

Plays and concerts

THE SHORT VERSION

Interpreting a performance means translating more than words. Emotion, tone, and atmosphere are the performance, and an interpretation that carries only the text leaves a Deaf audience with the plot but not the play.

FOR PLAYS

Six things to sort out before and during a theatrical performance.

TIP	WHAT IT MEANS IN PRACTICE
01 Read the script first	Get a copy ahead of time if you can. Knowing the context, the characters, and the themes lets you interpret with the right nuance rather than discovering the tone on the night.
02 Watch the blocking	Pay attention to how the actors move and to the stage directions. ASL is highly visual, and physical movement carries a significant part of what the audience receives.
03 Work with the director	Coordinate with the director or the production team. They can tell you which movements, cues, and emotional shifts are critical to the performance.
04 Sign the emotion	A play turns on emotional expression. Carry it through facial expression and body language — both are integral to ASL, and they are how the audience feels what the characters feel.
05 Stay in character	When interpreting a character's dialogue, use the body language and expression that character would use. It brings them to life and makes the performance immersive rather than reported.
06 Use the space	Keep good spatial awareness. With several characters on stage, place each one in a specific spot in your signing space, reflecting where they stand in relation to each other.

FOR CONCERTS

Music asks for rhythm and mood as much as for lyrics.

TIP	WHAT IT MEANS IN PRACTICE
01 Know the lyrics and the theme	Understanding both is essential. A good interpretation carries the energy, the mood, and the feeling behind the music, not only the words.
02 Visualize the music	Picture the rhythm, tempo, and mood as you interpret. Sign energetically for an upbeat song; for a slower, more emotional one, slow down and open up the facial expression.
03 Face and body carry the tone	Your face and body matter as much as the signs. Match your expression to the emotion in the song — the audience reads your face for tone even when they cannot follow every sign.
04 Interpret the message	Many songs carry a theme beyond the lyrics — love, hope, struggle. Make sure that theme comes through in the interpretation.
05 Stay in sync	Timing is essential. Sync your signs to the rhythm and the lyrics so the performance keeps its flow.
06 Coordinate with the artist	Collaborate with the performer or the band where you can. If the artist uses particular gestures during the show, work them in to keep the interpretation authentic.

COMMON TO BOTH

Half of these twelve come down to the same thing: your face and body are doing the work the music or the acting does for a hearing audience. Preparation is the other half — the script, the lyrics, and a conversation with the director or the artist all happen before you are on stage.