



Clarion UK

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# The good practice guide: How many interpreters do I need?

Ensuring every Deaf and disabled person gets the best communication support in the right place, at the right time, throughout life.

[www.clarion-uk.com](http://www.clarion-uk.com)





## When do I need two interpreters?

There are a range of scenarios where it is recommended to work with more than one interpreter. Here are some examples:

- **Any meeting that is more than 1.5 hours**
- **At a mental health assessment or for a police statement, if details are inaccurate or incorrect, the consequences are significant and long lasting. Two interpreters would be recommended.**
- **As the size and chance of risk of a misinterpretation increase, so does the importance of having two or more interpreters.**

For example, in court it is impossible to interrupt and clarify, so we recommend three interpreters: one to interpret, one to monitor and one to rest. Every 20 minutes they should swap roles.

- **At a conference, it is impossible to clarify so again, using two interpreters is the minimum standard.**



## Why do I need two interpreters?

There are several reasons why it is beneficial for all parties to work with more than one interpreter. The benefits are outlined below.

### Quality and accuracy

Research shows that mental fatigue in interpreters dramatically reduces the accuracy and 'intactness' of the target language output.

Moser-Mercer, Kunzli and Korac found with spoken language interpreters, 'that the more prolonged the interpreting task, the higher the number of errors, omissions being the most frequent'.

They recommended shorter turns to be taken by conference interpreters to ensure high quality of output.

Other research has indicated that a period of 20–25 minutes is the optimum span for interpreters to concentrate, before fatigue begins to affect the message. For sign language interpreting, team interpreters (2 or 3) will switch every 20 to 30 minutes, depending on the complexity of the task.



## Supported and enhanced interpreting

Team interpreting not only ensures that the quality of language is maintained, but it also means that interpreters can support each other and enhance each other's interpretation.

Although it may appear that only one interpreter is working, the passive interpreter is still responsible for supporting the other.

Only when 3 or more interpreters are used, can an interpreter truly 'switch off' and have a break. The passive interpreter is used as a prompt, for information that is missed or unclear to the active interpreter.

## Fluency in specialist language situations

Team interpreting is especially useful if the BSL user is not fluent in their preferred language or if the acoustics of the environment are not conducive for interpreting.

Thus in a legal setting, when it is not possible to stop proceedings, as this would interfere with the flow and the form of questioning, team interpreting is crucial to maintain the flow of the proceedings.

## Accuracy in recorded interviews

In Police stations, team interpreting is very useful as the solicitor's interpreter can also check the accuracy and understanding of the client and the interpretation. This is especially important with the growing use of DVD recordings of interviews.

With DVD recordings, the defence solicitor/barrister can have access to the filmed interview and have it retranslated by an expert for omissions, inaccuracies or mistakes.



The solicitor's interpreter also has access to the style of language the Deaf person uses and will have knowledge of any specific signs or terminology that they use.

This can be clarified and communicated to the Police interpreters before the interview so that there is less chance of misinterpretation. Having two Police interpreters also ensures there is less chance of inaccuracies.

### How do interpreters work?

Interpreters work as a team. When one is actively interpreting, the other is monitoring to ensure accuracy. After 20 minutes (optimal processing time) they swap roles.

Clarion UK is available 24/7 365 days a year and we are happy to talk to you and discuss your needs.

Contact us here: <http://www.clarion-uk.com/contact-us>

Clarion UK can also provide Deaf Awareness Training that would help your firm better understand the needs of your deaf clients.

See here for more information: <http://www.clarion-uk.com>



## Clarion UK

Clarion UK has been providing quality interpreting services for over 17 years. Deaf people are at the heart of everything that we do, and we deliver an innovative, award-winning and highly successful service for the public, commercial and third sectors.

At Clarion, Our Vision is that Deaf and disabled people get the best interpreting & Specialist Support Services, in the right place, at the right time, throughout life.

Over the years we have established ourselves as a specialist provider across education, health, safeguarding and the legal sector and with the welfare-to-work sector.

**At Clarion UK we love what we do and we love doing it well.**

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