

## Making the Most of “Deaf Events”

**Goal:** To engage with people at Deaf events in meaningful, linguistically edifying ways.

### **Rationale:**

We know that as second language/culture learners we must actively pursue interactions with native ASL users to acquire linguistic and cultural fluency to our highest potential. With other languages this is done by moving for a time to a country in which that language is predominately used. With ASL, we do this by attending events at which we anticipate most participants will be Deaf.

While presence at these events might be better than nothing, mere attendance does nothing to aid in our linguistic and cultural development. This is where intentionality comes into play. This activity gives us a game-plan and some self-accountability to get the most out of our time at events.

### **Before the event:**

- Before attending any Deaf event, check out the Facebook page/website of the local NAD chapter, as well as NAD’s site, [DeafNation.com](http://DeafNation.com), [streetleverage.com](http://streetleverage.com), and other news sources specific to the Deaf community. Find at least one current event or hot topic to serve as a potential conversation starter.
- Develop and write down three questions to use as conversation pieces and practice how to sign them. ***Brainstorm potential answers and practice what those might look like in ASL, as well, so you are prepared to understand the other person’s response.*** You may even want to videotape yourself having an imaginary conversation (play both parts) and watch it, to prepare yourself for the upcoming discourse.

Along with drawing from current events, you might ask things like:

- ▶ I’m studying to become an interpreter, and am still learning what this means. Can you tell me about a time remember you had a great experience with an interpreter? What made it go so well? What about a bad experience; can you tell me what the interpreter could have done differently?
- ▶ I’ve heard that Deaf people sometimes have to fight to get places to pay for interpreting services. Do you experience this? What do you think could be done to make it go more smoothly?
- ▶ I saw a recent article about ...here is a summary of it...what are your thoughts?
- ▶ I know there’s a lot of discussion right now about ... (Deaf Ed, interpreting in hospitals, VRI/VRS, captions, etc...). What are your thoughts on that?

### **At the event:**

- Determine that you will not leave until you have asked each question to at least one person. If it turns into a long conversation, fantastic. If not, you have at least made an intentional effort to step out of your comfort zone and use your second language actively.
  - (This is where you might find yourself becoming very adept at excuses — don’t let them win! Determine to have these conversations, and find a way!)
- Pay special attention to how others are starting conversations, so you can learn cultural and linguistic norms in the ASL-using community, and put those into practice.
- Take note of how any speakers gain attention of large groups of people, how others get each other’s attention, how people are using eye-gaze, touch, etc.. How does this differ from an English-speaking setting?

- Scan the room/venue periodically to see what groupings look like (who are people grouped with, and why?). Take note of where you tend to be, and see if you can branch out to other groups (when you want to join another group, first observe how their behaviors are different from your own, and see if you can adjust to fit their norms for a time).

**After activity (follow-up):**

DO NOT SKIP THIS PART! Learning through action without reflection is fleeting.

- Write a journal entry/blog post/reflection paper/letter-to-a-friend-or-classmate about what you noticed, what you learned, and what you still want to figure out.
- Use your reflections to inspire your questions for the next event.
- Be sure to find at least one event every month, one way or another.  
(This is also rich ground for your excuses to rear up. Don't let them win!! Find a way.)