

A Guide for TEACHERS

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This guide includes suggestions for how the classroom teacher and the interpreter can work together to improve accessibility and integration.



An educational interpreter supports the ability of a student who is deaf or hard of hearing to be educated in a regular educational classroom. However, it is more complicated than simply placing an interpreter in the classroom. Real integration requires all members of the educational team to work together.

The Educational Interpreter's Role

Educational interpreters provide communication access by representing the classroom instruction, teacher and peer interactions, and other relevant sound information, such as school-wide announcements. They may provide access using some form of sign language interpreting, oral interpreting¹, or Cued Speech transliterating².

Learning Through an Interpreter is Challenging

Having an interpreter does not mean that the student who is deaf or hard of hearing has access to all classroom communication. The student may have language and vocabulary delays that mean he or she may not understand what is being interpreted or taught. It is also possible that the student may not understand because the interpreter's skills may not be sufficient for the subject matter or the student's level of skills.

Adults who are deaf or hard of hearing report that learning through an interpreter can be more

challenging than learning through direct communication.

Communicate with the student to understand his or her level of functioning, not just with the interpreter. You need to know the student's level and how much additional support the interpreter is or is not providing.

It is almost impossible to make a regular classroom completely accessible through an interpreter. Information will be missed. The student may not understand something because the interpreter missed it or did not interpret it accurately.

Not all interpreters are qualified. Research shows that about 60 percent of interpreters do

¹ Oral interpreting is done by a skilled professional who facilitates communication between individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing and those who are hearing. Oral interpreters work within a continuum of service provision from solely using mouth movements to the inclusion of natural gestures, fingerspelling, or writing key terms.

² Cued Speech transliterating is done by a professional, often certified, who uses a cueing system to facilitate communication between individuals who use spoken language and those who use Cued Speech (which is composed of eight handshapes with four different placements near the face which, when combined with movements of the mouth, make the sounds of spoken language look different from each other).



not have sufficient skills.³ They may lack the range of vocabulary and sign skills needed to translate spoken communication into sign language. They may not have sufficient understanding of the academic content, and this affects their ability to interpret the information.

Students Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing May Have a Range of Abilities to Communicate in Spoken Language

Students who are deaf or hard of hearing range from those who only communicate using sign language to those who use both speech and sign language. Many students have some ability to use and hear spoken English. However, their communication abilities can vary widely depending on the situation. A student's speech quality is not a good predictor of how much he or she understands spoken English. Speaking and understanding speech are different skills.

It is important to learn from the Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan team the student's expectations for communicating through spoken English and through an interpreter. Older students can also help you understand their communication needs.

Students' Rights Regarding Educational Interpreters

Your students who are deaf or hard of hearing have the right to:

- communicate in their own language and have the interpreter communicate in their language;
- utilize educational interpreters who are highly qualified;
- utilize educational interpreters in the classroom, during school meetings and assemblies, and during after-school groups, sports activities, and events;
- be treated with respect and encouraged to become independent like their classmates who can hear;
- opportunities to learn how to work with and schedule interpreters;
- opportunities to learn how to use Internet interpreters;
- be included in discussions concerning interpreting and their interpreters, such as in their Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings or teacher meetings (if they are 14 years old or older); and
- have their family know about their interpreters and how the accommodation is working.

For most students who have spoken language skills, spoken communication is best when only one or two people are talking and the environment is quiet. Some students may be able to talk with a teacher somewhat independently in this situation. They may want an interpreter only if communication becomes difficult. Other students may want an interpreter in all communication situations.

Noisy classrooms with multiple speakers make listening very challenging for many students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Students may need to utilize an interpreter more in these situations and depend on hearing less, or they may rely on a combination of hearing, watching you, and watching the interpreter.

As the complexity of content and vocabulary in academic instruction increases, a student who is deaf or hard of hearing may need to utilize an interpreter more. That is, in more social conversations the student may be successful in using spoken English but in academic lessons may need more interpreter support.

Interpreting Services Should be Discussed at IEP Meetings and Other Times

At every IEP meeting, take time to discuss how the student will utilize the interpreter. Students who are deaf or hard of hearing are not all alike, and each student has different needs.

Should the interpreter be allowed to help the student maintain attention on him or her? Student levels of attention to the interpreter will usually improve with age and experience. Older students will need to assume more responsibility.

Should the interpreter tutor or assist the student with school work? If the interpreter serves as a tutor, he or she should report back to the IEP team about the student's success. The IEP team should decide if the interpreter is qualified to tutor and should define when and where tutoring will occur. The tutoring should be supervised by a qualified teacher.

How do the student's auditory skills affect how he or she utilizes an interpreter? A student with auditory access may watch the teacher and utilize the interpreter only when he or she

³ Schick, B., Williams, K., & Kupermintz, H. (2006). Look who's being left behind: Educational interpreters and access to education for deaf and hard of hearing students. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education, 11*, 3-20.

misses information or is not understanding the teacher's communication.

Students should direct academic questions to you. This helps the student understand that you are in charge of academic instruction and encourages student-teacher interaction.

Share and Communicate

The interpreter will do a better job interpreting if he or she understands your goals, style of classroom management, and general philosophy of learning.

Share lesson plans, books, and materials with the interpreter in advance so he or she can review them during preparation time. When the interpreter knows about the goals of a lesson and the lesson content, especially new vocabulary, he or she is better able to convey the classroom communication into sign language.

Share new vocabulary in advance. An interpreter may need to do research to learn the signs for academic vocabulary. He or she may be able to review new vocabulary with the student in advance as well.

Talk with the interpreter. You can learn what makes his or her job easier or harder. Sometimes simple changes to the classroom or routines result in big changes in the quality of interpretation.

Learn from the interpreter. The interpreter often knows a great deal about the students for whom he or she interprets. He or she can help you understand how much the student understands. However, the interpreter should not be your only source of information. Be sure to communicate with the student directly so you also gain information about his or her communication skills. The IEP team can provide essential information about the student as well.

The interpreter can help you learn to communicate using an interpreter. Not surprisingly, most people who are hearing do not know how to use an interpreter to facilitate communication. It is fine to ask the interpreter to give you feedback.

Think Visually

Create a visually accessible learning environment. When a student who is deaf or hard of hearing is watching an interpreter, it is very challenging

to also look at the board or other visual materials. A student who is hearing can look at something while listening to you talk. Students who are deaf or hard of hearing vary in their ability to do this. There are some simple ways to support students:

- Slow down and don't talk during looking time. Give all students a brief time to look at visuals before talking.
- Let students know where you look. Students who are hearing can follow where you are looking or gesturing. Students who are deaf or hard of hearing may miss this cue.
- Require each student to raise his or her hand and be called on before speaking. The student who is deaf or hard of hearing needs to know who is speaking, not just what is being said. Students who are hearing may know each other's voices and know who is speaking. A student who is deaf or hard of hearing may not recognize others' voices.
- Use visual supports. Even though they make looking a bit more challenging, these are excellent learning support.

The Interpreter's Job is to Interpret

An interpreter is a professional who has spent a great deal of time learning sign language and interpreting. The interpreter is not a classroom aide. He or she should not be left in charge of the classroom while a teacher leaves the room.

A student who is deaf or hard of hearing should never miss classroom communication or peer interaction so the interpreter can do other tasks. When not needed for interpreting, many interpreters use the time to prepare for future classes.

Who is Responsible for Classroom Management?

Teachers are responsible for maintaining a safe and effective learning environment for all students, including students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Some teachers prefer that all adults in the classroom be engaged in classroom management. Other teachers prefer to be in charge of all classroom management. Communicate your preferences to the interpreter.



The interpreter is a member of the educational team and should work with you to help you manage your class consistent with your expectations and goals.

The student who is deaf or hard of hearing does not “belong” to the interpreter. He or she is a member of the class, and expectations of him or her should be consistent with those of the rest of the students. Communicate with the interpreter what kinds of student behaviors must not be ignored regardless of a student’s hearing status.

Communicate Directly with the Student Who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Students who are deaf or hard of hearing need to learn to negotiate classrooms through the use of an interpreter or through spoken English if they are able. They need to learn to talk with you directly, using the interpreter when needed. Model this process. Talk with each student directly. He or she may be looking at the interpreter, but you should look at the student.

For some students who are deaf or hard of hearing, teachers can communicate in spoken language and gestures in order to help them feel more connected. Explore how much a student understands without an interpreter. For example, can you welcome the student in the morning with a smile and a gesture? Can you direct a student back to a worksheet with a look and a gesture? Can you talk with the student about his or her homework? These kinds of direct communications can help

underscore that you see the student as a valuable member of the class.

Learn some basic sign communication and everyday signs. You do not need to know many signs to communicate a sense of inclusion. Your goal should not be to teach using sign language but to greet and interact with the student who is deaf or hard of hearing. This shows the student that even though you do not know sign language, you know it is part of who he or she is.

Help the Student Who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing be as Independent and Connected as Possible

One of the risks of having an interpreter is that it is easy for students who are deaf or hard of hearing to become isolated in a classroom of peers and adults who can hear. Ensure that the student is a full member of the classroom.

Students who are hearing also need to learn how to communicate directly with their peers who are deaf or hard of hearing. It can be intimidating communicating through an interpreter. The interpreter can help students learn how to best communicate with each other.

The Interpreter is a Professional Working in the School

The interpreter should follow all school policies just like all other professionals. In addition, there are national guidelines for professional conduct specifically for educational interpreters.

You can find more information about classroom interpreting at www.classroominterpreting.org.

For more information and resources about the education of students who are deaf or hard of hearing, visit www.clerccenter.gallaudet.edu. You will also find all the guides in our Classroom Interpreting series on our website.

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This guide was developed in collaboration with staff in the Center for Childhood Deafness at Boys Town National Research Hospital.



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