



Certified and Qualified Interpreters: What's the Difference?

The Americans with Disabilities Act, a federal civil rights law prohibiting discrimination against individuals with disabilities, requires that individuals needing sign language interpreting services receive them from *qualified interpreters*. The federal regulations define “qualified interpreter” very specifically as, “... *an interpreter who is able to interpret effectively, accurately and impartially both receptively and expressively, using any necessary specialized vocabulary.*”

How do I ensure that the interpreters I hire are meeting the federal requirements?

While certification is not a federal requirement, it remains the best way to provide the quality assurance necessary to meet the requirements of federal law when you provide communications access through sign language interpreting.

Certification of interpreters and quality assurance assessments from the state ensure that those who are providing specific services are meeting particular levels of skills and professional behaviors. In fact, interpreters should always be able and willing to provide you with proof of credentials.

National certification of interpreters is through the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, or RID. Interpreters who meet RID's stringent professional guidelines by passing both practical and performance skill based examinations are not only “qualified” under ADA, but are also professionally committed to a strict code of professional ethics, subject to nationally administered grievance resolution processes, and required to maintain a high level of continuing professional skill development. The interpreters at *Interpreting Solutions, Inc.* are fully qualified and RID certified.

Am I required to hire a certified interpreter?

You are required, by federal law, to hire an interpreter who meets the ADA's “qualified” requirements. You are required to ensure that the interpreter you provide can:

- ❑ Fully and accurately understand what the Deaf person signs, in whichever type of sign language he or she uses, and be understood by the Deaf person as he or she communicates,
- ❑ Interpret impartially. This means correctly expressing the voice, tone, emotion, and non-spoken message of the communication visually to the Deaf person *as the speaker communicates it*. The interpreter cannot allow his or her own opinions, emotions, or experiences to change the messages being communicated.
- ❑ Render any specialized vocabulary accurately so that the meaning of the communication is clear and conceptually correct. This is especially critical in situations such as conferences, professional discussions, medical or legal situations, or any time there is

specialized terminology in use. This means, in certain types of situations, interpreters with special background or experience are essential.

Can I use a family member of the Deaf person to act as an interpreter?

This is not considered an effective way to ensure ADA compliance or to ensure equal access to communications. In some states, it is illegal. Typically, you should not consider using a family member to interpret unless:

- ❑ The family member happens to be a “qualified interpreter,” AND
- ❑ The family member is not simultaneously in another role (for example, that of a parent of a deaf child at a medical appointment), AND
- ❑ The family member is not a minor (under age 18), AND
- ❑ The family member does not have an emotional investment in the communication (for example, a family member in an employment or medical situation would *not* be appropriate), AND
- ❑ Both the family member and the Deaf person are fully willing to do this even after being told, by you, that they have the right to have a qualified sign language interpreter present.

As you can see, generally a family member is not an appropriate choice for providing communications access.

But what if the Deaf person or family member says “I’ll bring along my family member to interpret for me?”

A family member will often not meet the criteria for “qualified interpreter.” *Interpreting Solutions, Inc.* recommends that you simply say:

- thanks for offering to help, then
- tell the Deaf person you are required to hire a qualified interpreter and,
- you want to ensure communication’s access as required by federal law.

Can I use student interpreters or people who do not have national certifications or state quality assurance? Sometimes they will work for free or reduced rates.

The bottom line is meeting the needs of the consumer and following federal civil rights laws, which require that a “qualified” interpreter be provided. Please contact *Interpreting Solutions, Inc* at 414-732-9966 or jill@interpretingsolutionsinc.com to discuss your needs. You might also find our free download, *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): Ensuring Effective Communication* helpful. It is available on our web site.

> For information on the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf: www.rid.org
> For information on the credentials of interpreters at *Interpreting Solutions, Inc.*, please call or email: 414-732-9966 or jill@interpretingsolutionsinc.com
> To access the web pages on our web site dealing with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), please visit us at www.interpretingsolutionsinc.com[SPC1]

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