



PEN-International
For Students Who Are Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing

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Tips for Communicating with International Guests

General

- Refer to visitors as ‘international guests’ rather than ‘foreigners’ or ‘foreign nationals’.
- Communicating with international guests requires patience and courtesy. There will be misunderstandings but do not lose your patience when they occur—simply continue to attempt to clarify.
- Despite the language barrier, do not be shy. Using spoken/ sign communication and/or gestures, show an interest in the guest by engaging your guests. Take some time to find out what topics are of interest to your guests.
- Making the effort to learn a few commonly used words or signs of the international guest’s native language (e.g. ‘Thank you’) is always much appreciated.
- If the international guest possesses some knowledge of English and you are using spoken language, speak slower and clearly, do not use idioms, jargon or slang. However, do not make the message so simple that you appear condescending.
- Speak with more formality since most international guests are schooled in more formal English structure, however, do not be stiff in your communication (e.g. instead of saying ‘hi there’, say ‘hello’. Instead of saying ‘he’ll’, say ‘he will’)
- Slang, idioms, or jargon are very difficult to translate and are often taken literally, which can lead to misunderstandings. For example, the idiom, “The door is always open”, which is used to indicate that a guest is always welcome, might be greeted by the question, “Why do you always leave your door open?”

- Do not use rhetorical questions as they tend to confuse the listener. Rather than say, “Why do we do this?”, say, “We do this because.....”
- For international guests who have limited knowledge of spoken English, write important things down (e.g., directions, instructions, schedules and the like). International guests are often more adept at reading and writing English than listening to English or speaking it.
- Avoid using American standards (e.g. 2:00 p.m. can be translated into 14.00 hours, March 12, 2005 can be translated into 12 March 2005, and miles can be converted to kilometers).
- Use a bilingual dictionary to assist with communication.
- Many cultures use more formality than we do in the USA. Avoid calling guests by their first names, unless invited to do so. Use titles (e.g. Mr., Mrs., Doctor, Professor). If you are unsure of which is their surname, simply ask. (*Travel Industry Association of America*).
- While body language can be a very useful communication tool, use caution. For example:
 - People of other cultures may have a different ‘comfort zone’ than we do.
 - Minimize hand gestures, as some of our commonly used gestures may have negative meanings in other countries
 - In general, avoid physically touching international guests as it may be perceived as aggressive in some cultures. On the other hand, in some cultures, touching is very common but where and how one is touched is critical. Follow the lead of your guest but only if you yourself feel comfortable.
 - Some cultures may consider direct eye contact as intrusive and disrespectful. Try to mirror the degree of eye contact they give you.
 - The handshake has many variations among cultures. Wait and see if the international visitor extends his/her hand, and if so, try to match the pressure and length of the handshake. (*Travel Industry Association of America*)

-BE FLEXIBLE

Presentations using an interpreter

- Establish ground communication rules and explain the interpreter set-up to participants at the beginning of the presentation.
- It is possible that communication may be two, three, or even four way. For instance, a deaf presenter who uses ASL may require an ASL interpreter to voice into English. A second interpreter would translate from spoken English into the spoken language of the international guest. Then, a third interpreter would translate from the spoken language of the international guest into their native sign language.
- As there could be as many as six interpreters, or even more, in a classroom/ presentation setting, be sure the room can accommodate everyone. Ensure that the set up of all the interpreters still allows for all participants to have clear visual access.
- Having presentation materials translated into the international guests’ native language is always helpful but is often prohibitive in terms of cost and time.

- When presenting, deliver your information in chunks. Say only a few sentences on a topic but make sure that the sentences communicate a complete idea. Pause, and wait for the interpreters to translate the information to the audience.
- Simple, literal sentence structures leave less room for misunderstandings, and are best and easiest for the interpreters to translate.
- Encourage and allow time for questions from the audience, and for the translation process.
- Use active listening. Clarify what you see/hear so that the interpreters can translate for the audience.
- BE FLEXIBLE and prepared for the unexpected! The dynamics of communication change constantly. There may be times when you are required to talk and sign at the same time due to the interpreting set-up and audience needs.

References

1. Travel Industry Association of America, 1100 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 450, Washington, DC 20005-3934, Copyright 2005.
http://www.tia.org/Tourism/ntw_tipsinternational.asp
2. The Center for Association Leadership, 1300 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, DC, 20004. Copyright 2001, 2002.
<http://www.centeronline.org/knowledge/whitepaper.cfm>

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