing national standards of quality for interpreters and functions as a certifying body. An interpreter can obtain Certificates of Transliteration and Interpretation and afterwards will be as excited as a lawyer who just passed the Bar. The interpreters with whom you work may be at various stages in their attempts to become certified – some may have just passed the Written test, making them Candidates for Certification; some may be studying and preparing for the interpreting and transliterating tests; and others may have passed one or both of them.

The National Association of the Deaf (NAD) also certifies sign language interpreters via their Interpreter Assessment and Certification Program, which was established in 1991. They evaluate and certify qualified candidates to serve as sign language interpreters, and they do so within five levels of Interpreter Assessment. To become certified by NAD, it is necessary for the candidate to attain a rating of Level 3 or better.

Does this interpreter follow this same student of mine around all day every day?

Staff Interpreters usually work full-time for the University and are given a new interpreting schedule every semester. When all the students who use interpreters turn in their schedules to the office that serves students who are disabled, the Interpreting Coordinator hands the interpreters a schedule of classes to interpret for several students who are deaf or hard of hearing with a wide variety of majors. Interpreters may start out their day interpreting Chemistry, then run across campus to an Anatomy class, followed by an English Literature course, Engineering, then Latin, and end the day interpreting for a Nursing major. Staff and freelance interpreters also interpret advising sessions, plays,

concerts, sorority and fraternity meetings, study sessions, etc. They also interpret for faculty and staff who are deaf and hard of hearing.

Why is s/he not like the deaf student I had last semester?

Students who are deaf, like students who can hear, are a diverse group of individuals. They use different modes of communication, have different majors and goals in life, and may not even know each other. Some of them may not use interpreters at all or may need a notetaker during class. If a student needs a notetaker, s/he will probably ask another student to volunteer to share notes. Most offices that serve students who are disabled will supply these volunteer notetakers with carbon paper specifically designed for easy notetaking. Notetakers allow the student to attend to the interpreter during the lecture.

Is there anything special I need to do when I plan to show a film?

Videotapes and films can be a source of great frustration for interpreters and students who are deaf and hard of hearing. Most movies and programs made recently are closed captioned, which means that -- with a few simple modifications -- the words will appear at the bottom of the screen for the student to read. *Almost all programs taped from television are captioned, even though you can't see it without a decoder.* Again, with a few simple modifications, the captioning can be opened. However, these adjustments take time, so it would be helpful to the interpreters to have a few days notice that you will be using a videotape. Unfortunately, not all films are close captioned, so making the video available for interpreters to preview is extremely beneficial, because this allows them time to prepare and become familiar with the material that will be presented on the tape.

What if I need to turn out the lights?

Imagine watching television with the mute button on. As people who receive information with our ears, this is not a pleasant experience. Similarly, students who are deaf are receiving information visually, which is impossible in a dark room. Please allow for adequate lighting during videotapes, slides, overheads, etc.

Is the interpreter going to tutor this deaf student?

The interpreter does not tutor or teach the deaf student. They do not ask them about their papers, projects, research, grades, or whether or not they like or dislike the professor. They may care about the student for whom they interpret and often chat with them before or after class, but they are not talking about the answers to yesterday's quiz. Very often professors pull interpreters aside and launch into an explanation of the student's status in the class, thinking that interpreters -- in some way -- tutor the student. Please remember that interpreters typically interpret for several students every day and do not keep up with each student's individual grades. They also should not be expected to relay messages from you to the student. Please speak directly to the student about any issues or concerns you may have.

If the interpreter is not tutoring, why does s/he need a textbook?

Because of the variety and complexity of the courses to which they are assigned, interpreters have to prepare for classes much like professors familiarize themselves with lecture material. Because it is important that they understand where you are

going with a lecture, providing them with copies of your syllabus, textbook(s), and hand-outs will help tremendously. These materials help them become familiar with concepts you may introduce during lectures. Studying also helps them learn to spell important terminology. Copies of your lecture notes would be helpful to and greatly appreciated by interpreters.

Is this person who is interpreting going to be sharing his or her ideas with the rest of the class?

Absolutely not. The interpreter is only there to facilitate communication, because two or more people share two different languages – a spoken one and a signed one. The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) has established a Code of Ethics that interpreters are to follow. Interpreters are required to:

- *Keep information confidential* – The information passed between student and professor will not be repeated.
- *Interpret everything that is said in exactly the way it was intended* – They interpret whatever the professor says, and they voice exactly what the student signs. They are not there to edit or omit information, even if they disagree with what is being conveyed.
- *Avoid counseling and interjecting our personal opinions* – Just as they are not there to omit information, they also should not add information.

These are summaries of just a few tenets of the RID Code of Ethics. To read RID's Code of Ethics in its entirety, check out <http://www.rid.org/> {LINK}.

Will the interpreter be able to keep up with me?

If you can read and lecture at a conversational rate, this will help interpreters process and deliver information accurately. If the lecture is moving too rapidly or too many people are speaking at once, the interpreter may ask for repetition or clarification. Please be patient and know that they are only trying for an accurate interpretation.

Why are there two interpreters?

Interpreting is physically fatiguing, not to mention the fact that the interpreters are interpreting in courses they may not have had any educational experience in themselves. Also, students who are deaf have a wide variety of needs and signing modes. Some of them use American Sign Language and some communicate using signing systems that have English as a base. If two interpreters are present, they can switch interpreting every 20 to 30 minutes. In short, length of class, course content, and student needs are all reasons why two interpreters may be sent.

Team interpreters who are not actually interpreting for the moment are still on the job. They are attending to the information being presented should the lead interpreter not hear it, misunderstand it, or need clarification. They are also helpful for providing information that the professor writes on the board that the lead interpreter may not be able to see due to his/her positioning in the room.

Great! There's another colleague in my room. Can I ask one or both of these interpreters to be my classroom assistant?

Interpreters are flexible and willing to work with you as a team, and they realize that the dynamics of the classroom will change with their presence. However, it would not be appropriate to ask them to get out of their seats and distribute papers to the class or be responsible for collecting and returning student evaluations for you at the end of each semester. Even when you are not lecturing, they may still be interpreting, such as, if the classmate behind the student for whom they are interpreting has a question for the student. Interpreters may even be informing the student that a loud plane is flying overhead or students are talking very loudly in the hallway, providing an explanation as to why the students and instructor look so distracted. They also feel uncomfortable when asked to be a proctor during an examination; think of all the ethical issues if you ask them to do that, they agree, and then they catch a student cheating. Those are just a few examples of stepping out of roles as facilitators of communication. If you ask an interpreter to lean over and turn off the light for a slide presentation, they should not give you a stern lecture! They are willing to help in any way they can. But, remember that their sole function in the classroom is to interpret – interpret the lecture and voice for the student when needed.