

12 tips for booking BSL interpreters for studio shows

Please note, although much of this advice applies to all kinds of filming, a further set of tips for working with BSL interpreters specifically on location and in the edit will be produced in due course.

1. Be prepared

Create a list of reputable interpreting agencies and individuals to contact, as part of your pre-production process. This could include people you have worked with previously, or recommendations from deaf people or trusted BSL interpreters.

A good starting point to find an interpreter can be the NRCPD website, which allows you to search for interpreters based on location, registration status etc.

If the interpreter is going to interpret for a specific BSL contributor/guest on the show (rather than for the audience at home), ask the BSL user for their preferred interpreter/s. Often deaf people will have their own preferred interpreters who can represent them well.

2. Plan in advance

When booking BSL interpreters you will need to book in advance, with at least one month notice, if possible. It can be possible to book interpreters at short notice, but it is important that you allow sufficient time for the interpreter to prepare for the assignment. Only an experienced interpreter should accept a last-minute request.

Please be aware, an interpreter will often charge more if they are expected to be featured on-screen whilst interpreting; this is standard practice.

3. Do your due diligence

When booking interpreters, it is vital to check their credentials and confirm they are registered and safe to practice. If you are producing an item that is from a specific region, endeavour to book a local interpreter from there, who will be familiar with regional signs.

BSL Interpreters should be registered with NRCPD (The National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind people) or RBSLI (Regulatory Body for Sign Language Interpreters & Translators). Registered interpreters will have a yellow badge to signify their registration status - they are known as an RSLI (Registered Sign Language Interpreter). Their credentials can also be found on the NRCPD/RBSLI websites. On camera interpreting is not suitable for trainee interpreters.

Check that the interpreter you wish to work with has directly relevant experience working in the TV industry carrying out a similar task – for example, interpreting a presenter's word on camera for viewers at home is very different to interpreting 1-to-1 for a BSL user during an interview.

As well as ensuring they have the right qualifications and experience, please get personal recommendations and references from BSL users or other trusted BSL interpreters or translators

4. Interpreter or translator?

If an autocue system is being used it is recommended that instead of interpreters, you employ qualified Deaf Translators – they are known as RSLT (Registered Sign Language Translators). Deaf Translators are native language BSL users and are also registered with NRCPD.

Consider using AI as live captions for talk shows and any live events especially the high performing AI. Some of these provide near 95% or more accuracy.

5. Book two interpreters for each BSL user in the cast or crew

As a general rule (but not in all cases), if you have deaf cast members, guests or production team, book a minimum of two interpreters per deaf person, ensuring access needs are met for all. Please note, any on-screen interpreter will *not* be able to provide access for production as well.

Always ask the deaf cast members/guests/crew if they have a preferred interpreter list - often these interpreters will have a long standing working relationship with these deaf individuals. If appearing on camera for the audiences at home, their credentials will still need to be checked.

6. Give the interpreter time and tools to prepare

Interpreters will require information beforehand to familiarise themselves with the production. If the item is live and there is no tangible preparation to be given, give the interpreter as much information as possible about what could be expected and who will be involved in that segment of the show.

Inform the interpreter of any specific dress code. Plain clothing is recommended for clear visibility.

7. Think carefully how you position on-screen interpreters

If your programme is later released with in-vision BSL interpretation added by our Access Services team, there will be no additional signing when there is an interpreter on screen on the actual programme. This is because deaf viewers will be distracted if there is both live interpretation and interpretation added later.

In other words: the BSL interpretation you provide will be the only way BSL users can access that part of your programme. So, for set up and framing, you need to ensure:

a) The interpreter should be facing the camera and fully framed from above their head to below the waistline, or a full-length frame, if required. Be prepared to adjust the framing based on the height of interpreter.

b) The interpreter can be positioned next to the speaker or slightly behind, but must be clearly seen in frame so deaf audiences/viewers can access the interpretation.

c) Always allow time for the interpreter to finish working before the cutting to another shot, so you don't cut off the interpreter mid-sentence.

8. Brief your presenters and guests for working with interpreters

When there is an interpreter present, anyone on screen should avoid speaking too quickly, use a natural pace and take it in turns to speak, thereby avoiding any overlap.

9. Use the correct language in scripts

Introduce the interpreter you are working with by their name first, and then their job title 'BSL interpreter'. Qualified interpreters are not signers.

10. Include directions for interpreters in the script

Add notations onto the script to indicate where the interpreter should stand, which camera will point at the interpreter and (if applicable) which autocue they should refer to.

11. Guidance fees

For an idea of fees, you could look at NUBSLI (National Union of British Sign Language Interpreters) website which has guidance fees. Bear in mind, this is just a guidance and on camera interpreters and those experienced in media often charge more than the daily standard fee.

12. Websites references

NRCPD – <https://www.nrcpd.org.uk>

RBSLI – <https://rbsli.org>

NRCPD – <http://nubsli.com>

For further information please contact Nicole Steven (NSteven@Channel4.co.uk)

These guidelines were developed for Channel 4 in collaboration with WealdBSL.

