

***So You Want To Be An Interpreter? 4<sup>th</sup> edition***

***Study Guide: Chapter 13***

***Transcript***

**1. Community Settings**

I work in, uh, community settings like staff meetings, um, job interviews...uh, person's first couple days on the job...I've done that kind of thing and, again, it's all about rapport and building up the rapport and making it a positive experience and, I'm gonna say this time, I'd work at making a positive experience for the hearing people. You know, building up their comfort zone so that they're not afraid to have a Deaf person working with them. Um, if it's a staff meeting where the Deaf person has worked there for years and years and years, it's just making sure that they have an equal opportunity to voice their opinions and their concerns and that they know, uh, where management stands on different things.

**2. Education Settings**

**SPEAKER #1**

**K - 12**

When I think about interpreting in educational settings, I first of all, for myself, uh, divide that into K-12 which we think of as, like, public school or, uh, your basic education, and post-secondary settings. In K-12 I see a significant difference between younger grades, I would say grades 7, maybe 8, and lower and grade 8 or 9 and up through grade 12. I think that, uh, the way I function, the decisions I make, the relationship I have with the students who are Deaf, um, has...is dramatically different between grade 2 and grade 11, for example. So, in that setting, it's absolutely critical that I recognize my role as a member of an educational team, um, so that I know, in a meeting with and having dialog with, what the educational goals are for each of the students I'm working with, um, what the goals are for...of the instructor. When they're doing this particular song or story or math lesson, is it really like a song, is it for entertainment or is there an underlying thing here where we're really trying to teach manners, or we're really trying to teach, uh, citizenship or...so understanding the teacher's goal is absolutely critical.

Establishing a good professional rapport with the, uh, professionals in that environment but also a nice relationship, while it's still professional, between myself and the student. Lots and lots of prep work. A number of places that I would personally have to turn down the job...I don't do Shakespeare...um, I, I just don't, don't understand it that well, I'm not quick enough, I'm not...I'm not the right interpreter for that class. I don't speak Spanish, sorry, I don't speak French so I would have to turn that job down. I speak some Spanish. So, with the proper amount of prep and a teacher who's understanding and so forth, I might be able to interpret for a Spanish class. Those kinds of decisions I have to make on an ongoing basis and I find that that kind of work in, in some ways in quite comfortable. It's more or less routine and the same day after day, uh, and yet I personally find it exhausting to have to go, basically be with the professionals, with the students from 8 in the morning to 3 or 4 in the afternoon. So, for me, working in that setting, I have to really look after my own wellness and, uh, eat well, exercise, get to bed early...those kinds of things.

**Post-Secondary Upgrading**

When I think about interpreting in post-secondary settings, I see a great diversity between things like, um, college upgrading or basic educational opportunities where, uh, students are basically doing some catch up work to get them up to, uh, college level literacy or math or whatever it is they're doing their studies in. Um...that I see as being somewhat similar to grades 8 – 12 in the...in the public school. Although you are dealing with adults and you're dealing, most the time, in a college, uh, structure where the rules are very different. If a student doesn't come, they don't come. Nobody's gonna track them down and call their parents and tell them

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and things like that. So, sometimes these are transitional students who are still really trying to understand the rules of the institution, the rules of the “world”, and how to function in it. So, when I look at making an interpretation between something an instructor says to a Deaf student in that type of setting, a part of the cultural expansion that might be appropriate would be to talk about, to include in the interpretation, uh, something about in college the requirement is, uh, such and such, not like high school, so I expect you to whatever. Those kinds of things.

*College/University*

When I’m interpreting in colleges and universities, whether it be at the undergraduate level or graduate level, I find myself doing an incredible amount of prep work. The students are expected to come to class having read the textbook. By granny, I better be there having read the textbook. They’re supposed to have done supplemental readings. I’d better get a copy of that handout that’s, uh...that article that’s supposed to be read. I need to go to the library and look at videotapes. I need to go on the Internet and do some research. I need to be as prepared as I can possibly be in order to, uh, really be able to enter into the instructional, um, persona of the teacher. The teacher’s a content expert and while I can’t become a content expert, I need to become as familiar with the content as I possibly can because then I’ve got the energy, in the act of interpreting, of conveying their attitude, conveying their affect, um...making sure that I’m attending to what their goals are, and conveying those things in a very efficient manner. Um, likewise, I’m interacting with the student in a different way. Working with adult students in university, um, undergraduate or post-graduate, uh, levels of work, um, is very different than working with Deaf children and youth and so, the boundaries have to be inspected again. The uh, expectations need to be discussed overtly cause I’m an adult working with an adult and, uh, in order to be a part of the empowerment process, I need to be sure that I’m not the one making all the decisions.

*SPEAKER #2*

*Post-Secondary*

Yeah, and um, also finding the number of people that really don’t know how to work with Deaf people...that surprised me...um, or not even knowing how but being almost close-minded about it and having to take a...um, an ally role and, and to say...and, and to almost educate people about interpreting and, and deafness. So, which, which surprised me cause I thought that, you know, especially in the educational, post-secondary institutions thinking, you know, these are bright people, they’d be a little bit more open minded...but there are some that I’ve met out there that, that aren’t and that to me was, was...is difficult to, to process through...and still today, like I still find, um, although, um, some who’ve worked with interpreters before are quite open but those who haven’t and who, and who are much older, like, who, who, who’ve been teaching for 20, 25, 30 years...a little bit more closed minded on, on how to work with Deaf people and stuff and they’re...oh, they’re just any other student and so we’ll just go on. So, if we’re gonna show a video and turn off the lights, well then, that’s too bad, you know. So, it’s that kind of stuff is difficult and that’s where, you know, you have to start taking initiative because you can’t do your work. So...and that’s how I look at it as I can’t do my job if the lights are turned off or whatever.

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*SPEAKER #3*

*Post Secondary*

The advice I'd give to an interpreter who's working in post-secondary educational settings would be to do your prep and...there's really a lot of prep that you can do even if someone doesn't actually come right up to you and hand you a piece of paper and say read this, it'll tell you everything you need to know for next Tuesday's class. Um...you can prepare for those sorts of assignments by educating yourself around the topic. Um...you can go on the Internet and research topics. Uh...you can read, um, books, um, by the same authors that are going to be talked about in the class but you can also explore further than that. Um...another important part of preparation is, um, checking with the instructor or whoever is conducting the class and trying to get a sense of what to expect but you will meet all kinds of instructors and some, in my experience...there have been some for, with whom it's just not possible to do that. It could be a personal characteristic, uh, an orientation to their work, um, how they see their role, how they see my role, and I sometimes, quite honestly, don't feel it's within my power to, to effect much change in their thinking. So, um, I have to sort of pull out all the stops and try to prepare myself in my own way.

*SPEAKER #4*

*High School*

Working in a high school is predictable and it's not predictable. Um, I'm in eight different classes every day...well, like four different classes one day and four different classes the next day. Um, I have, sometimes I interpret for one student, sometimes I interpret for five students. I would say, after having been there for eight or nine years, it gets easy because I end up interpreting the same courses that I've already interpreted in the past. But as a new interpreter, eight years ago, it was tough. It was stuff I had never interpreted before and you're dealing with a lot of different personalities. At the school where I work, there's 300 hearing teachers and they're...there's a lot of politics and personalities involved in everything. Uh...I'm in classes. I interpret for Deaf adults who work in the school, that's staff meetings and parent meetings. I interpret for sports after school, sports in the morning...uh, there's lunchtime activities...it's pretty much go, go, go non-stop...and, sometimes I feel labeled an educational interpreter and I prefer to say I'm an interpreter in an educational setting which is why I think it's ultra important...I think it's easy that a person can get stuck working only in that setting because you have a paycheck every 2 weeks, you know you have a job to go back to for 10 months of the year, you know you'll go back in September. So, it's really easy to get stuck there and not venture out into the larger Deaf community and the interpreting community which I think is why it's really important that interpreter's who work there go ahead and interpret that one post-secondary class a week, at night, or take that weekend assignment. That way you don't get stuck there and the people out in the broader community know who you are and...another good way to keep in touch with the interpreting community and the Deaf community is to be involved in a professional association...and, I guess show people that "educational interpreters" have got it together as well.

*Interpreting a French class*

When I interpret in a French class, I pretty much drop form...no, I pretty much stick to form. French form. I use ASL signs in French word order and...I don't know if a non-native French person could interpret in a French class because when I listen to the French there's nothing that goes on in my head and turns it into English and then it comes out on my hands. I just listen to

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the French and it comes out on my hands. There's no middle part that I think there is for a non-native French speaker or somebody who doesn't do it all the time. I think there's a middle spot for them to do a quick thing into English and then they can put it out into sign language. I don't interpret LSQ. I don't know LSQ and, here in BC, that's not why I'm in those classes. Those students aren't there to learn LSQ. Um, I do a lot of work on my mouth when I'm interpreting the French...um, a lot of initialized signs and...and basically the student gets their, the Deaf student will get their feeds off of me. Like, they see what I do and they will...when they're answering, I notice they tend to do the same thing...a lot of things on their mouth, they follow the French word order with their signs, and its worked really well.

#### ***Interpreting Shakespeare***

How about Shakespeare? <laughter> When I first started working in the high school, I could barely interpret Shakespeare and after having interpreted it year after year after year, I only feel now that I'm confident with it. When you have to interpret Shakespeare, I think you have to know Shakespeare. So that means reading the play yourself, and knowing the story, watching the movie...because you can't...I don't really listen to the words anymore, I, I just know the story and often, uh, often, I think, hearing students don't understand it either...so it's okay if the Deaf student doesn't understand it all...and the way it's taught in the high schools is they'll read a little bit and then the teacher gives a modern day English explanation of what they just read and that's where you really have to be on so that the Deaf student can get the, the crux of what was just read...and it's kind of like interpreting again...like, they read the Shakespeare, the teacher will interpret the Shakespeare, and then I have to interpret what the teacher interpreted from the Shakespeare.

#### ***Post Secondary***

To me working in post secondary is very different than working in the high school or elementary school setting. When I come to the post secondary, I feel more professional...and people seem to...they don't seem to notice the interpreter as much in post secondary...and I think it's important to try and build a good rapport with the instructor...um, and sometimes that's gonna be hard because a lot of instructors are used to being the only person up at the front of the room and they're not too inviting of having another person in their space but I'd, really I'd say that's probably 20% of the time. The other 80%, people are wonderful. Um...you're more on your own in post secondary. You're more responsible for your...getting to your class...there's nobody watching you. So you represent, um, your employer at the college...whoever hired you to do the job, you represent that person to a number of people and, uh...often hearing people will also judge the Deaf person based on, based on how you work. So, I just think it's ultra important to be...to step up the professionalism in post secondary. It just makes everybody feel a little more comfortable.

**3. Gay Lesbian Clients :** *Signed by a Deaf speaker with English voice over.*

#### **4. Medical Settings**

##### ***SPEAKER #1***

It's virtually impossible to prep for medical situations which is one of the reasons, my personal bias is, you shouldn't be doing it until you've graduated from an interpreting program and got 3 or 4 years of experience under your belt at least...at the very least. Um...there are some things I can prep for, if I'm going to be interpreting for the delivery of a baby I can...I can do the prep, I

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can find out what Braxton-Hicks contractions are, I can watch the videotapes, I might even go and sit in on one full class that is intended for prospective parents. Um, those kinds of things I can prepare myself for in terms of content and knowledge. If I have delivered a child myself or have been in one of those deliveries with my, um, partner or my friend, I can bring that, um, experience base with me but I never know exactly what's going to happen. Uh, the child might be...it might be discovered at the last moment that the cord is wrapped around the neck, we got to do an emergency C-section or the baby has turned and the doctor's got to reach up and try to turn that child or the baby is born but in incredible distress or, in the midst of labor, mom has cardiac arrest...like, you never know exactly what you're going to walk into. You go into a doctor's appointment for a seemingly routine situation and, uh, you find out that, um, that's she's gone to see her doctor because she's not been able to sleep, that's what you're told and when you get in there you find out that, oh, she was raped three nights ago and we now have a serious medical and legal situation on our hands. So, um, I go in bringing everything I have with me...all of my experience, as much information as I can get in advance about what's going to happen, who is this doctor, what's their type of relation with their patients and things like that...but ready to, uh, drop back and punt if I have to do so. And that's why it takes, um, a minimal level of skill in order to walk in there. You're not ready to do medical until you've got several years of experience under your belt.

**SPEAKER #2**

When I walk into like a doctor's waiting room and I'm there for a medical interpreting appointment, uh, I will, of course let them know that, that I've arrived and look for the, the Deaf consumer in the, in the waiting room and I try to make a connection with the Deaf person. Uh...if we, if we don't know each other then there's a bit of a brief introduction, um...but even if we do know each other, um, I usually will find a way to ask a couple of basic things like whether this is their first time seeing this health professional or, or conversely, are they...have they been here many times...and then they'll usually give a little bit of a sense of, of what the health issue is and where they're at in their, in their, um, process of working with it. So, I feel like I need to have...do just that much of preparation but I also have to be really aware that health issues can be frightening for people, they can be embarrassing for people. So, um, even though I'll ask for a little bit of information I...I tend to also, um, pull back and be pretty quiet and, um, just leave them their own space and...

**SPEAKER #3**

Before I started working in medical settings, I thought it would be really hard but I actually don't find it that hard. Um, out of all the settings I work in, for some reason I find doctors and nurses the most accommodating to the interpreter and I think it's because, for some many years, they didn't have an interpreter and they're just that much more grateful...and it is grateful...they're grateful to have an interpreter. I've had doctors say to me, after an assignment, I'm just so happy that we have this service now. Like, they...prior to having an interpreter, the doctor often felt like they didn't have a rapport with their patient and they feel that, because they have an interpreter, that the rapport is that much better. Um...there's one thing I've learned about working in medical settings is that you work with a variety of Deaf people and there are Deaf people that are a challenge for me to understand...and, I've had Deaf interpreters come with me and really, I feel like it saved my life...and it's been invaluable to have a Deaf interpreter with me for some of the people that are a real challenge. Because they come from all walks of life in the medical setting...um, homeless to affluent. You know, so be ready for anything and sometimes

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they...sometimes a Deaf person just goes to a hospital at 3 o'clock in the morning because they're lonely and, you know, sometimes all they need is half an hour of interaction with doctors, nurses, and an interpreter and then they can go home and, you know what, there's nothing wrong with that, that's just mental health emergency.

**5. Mental Health Setting**

**SPEAKER #1**

I specialize in doing interpreting in mental health, uh, settings. I am also currently completing a second doctorate and this one in psychology and counseling. So, that helps me. I bring a lot of understanding of terminology and but more importantly around the goals of the therapist. What...when they ask a question in a certain way, what is it they are trying to get at? Um, I find mental health interpreting to be incredibly challenging. The nuances are very important and there are a number of places where I don't make a complete linguistic and/or cultural, um, adaptation from what the Deaf person says to the therapist because the form, sometimes in those cases, really is important. Um...when they start talking about, uh, certain aspects of things they are seeing or hearing, or the way that they are viewing what is going on around them, it can actually be a clue to paranoia or other kinds of, uh, mental disabilities and so I have to be incredibly careful that I don't inadvertently eliminate some of those critical pieces in my attempt to make a linguistic and cultural adaptation of a message into the therapists language. Um, so again, I think you need to be a very experienced individual and recognize the grave, um, seriousness of what can happen. Misinterpretations can have a permanent and disastrous impact on the life of a person who's in counseling. So, um, I take that very seriously. We have a great advantage here in British Columbia because of a program that's called the Well-Being Program, funded by the government, specifically for, uh, to provide mental health services to members of the Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and hard-of-hearing community...but as an interpreter working in that system, we actually get paid for time to debrief sessions with therapists and I find that to be amazingly important. I'm in the midst of interpreting something and I do a good interpretation but there's something lacking in the color or the flavor or the detail. I can't get it in right then without breaking the whole rhythm of the interaction. So, in the debriefing session I would say something like, you remember when the, um, client said something about picking up a gun, um...and holding it at, um, that person. I need to be sure that you know that the kind of gun that the person was indicating...was referring to was definitely a hand gun and it was an automatic because of the way they indicated, um...that they...how they loaded that gun, or that it was a rifle or...those kinds of nuances, subtle nuances, I know it as I'm seeing the interpretation and if I can get it into that actual first round interpretation, I will, but sometimes it's not possible. So, in those debriefings, I'm not talking about the client. I'm talking about the communication and the interpreting process and anything that I felt or that the therapist felt wasn't clear or wasn't complete. So, I've had therapists say to me, it seems to me that, um, the, the, the client is much more focused and on target in terms of responding quickly to my questions, are you seeing that same thing? And I would say, yes, I'm seeing that when I ask a question...when I asked questions today...when you asked questions and they were conveyed today, there was a pause for a momentary bit of reflection or thought and then we had an answer. Unlike 3 weeks ago, when, um, there wasn't a consistent eye gaze, when, um, the responses seemed to not be directed to the question and things like that. So, yes, I think that your sense that that was happening is correct. Those kinds of things are what we do in the, uh, in the debriefing.

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#### **6. Religious Settings**

EXAMPLE *This portion of the study guide is signed with audio.*

##### SPEAKER #1

Another area that I work a great deal in is that of religious. I interpret for a Deaf church where everything is done in sign language and I do the voice interpretation. I interpret for a hearing church where everything that is happening is done in spoken language and I interpret into ASL. I do a number of weddings and a number of funerals. I find it such a privilege to be in that kind of a setting. It's the kind of a setting where I can usually do a great deal of prep. I've got the words to the songs, the words to the scripture. Sometimes I have the whole sermon text in advance. Um...I get to, uh, be present at a point of joy when we see, uh, weddings taking place and, and I am present at the time when a family is, uh, sometimes suffering the saddest, uh, loss of their lives around a funeral. So, I find it a very...a great privilege to be, um, asked to do those kinds of things. I, uh, take offense at people working in religious settings who've never gotten any professional training, who are not members of a professional association, um, who don't go to workshops and learn how to do their work well, and who seem to kind of hide behind the cloak of the clergy in saying, well, you know, it's just church interpreting. Um, as a professional interpreter, my sense is that if it's important enough to be interpreted, then it's important enough that it be interpreted well and correctly. If you truly believe that this religious philosophy has to do with life after death and the salvation of one's soul, what can be more important than to interpret it a way that the ideas and the concepts are truly accessible to the people that you're working with. Um...so, um...I, um...I've kind of been a vigilante out there, uh, saying come on, get...get with the program. Don't accept work, whether it's paid or volunteer in any kind of a setting that you're not qualified to do and if you don't know anything about the profession, and you haven't had any training, or you don't know if you're qualified, then you probably aren't. So, do us all a favor, the Deaf community, the hearing community, and the profession of interpreters by, um, stopping that and getting out and getting yourself trained. I have the highest admiration for people who go, whoa...I got in here with all the best intentions and for the longest time and even maybe now I'm the only one but I...you know, something, anything is not better than nothing. I'm gonna go get myself the kind of education and preparation I need and I'll be back.

##### SPEAKER #2

Interpreting in some personal settings like weddings and funerals, uh, family gatherings...all has another set of layers to it. It's, it's interesting, um...sometimes people ask me, you know, how can you possibly make it through...how can you interpret a sad event like a funeral and not, not show any emotion...and I say, uh, interpreters are allowed to show emotion and, in fact, it would be...it would be wrong to be interpreting, um, a sad event, like a funeral, and look like it wasn't affecting you at all. So, I've interpreted funerals with tears streaming down my face and I don't think that, that, um, has negatively impacted my work. I think it was, it was a good match. <laughter> Um...those sorts of large family gatherings, like weddings, they...they're always a little unexpected as to how they're going to really transpire because, um...you know, they have sort of a free flow to them, even though there's a kind of a program or an agenda. Uh, as an interpreter you don't know exactly what you're gonna be called upon to do and interpret what conversations between whom and, and when and you get all kinds of, um, family dynamics thrown in there. So, uh, it can be, it can be really interesting work and I think, for me, and probably for most interpreters if you, if you get asked to interpret at a wedding or a funeral, it's

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probably because you also have more than just a professional connection with the individuals involved and so then you have to factor in, um, ethical boundaries and, um, how to, how to provide the professional services and yet still be a friend, still be, uh, someone who is personally connected. So, um...not that straightforward when you think of it.

**SPEAKER #3**

I also, on occasion, will work in religious settings which are a challenge in and of their own because...religion is so loaded with image and visualization and things that aren't really there and it's tough...and they sing a lot and that's tough too. <laughter>