



From the AACT Resource Library

Finding a Qualified ASL interpreter

In addition to our goal of making theatre as inclusive as possible, federal law states that if the patrons have paid to be in attendance, venues are required to provide interpretive services for their Deaf audience members, upon request.

To find a Certified American Sign Language interpreter:

- Check the Registry of Interpreters in the online (RID) Database (<https://rid.org/>), which lets you to search for certified interpreters in your area.
- You may also contact your state office of the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) (<https://www.nad.org/members/state-association-affiliates/>).

Although not recommended as your first option, you can also search Google for an “interpreter referral agency” and include the name of your city and state. Just be sure to ask for the interpreter's certification and experience.

When requesting an interpreter:

- *Specify your needs:* Clearly state the type of event, setting, and any specific requirements for the interpreter. See below, regarding events lasting more than an hour.
- *Give adequate notice:* Plan ahead and request an interpreter well in advance. It can be hard to find a qualified interpreter on short notice.
- *Verify certification:* If you're not referred by RID or NAD, ask about the interpreter's certification status and experience.

Key points about ASL interpreters and time:

- Many ASL interpreters have a two-hour minimum booking time, even if the actual interpreting needed is shorter, to account for preparation, travel, check-in, and potential scheduling changes.
- For a class, a meeting, or performance exceeding an hour, two interpreters are typically used in 20-minute increments. Research shows that after this time, the quality of interpretation may decline due to mental fatigue involved in the process.

- Interpreting a performance is usually more complex than interpreting in a class or meeting. A play often has multiple characters, sometimes with overlapping dialogue.
- Interpreters do not face the stage, so they translate based on what they hear behind them. Since acoustics in the space may direct sound away from the interpreter, or muffle the sound, interpreters may need a monitor (or earphones) to hear on-stage dialogue fully.
- Some actors' voices may sound similar and it sometimes can be hard to discern which character is speaking. For this reason, interpreters typically require a music stand with the script (usually on an iPad or similar device) in front of them. While the interpreter may have rehearsed, and most of the necessary signs are memorized, the script is there for support, just in case.

More Information

- [Performance Interpreting: Common Questions and Answers for Venues](#) (Gate Communications)
- [ASL and Theatre: Here's What Not to Do](#) (American Theatre)
- [ADA Quick Tips - Sign Language Interpreters](#) (AADA National Network)