

How to work with Auslan and Deaf Interpreters

Auslan

Auslan (Australian Sign Language) is the language of the Australian Deaf Community. It is the preferred language of the majority of Deaf Australians. It is a highly visual language using signs, enhanced facial expressions and body language to communicate.

Working with Auslan Interpreters

Auslan interpreters convey meaning from spoken English into Auslan and vice versa, and may be either simultaneous or consecutive. The following factors are important to keep in mind when requesting an Auslan interpreter:

Qualification level of the Interpreter:

The National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) provides the accreditation for Auslan interpreters. There are currently two different levels of accreditation; Para-professional **Level 2** and Professional **Level 3**.

- **Level 2** interpreters are suitable for Centrelink and medical appointments, education, general workplace meetings etc.
- **Level 3** interpreters are suitable for the settings mentioned above as well as being qualified for all Court or legal assignments, police work, mental health and conferences.

Occupational Health and Safety Requirements

Two interpreters are required for sessions over one hour. They work together in tandem to prevent mental and physical fatigue, and to comply with Occupational Health and Safety standards. By having interpreters work in tandem it ensures smooth uninterrupted communication between all parties.

Deafblind/Tactile Interpreting

Used by people who are both Deaf and have vision impairment. The Deafblind individual places their hands over the interpreter's and reads the signs through touch and movement. This can be exhausting for both the interpreter and the Deafblind client.

Breaks are even more important than with regular interpreting, and should be taken more often.

Correct seating can also reduce the risk of strain or injury; both parties should be comfortable and at an equal height. Specially designed cushioned tables for tactile signing is available.

Deaf Interpreters

A Deaf interpreter is a person who is themselves Deaf, and like an Auslan interpreter is highly skilled translating from one language to another. They transfer meaning between Auslan and an alternate form of communication that can be understood by individuals who are not using standard Auslan.

Deaf interpreters work together with an Auslan interpreter who will first interpret English to Auslan for the Deaf interpreter.

Auslan has its own distinct structure, which differs from English, for example:

English sentence construction:

I saw a beautiful black cat this morning

Auslan sentence construction:

Cat, black, I saw this morning, beautiful

Why are Deaf interpreters necessary?

Deaf interpreters are often used in situations where clients may:

- Use a foreign sign language;
- Have minimal or limited communication skills.
- Use non-standard signs or gestures that may be unique to their community or background.
- Be Deafblind or Deaf with a visual impairment.

Tips for successful Interpreting sessions:

- Ensure lighting and seating arrangements allow for clear communication to take place. It is best if the interpreter is seated next to the main speaker, with the deaf client seated at the front.
- The interpreter does not give a literal word for word interpretation, but an abridged version. This may take more or less time, depending on the differences between languages.
- The Deaf person will look at the interpreter and also at the person speaking when appropriate. The speaker should look at the Deaf person, not the interpreter.
- Allow time for the Deaf person to read any materials before continuing. Deaf people are unable to watch the interpreter and read at the same time. It is important to remember this if overheads or presentations are being used or notes need to be taken.
- In accordance with Occupational Health and Safety issues, regular breaks should be negotiated prior to commencement.
- Sometimes it is necessary to have two or more interpreters working in tandem. This usually occurs if the appointment is longer than one hour. The need for tandem interpreting can be clarified with SLC VIC.

Other services

Notetaking

Notetakers are used for Deaf or hard of hearing clients who do not use Auslan or another sign language. They provide accurate, legible notes to assist communication and between parties and for records. Notetakers must abide by professional ethical standards at all times.

Live Captioning

The instantaneous verbatim transcription of spoken English into text. Live captioning is available through SLC VIC, using qualified stenographers, who can work onsite or remotely via a telephone or audio link. This is fast and accurate compared to notetaking. Captions are displayed through a projector or can be viewed through supported devices such as laptops, tablets or smartphones.

Video Relay and Skype Interpreting SLC VIC provides Video Relay Interpreting (VRI) and Skype interpreting over the internet, enabling interpreting services to be delivered remotely.

About VICDEAF and SLC VIC

Vicdeaf is a statewide provider for Deaf and hard of hearing people. Vicdeaf's vision is 'Access and equity for Deaf and hard of hearing Victorians'.

Established in 1884, Vicdeaf is the primary source of reference, referral, advice and support for Deaf and hard of hearing Victorians.

Sign Language Communications Victoria (SLC VIC) is a division of Vicdeaf, and is the largest and most experienced provider of Auslan services, with interpreters, tactile interpreters, Deaf interpreters, notetaking and live captioning available.

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