

Community Interpreter Orientation and Tip Sheet

Welcome to the SEIU Healthcare NW Training Partnership training program for Home Care Aides! We are very grateful to you for volunteering to interpret a training class for a Home Care Aide (HCA) student who has limited English language skills. By offering your time and bilingual skills, you are helping to make this training experience possible for that student. Your role is a very important one in their learning new job skills.

This “tip sheet” is intended to help you prepare for your upcoming experience as a volunteer Community Interpreter, so that you are as successful as possible.

Some expectations of your role as a Community Interpreter:

- Please be on time and do not leave at any time while the class is in progress. You are making a commitment to be there for your student.
- On the first day of class, please arrive at least 30 minutes early, to meet with your instructor and your student to discuss how you’ll work together most successfully. You are a team.
- If you are unable to make it the day(s) of the class, inform your student as early as possible. They will have to find another interpreter to replace you.
- Be respectful of the class instructor and of your student, and of the other students in the class.
- Have a positive attitude about the material being presented in the class.

Preparing for interpreting ahead of time:

- If you don’t have much experience interpreting as someone else is speaking continuously (known as “simultaneous interpretation”), then you should try to practice doing so.
 - Try to interpret into your other language what’s being said on a TV newscast. See how long you can keep up.
 - If you get behind, stop and then start again with a new story. Don’t just get frustrated and try to fake it.
 - TV is better than radio, because there’s also body language to observe, which you will have in the classroom situation.
 - This kind of interpretation is hard to do.

Meeting with your instructor and your student the first day of class:

- We highly recommend that you and your student meet with the instructor at least 30 minutes before the class begins. Your purpose for doing so is to work out together ways to do the best possible job of communicating with each other.
- Introduce yourself and your student to the instructor.
- Discuss where you and your student will be seated in the classroom.
 - Your position should be in the front row, at one end of the row. This makes it easiest for you and your student to see the instructor and the screen, and to hear him or her

clearly, but at the same time to interfere the least with the other students' ability to hear the instructor.

- In that position, your student should be seated at the table, and you should be seated slightly behind and slightly off to one side of them (not at the table). It's very important that you be **close** to your student.
- This allows you to speak very closely into one of their ears, and to be heard clearly by your student, without you having to speak loudly, which would be distracting to others.
- It also allows you and your student to both look straight ahead at the instructor or other students when they are speaking. And you will not have to turn your head to face your student as you interpret; that would give you a bad neck ache if you did it through the entire class!
- Tell your student to focus their attention on the instructor and to watch the screen when the instructor is showing something. It's not intuitive for the student to do this! You will remain in the background, behind them but easily heard.
- Agree with the instructor on a signal system that you will use to ask him or her to slow down or to pause when they are speaking too quickly for you to keep up.
 - The instructor will provide you with three cards to use to signal him or her when you're getting behind in your interpreting: a yellow, a red, and a green card – just like a traffic light.
 - Don't be afraid to signal the instructor to **slow down**– by holding up the **yellow card**; to **pause** – by holding up the **red card**; and to **start speaking again** – by holding up the **green card**.
 - Go over these signals together, to be clear about how you'll use them.
- Tell your student to raise their hand when they want to ask the instructor a question or speak in class. You'll just interpret everything your student asks or says.
- Ask your student, when he or she speaks, to speak with pauses, use short sentences and not go on for long without pauses. This will give you a little break, since it's not "simultaneous" interpretation, but "pause" interpretation, which is easier to do.

During the class:

- At the very beginning of the class, your instructor will introduce you to the other students and explain the important role that you will play in the class. He or she will talk about how the sound of your interpreting might impact the other students, and how they can help by speaking loudly and clearly, and not engaging in side talk.
- Your job is to interpret **everything** that is said, as it is stated – by the instructor, your student, and the rest of the class.
 - For example, when the instructor says: "Class, please open your books", you should say to your student: "Class, please open your books." Do **not** say: "He said: 'Class, please open your books'".

- This has the benefits for you of not having to change the grammar, and saving time and words. It makes it clear that the communication is between the instructor and your student – **not** between you and your student.
- As the interpreter, you're there to facilitate the communication between them.
- Keep your eyes on the instructor and other speakers; read their body language. Remind your student to do the same. They may be able to understand some of the English being spoken.
- During breaks, ask your student if they understand what is being interpreted. If they do not, try to make adjustments that will help.
- The instructor should either ask the other students to speak louder when they ask a question, or automatically repeat the question. If they don't, feel free to say: "We can't hear the speaker. Could you please repeat the question?" They should speak slowly and distinctly.
- Interpreting in a class setting like this is a very tiring and difficult job, especially for such a lengthy event. The instructor will give shorter, more frequent breaks because of the strain of interpreting.

In conclusion:

Once again, we greatly appreciate your contribution to the learning for your HCA student. Hopefully this "tip sheet" will help you be better prepared for the interpretation challenge ahead. And we wish you a very successful and rewarding experience interpreting in the classroom.