

Hiring a Qualified Interpreter

Finding good help is difficult enough these days, but trying to hire a qualified sign language interpreter can be especially difficult if you don't know what to look for. Here are some ideas that may help in your search.

- The hiring of interpreters can come in at least two ways – either using an interpreter referral agency or direct hiring. Both have their advantages and disadvantages.
 - Using an independent interpreter referral agency will probably be more expensive; however, the agency will retain the responsibility to make the contact, hire the interpreter, and negotiate billing. They can also vouch to the interpreter's skill level and ethics if they've worked with that interpreter before.
 - Hiring an interpreter yourself may allow you to negotiate rates for services. However, you may have to contact several interpreters before you find one that is available. Also you may not be familiar with the interpreter's skills, strengths, and weaknesses.
- The ability to use sign language, even fluently, does not in and of itself make for a good interpreter. While an extensive knowledge of sign language is required to be an interpreter, many other factors are involved in finding an interpreter who will meet your needs, the student's needs, and the needs of the faculty.
- When hiring an interpreter, ask to see her/his certification. Certification shows that the interpreter has passed the appropriate skills test and has knowledge in the languages (English and American Sign Language) and cultures (Hearing and Deaf) along with ethical standards and practices. Certification may be in one of at least three different forms:
 - RID (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf) national certification – includes CSC, CI, CT, IC, TC, and RSC.
 - NAD (National Association of the Deaf) national certification – includes Level 5 (highest level) through Level 3 (generalist).
 - Different states also may have certification/screening systems that are only recognized within the specific state. One example of this is the Mid-South Quality Assurance Screening Test, which goes from Level 5 (highest level) through Level 1 (lowest level). State screening tests are a stepping stone toward full national certification.

Other things to look for when hiring an interpreter:

- Does the interpreter come to the job interview on time? Dressed appropriately?
- Can the interpreter intelligently explain the role of an interpreter so that you can understand it? This would include information relating to both classroom responsibilities and any outside duties needed to do her/his job well (for example, obtaining a copy of textbooks to read for specialized vocabulary).
- Does the interpreter have a degree from an Interpreter Education Program? While this should not be considered an absolute prerequisite to employment, it does permit the prospective employer to make some

assumptions about the interpreter's background and knowledge in the field.

- What is the education level of the interpreter compared to the education level of the class? This is important, because the interpreter must be able to comprehend and match the appropriate language needed for that course.
- Does the interpreter speak in a professional manner? Does she/he have a good command of the English language? Sign language interpreters have to be fluent in English as well as in American Sign Language.
- Does the interpreter exhibit paternalistic or condescending behaviors toward the student who is deaf or toward deaf persons in general? (This is a big warning sign!)
- Is the interpreter willing to commit to working for the duration of the semester?
- Is the interpreter a member of her/his professional organizations? If so, she/he should be able to produce a membership card to Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) and the state chapter of RID (if available), or the NAD Interpreter Section. The RID Code of Ethics states that interpreters:

...shall strive to further knowledge and skills through participation in workshops, professional meetings, interaction with professional colleagues, and reading of current literature in the field.

Ask the interpreter to describe or list professional development activities since receiving certification.

- Has the interpreter been active in her/his state organization? This can show a commitment to the field and a desire for professional development.
- Does the interpreter have a reputation among the deaf community? Ask around to get others' opinions on her/his skills and ethics, require references from the deaf community, or screen the interpreter with a panel of evaluators comprised of either students or local deaf community members.
- Ask the interpreter to describe a time she/he was faced with an ethical dilemma, sharing how the situation was resolved (without breaking confidentiality).
- Interpreters are to accept assignments with discretion according to their skill level. Can the interpreter name areas in which she/he is currently trying to improve?

By investing a little time and thought, you can increase the likelihood that you're hiring the most qualified person for the job. This will benefit everyone involved!

For more information on how to contact professionals in the interpreting field, as well as other topics covered by the NETAC Teacher Tipsheet series, visit NETAC's website at <http://netac.rit.edu>.

For more information, contact:

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