



Do my eyes loyally enhance my ASL? You bet they do!

During a mentoring session, one VRS interpreter shared about a particular challenge she had faced. She had used signed English translations for "pre-surgery" and "post-surgery" by simply signing "pre-" (before) and "post" (after) surgery. Clearly, the Deaf client didn't catch the full meaning of those concepts. With my suggestions, the interpreter turned her emphasis to the concept of planning by using a sign that indicated "when" to do certain things. As a suggestion for giving the Deaf person the opportunity to see how time periods work, I demonstrated the use of a visually rich sign, "schedule" to give the idea that before and after surgery, a schedule or time frame had to be set up for specific actions as directed by the medical professionals. Just signing "pre" and "post" doesn't carry enough information for people who are not familiar with the procedures.

In the past, during my work as a Deaf interpreter, an interpreter signed in English "every other Saturday" whereas I translated using my hands to show a "calendar" and pointed to every other Saturday to translate the timing to a visual image.

When you are interpreting, the ways that you translate various ideas will depend on the communication methods used by an individual Deaf person. For example, some might be most comfortable with the use of strong visual-gestural signing, whereas others might prefer more English-like signing. It is part of the interpreter's responsibility to assess whether or not full communication is taking place. Sometimes, it isn't adequate to use signs that refer to a general time period. Instead, conveying complete information will require setting up a mental picture that puts the time period in perspective.

I love to help interpreters, teachers, and everyone who wants to learn about signing and interpreting effectively. I've noticed that my brain and my eyes seem to have totally different perspectives. I can rely on my visualization skills to best describe what something means or how it works. My brain is always learning, as well, especially when I'm trying to think of how to say something in written English! My eyes loyally enhance my ASL. Whenever I wish to figure out the BEST and clearest message to communicate effectively with Deaf people, I come up with suggestions that might be helpful. However, if a specific suggestion doesn't work for you, that's fine – stick with your regular way of signing. Just keep in mind that a Deaf individual is not always going to give you back channel feedback to let you know if he or she truly understands. I have broad experience signing with many different Deaf people. I tend to switch my way of communicating, shifting to match each Deaf person's communication level or preference. I'm flexible because I LOVE to communicate with everyone, and that includes senior citizens and toddlers! I've had so many amazing experiences, all around America, and I've come across a number of different ASL Dialects and communication methods. Please kindly understand that my suggestions are offered simply as options to include in your repertoire.

Hugs! ~ Trix