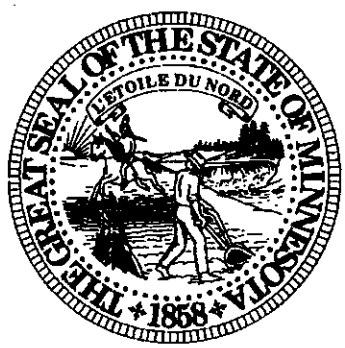


Code Of

Professional Responsibility

For Interpreters

In The

Minnesota State Court System

Prescribed and Ordered by

The Minnesota Supreme Court

September 18, 1995

C9-94-1898

This creates an obligation to conserve every element of information contained in a source language communication when it is rendered in the target language.

Therefore, interpreters are obligated to apply their best skills and judgment to faithfully preserve the meaning of what is said in court, including the style or register of speech. Verbatim, "word for word" or literal oral interpretations are not appropriate when they distort the meaning of what was said in the source language, but every spoken statement, even if it appears non-responsive, obscene, rambling, or incoherent should be interpreted. This includes apparent misstatements.

Interpreters should never interject any statement or elaboration of their own. If the need arises to explain an interpreting problem (e.g. a term or phrase with no direct equivalent in the target language or a misunderstanding that only the interpreter can clarify), the interpreter should ask the court's permission to provide an explanation. Spoken language interpreters should convey the emotional emphasis of the speaker without reenacting or mimicking the speaker's emotions, or dramatic gestures. Sign language interpreters, however, must employ all of the visual cues that the language they are interpreting for requires--including facial expressions and body language, in addition to hand gestures. Judges, therefore, should ensure that court participants do not confuse these essential elements of the interpreted language with inappropriate interpreter conduct. Any challenge to the interpreter's conduct should be directed to the judge.

The obligation to preserve accuracy includes the interpreter's duty to correct any errors of interpretation discovered by the interpreter during the proceeding. Interpreters should demonstrate their professionalism by objectively analyzing any challenge to their performance.

The ethical responsibility to accurately and completely interpret includes the responsibility of being properly prepared for interpreting assignments. Interpreters are encouraged to obtain documents and other information necessary to familiarize themselves with the nature and purpose of a proceeding. Prior preparation is especially required when testimony or documents include highly specialized terminology and subject matter.

CANON 2: REPRESENTATION OF QUALIFICATIONS

Interpreters shall accurately and completely represent their certifications, training, and pertinent experience.

Commentary

Acceptance of a case by an interpreter conveys linguistic competency in legal settings. Withdrawing or being asked to withdraw from a case after it begins causes a disruption of court proceedings and is wasteful of scarce public resources. It is therefore essential that interpreters present a complete and truthful account of their training, certification and experience prior to appointment so the officers of the court can fairly evaluate their qualifications for delivering interpreting services.

3. the interpreter has served in an investigative capacity for any party involved in the case at issue;

4. the interpreter has previously been retained by a law enforcement agency to assist in the preparation of the criminal case at issue;

5. the interpreter has been involved in the choice of counsel or law firm for that case at issue;

6. the interpreter is an attorney in the case at issue;

7. the interpreter has previously been retained for private employment by one of the parties to interpret in the case at issue; or

8. for any other reason, the interpreter's independence of judgment would be compromised in the course of providing services.

The existence of any one of the above-mentioned circumstances does not alone disqualify an interpreter from providing services as long as the interpreter is able to render services objectively. An interpreter may serve if the judge and all parties consent. If an actual or apparent conflict of interest exists, the interpreter may, without explanation to any of the parties or the judge, decline to provide services.

Should an interpreter become aware that a non-English speaking participant views the interpreter as having a bias or being biased, the interpreter should disclose that knowledge to the judge.

CANON 4: PROFESSIONAL DEMEANOR

Interpreters shall conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the dignity of the court.

Commentary

Interpreters should know and observe the established protocol, rules, and procedures for delivering interpreting services. When speaking in English, interpreters should speak at a rate and volume that enables them to be heard and understood throughout the courtroom. If an interpreter is not actively interpreting, the interpreter should not engage in any distracting activity in the courtroom such as reading newspapers or magazines or engaging in conduct that may call inappropriate attention to the interpreter. Interpreters should dress in a manner that is consistent with the dignity of the proceedings of the court.

Interpreters should avoid obstructing the view of any of the individuals involved in the proceedings, but should be appropriately positioned to facilitate communication. Interpreters who use sign language or other visual modes of communication must, however, be positioned so

engage in any other activities which may be construed to constitute a service other than interpreting or translating while serving as an interpreter.

Commentary

Since interpreters are responsible only for enabling others to communicate, they should limit themselves to the activity of interpreting or translating only, including official functions as described in the commentary to Canon 3. Interpreters, however, may be required to initiate communications during a proceeding when they find it necessary to seek direction from the court in performing their duties. Examples of such circumstances include seeking direction from the court when unable to understand or express a word or thought, requesting speakers to moderate their rate of communication or repeat or rephrase something, correcting their own interpreting errors, or notifying the court of reservations about their ability to satisfy an assignment competently. In such instances, they should make it clear that they are speaking for themselves.

An interpreter may convey legal advice from an attorney to a person only while that attorney is giving it. An interpreter should not explain the purpose or contents of forms, services, or otherwise act as counselors or advisors unless they are interpreting for someone who is acting in that official capacity. The interpreter may translate language on a form for a person who is filling out the form, but should not explain the form or its purpose for such a person.

While engaged in the function of interpreting, interpreters should not personally perform official acts that are the official responsibility of other court officials including, but not limited to, court clerks, pretrial release investigators or interviewers, or probation counselors.

CANON 8: ASSESSING AND REPORTING IMPEDIMENTS TO PERFORMANCE

Interpreters shall assess at all times their ability to deliver their services. When interpreters have any reservation about their ability to satisfy an assignment competently, they shall immediately convey that reservation to the appropriate judicial authority.

Commentary

If the communication mode or language variety of the non-English-speaking person cannot be readily interpreted, the interpreter should notify the appropriate judicial authority, which includes a supervisory interpreter, a judge, or another official with jurisdiction over interpreter matters.

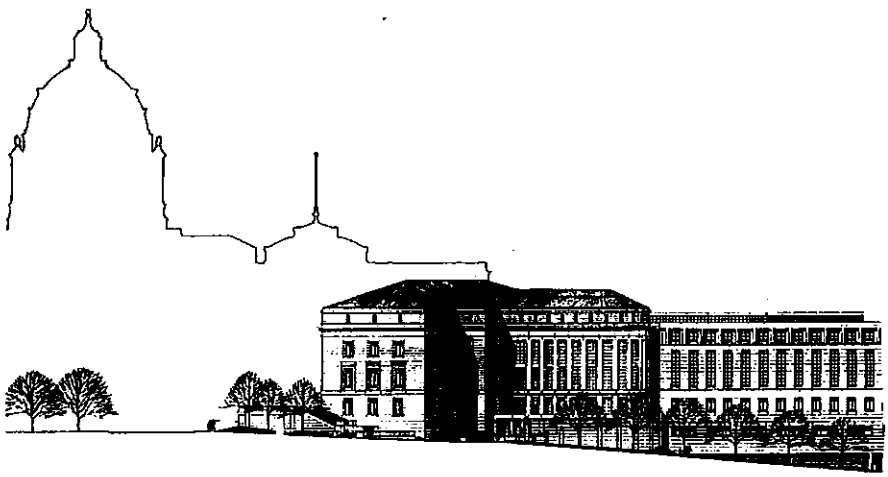
Interpreters should notify the appropriate judicial authority of any environmental or physical limitation that impedes or hinders their ability to deliver interpreting services adequately, e.g., the courtroom is not quiet enough for the interpreter to hear or be heard by the non-English speaker, more than one person at a time is speaking, or principals or witnesses of the court are speaking at a rate of speed that is too rapid for the interpreter to adequately interpret. Sign language interpreters must ensure that they can both see and convey the full range of visual language elements that are necessary for communication, including facial expressions and body movement, as well as hand gestures.

Commentary

Interpreters must continually strive to improve their interpreting skills and increase their knowledge of the languages they work in professionally, including past and current trends in technical terminology and social and regional dialects as well as their applicable within court proceedings.

Interpreters should keep informed of all statutes, rules of court and policies of the judiciary that govern the performance of their professional duties.

An interpreter should seek to elevate the standards of the profession through participation in workshops, professional meetings, interaction with colleagues, and reading current literature in the field.



Direct Inquiries To:

Minnesota Court Interpreter Program

The Supreme Court of Minnesota
State Court Administration
140 Minnesota Judicial Center
25 Constitution Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55155-1500
Phone (651) 297-5300
Fax (651) 297-5636
Email: cip@courts.state.mn.us

The following are suggested questions for determining whether an interpreter is qualified to interpret at a given hearing. These questions are found in the Best Practices Manual On Interpreters.

Communication Needs

1. Have you communicated with the party/witness/defendant in need of your services?

2. Can you communicate clearly with one another?

3. Are you able to interpret simultaneously without leaving out or changing anything that is said?

Sign Language Interpreter

- What communication mode does this person prefer? (i.e. American Sign Language, Tactile Communication, Signed English)
- Does this person require the use of a deaf relay interpreter?
- Does this person require the court to provide any special equipment to aid in the understanding of this proceeding? (Amplification, Real Time Captioning)

Foreign Language Interpreter

- Are you familiar with any dialect or idiomatic peculiarities of the language used by the person in this case?
- Are you able to communicate despite these idiosyncrasies?

Interpreter Qualifications

1. Are you court certified by the Minnesota Court Interpreter Program in the _____ language? *(If yes, skip to "Conflicts of Interest.")*

2. Are you on the Statewide Roster of Court Interpreters?

3. How long have you been communicating in English and _____?

4. What formal language training have you received in these two languages?

5. Do you possess interpreter certification status from a group or organization other than the Minnesota Court Interpreter Program?

6. In what settings have you interpreted?

Conflicts of Interest

1. Have you ever interpreted for any of the parties or witnesses in this case?

2. Have you interpreted in any incident related to this case?

3. Are you able to remain fair and impartial in relationship to the parties and witnesses in this case?

4. Will you remain objective based upon the subject matter of this case?

Ethics

1. Have you read the *Code of Professional Responsibility for Interpreters in the Minnesota State Court System*?

2. Do you understand your duties with respect to the Code of Professional Responsibility?

3. Do you promise to adhere to the Code of Professional Responsibility during these proceedings?

Other

1. Have you ever been disqualified from interpreting in any court or administrative proceeding? Why?

2. ***To the Parties:*** Does either party have any questions for the interpreter?

3. ***To the Client/Witness/Defendant:*** Can you effectively communicate through this interpreter?

" SIGN LANGUAGE COMMUNICATOR VS. SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETER"

Who is a sign language communicator? This is a person who can communicate effectively with deaf people about their daily life activities for purposes of work, recreation, and socialization.

When any of us communicate with each other, we talk about things we know quite a bit about and have experienced in our lives. Communicators are in charge of what they say. They can say it in their way. When a topic comes up that we haven't experienced or don't know very much about, we tend to participate less. Sometimes we might even change the subject. If you don't know anything about computers, you probably won't talk about them much.

In other words, a communicator is a person who can communicate about things with which he or she is familiar.

Sign language communicators learn necessary signs and sentence structure, either through formal classes or through regular contact with deaf people, which they need to convey information about themselves and their lives.

Typically, in using any language we can understand more than we can express. We can read books which use complex language structures and words, even though, if we were to tell someone what we had read, we would use simpler language structures and words than the book used. And to understand the concept in the book we didn't need to understand each and every word. We can figure out the concept anyway.

This is true of sign language communicators. They can often understand more of what the deaf person signs, even though would not have been able to sign that same concept themselves. The communicator may miss a sign or two and still understand the basic concept the deaf person is signing.

So a communicator's comprehension skills are often higher than his or her signing skills.

When we communicate with each other we can go as slow as we need to. We can ask for clarification when we don't understand. We can stop and think about how we want to say it. And we can use our own words to express ourselves. We can be in control of the communication process.

How is a sign language interpreter different than a sign language communicator? An interpreter is responsible for conveying the message of the speaker or signer to the other person. This means that he interpreter is not in charge of what someone says. The interpreter, therefore, often has to interpret information which is not familiar to them in their life experience. This means that the interpreter needs to be able to use sign language at a higher level of complete and for a greater variety of topics than the communicator does. If the speaker or signer is talking about computers, the interpreter needs to become

familiar with the English words and the signs used to communicate information about computers.

The interpreter needs to have a higher level of receptive and expressive English Sign Language. They need to be able to understand everything a deaf person signs because the are to put all of that information into English so that the hearing can understand it. They need to be able to sign everything the hearing person says in such a way that it is totally understandable to the deaf person.The interpreter can not change the English into simpler signs because the interpreter lacks the adequate sign language vocabulary to convey a complex concept.

An interpreter is not in charge of the speed of the speaker's or signer's information or the vocabulary they may choose to use. The interpreter needs to be able to think quickly, to make quick decisions of how to translate; they cannot stop to think about how they might sign it or say it because the speaker will continue on and the interpreter will be lost.

The interpreter has to be able to peocess the message in two separate ways. In their ear and out their hands at the same time. In a way, this process might be like reading a brand new piece of sheet music for the first time while playing the piece expertly on the piano.

Many people assume that if you know how to sign, you can easily interpret anything. This is not a true assumption. Children need five to six years of constant exposure to language to become skilled in that language. After 33 hours of instruction in a term, you are just beginning to understand the use of American Sign Language. Fluency takes much longer and skills good enough for interpreting take even more time.

In other foreign languages, people study the language and culture for at least four years, then, if they decide they want to become an interpreter, they study for another one or two years. You can see from this, that learning a second language requires a great deal of study and that interpreting skills are learned in addition to language skills.

Another important issue that interpreters need to keep in mind is that the interpreter must remain objective when interpreting. The interpreter cannot provide advice or help the hearing or deaf person beyond providing interpreter services. This is also one of the important differences between an interpreter and a sign language communicator. Communicators often give advice and help people in many situations. It is part of the relationship that is developed through communicating with each other. Interpreters have a different type of relationship with the people for whom they interpret. Their relationship is that of communication facilitator so that the deaf person and the hearing person may develop a relationship through their communication.

BEING IGNORED CAN BE BLISS
HOW TO USE A SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETER

Much can be learned about an individual from the family, friends, and colleagues who are close to that person. Some understanding of deaf people and what it is like to be deaf and to live independently can be acquired from learning how sign language interpreters perform their work.

While an interpreter is a communication aid, he or she has a more extensive working relationship with a deaf person than a reader has with a blind person.

Nevertheless, this relationship is not as intimate as between a personal care attendant and a person with a severe mobility impairment. Most interpreters work with a deaf person for only three or four hours at a time. Rarely do they work repeatedly with the same individual, and when that does happen, It happens sporadically.

Deaf persons do not select interpreters from a group of interviewed candidates. Almost never does a hearing impaired person train an interpreter to the work. In fact, in many instances, interpreters, unlike attendants, are not working for a deaf person, but for the agency, school, or meeting in which deaf persons participate.

Finally, an attendant is involved with many aspects of a disabled person's life, from bathing, to transportation. A sign interpreter is there for one specific purpose: Communication between the hearing world and deaf persons.

There is a poster at the bookstore at Gallaudet College, a post - secondary school for deaf persons in Washington D.C. A little elf smiles down saying, " I'm not deaf, I just ignore you." How well that describes my own situation.

Ironically, as a sign language interpreter, I am constantly in situations where I have to ignore people. I am most successful when I can get others to ignore me too.

What's the big secret? Because I am certified by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf. I must follow the Code of Ethics they have established. Confidentiality is first and foremost. Nothing can be revealed about an interpreting assignment, including the fact that it even occurred.

So if you arrive late at a meeting or duck out for a cigarette, don't ask me what happened, I won't tell you. But all is not lost. Simply ask me to interpret while you ask one of the deaf people. That's why I am there.

Basically, it comes down to the fact that I wouldn't be there if it weren't for a communication problem between two parties. Deaf people have the same right to privacy as anyone else. It's not my right to take that away from them.

Suppressing just names and places doesn't work. The deaf community is so small, it is very easy to figure things out with a minimum of information. Suppose I tell you, I'm going to traffic court on Wednesday morning and later you meet a deaf person who has some legal problems to take of on Wednesday, but nothing serious. If that person also has a dented fender on his or her car, it's not hard for you to realize who else is going to court.

Other situations that can jeopardize confidentially are more obvious. For instance, teachers ask me how deaf students are doing in school. Or employees want to know if their hearing impaired boss made the phone calls as promised. Also, many hearing people expect interprets to be thoroughly familiar with the deaf individual for whom we interpret.

Frequently, when I arrive at a new job, the teacher or lawyer will question me about the deaf person's residence, employment, and other personal matters. It's hard for them to believe that nine times out of ten, I have never met the deaf person before either. In all cases, my answer to questions about deaf individuals is the same. I will be happy to interpret when you ask the deaf person directly.

Another part of the Code of Ethics requires me to refrain from influencing in any way the communication I am facilitating. This means more than simple impartiality. Interpreters must, in a real sense, fade into the background. Sometimes, however, I can't help intruding.

Once while interpreting before a packed auditorium, I made the sign for "dream" and swung my arms wide. (Signs are made as large as possible on stage so that they are easily seen from a distance.) Somehow I knocked an entire pitcher of ice water off the podium and into the face of the speaker.

Another interpreter, also before an audience, once locked arms with a wildly gesticulating speaker. Needless to say, on such occasions, the interpreter unavoidably influences what happens next.

Actually, The Code of Ethics prohibits deliberately altering what someone says. I cannot add my opinions, change that angry "damn" to a modest "heck", or leave anything out. Anything. If you say,"Ask her if she took any science in high school." I sign exactly that, including the "Ask her."

If the deaf person replies, "Tell him just a year of biology." I vocally communicate every word to the hearing person. Usually people soon realize how stiff they sound to each other and begin to speak more directly.

Sometimes, however, people are determined to involve me in the conversation. This is something I must resist. If you ask me a question or speak to me directly while I am interpreting, I will sign what you say, but I will avoid making any eye contact. Occasionally, people become aggressive, grabbing my arms in frustration and yelling,

"You, you, I'm talking to you"!

Ideally, all parties will arrive early and give me a chance to explain my work. Sometimes this actually occurs, but most often people don't show up until the time for the class or the appointment, leaving me no opportunity to clarify my role.

This clarification is important for the hearing person unused to depending on a third party for communication. How unnatural this arrangement is became clear to me while learning sign language. Every night my classmates and I would come back from our practice assignments and moan,"When, oh when, will people stop this "tell him" and "ask her" and talk directly to each other"?

Then one day we had a lecture on interpreting for deaf-blind people given by a person both visually and aurally impaired. This was the first time many of us found ourselves having to communicate through an interpreter. The first question someone in the class asked began, "Ask him if...."

We all looked around in shock. If we, who supposedly knew better, found ourselves talking to the interpreter instead of to the lecturer, was it any wonder that the rest of the world was having the same problem?

American Sign Language (ASL) provides a means for deaf people to express themselves and to comprehend others as naturally as speech does for persons who hear and speak. But ASL does not simply translate spoken English. It interprets English into a different language with its own grammar, rules, and forms of expression. Like written characters in the Chinese language, many signs in ASL express concepts, not simply individual words.

Because eyes strain and get tired after even brief periods of concentration, ASL is very economical. What might take ten words to say in English is communicated in ASL by two signs and some facial expression. Even the position of the hands in relation to the body (and both the obvious and subtle movements of the hands) communicate meaning.

Still, as precisely as it has been developed, ASL has some limitations. It is very difficult to learn thoroughly and perfectly. Also, it sometimes requires more time to interpret spoken English into ASL than the interpreter has available. Consequently, we interpreters often mix interpreting in ASL along with "transliterating" into elemental signs some of what is spoken.

Sometimes signs and words just do not match. Nothing stops an interpreter faster than a joke like, "What's black and white and red all over"? A newspaper, right? But when I sign the punch line for this type of joke, the deaf person usually wonders why everybody else is laughing. On the other hand, puns are possible in sign language that, when interpreted into English, mean nothing.

Fortunately, people need not worry themselves about the technical end of interpreting. That is my job. Nevertheless, if people understand the common sense limitations of interpreting, they can help me greatly. This goes for deaf people as well as hearing people. I've heard deaf people complain unjustly that their interpreter is lazy for failing to interpret conversations on the other side of the room.

While I am obligated to interpret everything I hear (including the dog barking outside or the airplane overhead) I can't hear what goes on outside in the hall or in a noisy crowd. Unfortunately, some people who always have been deaf just don't fully understand the limits on the sense off hearing.

Similarly, many hearing people do not understand the interpreter's basic need to be readily visible while working. On occasion, I have been positioned in out of the way spots such as, behind a post, or so far over to the side that deaf people couldn't possibly watch both the interpreter and the person actually speaking.

Another probl[illegible] is fatigue. For a two or three-hour class, a break after each hour gives my arms (and [illegible] deaf person's eyes) a needed rest. For a longer meeting, two interpreters should be hired to relieve each other periodically, usually every thirty minutes.

Interpreting is hard physical work. If you don't think so, try waving your arms constantly for 45 minutes. Also, I have the added stress of analyzing sentences to choose the correct signs and the dry throat from mouthing all the words while I interpret to aid the deaf people who read lips. After fatigue sets in, it becomes harder to concentrate and I find myself thinking more about how tired I am than what is being said.

From experience, I have learned to dash for the door whenever a meeting calls a break. If I don't, invariably someone will decide they have to ask a deaf person some questions, and I spend my precious rest time interpreting. I am only human let me have ten minutes. If you [illegible] a meeting, look around and make sure I am back before you resume business. [illegible] ve returned to meetings before the end of the break time only to find business is in full swing. The deaf people in attendance had no way of knowing the chairman, who appeared to be talking to someone across the room, had already called the meeting to order.

Another predicament can occur when a deaf person reads something while someone else gives verbal instructions, such as in many test situations. In one class I interpreted, the teacher would give out an exam, then talk constantly. For most students this was no problem, but the deaf students could not easily watch me and read at the same time. During one exam, the teacher started changing the question verbally. To quickly get the deaf student's attention, I began flicking the light switch off and on.

The same teacher's love for slide shows also caused problems. At a moment's notice, the classroom would be plunged into darkness. My request for a little light during slide presentations was countered with the teacher's suggestion to wear day-glo gloves. But eventually he agreed to leave one light on during slide shows.

It is extremely difficult to interpret when more than one person speaks. (No I can't sign one person on each hand.) Usually this happens when people are arguing, so it's even more difficult for me to follow along. Interpreters are divided on how to handle this. Some say it is all right to request people to slow down and stop interrupting each other. Other interpreters feel you should just sign as much as possible, since the hearing people probably aren't getting it all either. Another difficulty; I usually point to whomever is speaking, and if people are cutting each other off, I spend more time pointing than signing.

A blind woman told me about a similar problem she had, but in reverse. At one meeting, the same interpreter vocalized what two different deaf people were signing. Since there was only one voice, the blind woman assumed only one deaf person had the floor and kept contradicting himself. When she finally realized the true situation, the blind woman asked the participants to identify themselves each time one of them spoke. Some meetings avoid this problem altogether by hiring more than one interpreter.

This brings me to a sore topic. People hate to pay interpreters. Apparently, it is thought that this takes advantage of the deaf person's handicap. But then so do doctors, hearing aid dealers, and hospitals. No one denies that they should be paid for their services.

Look at the truth of the situation. First, we interpreters are professionals who have trained long and hard to perfect our skills. Secondly, if you are not willing to pay me, I have to take another job and will not be available for the 10:00 a.m. conference or the 2:00 p.m. doctor's appointment.

Still, interpreters who volunteer do not necessarily act unethically. Occasionally, we donate services to worthy causes or to help out friends. Certainly, I am not going to send a bill for every joke I sign at a party. But generally, I have found that people, who are always willing to volunteer, get into interpreting situations beyond their skills.

They also tend not to follow ethics because "After all, I wasn't really interpreting, I just went along to help". That might be all right for a meeting or a chat at a water cooler, but it is a bad bargain for anything else. The money you pay an interpreter is well worth it.

Certification of interpreters is done by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf. Like other applicants, I was tested by a panel of both hearing and deaf interpreters. (Yes there is such thing as deaf interpreters. They work in special situations, usually with deaf people who have minimal English or minimal language skills.)

The panel questioned me about my background, my interests in sign language, and my reason for wanting to be certified. Then came a series of ethical questions, mostly in the form of "What would you do if...."

A test of my expressive skills involving my listening to two tapes and signing what I heard. The first was a story which lent itself very well to ASL. It was very descriptive with different characters and lots of action. The second tape was a lecture full of technical terms read by someone who spoke faster and faster as the tape progressed.

To demonstrate my receptive skills, I had to voice (in proper English and with appropriate word choices) what I saw being signed on a videotape. For the benefit of the deaf panelists, one of the hearing panelists sat behind me and signed to them everything I said. When he put his hands on his lap, they knew I was stumped.

Of course, certification is no guarantee of quality. It is only a guide. I know some excellent interpreters who, for various reasons, decline to take the test. On the other hand, some certified interpreters seem to memorize the Code of Ethics before the test and then immediately forget it. Still, unless you know the interpreter's skills personally, it is safer to hire a certified person.

When calling an interpreter to arrange a job, be specific about needs. Realize that we are people and have different combinations of skills and expertise. Also, there are various types of certification. Interpreters are supposed to refuse any job for which the are not qualified, but we need to be able to make an informed decision.

Once, I arrived at a job which the referral center assured me fine for my skill level. It turned out to be an interview between a person charged with a crime and an attorney. I turn down all legal assignments because I don't feel I have the proper skills. Also, I do not want the responsibility of a mistake that might cost someone their freedom or a great deal of money. I suggested to the persons involved that they hire someone certified for legal work.

Other situations are not as potentially dangerous, but the right interpreter can make an important difference. At a workshop or meeting where input from deaf people is needed, request someone with good skills in communicating vocally what deaf participants say in sign. Nothing inhibits a deaf person more than an interpreter who cannot communicate the deaf person's thoughts. In these situations, the interpreter's mistakes appear to be the deaf person's and so the deaf person will tend to refrain from speaking.

A different but related problem once occurred at a medical school. A deaf student missed an entire lecture that accompanied an autopsy because the interpreter fainted at the sight of the corpse. Better advance information might have secured an interpreter who was a biology major, or, like one of my classmates at Gallaudet College, worked in a funeral home.

Another type of interpreter that is very new is the oral interpreter. Technically, they do not interpret; they mouth spoken English in a form that is more visible on the lips. This is more complicated than it seems. Skilled oral interpreters are familiar with how certain words and letter combinations appear on the lips and how to accentuate them. They will also use substitute words if they are more visible on the lips and have the same meaning.

Deaf people hire oral interpreters choose not to use sign language and even find signing a distraction rather than a help. Most of the time they prefer to rely on their own lip-reading and speaking abilities and not another person for communication. The oral versus sign controversy in deaf education has been going on for hundreds of years and is still not settled.

The ideal experience happened to me about six months ago. I was interpreting at a meeting at which angry people were arguing with one another. My arms got progressively tired and my eyes more and more droopy. Then one of the deaf participants declared, "The interpreter needs a break."

That someone was so thoughtful was amazing. But what happened next even more so. The hearing person who chaired the meeting turned to the deaf person who had spoken up and said, "Okay, tell the interpreter she can have a break."

I was shocked to the core. After all those months of having people talk to each other through me, these two were talking to me through each other! I had succeeded! I was being completely ignored while direct communication took place between these two people.

That may be the ideal interpreting experience. But in my mind it would be best if people took the time to communicate directly with each other through a medium they both understand. Deaf people and hearing persons have a lot to offer each other. If we all really took the time to find what other people have to say, I wouldn't have to work so hard to be ignored. Then I would become obsolete. That would be terrific.

Barbara Fink- Ms. Fink is a free-lance interpreter. The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf is a membership organization of professional interpreters with affiliates in many states. The service of professional's interpreters can be secured from over 160 interpreter referral centers across the nation. The Registry publishes regional directories that list these centers and their addresses and phone numbers. Local centers are also known to many community service agencies, and some are listed in the telephone book. The address of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf is 814 Thayer Street, Silver Springs, MD 20814. (301) 558-2406 (voice/TTY)