

English to American Sign Language (ASL) Video Production Checklist

Please use this checklist while planning for your English to American Sign Language (ASL) video project. This checklist was written in a way to cover both large and small video projects while giving your team the ability to perform the tasks that best suit your unique video project. Do incorporate this checklist as early as possible in your project's timeline.

Rationale

The Minnesota Commission of the Deaf, DeafBlind & Hard of Hearing (MNCDHH) asks state agencies to include ASL to future video productions, those produced internally and those produced externally for outreach and engagement efforts, including when the videos will be translated in spoken language (Spanish, Somali, Hmong, Karen, etc.). Here are several reasons why inclusion and equity matter to the population who are deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing as well as to the State of Minnesota.

- **50,600 Minnesotans use ASL as their primary language**

The state's population is currently estimated to be 5.66 million. Of this number, an estimated 50,600 Minnesotans are culturally Deaf and use American Sign Language (ASL) as their primary language. They may or may not be fluent in written English. According to Johns Hopkins University, 20% of the population is deaf or hard of hearing. The World Federation of the Deaf, an NGO that advises the UN and WHO and is a member of the International Disability Alliance, estimates the percentage of people who are Deaf and use ASL to be a little less than 1% (.0092). The numbers of individuals estimated to use ASL as a first language is close in number to people who use Hmong to communicate in their homes in Minnesota. According to the State Demographer: 11.5% of Minnesotans (age 5+) spoke a language other than English at home. Behind English, the most common languages spoken are Spanish (about 193,600 speakers) and Somali, (74,000) and Hmong (56,200 speakers).

- **Individuals with hearing loss are an untapped labor pool**

In 2014, Governor Mark Dayton signed Executive Order 14-14, requiring the percentage of state employees with disabilities to reach 7% by August 2018.

In a 2016 report from the National Deaf Center, funded by the US Department of Education, only 48% of people who are deaf have a job, and 47% are not in labor force. The percentage of Deaf African Americans in the labor force is 40.6%, Deaf Native Americans is 42.5% and individuals who are Deaf with additional disabilities is 31.7%. We need to tap into the deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing labor pool to meet workforce needs.

Prepared by the Minnesota Commission of the Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing (MNCDHH). For further information, contact Anne Sittner Anderson at 612-404-2441 or anne.sittner-anderson@state.mn.us. Originally written in 2017. Updated in 2019.

- **State Technology Accessibility Standards**

The State's Technology Accessibility Standards requires WCAG 2.0 Level AA and encourages WCAG 2.0 Level AAA. Producing ASL videos is Level AAA of WCAG 2.0, which illustrates that our great state continues to raise the bar and exceed expectations.

Video Production Team

You will likely need the following team members:

- **Project manager:** Oversees the project in each stage of production. Troubleshoots issues. Keeps the project moving along the pipeline on time and within budget.
- **Content expert:** Understands the original content and provides the original content in English, having either written it or obtained from the original source with permission. Works with the ASL talent and ASL master to ensure that the ASL version is accurate. The content expert has subject matter expertise but may or may not be fluent in ASL. In the event that s/he is not fluent in ASL, the content expert may need to confer with someone who is fluent to ensure that the material will be easy to translate. The English script should be written in plain language.
- **ASL talent:** Translates the original content into ASL, during both preparation stages and finally during filming. Works with the content expert and ASL master to ensure that the ASL version is accurate. Also practices with the ASL master prior to filming.
- **ASL master:** Responsible for the integrity of the translation (English to ASL), during preparation stages and filming. Works with the ASL talent and content expert to ensure that the ASL version is accurate. Also practices with the ASL talent prior to filming.
- **ASL reviewer:** A qualified bilingual person who is fluent in both ASL and English. Reviews the filmed translations to confirm the accuracy of the translation and clarity of the message. Could do a rough edit on the English text knowing that some of the English may need to be tweaked for the captioning (this task could also be left to the film production team). Works with the film production team to identify any needed fixes related to the ASL content, and approves them prior to finalization. We suggest more than one person acts as the ASL reviewer.
- **Film production crew:** Including the producer, director, cameraman, and teleprompter. We typically hire a vendor to do film production for us, so this falls under their scope.
- **ASL interpreter:** In the event that the film production company is staffed by those who are not fluent in ASL, this team will also include a certified ASL interpreter. The interpreter will voice during the filming to assist with the editing process. An interpreter may be necessary during the editing process to ensure that everything syncs in all languages (including captions).

Accessibility

In order to ensure that the video is fully accessible to all, whether they use American Sign Language or English, plan to do the following:

- A voice talent will be hired to voice the English audio. The voice talent will be given the script that includes any post-filming changes.
- The film production company will need to provide open or closed captions in the film.
- A descriptive text transcript will need to be created after all of the film edits are complete. This transcript will be included either as an attached MS Word document or in the body of the text on the same page as the video. The transcript will be available for users who will use either
- JAWS or a Braille reader to access the video; or for anyone who prefers to read instead of watch the video.
- Audio description is advised to convey visual information such as b-roll, graphics, or text that is not conveyed by the ASL talent.

Technical Specs

- Minimum: 30FPS, 1/75 shutter speed, 720p resolution, 5Mbps bit rate

- Preferred: 60FPS, 1/125 shutter speed, 1080p resolution, 12Mbps bit rate

Dos and Don'ts for Filming

- ASL talent must wear clothing that contrasts with his/her skin tone. For example, a person with light skin should wear dark, solid-colored clothing, such as dark gray, dark blue or black. A person with dark skin should wear light, solid-colored clothing, such as peach. Tops must cover the arms, either $\frac{3}{4}$ sleeve or to the wrist. Tops should also reach to the neckline of the talent. Covering the neck is acceptable but not required. No jewelry, scarves, or anything that would distract the eyes from the interpretation. Hair should be back behind the shoulders or pulled away from the face. Facial makeup should be neutral, and hands should have no nail polish.
- ASL talent must be featured predominately in the film. On the bottom right is ok but the talent must be large enough to be easily seen.
- Avoid, or reduce, competition for visual attention. In the background, keep the movement to a minimum. Having movement behind the ASL talent can be distracting. *Note: If you need to feature text or action on the screen, a possible solution is to pause the ASL translation, cut to visual information, and then resume the ASL translation.*
- Carefully consider placement of all elements on the screen, including images, text, ASL talent, and captions so that they do not interfere substantially with each other.
- If we have the ASL talent on green or blue screen ("alpha key"), the talent will be clearer if there is a shadow added behind him/her in post-production.

Timeline

When planning the timeline for this project, the project manager should consider this formula for how many hours of work it takes to produce how many minutes of video. Use this formula as a guide to predict the project timeline. Bear in mind, this is only an estimate. The actual time needed depends on the level of complexity of the video topic, how easy the script is to translate, and how knowledgeable the ASL talent and master are on the topic.

Per 1 minute of video, plan for:

- The ASL talent to spend 10 minutes on translation + 5 minutes working with the ASL master.
- The ASL master to spend 5 minutes prep + 5 minutes working with the ASL talent.
- Onsite filming: 5-10 minutes of filming per minute of finished film. This range depends greatly on the experience of the ASL talent.
- Editing: 5-10 minutes of editing per minute of finished film.
- Captioning: 5 minutes per minute of finished video.
- Voiceover: 5 minutes per minute of video.
- Filming set-up/take-down: Roughly 1 hour is needed for set-up and take-down.

Summary: Excluding the time spent on set-up/take-down, one can expect 45 minutes – 55 minutes of preparation time for each minute of finished video with ASL content.

Pre-Production

- Content expert sends finished scripts to film production team.
- Film production team reviews and sends finished script to all relevant personnel and contractors, including the ASL talent and ASL master. *Note: the voice talent does not receive this version of the script.*
- Film production crew prepares for filming. The ASL talent and ASL master practice together prior to filming. They confer with the content expert as needed. They also decide whether they want the English script to be fed in the teleprompter or if they want to create a set of condensed notes or ASL gloss (also known as ASL script) depending on the preference of the ASL talent to be fed into the teleprompter.
- If there are condensed notes, the ASL talent and ASL master create and send the condensed notes to the film production crew, the content expert, and the project manager so all are aware that the notes will be used in

filming. *Note: This will also provide the film production crew, the content expert and the project manager with the opportunity to correct any inaccurate information.*

- The film production crew and project manager make arrangements for the filming day(s).

Production Day

- The filming takes place. During the filming, the ASL master and content expert will watch for any oddities/miscues.
- The film crew must consider the placement of closed captioning and any other planned elements appearing onscreen and frames the ASL talent in a strategic location.

Post-Production

- The film production crew edits the film. The project manager, content expert, and ASL interpreter double-checks the script(s) and film(s) to pinpoint any deviations from the original script.
- The original script is revised as needed for captioning to accurately reflect the filmed cuts.
- The voice talent is recorded as s/he reads from the revised script(s). *Note: Alternatively, the closed captioning could be completed first and then the voice over work is done afterward, depending on what works best for the person doing the work.*
- The film production crew continues editing, collaborating with the ASL reviewer(s).
- When ready, the film production crew sends the film to the content expert and project manager for changes. They may act as the ASL reviewer or bring in another person.
- The ASL reviewer, content expert and project manager reviews and sends revisions.
- The film production crew incorporates the revisions.
- This continues until the film meets expectations, within reason. Deadlines are important and need to be met. Always strive to produce a quality video on time and within budget. If the deadline needs to be extended for any reason, it can only be changed via negotiation.
- The film production crew produces the final film in an agreed upon format (video streaming platforms such as YouTube, Vimeo, JWPlayer; DVDs, etc.) with open/closed captioning and voiceover embed. The specs on film delivery and release will need to be agreed upon between the vendor and hiring organization.

Additional Resources

- [Guidelines: English-into-Auslan Video Production](#), a project conducted by Melbourne Polytechnic in conjunction with Macquarie University, with additional support from a number of community organizations. Grant funding provided by ACCAN.
- [Plain Language.gov: Improving Communication from the Federal Government to the Public](#)
- [WebAIM: Captions, Transcripts, and Audio Descriptions](#)