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# Certification of Sign Language Interpreters: What Do All These Letters Mean?

*by Beth Schoenberg, June 1999*

All consumers who contract for a service want to know that their service provider is competent. However, most consumers don't have the knowledge to evaluate the services provided by a sign language interpreter. Interpreter certification is important because it guarantees that the interpreter you hire has at least a minimum level of skill. In order to receive certification, an interpreter must pass a rigorous examination which includes both skills and knowledge. Many interpreters have received a "certificate of completion" from an interpreter training program; this is NOT the same thing as being a certified interpreter. By hiring a certified interpreter, you know that your interpreter has been judged by his or her peers and consumers as capable to provide quality services. Additionally, a grievance system has been established by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc. (RID) in the case that you feel an RID certified interpreter has behaved unethically; this provides additional protection for consumers.

It is important to realize that a certified interpreter is not necessarily qualified for every interpreting situation and environment. Many interpreting assignments require additional skills or training above and beyond the entry level certification. SignOn is proud to work only with RID certified interpreters who are actively pursuing professional development opportunities; many of SignOn's interpreters have taken advanced training in specialized areas. However, SignOn does have an apprenticeship program, where interpreters who do not yet hold certification work in conjunction with a certified interpreter. The SignOn scheduler can help you determine the needs of your situation and can schedule you an appropriate interpreter.

To the dismay of many consumers, the interpreting profession has a plethora of different certifications, which makes it difficult to remember all the different acronyms and meanings.

Here is a short introduction to interpreter certification:

There are two systems for sign language interpreter certification, with different testing structures and administering organizations.

**The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc. (RID)** has been certifying sign language interpreters for over 25 years. Their testing system is a two part process, consisting of a written test and a performance test. The written test must be passed before a candidate can take the performance test. The performance test is graded on a pass/fail system, with the requirement that an interpreter must have skills above a minimum level in order to receive a passing score. The certifications given by RID are represented by the following acronyms:

**CI (Certificate of Interpretation):** qualified to interpret between spoken English and American Sign Language

**CT (Certificate of Transliteration):** qualified to transliterate between spoken English and a signed English system

**SC:L (Specialist Certificate: Legal):** qualified to interpret in a variety of legal situations

**OTC (Oral Transliterating Certificate):** qualified to work as an oral interpreter (an interpreter who makes spoken English visible to a consumer who relies on speechreading or lipreading)

**CDI (Certified Deaf Interpreter):** a deaf interpreter who is qualified to act as a relay (or intermediary) interpreter.

To confuse things even further, when RID revised their certification testing in the mid eighties, they also changed the terminology they used for their certificates. Consequently, you may find interpreters who possess the following certificates:

**CSC (Comprehensive Skills Certificate)**  
**IC (Interpreting Certificate)**  
**TC (Transliteration Certificate)**  
**RSC (Reverse Skills Certificate)**

Interpreters who hold these certificates are also skilled, but were evaluated prior to 1989.

### **All of SignOn's interpreters hold RID certification**

The National Association of the Deaf (NAD) developed a testing system that is administered in Washington State by the Washington State Association of the Deaf (WSAD). Interpreters who take this test are given a rating corresponding to a skill level, which is represented numerically. Levels 1 and 2 originally corresponded to unqualified levels of skill, and are no longer given. You may see NAD certified interpreters with the following rankings:

**Level 3: generalist**

**Level 4: advanced**

**Level 5: master**

Whereas both NAD and RID certifications indicate that the holder has proven a certain level of skills, the different certifications and levels do not parallel each other, that is, a NAD level 5 is not equivalent to an RID CI and CT.

If you have questions about certification of sign language interpreters, or would like to know how to determine an interpreter's qualifications, please contact SignOn.