

Advocating for yourself, or self-advocacy, is important. When you need an interpreter, you need to ask for one. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) says businesses and government agencies must give you “effective communication.” Effective communication means you understand the person who is speaking to you and the person understands you. Effective communication could mean hiring an interpreter or CART services and is different depending on the person and the situation. Here are tips for when you need to ask for a sign language interpreter so that you have effective communication.

## TIPS FOR SELF-ADVOCACY

1. **NEED** – You can only ask for an interpreter when you really need one. “Need” may be different depending on the person or situation. You may need an interpreter at a doctor’s appointment, a lawyer’s office, at a school meeting for your child, or at a public meeting. You may not need an interpreter when you are ordering food at a restaurant.
2. **KNOW YOUR RIGHTS** – The ADA says a business or the government must provide you with an interpreter when you need one to communicate successfully and effectively.
3. **FREE** – You should not be charged for an interpreter.
4. **ASK BEFORE** – You need to ask for an interpreter before your appointment. Ask for an interpreter as soon as you know about your appointment. You must give the business or government agency time to find and hire an interpreter.
5. **PRACTICE** – Practice how you will ask for an interpreter. Will you ask verbally or write a note? You may say or write, “I am deaf. I need a sign language interpreter for effective communication.” You can use a friend to help you practice.
6. **FOLLOW UP** – Call at least two days before your appointment. Make sure you are getting an interpreter.
7. **DON’T WAIT** – If you do not ask for an interpreter before your appointment, you will likely not get one.
8. **SOMEONE SAYS, “NO” TO AN INTERPRETER** – Don’t give up! Stay calm. Repeat why you need an interpreter. Ask to speak to the office manager.
9. **ASK EVERY TIME** – Ask for an interpreter before every appointment.
10. **CHART** – You can ask the office to put a note in your medical chart that you need an interpreter.
11. **VRI** – You may use VRI. It may have problems. Stop and say something when it has problems. Say why the VRI is not working for you and ask them to put your issue with VRI in your chart. Then request an on-site interpreter.
12. **EDUCATE** – Some people don’t know about the ADA. DRT has information you can give the business or government agency. You can find the information at [www.disabilityrightstn.org/resources/effective-communication](http://www.disabilityrightstn.org/resources/effective-communication).

See these tips in ASL at: <http://bit.ly/SelfAdvocacyEC>