

Sign Language Interpreter

In order to work as a sign language interpreter, an individual must have the requisite skills, experience, education, and other job-related requirements of the position. This individual must also have the ability to perform the essential job functions of the position. To this end, the San Antonio College Department of American Sign Language and Interpreter Training has compiled this list of essential functions for sign language interpreters.

It is important for students to consider the following essential functions when pursuing a career as a sign language interpreter.

Essential Physical Abilities

Hearing: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to hear, identify and understand the speech of another person without relying on visual assistance.

Speech: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to speak clearly so that it is understandable to a listener.

Vision: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to see details of another person's handshapes, hand movements, and facial expressions at a range from three to six feet.

Facial: A sign language interpreter must have control over the muscles of the face in order to manipulate the eyebrows, cheeks, mouth, and nose.

Manual Dexterity: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to quickly make coordinated movements of one hand, a hand together with its arm, two hands, or two hand together with arms.

Finger Dexterity: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to make precisely coordinated movements of the fingers of one or both hands.

Wrist-Finger Speed: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to make fast, simple, repeated movements of the fingers, hands, and wrists.

Limb Movement: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to move the arms in order to place the hands slightly above the head as well as extend the arms out toward the front of the body and out to the sides of the body.

Limb Movement Speed: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to quickly move the arms.

Dual-Limb Coordination: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to coordinate movements of both arms while sitting or standing.

Head: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to control the head in order to nod and to turn it from side to side.

Physical Stamina: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to endure a medium amount of physical exertion without getting winded or out of breath for at least 30 minutes at a time.

Essential Cognitive Abilities

Critical Thinking: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to use logic and analysis to assess communicative events in order to make adjustments in approaches to interpretation.

Self-Monitoring: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to monitor and assess the interpretation both during and after a task.

Selective Attention: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to concentrate and not be distracted while performing a task and sustain that attention over a period of time.

Auditory Attention: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to focus on a single source of auditory information in the presence of other distracting sounds.

Visual Attention: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to focus on a single source of visual information in the presence of other distracting movements in the surrounding area.

Mental Stamina: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to sustain a significant amount of mental processing without fatigue or breakdown for at least 30 minutes at a time.

Working Memory: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to remember information such as concepts, words, and numbers for a brief time while performing the task of interpreting.

Information Ordering: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to track and arrange information in a certain order.

Pattern Inference: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to quickly make sense of information even when parts of that information may appear to be missing.

Time Sharing: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to efficiently shift back and forth between two or more activities or tasks and between two or more sources of information.

Problem Sensitivity: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to recognize when something is wrong or is likely to go wrong.

Fluency of Ideas: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to come up with a number of ideas about a given topic. This concerns the number of ideas produced and not the quality, correctness, or creativity of the ideas.

Breadth of Knowledge: A sign language interpreter must have at least introductory-level knowledge in a broad variety of topics and fields of interests.

Essential Cultural and Linguistic Abilities

English Language: A sign language interpreter must have knowledge of the structure and content of the English language including the meaning and spelling of words, rules of composition, and grammar.

English Language: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to listen to and understand information and ideas presented through spoken words and sentences.

English Language: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to communicate information and ideas by speaking so others will understand.

Written English Comprehension: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to read and understand information and ideas presented in writing.

Written English Expression: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to communicate information and ideas in writing so others will understand.

American Sign Language: A sign language interpreter must have knowledge of the structure and content of American Sign Language including the meaning of lexical and phrasal items, features, rules of grammar, and articulation.

American Sign Language: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to watch and understand information and ideas presented through signs, gestures, classifiers, and fingerspelling.

American Sign Language: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to communicate information and ideas through signs, gestures, classifiers, and fingerspelling so others will understand.

Culture: A sign language interpreter must have an in-depth understanding of the cultural norms and mores of members of the American English-speaking community.

Culture: A sign language interpreter must have an in-depth understanding of the cultural norms and mores of members of the American Deaf Community.

Essential Professional Attributes

Social Perceptiveness: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to be aware of and sensitive to others' reactions and the ability to understand why others react as they do.

Independence: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to develop independent approaches to doing things, work with little or no supervision, and depend on oneself to get things done.

Interpersonal Relationships: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to develop constructive and cooperative working relationships with others, and maintain them over time.

Adaptability/Flexibility: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to adapt to considerable variety in the workplace and be flexible and accepting of change, both positive and negative.

Emotional Well Being: A sign language interpreter must have the ability exercise emotional control and stability in order to fully utilize intellectual abilities and good judgment.

Self Control: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to maintain composure, keep emotions in check, control anger, and avoid aggressive behavior, even in very difficult situations.

Professional Decorum: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to show respect and act in a professional manner during interactions with all parties.

Problem Solving: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to make complex decisions, including the ability to identify problems, collect information, establish facts, and draw valued conclusions

Organizing, Planning and Prioritizing Work: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to develop specific goals and plans to prioritize, organize, and accomplish your work.

Conflict Resolution: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to identify and resolve conflicts related to the meanings of words, concepts, practices, or behaviors.

Time Management: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to manage one's own time and the time of others.

Background: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to pass a criminal background check.

Ethical Standards: A sign language interpreter must have the ability to follow the tenets of the Code of Professional Conduct as set forth by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf. The seven tenets are:

1. Interpreters adhere to standards of confidential communication.
2. Interpreters possess the professional skills and knowledge required for the specific interpreting situation.
3. Interpreters conduct themselves in a manner appropriate to the specific interpreting situation.
4. Interpreters demonstrate respect for consumers.
5. Interpreters demonstrate respect for colleagues, interns, and students of the profession.
6. Interpreters maintain ethical business practices.
7. Interpreters engage in professional development.