

Working with an Auslan interpreter in the classroom

What is an Auslan interpreter?

- An Auslan interpreter is fluent in English and Australian Sign Language (Auslan). Their role is to facilitate communication between students who are deaf and use Auslan and their teachers, administration staff and fellow students. Interpreters do this by interpreting everything that is said in English into Auslan, and anything that is signed in Auslan into English. This is usually done simultaneously.
- Interpreters generally cannot add or omit information or modify the original message. They therefore interpret everything that is said in a classroom so that the student is able to participate fully and equally.
- Interpreters may assist with 'cultural bridging', which could include the addition of information to assist someone who is not familiar with another language to understand what was said. For example, interpreters may need to explain why a joke is funny in another language or add information about cultural practices that may not be widely understood.
- Interpreters must remain impartial and objective and ensure all information remains confidential.
- Interpreters are not qualified as teachers and so they cannot assist students with their work.

Formal framework

- Auslan interpreters are accredited by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI), as are interpreters for all other community languages in Australia.
- Most interpreters gain their qualification after completing an accredited course of study at TAFE or university.
- Auslan interpreters are expected to abide by the Australian Sign Language Interpreters Association (ASLIA) Code of Ethics.

Interpreting workforce issues

- There is an ongoing shortage of appropriately skilled and qualified interpreters. This means 4-6 weeks notice may be required to book an interpreter during busy times of the year.
- Interpreters cannot be experts in all subject areas and so preparation materials are important especially when working with an interpreter for the first time.

Occupational Health and Safety issues

- Interpreting between any two languages is mentally challenging. Auslan interpreting can also be physically demanding, especially where language is complex or delivered at a fast pace. Interpreters therefore need regular breaks.
- In some cases two interpreters may be required. DLOs will consider the level of difficulty and length of a class and book a second interpreter where necessary.

Tips for working with interpreters

As early as possible:

- Provide the interpreter with a course outline, overheads and notes. This will allow them to become familiar with subject specific terminology and the aims you are working towards.
- Plan class activities so there are regular breaks and a variety of activities. (Remember the OH&S issues above.)
- If possible, discuss how and when to schedule breaks with the interpreter.
- Use captioned videos. If captions are not available, ensure the interpreter is able to view the video in advance. Videos often compress a lot of information into a very short time and are therefore difficult to interpret effectively without preparation.
- Consider any safety or clothing requirements (e.g. footwear) and advise the interpreter.
- The interpreter and student may also meet just before a class to become familiar with their communication preferences and experience.

At the start of the class:

- Introduce yourself to the deaf student and the interpreter.
- When speaking to the student, speak directly to them, even though you are speaking through an interpreter. It can take a little time, but you will get used to it.
- Agree on preferred seating arrangements. The interpreter will usually position themselves near you so the deaf student can see you both at the same time.
- Briefly explain the role of the interpreter to the class.

During a class:

- Speak at a normal volume and pace.
- Clarify jargon or complex terminology. Writing key terms on the board or showing them in a slide is a useful strategy for everyone.
- When asking your class a question, remember there will be a slight delay as the interpreter conveys your question, so give your deaf student a chance to answer as well.
- Similarly, if you are pointing to something, hold for a second longer to give the interpreter and your deaf student time to see what you are pointing to.
- If something is not clear to the interpreter, they will ask for clarification so that the student is not disadvantaged.
- Repeat complex demonstrations, where possible, so a deaf student can watch the interpreter to see what you have said, but also see the demonstration in full.
- Provide regular breaks.
- At the end of a class, briefly check how things went with the deaf student and the interpreter.

Issues?

- You should expect interpreters to be punctual and to be professional at all times.
- If you have any concerns, raise them with the interpreter in the first instance, or your DLO.

Further information: www.deafconnected.com.au