



Guidelines for Auslan Interpreting in Media Settings

Background	2
Guidelines for Broadcasters	3
Framing	3
Inclusion of Signing Space in the Frame	3
Height Differences	4
Graphics	4
Size and Positioning	4
Examples of Best, Good and Poor Practice	5
Best Practice	5
Good Practice	5
Poor Practice	6
Broadcast editing and “lag time”	7
Guidelines for Organisations	8
Credentials and Training	8
Booking of Two Interpreters	8
Supply of preparatory information	8
Positioning	9
Livestreaming	9
Deaf Community Engagement	10
Guidelines for Agencies	11
Credentials	11
Community Engagement	11

Quality Assurance	11
Rostering	12
Handling Media Hype	12
Health and Safety	12
Remuneration	13
Preparatory Material	13
Support Mechanisms	13
Guidelines for Interpreters	14
The Toolkit of a Media Interpreter	14
Demands of Media Interpreting	14
Collegiality	15
Broadcasting Practicalities	15
Attire	16
Working Relationships	16
Professional Behaviour	17

Background

Deaf people require access to timely, accurate and reliable information through the media on an equal basis with others. This is especially important during emergencies for reasons of safety and health, but also during ordinary times to enable deaf people to participate fully in social, economic and civic life.

Many deaf people are not fluent in English, making it difficult or impossible for them to understand captions, especially if the content is unfamiliar. Captions are often inaccurate, delayed or incomplete. Auslan interpreters are therefore essential if an organisation wishes to reach all sections of the community with a particular message.

However, simply booking an Auslan interpreter does not guarantee high quality access. Interpreters, employers of interpreters, organisations booking interpreters, and broadcasters all have a role to play in ensuring that information reaches the deaf audience intact.

These guidelines have been developed by the Australian Sign Language Interpreters' Association (ASLIA) in response to the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic which has resulted in an increase of broadcasts interpreted into Auslan for Federal, State and Territory governments. The content of these guidelines is based on best practise, data learnings from the National Emergency Management Project (Vicdeaf, 2016), feedback from the Australian Deaf community, broadcasters and government departments, and insights gained from the ASLIA's Emergency Interpreters discussion forums.

This document outlines recommended standards for:

- Broadcasters
- Organisations booking interpreters
- Employers of interpreters
- Interpreter practitioners

Guidelines for Broadcasters

Broadcasters control many aspects of the final visual product presented to the deaf audience. Below are some guidelines to enable broadcasters to maximise intelligibility for a deaf audience and minimise distraction for their non-deaf audience.

Framing

Inclusion of Signing Space in the Frame

Auslan is a visual-spatial language which utilises the entire upper body. Interpreters move their hands within their "signing space" while communicating. The entire upper body of the interpreter and adequate space around them needs to be shown within frame. As the frame is being set, ask the interpreter to stand in position and sign and adjust the frame to include their whole signing space.

Height Differences

If there is more than one interpreter, height differences may affect the framing. Be aware that interpreters working in pairs typically swap every 15 minutes. This is to avoid fatigue and maintain a high level of accuracy throughout the event, but this will often require reframing.

Graphics

Graphics such as news tickers, supers or watermarks should not cover the interpreter as this can render the Auslan invisible or difficult to view/understand.

Size and Positioning

Ideal positioning for interpreters is to be placed next to the speaker. This way deaf audiences can access the interpreter, and receive important visual cues from the speaker, such as facial expressions which can convey tone and emotion.

Deaf people do not just need to see the hand movements of the interpreter. They also need to be able to read subtle facial expressions in order to understand the message. Best practise across the globe and anecdotal evidence from deaf audiences suggest that the interpreter should ideally take up about one third of the frame. This could be in a shared frame with the speaker, or by use of Picture in Picture (PIP). The size of the PIP is crucial to the target audience accessing the interpreted messages.

These requirements need to be balanced with the need to minimise wasted space and distractions for non-deaf audiences. However, non-deaf audiences report often enjoying watching the Auslan interpreters as well, and broadcasters could sometimes be more courageous in allowing the interpreter to take up more space.

Examples of Best, Good and Poor Practice

Best Practice



Background is unified using chromakey. The audience can clearly see the interpreter's whole signing space and facial expressions. The speaker is more prominent than the interpreter which minimises distraction for non-deaf audiences. Minimal wasted space.¹

Good Practice



The audience can clearly see the interpreter's whole signing space and facial expressions. A wide shot such as this is an excellent option when PIP is not available. Some unavoidable wasted space.



The audience can clearly see the interpreter's whole signing space and facial expressions. Plain backdrop enhances readability. The interpreter is next to the graphics and presenter so the audience can gather as much visual information as possible. However, the presenter appears smaller than interpreter and the amount of empty space is not ideal.

¹ Image credit: World Federation of the Deaf and World Association of Sign Language Interpreters. https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/default/files/wfd_-_wasli_guidelines_sl_access_final_18march20.pdf accessed 26.09.2020



The audience can clearly see the interpreter's whole signing space and facial expressions. The interpreter is next to the presenter so the target audience can gather as much visual information as possible from both presenter and interpreter. The white text behind the interpreter is somewhat distracting.

Poor Practice



The banner is covering the interpreter's hands, rendering this PIP almost entirely useless.



The captioning is covering the presenter's face, rendering the message largely unintelligible. Facial expression is an essential part of the Auslan grammar and lexicon.



The PIP is so small that the target audience cannot clearly see the interpreter's facial expression

Broadcast editing and “lag time”

Auslan interpreters work simultaneously; as the source language is being spoken, the interpreter is producing it in real time into Auslan. However, there is a “lag time” of a few seconds to allow the interpreter to receive the spoken English and interpret the meaning into Auslan. To ensure that the deaf audience receives the full message, wait until the interpreter stops moving their hands before cutting away.

Guidelines for Organisations

The following guidelines are relevant to any organisation which books an interpreter.

Credentials and Training

Organisations requesting an interpreter are strongly advised to check the credentials of the interpreter who arrives at the event. Auslan and Deaf Interpreters are required to hold current certification from the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters. You can require them to show their NAATI ID card and you can record the ID card number. Using this number, you can verify the currency of their credential on NAATI's website. Bear in mind that an Auslan interpreter with only "provisional" certification is not certified at a level appropriate for media briefings. (However, Deaf interpreters with Certified Provisional Deaf Interpreter credentials are appropriate as higher levels of credentialing are currently not available to Deaf interpreters.)

It is also advisable to ask the booking agency what training they have provided to their interpreters on media interpreting specifically. There are a number of interpreting providers around Australia who have provided training to their staff and many have designated teams of people who are trained and experienced in this type of work.

Booking of Two Interpreters

ASLIA strongly recommends two interpreters for all media briefings for reasons of accuracy and safety. The interpreters will swap about every 15 minutes in order to avoid fatigue-related errors and the support interpreter will work with their colleague by monitoring accuracy and feeding details which are dense but spoken quickly, such as numbers or lists of place names.

Supply of preparatory information

Preparation improves interpreting accuracy by reducing “cognitive load” - it is easier to interpret something if you aren’t simultaneously mentally processing new and unfamiliar information. Interpreters who work in media settings prepare by monitoring news feeds and other sources of information. However, on the day they are booked to provide interpreting services, it is best practice for the organisation to provide the following:

- A copy of any draft or final media releases
- A briefing from a member of the media team
- A list of speakers and expected topics
- A short briefing with the speaker/s themselves just before the media conference

Logistical details are also essential and include as a minimum the name and number of a contact person who is physically on site and can assist with access to the building and preparatory materials. This should be provided to the booking agency who will communicate this to the interpreter/s.

Interpreters treat all preparatory materials and information gleaned in the strictest confidence in line with the ASLIA Code of Ethics.

Positioning

Best practice is to position the interpreter immediately next to the speaker. This way deaf audiences can access the interpreter, and receive important visual cues from the speaker, such as facial expressions which can convey tone and emotion. This positioning also allows for the interpreter to hear the speaker clearly. The organiser is responsible for ensuring the interpreter has the appropriate approvals to position themselves appropriately.

Livestreaming

For specific framing of the interpreter/s, please see above under the guidelines for broadcasters. When broadcasting the event via social media, it is best practice to position the camera front on to the interpreter, including their whole signing space, with facial expressions clearly visible and no stickers or banners covering them.

Deaf Community Engagement

Booking an Auslan interpreter is a great way to engage a deaf audience, but there are many other ways to engage further with the Deaf Community. You can commission translations of your materials into Auslan, access deaf awareness training for your staff, partner with Deaf organisations in your state to arrange focus groups or leverage the Deaf specific organisations' social media reach to get your message out to the Deaf Community. Contact your local Deaf Organisation for more information:

Expression Australia (VIC, TAS)

The Deaf Society (NSW, ACT)

Access Plus WA (WA)

Deaf Can Do (SA)

Deaf Services Limited (QLD, NT)

Guidelines for Agencies

Selection of Interpreters

Obviously, it is the responsibility of the employer or agency to ensure that only interpreters who are currently certified as a Certified Interpreter or Conference Interpreter are engaged to jobs working in the media. Deaf Interpreters should also hold NAATI Certified Provisional Deaf Interpreter credentials as a minimum.

Engaging interpreters who are current members of ASLIA is also recommended as they have access to ongoing professional development, including forums and discussion groups, relevant to interpreting in media settings that are offered to ASLIA members.

Agencies may also wish to develop their own criteria for the selection of interpreters that take account of:

- Qualifications in addition to their NAATI certification, such as university qualifications
- Professional development completed
- Skill quality as assessed by the agency
- Years/hours of experience
- Team ethic
- Profile and reputation within the Deaf Community

Community Engagement

ASLIA strongly recommends thorough engagement with the Deaf Community to collect feedback from a diverse cross-section of deaf audiences. This could be in the form of an advisory committee or other feedback mechanism.

Quality Assurance

Agencies and employers are of course responsible for actively monitoring the work of their interpreters to ensure high quality services and improvements as needed.

Rostering

ASLIA recognises that media interpreting work is demanding and recommends rosters which allow interpreters to work sustainably. This protects the health safety of interpreters and ensure the long-term provision of interpreting services in the media setting.

Where there is a team of interpreters, the pairing of interpreters should take into consideration each of their skills. Some considerations may include:

- L1 Auslan with L1 English
- Media interpreting experience
- Complimentary extra-linguistic knowledge and skills

Handling Media Hype

At times, interpreters have been singled out by the general media and images of them have become viral on social media. ASLIA encourages agencies to adopt appropriate measures to (a) preserve the well-being of the interpreter and (b) draw the focus back to the content of the media briefings and the importance of access for the Deaf Community. This may include allocating an interpreter to non-media interpreting until the hype has died down.

Health and Safety

It goes without saying that ASLIA supports safe and sustainable work and employment practices for interpreters. In addition to the usual WHS recommendations (see the ASLIA WHS Policy) ASLIA urges agencies to consider matters such as:

- “bubbles” where teams are fixed so as to reduce the chance of Covid-19 transmission to the whole team
- breaks
- PPE and other protective measures as appropriate under public health guidelines and agency policy

Remuneration

ASLIA recognises that remuneration varies across employers and agencies. ASLIA recommends that the hourly rate reflect the demands of media interpreting as well as the skills and qualifications required. Remuneration needs to account for the extra preparation work required of media interpreters. During busier times, a call out fee or flat fee rate per day may be appropriate.

Preparatory Material

Agencies are responsible to support their interpreting staff by sourcing and providing preparatory material in good time wherever possible. See Guidelines for Organisations above.

Support Mechanisms

Based on their monitoring of the interpreters and feedback from the target audience, employers and agencies are responsible for sourcing appropriate professional development opportunities for interpreters and discussing strategies to manage situations. Further, we strongly encourage employers and agencies to make clear to their interpreters where they can access opportunities for debriefing and offer opportunities to reflect on their work in a safe and constructive environment.

Group chat platforms have proved an effective way of supporting effective communication within interpreting teams and between employers or agencies and their interpreters. Platforms may include WhatsApp or the internal systems of an organisation. A representative from the employer or agency should be present in these chats for oversight and moderation.

Where appropriate and possible, employers and agencies are responsible for facilitating opportunities for developing media interpreters to observe experienced interpreters working in a media setting. Mentoring relationships or opportunities should be facilitated where feasible and appropriate.

Guidelines for Interpreters

The Toolkit of a Media Interpreter

As well as having the appropriate credentials and training, ASLIA recommends that interpreters undertaking media work:

- have undertaken observation of media interpreters and mentoring before beginning media interpreting work
- continue to develop broad general knowledge of current affairs, historical events, public policy, politics, and social issues
- develop their skills in communicating complex information to an audience of monolingual Auslan users
- develop a range of strategies for handling the demands of media interpreting
- develop strong networks with peers and trusted people from whom they can seek feedback
- develop good strategies for self-care

Demands of Media Interpreting

Media interpreting requires the interpreter to confidently implement a range of coping strategies to manage the various demands which include:

- time constraints, short notice for assignments
- speed and density of information
- cohesiveness of speaker, differing speaking styles
- expectations of client, audiences and television editors
- lack of preparation, short or limited briefings
- the practicalities of broadcasting
- achieving clarity for a monolingual audience
- unfamiliar terms and concepts
- fear of making mistakes on camera
- the potential for vicarious trauma
- finding yourself interpreting information that is highly relevant to you personally, e.g. lockdowns in your area, fires near your home

Collegiality

Media work encompasses a wide variety of situations such as natural disasters, acts of terror and events impacting public safety. These situations are emotional and stressful and as such, it is vital that interpreters work in solidarity, are collegiate, engage in peer support, and share resources, skills and knowledge. Interpreters allocated to a team for media interpreting are required to engage in regular communication to develop a rapport and working relationship that ensures the team is as effective as possible. Where this isn't possible, interpreters should contact their agency or employer to seek a resolution.

Open and effective communication between interpreters encompasses discussing:

- how to transition and when
- prompting strategies and preferences
- who will lead, e.g. in liaison with the organisation who has booked interpreters
- debriefing and opportunities for feedback as appropriate

Broadcasting Practicalities

Interpreters should expect to work in some of the following settings:

- Live television press conferences (in a studio or public outside area)
- Pre-recorded videos for distribution across social media
- On-site (e.g. bushfire evacuation centres or scenes of a crime)
- Remotely in real time (streamed by broadcaster)

Best practice for on-site bookings is to arrive with plenty of time to locate your contact person and receive a briefing. If possible, be at the location of the press conference with ample time to:

- work out where you will be standing and negotiate if needed so that you are optimally visible.

- work with camera operators so that they can frame you appropriately. It is helpful to show them your normal signing space to ensure that they are not going to cut out your hands.
- find out which cameras will be filming the interpreter/s. These are the cameras you will need to engage with using eye gaze.

If time allows, you can sometimes ask journalists about the questions they think might come up during the briefing.

Be aware that cameras are often rolling long before the press conference starts. Once you have been “framed up” by the camera operators, it is safer to stand to the side where you are not visible.

Attire

Attire needs to take into account the ASLIA code of conduct, physical location, weather and goal of the setting. ASLIA encourages interpreters to be neat and business-like, avoiding distracting facial hair, jewellery or makeup. High necklines are strongly recommended for media work to enhance the visibility of the interpreter’s hands on screen. Common sense should prevail.

Working Relationships

Developing appropriate working relationships with journalists, camera operators and media advisors is key to performing the job well. Positive communication and relationships will support the development of trust between broadcasters, media industry personal, presenters and interpreters which ultimately reflects well on the industry and Deaf community. Trust will naturally improve communication and therefore access to information and content that will benefit the interpreter’s ability to do a faithful interpretation.

Professional Behaviour

Before, during and after working in the media, interpreters will adhere to the ASLIA Code of Ethics which includes but is not limited to: confidentiality (1.1), professional conduct (1.2), scope of practise (1.3).

Some considerations particularly relevant to media interpreting are:

- The disposal of sensitive content or intellectual property such as briefings and speaker lists. It is the interpreter's responsibility to ensure it is returned or destroyed before leaving the venue.
- Signing confidentiality agreements with organisations booking interpreters. It is recommended that you check with your agency if you have any concerns about this and that the agency negotiate with the organisation to ensure that confidentiality agreements allow for appropriate debriefing with your supervisor.
- Managing social media. Interpreters are encouraged to refrain from acknowledging or responding to feedback or comments on social media platforms from members the deaf community, interpreting industry and general public. The sharing of broadcasted videos on social media is not the responsibility of the interpreter. Rather, the employer and booking organisation have the widest reach and are best placed to do this. Most agencies have their own social media policies to guide interpreters in managing this.
- Unwanted or ill-informed comments. Where comments suggest that a party does not adequately understand the role of an interpreter or Auslan or if lateral violence or cyber-bullying is occurring, please refer these to the employer.

For further information on ASLIA, the work of media interpreters or assistance in following the guidelines outlined above, you can contact ASLIA: info@aslia.com.au

For further information on Auslan or the Deaf Community, you can contact Deaf Australia:

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Email: info@deafaustralia.org.au