

**Domain #2 Comprehensive Essay**

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## **Domain #2: Human Relations Comprehensive Essay**

The second domain in the 34 Entry-to-Practice Competencies for Interpreters, as outlined by Witter-Merithew and Johnson (2005), is Human Relations. For interpreters to work effectively, they must engage with people at every moment. At the heart of interpreting is building and maintaining strong interpersonal relationships, as well as demonstrating collaborative and respectful interactions with everyone involved. Within this domain, interpreters must show respect for all parties involved in the interpreting process—including colleagues, consumers, employers, and interpreting interns—and take responsibility for their own actions and work (Competency 2.1). Interpreters must also advocate for working environments that are safe, equitable, and productive for both interpreters and consumers (Competency 2.2). When working with both ASL and English, interpreters must show respect by acknowledging each language's distinct linguistic and cultural norms. They must also be able to work along the spectrum of signing systems (such as Pidgin Signed English or Signing Exact English) to match consumer needs when appropriate (Competency 2.3).

Connected to Competency 2.3, interpreters must also recognize and respect cultural differences among consumers by demonstrating appropriate behaviors and communication strategies when conversing and interpreting. This could include adjusting communication strategies or responding sensitively to cultural norms (Competency 2.4). An interpreter may have excellent technical interpreting and language skills, but if they are difficult to work with from a human relations standpoint, their work will often be ineffective. Strong interpersonal skills, respect for others, and advocacy for appropriate working conditions are all essential components of effective interpreting practice.

Competency 2.1 highlights the importance of interpreters maintaining respect and collegiality toward all consumers and individuals involved in the interpreting process. This includes demonstrating respect when working across different cultures, upholding professionalism, promoting positive relationships and connections, and fostering an environment where trust and collaboration can thrive. Interpreters are often present during intense, deeply personal moments in people's lives, so building trust and respect is essential to an effective interpreting process.

Interpreting work is demanding both physically and cognitively. Competency 2.2 empowers interpreters to advocate for safe and productive working conditions that protect their well-being, allowing them to continue performing effectively. This can include advocating for breaks or requesting a team interpreter to reduce the physical and mental strain of the work. This competency also empowers interpreters to advocate for environmental changes during interpreting situations to ensure that consumers have full access to communication. For example, rearranging the room so the Deaf consumer has a clear line of sight to the interpreter demonstrates proficiency in this competency.

Because interpreters work within the process of transferring messages between English and ASL, it is imperative that they show respect for the linguistic and cultural differences of each language, both when using the languages conversationally and when interpreting, as mentioned in Competency 2.3. In ASL, this includes contact varieties such as Pidgin Signed English (PSE) and Signing Exact English (SEE). Interpreters must be able to adjust their language use to meet the consumer's needs and follow the cultural norms of each language. If an interpreter ignores these language-use norms, not only could meaning be lost in the interpretation, but it could also come across as insensitive.

Competency 2.4 is closely related to Competency 2.3, as it focuses on respecting cultural differences at a behavioral level. Interpreters serve as cultural mediators and must understand the interaction norms within different groups, matching those norms to show respect when engaging with others. For example, when conversing with or interpreting for Deaf individuals, prioritizing information sharing and maintaining clear sightlines is essential, as these are valued aspects of Deaf culture. If interpreters blatantly disregarded these values, it could lead to a lack of trust between interpreters and consumers. Recognizing and honoring these differences is essential for interpreters to build positive relationships with consumers from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Domain 2 reminds interpreters of the importance of keeping people at the center of their work. Interpreters facilitate communication between individuals and also support the development of meaningful connections. By demonstrating respect for colleagues, consumers, and the languages and cultures involved, interpreters promote an interpreting process that prioritizes trust and understanding. Mastery of the human relations competencies ensures that interpreters are not only skilled practitioners but also empathetic professionals who prioritize the well-being and rights of everyone they serve. Ultimately, these competencies lay the foundation for ethical, effective, and culturally responsive interpreting.

## References

- Witter-Merithew, A., & Johnson, L. J. (2005). *Toward competent practice: Conversations with stakeholders*. Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc.