



STANDARD PRACTICE PAPER

INTERPRETING FOR INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE DEAF-BLIND

RID encourages use of these papers for public distribution and advocacy.

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INTERPRETING FOR INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE DEAF-BLIND

The deaf-blind population consists of individuals who have differing degrees of vision and hearing loss. Some factors contributing to the great diversity among deaf-blind people in terms of language use and communication preferences are:

- age of onset and cause of the vision loss and hearing loss
- degree of usable vision and/or hearing, and whether current vision and hearing is stable, progressive, or fluctuating
- level of language competencies in sign language and/or English
- educational background
- socio-economic background
- family and ethnic background
- physical or cognitive abilities

There is a continuum of vision and hearing loss among people who are deaf-blind. Some deaf-blind people have a substantial amount of vision while others have little or no usable vision. The same is true for hearing; some deaf-blind people are hard of hearing while others are moderately or profoundly deaf. The diversity in levels of vision and hearing contribute to the variety of communication modes used by people who are deaf-blind. Examples of these include:

- sign language at close visual range or in a limited visual space
- sign language received by sense of touch with one or two hands (tactile)
- speechreading at close range
- fingerspelling received by sense of touch with one hand or two
- print-on-palm (block letters drawn on the palm)
- Braille
- hearing with assistive listening devices
- reading with assistive devices for communication (e.g., refreshable braille, real time captioning, large visual display).

Vision and hearing are primary channels for interacting with others, understanding the environment and benefiting from educational and professional opportunities. For deaf-blind people to be active and informed participants in society they often need qualified interpreters. From an accessibility viewpoint, providing qualified interpreters is one way agencies, facilities, and programs can make themselves available to deaf-blind people.

How can I arrange for interpreting services?

The person arranging interpreting services for deaf-blind consumers should:

- ask for consumer preferences regarding communication mode and specific interpreter(s)
- engage interpreters skilled in working with deaf-blind consumers (Not all sign language interpreters are qualified to work with deaf-blind consumers.)
- engage an appropriate number of interpreters
- arrive at a clear understanding of the interpreters' roles and responsibilities for the assignment
- not assume that interpreters will also be responsible for providing or setting up special communication equipment (e.g. amplifiers, FM systems, brailers)
- provide scripts, outlines, texts, or other relevant materials in advance
- be aware that deaf-blind participants and interpreters may need frequent breaks
- ensure that the visual environment is conducive to communication for the deaf-blind participant.

What Is Included in The Interpreting Process?

Just as communication modes may vary, the interpreting process varies greatly depending on the needs of the deaf-blind individuals involved and on the situation in which the interpreting takes place. Because of the unique nature of deaf-blind communication, interpreters must be versatile and flexible. For the same reason, the ratio of interpreters to consumers may be high

so that the unique communication needs of each deaf-blind consumer can be met satisfactorily. In situations involving one deaf-blind individual, only one interpreter or interpreter team would be needed. When two or more deaf-blind individuals are present, more teams may be required. For example, one team might interpret via touch with a single consumer, while another team would interpret at close visual range with a group of two to four consumers, and yet another team would produce a Braille transcript or provide audible interpretation using an FM system.

Another reason two or more interpreters may be needed is that interpreting with deaf-blind persons is strenuous both physically and mentally, and interpreters may need frequent rest breaks or relief.

Sometimes a team includes an interpreter who is deaf. In these instances, that interpreter receives the speaker's message visually, processes the message, then transmits it in the mode most easily understood by that particular deaf-blind consumer.

Interpreters working with deaf-blind people will be sensitive to environmental factors such as visual background, lighting, seating positions, and auditory factors which may affect the interpreting process. When possible, interpreters will address these issues in advance of the interpreting event. When that is not possible, the interpreters will make necessary adjustments in order to achieve the best possible results.

When interpreting with a deaf-blind individual, transmitting what is being said by others is only part of the task. Other information interpreters may express to deaf-blind persons could include:

- the layout of the room
- who is present and what they are doing
- who is speaking
- the speaker's emotion
- unspoken actions and reactions of people in the room
- extraneous noises
- other visual and auditory information
- culturally relevant information

What Are Support Service Providers?

Many deaf-blind people may require services not typically associated with interpreting. For example, a deaf-blind person may request the assistance of a guide. An individual trained to provide such services is often referred to as a Support Service Provider (SSP). While SSP duties may be performed by interpreters, their primary duty is to interpret. Therefore any additional responsibilities should be agreed upon in advance by all parties.

The Association believes that using certified interpreters who are skilled and qualified allows people who are deaf-blind to participate on a basis equal to their peers who are not deaf-blind. Providing qualified interpreters is one way agencies, facilities, and programs can make themselves accessible to deaf-blind people.

RID has a series of Standard Practice Papers available upon request. Footnotes frequently reference these materials