

THE SIGN LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY INTERVIEW (SLPI): A BRIEF DESCRIPTION

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The SLPI, a conversational approach to sign language communication skills assessment, is based on the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) (also known as the Language Proficiency Interview/LPI). Like the O/LPI, the SLPI permits interview content to vary according to the job responsibilities, background, and interests of each person interviewed. Consistent with the O/LPI, the goal of the SLPI is to assess how well people are able to use sign language for their communication needs, and, as appropriate, to assist people in development of their sign language communication skills.

The SLPI involves a one-to-one conversation between the interviewer and candidate/interviewee, with each interviewee videotaped and subsequently rated independently by two or three SLPI raters. (See Attachments 2 and 3 for SLPI candidate information and tips.) The basis for rating is the SLPI Rating Scale (Attachment 4), a standard scale based on a highly skilled, knowledgeable native/native like signer.

The SLPI assesses American Sign Language (ASL) as it is used among skilled sign language communicators in the United States. This use includes the full range of ASL from pure, linguistic descriptions of ASL to English influenced signing. This full range is characterized by (a) Meaning-based sign language vocabulary selection consistent with standardized signs in current use by skilled language users, and (b) a variety of grammatical features that are consistent with effective use of gestural/visual language for communication. These grammatical features include: (a) space, indexing, eye gaze, sign movement directionality, the body shifts to separate ideas and to identify and discuss persons, places, and objects present and not present; (b) classifiers for describing and representing persons, places and objects and their movements (for example, use of the index finger to represent a person); sign word order which facilitates effective communication in gestural-visual language; and (d) facial expressions and other body movements (non-manual signals) to support and add to information communicated (for example, affirmative and negative head movements). In addition to vocabulary and grammatical features, clarity of sign production, fluency, and comprehension are important to effective communication when using a gestural-visual language, and therefore are considered in SLPI ratings. Further explanation of what is assessed by the SLPI is provided in the SLPI Training Workshop Notebook, Section 5, Skills Important for Effective Sign language Communication and Sign Language Proficiency Interview (SLPI) Rating Levels. Copies of this paper are available from the authors of this paper.

As we have discussed consistently in SLPI presentations and published materials, follow up is critical to successful use of the SLPI. Thus, SLPI candidates are encouraged to schedule SLPI follow up meetings. During the follow up meetings candidates have the opportunity to meet with sign language specialists to review and discuss their SLPI videotapes as a basis for planning skill development activities based on their individual communication skills and needs.