



AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE  
TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

## **ASLTA Recommendations on ASL Instructional Class Sizes**

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The American Sign Language Teachers Association (ASLTA) recommends an optimal instructional class size for classes in American Sign Language of 8 to 20 students depending on the level and nature of instruction. This is based on recommendations from the disciplines of foreign language instruction and sign language interpreter training, as well as a survey of recommendations from 300 sign language program administrators. Maximum enrollment for beginning level instruction should not exceed 20 students, and smaller class sizes are recommended for intermediate and advanced classes based on the considerations outlined below.

Guidelines developed by the Association of Departments of Foreign Languages (ADFL) in effect since 1978 indicate that the optimum class size for introductory foreign language classes is 12, and the maximum should not exceed 20. Position papers published by the Conference of Interpreter Trainers in the mid-1980s and re-issued in 1994 and 1998 strongly recommend class sizes of 8 to 12 students per section. In a 1995 survey of sign language program administrators (Cooper, 1997), 84% of the sign language program administrators recommended class sizes of 8 to 10 students (the remaining 16% suggested class size might include as many as 35 students).

### **ASLTA supports the need for small class size for the following reasons:**

Beginning level instruction may appropriately focus on receptive skills development with less focus and evaluation of students' expressive skills. Intermediate and advanced level classes will have more emphasis on expressive, conversational, and presentation skills requiring smaller classes.

ASL is not a written language, so written drills and compositions are difficult and/or ineffective. Frequent in-class recitations are necessary for teachers to observe student

progress and language proficiency and the process of observing each student is time-consuming.

The use of videotaped feedback, which allows students to see their performance and facilitate self-correction of production errors, is strongly recommended. This technique is extremely time-consuming, considering that each ten-minute tape takes 30 to 45 minutes to critique, plus time needed for instructors to sit with each student individually to watch the tape and point out correct and incorrect features.

ASL is a visual/spatial language, and all students must be able to see the instructor and other class members as the language is modeled and introduced to the class. This precludes the traditional classroom seating arrangement where students are aligned in rows behind one another; being seated in a semicircle arrangement enables students to see each other better but limits the number of seats in the classroom. The visual nature of this language also necessitates more time for turn-taking in the classroom, as all must turn to make eye contact with the next speaker in order to “hear” (see) what is being said.