



Why is Professional Development so Important to ASL Interpreters?

New discoveries must always be made to keep pace with the current standards of interpreting audiences, to maintain and enhance interpreters' knowledge and skills, and to stay relevant and up-to-date in the profession. Awareness of changing trends and directions in both the interpreting profession and Deaf culture will always be necessary. Likewise, it is important to understand the differences between Deaf and hearing cultures and to professionally and appropriately interpret the respective languages and cultural expressions.

An interpreter who continues to use obsolete signs, and to rely on outdated knowledge, will see that the Deaf community loses respect for that interpreter's professional skills. New signs are constantly evolving, and the Deaf community continues to create new signs to keep up with new terminology and technological advances. I advocate for professional development that keeps pace with these emerging trends. This is especially vital in specialized interpreting fields (e.g., educational, legal, and mental health contexts). Professional development allows interpreters to keep up with new terms and phrases used by the general community, and new signs that keep in sync with trends in the Deaf community. Maintaining a professional profile requires professional development.

In my training sessions, I enjoy seeing participants update their sign inventory. In training, I have to code switch, choosing signs carefully to keep interpreters current. I may choose to sign more slowly in order to help interpreters grasp particular concepts. As I teach, I provide demonstrations in order to make sure the participants get all the information they need.

I work with both interpreters and the Deaf community, and I conduct "research" in both communities to keep up-to-date. Some deaf consumers have no idea how to work with their interpreters on matters concerning linguistic studies, the CPC, or placement during an assignment. I provide additional training for the Deaf community to ease their interactions with interpreters. Different Deaf communities come from varied socioeconomic levels and there are groups that may have greater strengths in American Sign Language or in the English language. I demonstrate current natural language trends in both ASL and English. Professional interpreters must understand and customize interpreting for their audiences. For example, ASL dialects have a big impact on the quality of VRS interpreting. To aid interpreters, I continuously keep alert to changing English expressions and to evolving ASL adaptations. I demonstrate these in my video clips and workshops. In any profession, and certainly in a language-related profession, it is important to attend training sessions and stay up-to-date with linguistic changes.

My goal is to make a meaningful contribution, helping interpreters become more effective in the workplace, and encouraging them to advance their careers. This may involve moving into specialized fields like educational interpreting, signing for VRS companies, and increasing knowledge in medical, legal, and other types of interpreting. As I train interpreters, I see that they gain experience with new possibilities, new knowledge, and new skills, such as how classifiers have been used with current concepts, and how best to translate English idioms.

I deliver a deeper understanding of what it means to be a professional. I have always enjoyed sharing cultural exchanges through storytelling and through providing examples of exactly how to improve voiced interpreting. Also, by advancing our body of knowledge and deploying technology (e.g., YouTube, mobile videos, etc.), I can help to lower public apprehension and to increase public confidence in individual professionals. Professional development of this caliber raises interpreting standards.

I also share many interpreters' real-life stories, including their tales of accidental sign bloopers that have led to negative results. I train participants to successfully endure many challenges and to avoid mistakes. Sharing real-life stories allows participants the opportunity to realize that they are not alone. Stories and examples from working interpreters support hard-working professionals and the lessons learned please interpreting audiences.

There are numerous specific meanings that may require sensitivity in interpreting.

Examples:

- "sleeping together": This phrase may convey that two people slept in a single, shared bed. Perhaps there is an implication that the two people had sex, but this is not necessarily the meaning that is intended.
- "mammogram": The old-fashioned sign could look scary to some people. A better alternative is to sign "breast x-ray" at first, followed by a brief explanation of the procedure, and then subsequently using the correct sign.

ASL semantics as used in various contexts:

- vibration: This depends on what is vibrating. A vibrating phone looks much different than vibrating, buzzing bees.
- sex: Again, this depends on what or who is having sex. Sex between dogs looks very different than reproductive processes between flowers.
- cut: Instead of a single, generic sign used to represent all kinds of cuts, this verb requires agreement, as it is directional and location-specific. Thus, it should be signed on the specifically-affected area of the body.

Some words need to be fingerspelled rather than "signed" because there are many meanings attached to the concepts and their context is quite sensitive. Some examples of words that should be fingerspelled include: weapons, drugs, suicide, abuse, victim, terrorism, and cancer.

Sensitivity while voice interpreting: Many interpreters have asked me about the appropriate terms to use while voice-interpreting, especially on the platform at conferences. Voice interpreting in a culturally sensitive manner at these functions is important, yet many interpreters have never had an opportunity to learn culturally appropriate terminology for these situations. To address these concerns, I put together a chart for my "Voice Interpreting" workshop.

Someone with a disability

Appropriate	Sometimes acceptable	Inappropriate/Unprofessional
Deaf	Can't hear	Hearing impaired
Disabilities		Handicapped, disabled
Short stature (a person of short stature), "Little Person", dwarfism		Short one, you know that short, dwarf, midget
Brain injury survivor		Brain damaged
Physical disability (someone with a ...)		Quadriplegic, crippled
Learning disability	A slow learner	Learning disabled
Down syndrome	Looks like he has Down's	Down's
Intellectual disability or "developmental disability" or "someone with a developmental delay"		Retarded, a retard Mentally retarded
Receives special education services		In special education
Emotional disability		Emotionally disturbed, disordered

Overall, I love working with interpreters and I enjoy guiding them as they upgrade their professional skills and knowledge. Appreciation for professional interpreters strengthens our Deaf world! ~ Trix