



*Deaf Literacy  
Initiative*

# ASL Host Policy

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## Standards & Guidelines for Utilizing an ASL Host for DLI Videos

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**11/1/2010**

This ASL Host Policy addresses standards and guidelines regarding the use of an ASL Host for videos developed by Deaf Literacy Initiative. This policy addresses 4 categories: ASL Host Costume & Make-Up, ASL Host appearance, technical aspects and monitoring the message/content.

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## ASL Host Costume (clothes) & Make-Up

When choosing the clothes (costume) and make-up the ASL Host will use, you must keep in mind the message you want to give your viewer. The message will decide the type of clothing the ASL Host should wear. You want your viewer to get the message by seeing an ASL Host that is dressed well and looks like someone they can trust. If the aim of the message is for a specific audience, then your host should dress to that culture (i.e hijabs).

The following are **general** guidelines and standards.

### Clothing

When choosing clothes for the host, we suggest using clothes that

- are dull in colour so the host can be seen better
- are easy to move in with shirts tucked in
- allow the message to be heard and not distract from it
- allow hands and wrists to be seen
- allow the face to be fully seen
- goes well with the background colours
- have no wrinkles or rips

We recommend that the ASL Host bring 2 to 3 changes of clothing to try at the time of taping. This will allow the Host to choose the right clothes for the lighting, background and content.

## **Clothing - Color**

We recommend you use

- solid prints
- black, grey, dark blue and wine/plum are preferable

The color of clothing must contrast with the host skin color. Also note the color of the background (see page 14)

We don't recommended using

- neon colors (bright colours)
- patterns and plaids
- green, white, red
- light colors except if to contrast with host's skin color

## **Clothing - Specifics**

We recommend you use

- long or  $\frac{3}{4}$  sleeves length (note that  $\frac{3}{4}$  sleeves length is preferred by the Deafblind community)
- dress pants
- v-neck, turtleneck or round neck
- well fitted layers as it may provide visual depth (2-dimensional feel) example: sweater/cardigans with similar color as top

We don't recommend using

- sleeves that are long and covers the host wrists
- tank tops and short sleeve tops
- jeans
- dresses/skirts
- low cut top
- frills anywhere on tops
- unbuttoned golf shirts
- ties - unless message content requires the use of a tie in which case use a solid color with minimal contrast to the dress shirt
- shawls, vests or bulky jackets/cardigans
- sweaters with strong contrasting color of top
- hats - unless message content requires the use of a hat
- baggy clothing

## **Clothing - Other**

We don't recommend using

- pager with belt clutch
- shiny belt buckles
- logo on clothing - unless the logo supports the message content
- buttons on shirts that are shiny

## **Make-Up**

The type of camera, lighting and the host's skin tone will determine the make-up needed. If you have the budget to use a professional make-up artist you will get better results. Make-up artists know how to make the lighting work. Hosts who are made-up by make-up artists will use the lighting better.

Make-up helps to

- reduce the glare off the face and hands when filming
- keep the ASL Host from looking pale

If budget doesn't allow you to use a make-up artist, rice paper can be used to rub off hidden oils on a person's skin. Don't buy stage make-up as it is very expensive.

Always check to see how the ASL Host looks through the TV monitor to see if there is any glare or shadows on their face. This will help you know if you must add or remove make-up. Be careful not to use too much make-up as it may affect the viewer's self-image.

If the same ASL Host is working on videos over a period of time (days, weeks or months), we suggest you use the services of a professional make-up artist. This will ensure the ASL Host always looks the same.

## **Lipstick**

We recommended you use

- light colors

We don't recommend using

- red
- bright colours

- the same colour as the ASL Host's lips
- glitter

## **Eye Shadow**

We recommended you not use eye shadow but if you do, use

- light colours only
- moderate amounts of eye shadow

We don't recommended using

- glitter
- blue

## **Nails**

We recommend your nails are

- clean and trimmed

We don't recommend using

- acrylic or fake nails
- sheen polish
- nail polish



## **Make-Up - Other**

We don't recommend using

- fake eyelashes
- sparkle or glitter make-up

## **Jewellery**

Jewellery should

- be free of reflections, shine and sparkle
- not used at all or at a minimum
- not distract from the message
- be sensitive to the ASL Host's target audience, including religious, medical and cultural identities

We recommend you wear

- dainty, small pieces (examples: wedding band, small stud non-reflective earrings)

We don't recommend wearing

- watches
- bulky and bold jewellery pieces
- facial piercings including tongue
- bracelets (except for medical and cultural purposes)
- earrings that enlarge ear lobes

- hoop earrings
- engagement rings
- pins and brooches - except if message content supplements the pin, example:  
Poppy for Veteran's Day **\*\* explanation should be provided by the ASL Host as to what the pin/brooch represents \*\***

## Hair

Hair should be

- neat
- simple-styled
- presentable
- pulled away from the ASL Host's face so both facial grammar and non-manual signals are clearly communicated

Viewers must be able to see the ASL Host's eyebrows.

We strongly recommend that you **not** use a professional hairstylist. The heat of the studio lights will break down hairspray causing hairdos to change over the day. These changes can be seen on tape.

When deciding on the ASL Host's hairstyle, consider not only the message content, but also how long the videos will be used. Certain hairstyles could represent a certain time period or fad and will make the video look out of date.

We recommend you use

- hairclips or headbands to keep the hair off the ASL Host's face – be sure they aren't reflective, shiny/sparkly or distracting

- neutral, natural-looking colors

We don't recommend using

- pony tails that are laid on the chest of the ASL Host
- pig tails
- neon dyed color
- strong coloured streaks
- extensions, hair ribbons

## **Costume and Make-Up - Other**

### **Eye Glasses**

Always check in the TV monitor to see if the ASL Host's glasses are making light bounce off of the frames or lenses. Also check to make sure facial grammar is still clearly visible.

We recommended you use

- anti-glare glasses
- frames that are thin, contrast color to the Host's skin
- contacts whenever possible

If the ASL Host can go without glasses, it is better to not wear them.

We don't recommend using

- shiny, bulky or dramatic frames
- odd shaped frames

## **Facial Hair**

Be sure both facial grammar and non-manual signals are clear.

We recommend the ASL Host

- have clean hair
- have trimmed hair
- be neatly shaven

## **Teeth**

We recommend your ASL Host's teeth be clean and flossed.

We don't recommend using an ASL Host with braces.

## **Tattoos**

We recommend tattoos be hidden under clothing.

We don't recommend using an ASL Host with facial, neck or hand tattoos.

## ASL Host Appearance

When framing the ASL Host in the shot, the shot should

- begin at the belly button level
- end one hand length above the ASL Host's head

Horizontally (side to side), the ASL Host should appear to have a half-foot length of space at their widest point.

Keep the view tight<sup>1</sup> around the ASL Host.

The ASL Host

- should stand rather than sit - the message content and the script determines the best position
- must remain in the same spot
  - moving from side to side or front and back may be distracting to the viewer
  - moving too much may make the viewer think the Host is uncomfortable and not confident

Hint: Put tape on the floor to remind the ASL Host where to stand at all times.

The appearance of personal space between the ASL Host and the viewer should be equal to twice the space of a face-to-face conversation.

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<sup>1</sup> If captioning will be added later, refer to the Caption section in this policy (page 13).

## Fingerspelling

When fingerspelling

- use the dominant hand to fingerspell with the elbow at waist height
- the hand should be about eight to ten inches in front of the chest

For right-handed people

- the palm should be facing forward and slightly toward the left (except for letters G and H where the palm faces the body)
- the hand should move slightly to the right side of the body

For left-handed people

- the palm should be facing forward and slightly toward the right (except for letters G and H where the palm faces the body)
- the hand should move slightly to the left side of the body

- be comfortable and rhythmic
- keep the elbow from bouncing
- keep the wrist from twisting
- hold the first and last letter of the word for an extra beat before spelling the next word
- keep the face fully visible

Fingerspelling should be slightly outside of the body area and to the side. It is important that the fingerspelling is clearly visible against the color of the clothing and the background.

## **Pace & Style**

The ASL Host should

- use a pace and style that is steady and slightly slower than usual
- sign clearly and not exaggerate or appear choppy

Presentation or 'Stage' style doesn't have to be used unless the message content and script calls for it. It is important that the pace and style does not bore the viewer nor offend the viewer's intelligence.

## **Pausing**

When the ASL Host wishes to present a new topic or pause, they should lower their arms and either clasp their hands in front of the body or rest at their sides without swinging the arms. The Host should remain still and appear calm. This will make the editing process easier .

## Technical Aspects to Consider

### Camera Distance & Angle

The ASL Host

- must look directly in the camera to appear to be looking straight at the viewer
- should stand a minimum of 6 feet from the camera – to appear warm and engaging the ASL Host should stand 3 to 4 feet from the camera

The camera should be at eye level with the ASL Host's. However, if there is an appearance of a double-chin, we suggest you move the camera to slightly higher than eye level.

### Lighting

Lighting is one of the most important things to consider when filming. You will want to

- check the lighting through the TV monitor before filming
- ensure there are no shadows by using lots of lights
- ensure that the shadows from the ASL Host's hands are not visible on the ASL Host's clothing
- ensure that the lights are not reflecting off the background used

When preparing a 'studio' or a 'set' first make sure you remove all sources of natural light. Natural light can vary in intensity and can't be controlled.

The set is lit by using the **three-point lighting system**. It uses a **key light**, a **fill light**, and a **back light** (or **rim light**). Using 3 lights from 3 different directions creates a sense



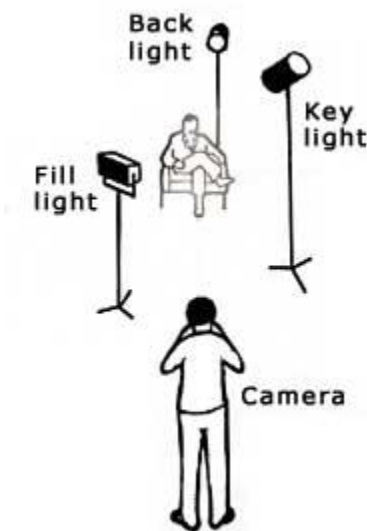
of depth that will ensure the Host will look 3 dimensional.<sup>2</sup>

**Key Light** is the spotlight. The key light is usually placed above and slightly to one side of the camera pointing at the ASL Host.

**Fill Light** is a softer light that gets rid of the shadows made by the key light. The fill light is usually placed on the opposite side of the camera from the key light.

**Back light** lights the outline of the subject from behind and helps to separate the ASL Host from the background. The back light is usually placed behind the subject and to the side from dead centre by about 20 degree<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 1<sup>4</sup>**



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<sup>2</sup> Valinoti, Sean Ryan (2007) **Three-Point Lighting: The Art of Lighting for Film**. Retrieved December 6, 2010 from <http://www.suite101.com/content/threepoint-lighting-a27970#ixzz17NIo87fN>

<sup>3-4</sup> Ottewill, Matt (n.d) **Basics of Video Lighting**. Retrieved December 6, 2010 from <http://www.planetoftunes.com/dv/lighting.html>

Take special note of lighting when using 2 or more ASL Hosts in the same screen shot who have contrasting skin color.

We recommend you

- eliminate shadows on the ASL Host's face, especially around the eye area
- look for shadows behind the ASL Host
- use the Three-Point Lighting system

## **Background Color**

When choosing a background color, consider the lighting and the ASL Host's clothing.

Backgrounds should be one solid colour with no visible patterns.

We recommend you use backgrounds that are

- walls (not shiny) or curtains
- dark - blue (preferably) or black
- chroma key green or blue

If using Chroma Key

- special care must be taken with the lighting
- the editor must have experience with changing the background color in the editing process
- the background must be changed to a solid color that contrasts the Host's clothing

We don't recommend using

- green - may give the Host a green hue
- the same color as the ASL Host's clothing - different colours show depth

- busy backgrounds (example: tropical scenes)

## **Editing**

We recommend you use

- a professional editor
- simple fade ins and outs
- consistent editing transitions

We don't recommend using tacky transitional effects (example: video clip bursting into pieces).

## **Captions, Pop-ups and Open Captions (subtitles)**

The goal is for the viewer to be able to read the captions easily. The captions must not clash with the content or overall video quality.

If text will be added in the editing process, the ASL Host must indicate the space the caption will be placed in.

If the text will be placed

- at the bottom of the screen, the Host must indicate this by using open face hands starting at the centre of the body and panning out
- at another location, the ASL Host should turn to face and point to where the text will be added

Depending on the length of the text, the ASL Host should pause for at least 2-3 seconds to allow for both the addition of the caption in the editing process and for the viewer to read the caption.

If open-captions or sub-titles will be added for those who do not understand American Sign Language, we suggest filming the ASL Host with slightly more space at their waist line so captions

- can be easily added later
- don't interfere with the Host's signing space

We recommend you use

- text size 14 or 18
- two lines maximum
- serif font - examples: Book Antiqua, Bookman Old Style
- bold or italics to empathize a word
- black letterbox with white letters

If more than one speaker – indicate who is speaking or signing.

We don't recommend using

- random colors

## **Manual Focus versus Auto Focus**

Using auto focus may cause problems because of the constant movements of the hands during the use of American Sign Language.

We recommend you use

- manual focus when filming indoors
- auto focus when filming outside

# Monitoring Message and Content

## ASL Consultants

If you have the budget for an ASL Consultant, they should be on the set to ensure that message equivalency and the correct register is being used. The ASL Consultant should also monitor for clear production of American Sign Language. If you don't have the budget for an ASL consultant then have the ASL Host meet with an ASL consultant while they are preparing for the shoot.

## Preparation

You want to give the ASL Host enough time to prepare so they are able to give the message or content credibility.

The amount of time needed for preparation depends on many factors. The main factors are the

- host's prior knowledge of the subject content and terminology
- host's abilities to perform on film
- length of the content that will be filmed

The more technical or complex the subject, the more time the ASL Host will need to prepare. An hour is needed to read or understand every page of information (12 point font, single spaced with 3-5 paragraphs).

Hosts need time to

- read and understand the material
- speak with an ASL Consultant (if necessary)

- practice
- understand what is expected of them

All of these factors must be considered when determining the amount of time needed to adequately prepare for filming.

It is responsibility of both the hiring organization, and the ASL Host to negotiate

- a reasonable amount of time for preparation
- a payment agreement
- all terms of a contract

## **Definitions of Special Terms**

A glossary of special terms can be made available with the video. To explain a special (technical) term not widely recognized, the ASL Host signs the word first, then fingerspells the word and then signs the word again. Using captions may also help.

## **ASL Host Experience & Background**

ASL Hosts should be screened for their abilities to sign on camera. The recommended background for an ASL Host includes

- knowledge of adult literacy
- fluency in ASL
- excellent use of the English language
- knowledge in clear sign production
- knowledge in ASL register

- experience signing on videos
- ability to send messages that are clear

Additional Skills considered an asset

- degree in Teaching, interpreting or ASL
- knowledge in ASL Linguistics

## **Measuring Neutrality**

The ASL Host's message should be free of any bias or personal opinions. Biases or personal opinions can be seen through

- rolling the eyes
- dropping the jaw
- other facial expressions that do not match the actual message
- smiling when sharing a serious topic
- shrugging in the attempt to patronize the viewer

If possible, an ASL consultant should be on the set to ensure that the message remains free of biases and personal opinions.

Non-manual markers are extremely important and must be monitored. An ASL consultant can provide feedback to remove any personal bias during the message or content.

## Use of Notes & Teleprompter

Teleprompters are generally difficult to use as speed and paces varies from one person to another. Translating English to ASL when reading English is also very difficult to perform live. If the Host prefers to use a teleprompter, the English to ASL translation must be prepared in advance. This translation can then be used on the teleprompter.

You can also use notes such as post-it notes that are taped to the side or under the camera. Notes should be in brief point form to allow the ASL Host to quickly glance at them as needed.

Shifting eyes to read or look at notes should be kept to a minimum.

## Overall Cohesion

The following should be considered when considering the ASL Host's understanding of the message and content as well as the viewers' understanding of the message.

- a. Parameter articulation<sup>5</sup> - sign production
- b. Pacing/phasing
- c. Processing time
- d. Non-manual use: markers and signals
- e. Mouthing
- f. Use of space: classifiers

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<sup>5</sup> In ASL, all signs have 5 parameters that must be executed correctly or the sign meaning will be skewed. Change one parameter and the meaning of the sign will change. The 5 parameters are: handshape, orientation, location, movement and non-manual signals.



The ASL host should be ASL fluent and sign clearly and neatly. The fingerspelling should not be sloppy. Facial expressions should be used properly with signs clearly using spatial spaces.

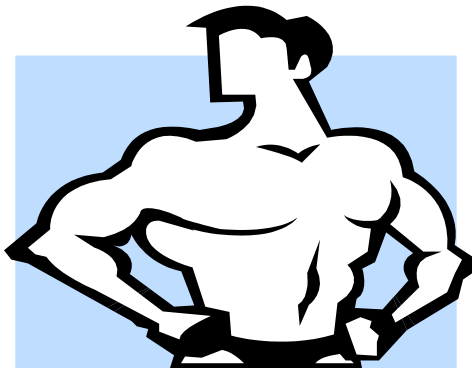
ASL discourse should be followed. The ASL Host should be able to grasp the content's concepts clearly.

Mouthing while signing depends upon your audience. It is best to use mouthing when used as a non-manual expressions as part of ASL grammar.

Most videos will be filmed in a 1:1 frame (see figure 2).

**Figure 2**

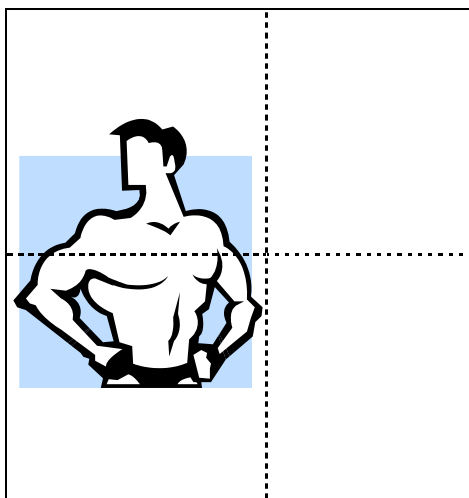
**1:1 Frame**



If the message uses a lot of classifiers for clarity, shoot the Host in a 1:2 Frame (see figure 3).

**Figure 3**

**1:2 Frame**



By using a 1:2 Frame, it will provide the space for the Host to clearly show the execution of the classifiers.

## Special Thanks

The information and guidance contained in this policy could not have been developed without the feedback and input from the following individuals.

Anselmo DeSousa - Deaf Literacy Initiative

Behista Mushtaq - Deaf Durham Services

Brent David Novodvorski

Bruce Belcher - PAC Member

David Hamen - PAC Member

Deaf West Theatre

Diane Unterschultz - PAC Member

Ellen Hibbard

Forrest Smith

Jennifer Best - Deaf Literacy Initiative

Kathleen O'Neil - PAC Member

Leah Morris - Plain Language Consultant

Melissa Malzkuhn - Deaf Studies Digital Journal

Paul LeDrew

Peggy Anne Gordon - Deaf Literacy Initiative

Ryan Commerson

Ted Blunt - Marble Media

Wanda Berrette - PAC Member

PAC = Deaf Literacy Initiative Project Advisory Committee