

# Oral Transliterating

## What does an oral transliterator do?

An oral transliterator provides communication access to a person who is deaf or hard of hearing and who uses speechreading and speaking as a means of communicating. The oral transliterator, positioned in front of the deaf person, inaudibly repeats the spoken message for the deaf person, making it as speechreadable as possible. This is called Expressive Oral Transliterating. An oral transliterator also can audibly voice the spoken message of a deaf person for the hearing audience. This is called Voicing or Voice-Over.

## When are oral transliterators used?

Oral transliterators are used in a variety of situations: educational settings; religious services and ceremonies; job interviews; medical and legal settings; areas of employment; conferences and workshops; town meetings; etc.

They are especially helpful when:

- there are multiple speakers (such as a discussion)
- the speechreader cannot see the speaker clearly (for example, in a large auditorium)
- the speaker is not speechreadable (such as a speaker with facial hair covering the lips)

## What are the characteristics of an effective oral transliterator?

- 1) Oral transliterators must be *speechreadable* (lipreadable) to an average speechreader with little or no effort. They must have natural and clear articulation with no exaggerated lip movements or mannerisms.
- 2) Effective oral transliterators are *naturally expressive* when they speak, using facial and body expression to enhance the speechreading process.
- 3) Oral transliterators must have the *ability to speak inaudibly*. It is very distracting to the hearing audience to hear an oral transliterator whispering loudly or making “smacking” noises while transliterating.
- 4) Oral transliterators must have *excellent short-term memory and must be able to understand easily the speech of a variety of both hearing and deaf speakers*. The ability to listen to information and hold it in one’s short-term memory, while simultaneously “mouthing” (for expressive oral transliterating) or voicing (for voice-over transliterating) other information is vital.
- 5) Oral transliterators must be able to *concentrate for long periods of time* in the midst of all sorts of distractions - visual and auditory. This not only involves listening to the speaker/s and concentrating on the message, but always being aware of what is happening in the environment and relaying this information to the consumer.
- 6) Oral transliterators must be *comfortable with the English language*. There are times in the process of transliterating when it is necessary to paraphrase, rephrase, or make appropriate substitutions of original information to aid in the speechreading process. All of this involves manipulating the English language while maintaining the intent of the speaker’s message.
- 7) Oral transliterators need to have *knowledge of speech production and the speechreading process* to enable them to identify speech sounds or words that are not easily visible on the lips.
- 8) Oral transliterators must use *verbal and nonverbal techniques* to support the speechreading process, especially in coping with the potential limitations mentioned above. Sometimes a particular word is not visible on the lips or is homophonous (a word articulated in the same place, thus looking the same on the lips as another word), which can be confusing to the speechreader. The oral transliterator can use the *verbal technique* of adding a clarifying word before the “difficult” word. For example, in the sentence, “She had a beautiful vase,” the oral transliterator would transliterate, “She had a beautiful flower vase.” or “She had a beautiful vase for her flowers.” A *nonverbal technique* would be using palm writing to clarify two numbers that look the same on the lips (such as fifty and fifteen). The oral transliterator would hold up her palm and write the correct number on the palm for the speechreader to “read.”
- 9) Oral transliterators must have a thorough *understanding of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) Code of Ethics* and of their role as described in the Code.

### **What credentials should an oral transliterator have?**

The transliterator should be trained and certified as an Oral Transliterator by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), this country's premier certifying body. For more information about RID and the certification process, go to RID's Web site at [www.rid.org](http://www.rid.org).

If such a person cannot be found in your area, look for a trained Oral Transliterator with state approval or Quality Assurance Approval from the Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing ([www.agbell.org](http://www.agbell.org)). Some states also may have state-based screening programs similar to those used for sign language interpreters.

The Mainstream Center at the Clarke School for the Deaf in Northampton, Massachusetts, offers an annual summer workshop in the fundamentals of oral transliterating. In addition to beginners, many sign language interpreters attend this training to gain the skills necessary for effective oral transliterating. If you would like more information about the Mainstream Center's oral transliterating workshop, visit: [www.clarkeschool.org](http://www.clarkeschool.org).

### **Educational oral transliterating**

Educational oral transliterators can be found on all educational levels: elementary school through college. Often the greatest challenge to mainstreaming for a student with hearing loss is gaining access to information. A typical classroom is primarily an auditory environment, where listening is the key to getting the most information. Hearing loss obviously is a major barrier to receiving information through listening. Oral transliterating is an effective option for many "oral" students, defined here as those who use their own voices, hearing, and speechreading for receptive information. These students use some degree of residual hearing—perhaps through a hearing aid or cochlear implant—and may use an FM system in the classroom. The oral transliterator facilitates all of the information from the teacher and other members of the class in a way that makes it easy for the student with hearing loss to speechread. If the student doesn't understand the content of the material, the student

asks the teacher for clarification. The oral transliterator does not teach or tutor, but facilitates communication.

When an Individual Education Program (IEP) specifies oral transliterating services, it is recommended, though not dictated by law, that the student have input into the choice of candidate. Not all people can be easily speechread. Not all people with hearing loss have the same speechreading ability. The student should have an opportunity to communicate with the candidate to judge his/ her speechreadability before the candidate is hired.

A knowledgeable person or organization should supervise oral transliterators in educational settings. This should include observations and an evaluation of the transliterator at various intervals during the year, along with feedback from the deaf student about the effectiveness of the service.

Oral transliterators should also be required to upgrade their transliterating skill through additional training on a regular basis.

Schools should develop job descriptions that clearly outline the responsibilities of the oral transliterator. *One job description does not fit all oral transliterating situations, since they may vary according to the educational setting, the age and grade level of the student, and the needs of the school or program.*

### **Using an FM System with an oral transliterator**

Can a student who uses a personal FM system in the classroom also use an oral transliterator? This depends on the individual. Many students use an oral transliterator in conjunction with a trained notetaker. The transliterator provides moment-to-moment access, while the notetaker provides a summary of notes to be used after class. These students may prefer to listen when classroom conditions are optimal, but choose to use the oral transliterator in other situations, such as for a fast-paced class discussion where other students in the class are not using an FM microphone.

For more information, contact:

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