

## ASL Translation and Video Production Guidelines Ed Savvy, LLC

These guidelines are a starting point for conversations around ASL video translations for standardized assessments. There are three phases to this process:

- Preparation
- Video Production
- Post-Production

These guidelines stem from our experiences in test development, assessment accommodations, accessibility, ASL translations, video production, quality control reviews, and teaching and learning for deaf students. This multidimensional approach informs our work in a holistic manner across the ASL translation and video production process. Some of our process is proprietary (either to Ed Savvy, LLC, itself, or to our clients); we therefore provide broad guidelines here to encourage more in-depth conversations for Assessment Developers and ASL Vendors.

🌟 **Important Clarification:** ASL translation is not ASL interpretation. ASL interpretation takes spoken language and, after the fact, provides an ASL version of the utterance. This is what most people experience when an ASL accommodation is provided with speech. An ASL translation goes back to the core message of English and, using the full grammatical and semantic features of ASL, restructures the delivery in an ASL-origin version of the item. These features are reflected in the ASL gloss and as part of the ASL production process. 🌟

### Preparation

ASL videos are part of the overall accessibility efforts in test development. Often issues arise during the video production process that can help improve the overall test item development protocol. Preparation can be up to half of the overall timeline and budget for ASL video production. Using this time and process wisely serves as a preventative measure against errors and results in a high-quality end product for the deaf test takers.

### ASL video team staffing

The ASL video team talent is responsible for a highly complex, domain specific set of knowledge and skills. Assembling a team that can meet these requirements is of the highest priority and should be part of the original contract between the Assessment Developer and the ASL vendor. **Deaf people should be prioritized in all roles.** ASL users are a must for clear communication on set. There is a long history of hearing people doing the work of deaf people in ASL video translations. This is no longer acceptable or ethical practice.

Additional considerations include:

- **Assessment accessibility expertise.** There is, as you know, a very specialized context for these ASL videos. This is not the same as a video that may be used as part of a media campaign or a professional development module. Someone on the team (preferably the team manager) needs to have a good sense of how to integrate the (sometimes competing) priorities that arise in this process.
- **Content area expertise.** Especially in the early stages of the process, a content area expert is invaluable and essential. This person should have a strong background in how deaf children learn content in the classroom. Our team has also benefitted enormously by having a deaf content area expert in the studio for clarification on novel technical terminology in more advanced material.
- **ASL expertise.** This almost always is a native ASL user who has experience not just in ASL usage but also in how to model and present clear representations for emerging ASL users (which is many deaf children in K-12 settings). While there may be CODAs (children of deaf adults) who have this native experience, almost always it is most appropriate to focus on deaf people for this expertise.
- **Deaf signers from diverse backgrounds.** Deaf signers who have experience in developing videos for K-12 deaf students is a critical piece to the overall quality of ASL video production.
- **Deaf videographers and post production editors.** There is a strong relationship between the technical quality of the video production and the visual linguistic aspects of ASL video production. Videographers that use ASL and work with deaf signers result in a significantly improved end product.

### Item bias.

One consideration is the quality of the item itself. It should be reviewed for sensitivity and bias before becoming part of the ASL translation pool. However, there are times when the ASL translation team may also serve as a spot check on issues that have not been resolved in the test item development process.

**Assessment Developer:** Have a clear set of guidelines as to how ASL video development vendors are to provide feedback if they see an item bias or sensitivity issue during production process.

**ASL vendor:** If you notice something about an item that you feel would contribute to a negative experience by a deaf test taker, notify your liaison. Even if the item still goes through in the current production timeframe, this issue is important to raise as we all improve the accessibility of our systems.

## Item batches.

ASL videos are most efficiently and effectively produced in a “batch” process. Creating individual, one-off videos should be reserved for emergencies only. A “batch” process allows for consistency within and across items and improves the user experience. For example, if there is a passage or stimulus, the same person should sign both that prompt and the accompanying items.

**Assessment Developers:** Work with your vendors to determine what size and kind of item batch will work for your ASL vendor. This will shape who they hire to do the video batch (see staffing, above). Ensure that your item batches are as coherent as possible, allowing for conceptual chunking of material (see gloss preparation, below).

**ASL Vendor:** Think about how you structure your video production time to maximize efficiency but also have a good match between your staff and the test item content. See staffing and gloss preparation guidelines for more information.

## Gloss production.

ASL gloss of items is essential for accurate, consistent, and high quality ASL translation videos. An ASL gloss is like a script for ASL translation, that, together with an ASL coach, provides clear guidance on how to provide the information in ASL.

Quality ASL Gloss development includes the following:

- **Time.** This process should not be rushed. It requires time and review by several experts, each with a different lens on the process. Plan for this and the time in the studio will be as smooth as possible.
- **Templates and previous examples.** Templates and previous examples are very helpful to maintain consistency across video production timeframes (especially across years, with different signers). These templates should be developed in collaboration with ASL and content area experts. This is especially critical when there is domain specific language and constructs represented in the items. Furthermore, there are regional differences in sign usage that must be minimized to ensure that students from diverse backgrounds will understand the videos.
- **Collaborative culture.** In reality, there is rarely one easy, straight forward answer that can be found within one person’s experience across an entire item bank. A collaborative, team culture is essential to the successful end result. The ASL gloss process is one place where the spirit of collaboration, asking questions, seeking support, and raising issues is essential. Taking care of these issues in the gloss production prevents them from showing up in the studio or in post-production. Make sure your team has a seamless place to comment, ask questions, and respond to issues during the gloss production process.

- **Multi-stage preparation and revision.** The exact configuration of who and how you approach gloss development may vary. We suggest, at minimum, the following sequence:
  - **Batch organization.** Before glossing, organize the items so that stimuli-items are grouped together, like items (e.g., all that have a number line) or link task types are together. This reduces cognitive load for signers (skipping around is very difficult) and ensures a higher level of consistency across item types.
  - **Draft gloss from templates.** Get the rough outline of the gloss down, first. Go back to previous glosses to double check for novel item types or terminology. Having this as a stable and iterative resource is invaluable.
  - **Full content pass.** The second pass should be from someone who has experience creating ASL item glosses in the content area and at that grade level. It is very helpful to have someone with additional experience being “in front of the camera” as a signer as they are familiar with what is helpful information to include in the gloss from the perspective of the ASL talent.
  - **ASL expert pass.** This third pass looks at the linguistic features of the item and ensures that the gloss reflects ASL in a way that is both authentic and age appropriate.
  - **Proofreading pass.** There are many detailed components to most items that need to be double checked. This proofreading pass is also a chance to resolve any issues that have arisen.

The signing team should receive a copy of the gloss packets at least a couple of days ahead of time to adequately familiarize themselves with the content and scope of work for the video production sessions.

**Assessment Developer:** While there is no one way to approach ASL gloss development, your vendors should be able to provide a very clear protocol and demonstrate where collaboration and issue resolution occurs. Be cautious about hiring a company that focuses on spoken language translations or in ASL for non-assessment contexts.

**ASL Vendor:** Develop an internal database of key ASL translation decisions. This allows for centralized documentation that can be a resource across current and new ASL talent.

## Video Production

The following are considerations to help support the quality end product of the ASL videos, reduce errors, and limit the number of videos that need to be revised.

**Clothing options.** Try to limit distracting clothing. This includes brightly colored shirts, shiny buttons, glare on glasses, shirts with poor contrast with background and skin tone. Hair should be neat and groomed and away from the face. Remove jewelry or other distracting details.

**Signing team.** We recommend that a team is always on set, with at least two people available. A collaborative approach here is also essential with the person who is off camera still available for feedback and collaboration. Make sure educators are involved.

**ASL coach.** We also recommend that the ASL coach is on set. The gloss is an important starting point but there is essential language clarification on set.

**TV on set.** We also recommend that a large TV screen is connected to the camera. We also recommend that someone is always watching the TV set to make sure that all technical quality issues are in place for each take. Do not rely on post production to catch errors.

Some common technical issues that we see include:

- **Hands out of frame or in front of face.** The signer needs to keep all signs away from the face and in the frame.
- **Eye gaze must be in the camera.** If someone is looking away, this removes the eye contact with the video viewer. Make sure teleprompter and visual aids keep the eye gaze in the camera and not off to one side.
- **Fixing in midstream.** If a signer realizes there is a mistake and fixes it in midstream, film it again. Errors should not be resolved on camera.
- **Rushing.** Sometimes a signer is getting tired and is rushing to get through an item. If this is the case, take a break, and proceed when the signer can approach the item with a natural pace. Fingerspelling should be clear.
- **Flickering lights, washed out lighting, overly bright lighting, etc.** In general, there is a high premium on quality lighting. Test shots should be done to ensure that what is being recorded is visible in the end product.

**Clarity.** ASL clarity is essential part of ASL translations for assessment. Some elements that we've noticed and focus on in ASL video production:

- YES, use ASL grammatical, non-manual, and sign space features.
- YES, describe an image or graph if it is in the item. Describe in front of the body.
- YES, use domain specific vocabulary where applicable.
- YES, sign responses and not just the prompt.
- NO, do not create sign names on the spot. Fingerspell names.
- YES, fingerspell technical terms if there is not a well-known sign.
- YES, include mouthing and facial features.
- YES, pay attention to palm orientation, particularly for numbers.
- YES, pay attention to verb tenses, plurality, and comparisons.

## Post Production

**File size.** There is always a compromise between file size and video quality. Test run different options so that the end result is visible by a test taker in a low bandwidth environment.

**Speed control.** Allowing test takers to control the speed (usually to slow it down) is essential to an accessible video watching experience.

**Gloss archive.** Recommend that Assessment Developers retain a copy of the gloss sheets to allow for consistency in the future. Also helps to trouble shoot if errors are found in later stages (is it in the original item, the gloss, or in the production process).

**Quality Control review and template update.** A double check of the videos is typically needed after the final production. Any major filming errors are usually caught by the post production editor and project manager during deliverable upload. The purpose of the final QC is to catch nuanced errors that might influence the quality of the final videos, as well as to improve the overall template and gloss production process.

**Assessment Developer.** Consider to what extent you wish to engage in an external QC review. This need will vary based on the length of time working with a specific Vendor and the extent to which deaf experts have been involved in our overall protocols. Establish an anonymous space where feedback can be provided, considered by your team, and shared with the Vendors as applicable.

**ASL Vendors:** Advocate for what you need to ensure a high-quality production process! This may be input on final file size, time needed to prepare ASL glosses, or ways to provide input on the overall test item development process.

🌟 **Need a deeper dive or a consultation?** 🌟

**Please feel free to reach out.** We are a dynamic team of deaf professionals who are eager to support access and equity for deaf people in education and the workplace. We have experience with ASL translation, QC reviews, test item development, item bias reviews, professional development creation, deaf-centered design, strategic planning, and more. *Our team can help you design a plan that works for your organization.*

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