

The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc., (RID) Standard Practice Paper (SPP) provides a framework of basic, respectable standards for RID members' professional work and conduct with consumers. This paper also provides specific information about the practice setting. This document is intended to raise awareness, educate, guide and encourage sound basic methods of professional practice. The SPP should be considered by members in arriving at an appropriate course of action with respect to their practice and professional conduct.

It is hoped that the standards will promote commitment to the pursuit of excellence in the practice of interpreting and be used for public distribution and advocacy.

About Oral Transliteration

Oral transliterators, also called oral interpreters, facilitate spoken communication between individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing and individuals who are not. Individuals who are "oralists" use speech and speechreading as their primary mode of communication and may or may not know or use manual communication modes or sign language. Each oral deaf/hard of hearing consumer has specific preferences for successful communication, thereby requiring transliterators to work within a continuum of service provision. In the strictest sense, oral transliteration does not usually include the use of formal sign language. However, transliterators respond to requests by consumers to add natural gesture; fingerspell particular words; write numbers or the beginning letter of a word that is easily misread in the air; and/or use signs to support words on the mouth. Oral transliterators may also "voice" for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing as these individuals may not use their own voices or their voices are difficult for listeners to understand. Oral transliteration should be provided by transliterators who are qualified, trained professionals.

When is an Oral Transliterator Needed?

In certain communication settings, speechreading, also referred to as lipreading, cannot be used effectively by individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. These settings may include the following:

- Classrooms
- Groups
- Conferences and seminars
- Communication with a speaker who is not present (phone calls, radio, public announcements, etc.)
- Communication with a speaker who is present but whose speech is difficult to speechread (accents, articulations differences, etc.)

Group meetings may pose difficulty for speechreaders. It is often challenging to locate the next speaker in a conversation or discussion thereby resulting in missed information. In settings such as the classroom, seminars or conferences, speechreaders may be unable to see the speaker's face clearly or may not be physically close enough to successfully speechread. Speakers may also be located out of the sightlines of speechreaders. Speakers who are within normal range of speechreaders may be difficult to speechread due to unclear speech, accents or facial hair that obscures mouth movements. Each of these scenarios necessitates oral transliterators whose responsibility is to silently replicate what speakers say, in an easy, speechreadable, clear and consistently-visible manner.

People unfamiliar with the speech of deaf and hard of hearing individuals may find them difficult to understand. In situations such as these, those unfamiliar with "deaf speech" may choose to have oral transliterators repeat the message for clarification. This is called voice interpreting. Decisions to use the voicing services of oral interpreters/transliterators are best made with the individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, interpreter(s) and the other individuals who are part of the event, seminar, etc. so

that a consensus of service provision is developed. Oral interpreters who provide voicing must have strong speechreading skills. Situations necessitating voice interpreting for deaf or hard of hearing individuals may include:

- Person's preference of the speaker(s) not to use his/her own voice
- Poor quality of sound system
- Acoustical factors of the setting including size of space or distance from audience
- Audience lacking in exposure/experience with speakers who are deaf or hard of hearing

There are also situations where individuals cannot speak for themselves due to surgical procedures such as laryngectomy or tracheotomy. Oral transliterators may serve well in this situation. The translation can be provided by professionals who are deaf or hard of hearing themselves and excellent speechreaders.

Note: Translitterators/Interpreters are professionals who are hearing, deaf or hard of hearing. Sometimes deaf and hearing professionals work in teams to render the most accurate messages.

How is Oral Transliteration Rendered?

Oral transliterating requires a variety of practiced techniques and skills in order to convey the message content, intent and emotion. Translitterators do not edit the content or meaning of messages, remaining faithful to the speaker's intent. Facial expression, body movement and natural gestures are integral components in the process.

Deaf and hard of hearing individuals who use speech and speechreading may have diverse preferences regarding support techniques employed by the oral translitterators. However, always required from oral interpreters/translitterators are:

- Accurate reception and production of the spoken message
- Articulation and phrasing that is easily understood
- Facial expression that matches the messages' intent
- Natural gesture that is subtle and supports the meaning

There are additional skills and techniques employed which may include:

- Rephrasing sentences or substitution of words in order to facilitate effective speechreading
- Mime-like gestures to clarify difficult to speechread words
- Using "air writing" or "palm writing" for words that are easily misunderstood, numbers or proper nouns

Where Professional Oral Translitterators Work

Oral translitterators work in a variety of public and private settings and situations including conferences, meetings and educational environments. Interpreters are trained professionals who are versatile, interact well with others and continue to find professional development to maintain and enhance techniques and skills. Many interpreters are in private practice and/or work with interpreter agencies. There are translitterators who are salaried staff members of organizations in corporations, not-for-profits or educational settings.

Under What Circumstances Can Oral Translitterators Work Most Successfully?

Optimum service is provided when oral translitterators:

- Work with consumers who are trained and experienced in speech and speechreading
- Have been apprised in advance of technical terms, acronyms, jargon and proper nouns specific to the assignment as well as being aware that that the aforementioned are familiar to the speechreader
- Have had the opportunity to meet with the speechreader to determine the best location/placement of the translitterator in relation to the environment (lighting, distance, angles and background)
- Have been apprised whether voicing will be required, and if it is deemed necessary, meeting with the speechreader to become familiar with his/her speech
- Work in a team with another qualified oral translitterator for longer assignments*

What Constitutes Qualified Oral Transliterators?

Qualified oral transliterators have knowledge and abilities in the process of speechreading, speech production and the communication needs of speechreaders. Transliterators are aware of environmental and social factors influencing the service provider and the service recipient. Transliterators know how to manipulate and adapt these factors for successful communication. Qualified oral transliterators have developed articulation skills and techniques that allow for easy understanding by speechreaders and have become skilled in employing verbal and non-verbal support techniques, thus assuring that the message is transmitted accurately. Qualified professionals have the stamina to deliver continuous, accurate reception and expression of the spoken message and the mental concentration to work for an extended period of time.

The knowledge, techniques and skills of oral transliterators are markedly different from those needed by sign language interpreters, however, what both groups of professionals have in common include:

- Knowledge of and adherence to the NAD-RID Code of Professional Conduct
- Professional standards of service and behavior
- Awareness of the communication needs of deaf and hard of hearing consumers

RID provides evaluation and certification of oral transliterators comparable to that of sign language interpreters. * Verification of oral certification can be requested from oral transliterators. It is important that oral transliterators had training and experience in the role of oral transliterator and be qualified and capable of doing the assignment. Acquiring and maintaining national certification reflects qualification.

Who is Responsible for Providing Interpreter/Transliterating Services?

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, qualified interpreters are listed as “auxiliary services” for ensuring that communication for people who are deaf or hard of hearing is as effective as communication with people who are not. An individual who depends upon speechreading for communication may request qualified oral transliterators in order to have an equal opportunity to participate in and enjoy the benefits of services, programs or activities. The responsible parties for provision of services may be employers, school, hospitals, conference sponsors, government offices or private persons.

How to Find Qualified Oral Transliterators

Private practice transliterators can be hired directly or through interpreter referral agencies. Hiring directly may be through a search on RID’s Web site or by contacting a RID Affiliate Chapter which has a list of active members who are certified and qualified. Interpreter referral agencies will do the search for requestors (employers, schools, hospitals, conference sponsors, etc.)

Quality assurance can be maintained by hiring RID certified oral transliterators. Transliterators certified by RID have demonstrated skills related to language and communication, as well as knowledge and practice of ethics and professionalism. To verify certification status, contact the RID national office at 703-838-0030.

To be effective, transliterator’s communication style and techniques must be compatible with that of the deaf or hard of hearing individuals in the assignment. Therefore, it is important that the deaf or hard of hearing consumers be consulted on the choice of transliterators. Specific transliterators may be declined because ethnicity, cultural and/or linguistic concerns of the consumers were not considered.

RID believes that the provision of qualified, certified oral transliterators will assist in providing equal opportunities for speechreaders to participate in and enjoy the benefits of an event, program or activity.