

Interpreter Etiquette & the Do's and Don'ts of Working with an Interpreter

OFFICE OF COURT INTERPRETING SERVICES

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- Do not refer to the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) party or Deaf person in the third person. For example, avoid saying, 'tell her' or 'explain to him.' Instead, speak directly to the individual as if there were no language barrier
- Use a normal tone and pace when speaking, there is no need to speak loudly or more slowly than normal.
- Be sure to pause frequently, which gives the interpreter time to interpret what has been said.
- Enunciation and speaking clearly is important. Avoid contractions, words like 'can't' can be easily misunderstood and are easily replaced with 'cannot'.
- Remember, the interpreter is required to interpret everything being said. If you don't want something to be interpreted then you should not discuss the subject.
- Colloquialisms and acronyms should be avoided, if they must be used explain their meaning and context to ensure the interpreter understands what's being conveyed.
- Avoid using slang, puns, idioms and humorous wordplay if possible when using an interpreter. Most often, the translation or interpretation is not equivalent and can lead to confusion.
- When working with an interpreter, waving your hand is appropriate etiquette to get the attention of a Deaf person.
- Instead of focusing on the interpreter, look and speak directly to the LEP or Deaf party when communicating and maintain eye contact.
- Do not chew gum, or place hands over your face or mouth and try ensuring that you are well-lit so that facial expressions are clear.
- If an individual is wearing a hearing aid, or a cochlear implant do not assume that the person can hear you.
- Background noise, conversation and visual distractions should be minimized whenever possible.
- Deaf individuals must maintain eye contact with an ASL interpreter in order to receive the interpreted message. Do not refer to visual exhibits or aids until an ASL interpretation is complete and the deaf individual has broken eye contact with their interpreter.

- Use of facial expressions and gestures can assist an interpreter when providing an interpretation.
- Use of visual aids, such as pointing to printed or written information can assist an interpreter providing an interpretation.
- It is important to note that English *may* not be the first language of some Deaf people. Keep in mind that *some* individuals who use American Sign Language may not be as proficient in writing or reading English.
- When communicating with an individual who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing, it is not appropriate to raise your voice to attempt to find a volume which can be heard. Instead, write a note to ask him/her what communication accommodation or interpretation services are needed.
- Only one person should be speaking when an interpreter is working, overlapping conversation cannot be interpreted effectively
- Never use family members or children as interpreters. They often lack the vocabulary, impartiality and neutrality to effectively interpret.
- The interpreter will never interject their own explanation or opinion into an interpretation.
- Court staff should never ask an opinion of an interpreter while working with a LEP or Deaf individual.
- The LEP or Deaf individual should never be left alone with an interpreter. This can lead to ethical dilemmas and a perceived conflict of interest and must be avoided.
- The interpreter must never provide or be *perceived* to be providing an LEP or Deaf individual with legal advice.
- Court staff and interpreters should not be seen engaging in 'side' conversations in front of an LEP or Deaf individual.
- Interpreters are not to assist LEP persons or Deaf individuals by filling out court forms or paperwork.
- Interpreters are only present to interpret spoken or written communication from the source language of an LEP, for example Spanish or American Sign Language, into a target language such as English.