



AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE
TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

Guidelines for Hiring ASL Teachers

A Resource for the Program Administrator

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American Sign Language (ASL) is accepted by colleges and universities and has been accepted in fulfillment of the modern/foreign language requirements at the high school, bachelors, and masters levels in schools and states across the United States (Wilcox, 1992, Cooper, 1997). The Modern Language Association reported that the number of students taking ASL classes has increased 16% from 2006 to 2009 and that ASL is the fourth most common foreign language in America. Over 40 states officially recognize ASL as a language. Research on ASL is regularly published in scholarly journals such as Sign Language Studies, American Annals of the Deaf, the Deaf American Monograph and Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education. Numerous conferences occur in areas of ASL teaching and linguistics, Deaf Studies and ASL Literature. All of these activities point to the need for a national organization of teachers of ASL and Deaf Studies. The ASLTA fulfills this need. ASLTA is a national, professional organization of American Sign Language and Deaf Studies teachers established since 1975. ASLTA was affiliated with the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) from 1975 to 2004. ASLTA's mission is to provide professional development, evaluation, certification and networking for teachers of American Sign Language and Deaf Studies and to serve as a clearinghouse for information regarding the teaching of ASL and Deaf Studies.

Why Are These Guidelines Important to You as a Program Administrator?

As an ASL Program Administrator or other person responsible for offering ASL classes, we know you are concerned about providing the highest quality instruction for your students. ASLTA provides professional development, information on the latest developments in the field of ASL instruction and certification to our member teachers. The goal of ASLTA is to ensure that ASL teachers are highly qualified to teach ASL and the culture and community of ASL users. ASLTA can be a resource for you to locate qualified ASL teachers in your area. Through our network of local chapters we can assist you in identifying ASL teachers who have shown a commitment to their profession and their own professional development by joining ASLTA at either the national or local level.

What Qualifications Should You Look for in an ASL Teacher?

Does the potential teacher hold a degree in American Sign Language or Deaf Studies from a college or university? The field of ASL instruction is growing. Several colleges and universities have established degrees in American Sign Language and Deaf Studies. For example, to name a few programs that offer training in ASL and Deaf Studies: A Masters Degree in Teaching ASL from Columbia University; a Masters in Sign Language Teaching from Gallaudet University, a Masters in Deaf Studies and ASL from Boston University; a Bachelors degree in ASL or Deaf Studies from Northeastern University, the University of Rochester, Gallaudet University, California State University at Northridge (CSUN), Gardner-Webb University in North Carolina, Keuka College in New York and other colleges and universities developing specialization in teaching ASL and Deaf Studies. McDaniel College offers a Master degree in Education with a specialization in ASL Specialist. While a degree specifically in teaching American Sign

Language and Deaf Studies is certainly preferable, many qualified teachers of ASL will have degrees in other fields but will have demonstrated their ability to teach ASL through qualified experience or certification from the ASLTA.

Does the potential teacher hold a certification from the ASLTA? ASLTA offers three levels of certification which can ensure that teachers you may be hiring have met the professional standards of their peers regarding skills and knowledge necessary to teach ASL. ASLTA offers Provisional, Qualified and Professional certifications. There are three steps in a process of certification with the expectation that all teachers will eventually hold the Professional certificate. With each level of certification held by teacher candidates you can be more confident that they have the skills you are looking for. Certification as an interpreter, for example, certification from the NAD-RID National Council on Interpreting (NAD-RID NCI), the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) or National Association of the Deaf (NAD) or scores from the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA), the ASL Proficiency Interview (ASLPI) or the Sign Language Proficiency Interview: ASL (SLPI: ASL) are not an appropriate measure of ability to teach ASL and should not be used as a substitute for ASLTA certification.

Is the potential teacher a member of a local, state, regional or national chapter of ASLTA? While membership does not automatically guarantee that a person is “qualified and competent,” it is an indication that potential teachers have a sincere interest in their own professional development and the profession of ASL teaching. Many of our members are in the process of seeking certification and it is our strong expectation that our members become certified as soon as they are qualified to proceed with the evaluation.

Has the potential teacher attended conferences, seminars and workshops in the area of ASL teaching and Deaf Studies? Examples of many workshops and conferences appropriate for ASL teachers include: ASLTA workshops held annually in conjunction with the organization’s professional development conferences; seminars

and workshops sponsored by national programs such as Gallaudet University, the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) and California State University at Northridge (CSUN) and workshops/seminars sponsored by regional, state or local chapters of ASLTA.

Does the potential instructor have evidence of fluency in ASL? For example, does the potential teacher have a score of 3+ or higher on American Sign Language Proficiency Interview (ASLPI) or an Advanced Plus or higher rating on the Sign Language Proficiency Interview (SLPI). These standardized tests measure a person's fluency in ASL. Certification from ASLTA is also evidence of fluency in ASL since in addition to skills and knowledge in teaching practices, ASL skills are assessed in the evaluation process leading to certification. Effective on January 1, 2009, ASLTA Provisional evaluation requires a candidate to demonstrate a score of 3+ or higher on the ASLPI or a rating of Advanced Plus or higher on the SLPI.

Has the potential instructor known and used ASL for a minimum of 5 years?

Normally it takes a minimum of 5 years of intensive language study and immersion for any person to develop "advanced" levels of proficiency. No one who has had only a few ASL classes and limited experience in the Deaf community should consider teaching ASL to others.

Does the potential instructor have a college degree? Effective on July 1, 2012, all new candidates for ASLTA Provisional level evaluation are required to possess a bachelor degree in any discipline. What about hiring a Deaf or Hearing teacher?

Non-native versus native teachers of languages is an issue debated among all foreign language teaching organizations. This issue is debated within the profession of ASL teaching as well. Like other professional organizations of language teachers the ASLTA believes what counts most are the qualifications of the potential teacher as outlined in the previous section. Most important are the teaching skills and knowledge of the

potential teacher and the potential teacher's ability to represent the language and culture as authentically as possible.

Naturally, if given a choice between two equally qualified individuals, choosing a Deaf native signer may offer students an authentic and enriching experience to learn ASL from a Deaf teacher. Deaf teachers often can offer special insights to their students based in their experiences that hearing teachers may not be able to offer. Hearing teachers of ASL also may bring special strengths to the learning experience for students. For example, knowing that a hearing individual has accomplished a native-like proficiency in ASL and an understanding of Deaf culture through interaction within the Deaf community can be inspiring to students of ASL. They may be able to see that it is truly possible for hearing people to learn and use ASL effectively. In one sense, a hearing teacher can act as a role model for adult learners of ASL. In programs with multiple levels of instruction it may be appropriate to consciously seek to have both deaf and hearing teachers.

It is the policy of ASLTA not to discriminate on the basis of hearing status. We believe it is important above all that teachers are qualified and competent. Holding ASLTA certification is one way of ensuring that a teacher is qualified to teach ASL whether the individual is deaf or hearing. We hope you will make ASLTA Certification an important criterion in your selection process for teachers of ASL.

Sign Language is here to stay.

As long as we have deaf people we will have our precious Sign Language as it is God's noblest gift to the Deaf.

- George Veditz, NAD President 1913

For further information about potential teachers of ASL for your program, please contact the national office:

American Sign Language Teachers Association

PO Box 92445

Rochester, NY 14692-9998

secretary@aslta.org

You may post job openings on the ASLTA website to seek qualified and ASLTA-certified teachers. Contact the ASLTA webmaster through the ASLTA website for further information.