



# Using Sign in SQA Exams

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# Introduction

In January 2007, the Scottish Sensory Centre (SSC) and SQA held a joint event on support strategies for candidates who use sign in their SQA exams.

One of the most repeated pieces of feedback we received was that teachers would value examples of good practice and advice on helping their candidates in the exam situation.

A small working group was set up, made up of members of SQA's Deaf Review Group<sup>1</sup>, teachers of the deaf, and colleagues from the SSC and SQA. Its remit was to provide advice, templates, and checklists and to remind everyone of their responsibilities when using sign in examinations

This guide, which was produced by the working group, contains both SQA's mandatory guidelines for conducting these exams and some further advice and examples of good practice. We hope you find it useful.

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<sup>1</sup> now known as Signed Transcription Reviewers

# Using sign: mandatory guidelines for centres

## Providing sign communicators

You are responsible for:

- ◆ making the necessary arrangements for providing a sign communicator
- ◆ ensuring that the sign communicator has the right level of knowledge of the subject and skill in sign language. For example, in a Higher Chemistry exam, the sign communicator's skills need to be sufficient to reflect the candidate's breadth of knowledge and ability
- ◆ making sure that both the candidate and the sign communicator are advised of, and sufficiently well prepared for, this arrangement

## Video equipment

You should prepare one video (either tape or digital) per candidate per subject and clearly label it with centre, candidate, and subject and level details. The candidate must be comfortable with, and have had practice of, being filmed.

You are also responsible for providing all the video equipment (camera and playback facilities) and for its operation during the assessment. As part of your **quality assurance procedures**, you should ensure that candidates, and where appropriate, parents or guardians, have agreed to the video recording of the assessment event and are aware of how it will be used by SQA.

## Accommodation

Where a sign communicator is used, a separate room will be necessary. The room must be suitable for filming and signing. This means that there should be adequate space and appropriate lighting to film the candidate in the most unobtrusive way possible.

## Invigilation

When a sign communicator is used in an external examination, additional invigilation will be required.

## Translation/transcription

A transcript in English of each candidate's signed responses as recorded (on video) should be prepared. This translation/transcription should be carried out within the centre by someone with the appropriate level of skill in signing.

### ***Using sign: mandatory guidelines for centres***

As candidates may also supplement their signed responses with additional written or graphic material, this must also be submitted along with the transcript of the signed responses.

It is important that the candidate is aware of, and has been prepared to work within the time constraints of the examination (including any agreed extra time allowance).

Further guidance on transcribing can be found on page 15.

### **External review of the translation/transcription**

We require the transcriptions, any additional material written by the candidates, and the videos, to be submitted within one week of the examination. All the required stationery, such as envelopes for submitting the videos, will be provided before the start of the examination diet.

You must ensure that the candidates' video evidence is enclosed in the envelope provided and is either available for pick up by an SQA-appointed carrier or is posted using pre-addressed labels.

A team of reviewers, with appropriate skills in signing, will review a sample of translations/transcriptions from each centre alongside the video evidence, to ensure that signed responses have been accurately transcribed.

SQA will ensure that the video evidence submitted is returned to you as soon as possible after review. You should retain videos as evidence to support any assessment appeals.

***Remember: It is your responsibility, in consultation with the candidate, to decide whether or not the use of a sign communicator is an appropriate arrangement for the candidate.***

***Requests to use a sign communicator should be submitted to SQA in the usual way.***

***SQA is not responsible for the payment of any fees and/or expenses to a transcriber or sign communicator.***

## **Extra time**

As you begin to work with your candidate (in some cases from S3 onwards) you will be able to understand your candidate's individual needs. As this process continues you will also be able to gather appropriate evidence from both class work and class assessments and eventually prelims to help support your request for extra time.

You must give your candidate sufficient time to complete their exam, the time needed by each individual might vary from candidate to candidate. In allowing extra time there are two things to consider:

- ◆ **Candidate fatigue:** exams that last a very long time can cause tiredness and may ultimately disadvantage the candidate.
- ◆ **The timing of the next part of the exam:** to help with this SQA can allow you to re-arrange exams if necessary, although candidates must be supervised during breaks in the exam. This must be agreed beforehand with the Assessment Arrangements team in Dalkeith.

# Using sign: mandatory guidelines for sign communicators

## Are you a sign communicator?

Do you know that there are certain things you should and shouldn't do?

## Preparation

It is very important that you have had the opportunity to prepare for signing in any assessment. For the external exam you will (under supervision of an invigilator) have access to the question paper up to one hour before the start of the exam. (If you think you may need more time for a particular paper, this must be negotiated with SQA beforehand.) During this preparation time you may consult with another sign communicator if you are uncertain, or if you have any concerns about any aspect of the translation of the question paper.

## In the external exam

To carry out the role of sign communicator successfully, **you must**:

- ◆ be able to communicate effectively with the candidate
- ◆ have a good working knowledge of the subject you are being asked to translate
- ◆ only translate under instruction from the candidate
- ◆ allow the candidate to study and interpret any reference maps, diagrams, and graphs independently, but you may sign any labels or text connected with such material

You **must not**:

- ◆ take the lead or initiative
- ◆ give any additional explanation or assistance

You should have had previous practice in working with the candidate, and both of you should be well prepared for working together under the examination conditions that will apply.

***Remember: Candidates can ask for parts of the question paper to be signed again as often as necessary, but you must not suggest or choose which parts.***

## **Guidelines for sign communicators: liaising with the exam invigilator**

Before the exam, discuss with the invigilator what your role is as the sign communicator. Highlight any issues that you think may concern him/her — for example, you may have to repeat a question several times if asked to do so by the candidate.

You may find it helpful to use the sheet on page 7 to give the Chief Invigilator information on individual candidates. The ‘Other relevant information’ box can be used to give the invigilators information about the conduct of the exam, for example:

- ◆ that the candidate may ask for the tape to be stopped and rewound in order to review an answer
- ◆ details of when you are entitled to see the exam paper

If in any doubt, clarify with the Chief Invigilator exactly what the role of the invigilator is in an exam where questions and responses might be signed.

Take the time to prepare your candidate so that they are aware of the invigilator’s role and presence.



## **Exam arrangements**

### **Information sheet**

Candidate details

--

Extra time

--

Other relevant information

--



# Using sign: mandatory guidelines for candidates

## Are you working with a sign communicator?

Do you know that there are certain things you should and shouldn't do?

You should have had previous practice in working with your sign communicator, and both of you should be well prepared for working together under exam conditions.

You must:

- ◆ clearly indicate to your sign communicator which questions (or parts of questions) you wish to have signed. You can ask for parts of the question paper to be signed again as often as necessary, but the sign communicator cannot suggest or choose which parts.
- ◆ study and interpret any reference maps, diagrams, graphs etc, on your own. Your sign communicator can sign any labels or text to you.

You will:

- ◆ have the option of writing some responses and signing others. You may also supplement your signed response with additional written or graphic material.

If you choose to sign your responses in your exams, SQA will require your signed responses to be recorded on video (tape or digital), so you must be comfortable with, and have had practice of, being filmed. You will need to complete a consent form — see example on page 13.

***Remember: Your sign communicator will take great care when signing a question to you. No additional explanation or assistance will be given. Remember that what your sign communicator does in the exam will be different from what he or she does in the classroom.***



## Filming candidates who sign

The following advice, checklists and templates, although not mandatory, have been devised to facilitate filming of deaf signing candidates.

- ◆ The room must be well lit and large enough for the filming to take place. Be aware of the sun and, if necessary, close curtains or blinds to prevent glare.
- ◆ Check you fully understand how to operate the camera — eg knowing how to switch on and off, load and unload tapes/discs — and that you have enough space for the duration of the exam.
- ◆ The use of a tripod will prevent shudder and loss of focus.
- ◆ The ideal position of the camera should be 4–5 metres from the candidate. Before the exam starts, you should check the candidate is in focus and fits the frame. No one else needs to be in the frame.
- ◆ Background noise should be reduced to a minimum. Walls ought to be plain, with no distracting information.
- ◆ Set the counter to zero.
- ◆ A piece of work with the key information — candidate's name, Scottish Candidate Number, centre name and number, examination and level/paper known as the clapperboard — should be presented to camera at the start of the examination (see example in Appendix 1). If the label on the video later becomes detached, this is a foolproof way of identifying both candidate and exam.
- ◆ If an audio technician is available, he or she should check the equipment before the exam starts. If it is at all possible, he or she should be on standby in case the equipment breaks down.



## Checklist for filming deaf signing candidates: Accommodation

- |    |   |                          |
|----|---|--------------------------|
|    |   | ✓                        |
| 1  | Is the examination room suitable, eg is it large enough?                      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2  | Is the room well lit?   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3  | Can the curtains/blinds be drawn to avoid sun/glare?                          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4  | Are there enough chairs and tables for all personnel?                         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5  | Are the walls plain and free from distracting information?                    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6  | Is the video clock set at the correct time?                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7  | Is an 'Examination in progress' sign attached to the door?                    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8  | Are there additional paper, pens, pencils and erasers available?              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9  | Is the subject-specific equipment available and in working order?             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10 | Is the appropriate clapperboard available, and does it match the examination? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11 | Is the distance from camera to candidate about 4–5 metres?                    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12 | Is the distance from candidate to sign communicator about 1–2 metres?         | <input type="checkbox"/> |



## Checklist for filming deaf signing candidates: Camera operations

(In some centres the audio technician will set and check equipment prior to the examination starting. However, not all centres will have this option available.)

- ✓
- 1 Are you familiar with the on/off controls of the camera?
  - 2 Are you familiar with how to load and unload tapes/discs?
  - 3 Have you enough blank tapes/discs?
  - 4 Do you have the right tapes/discs for your camera?
  - 5 Have you double checked that the camera works prior to the start of the examination?
  - 6 Have you set the camera on a tripod?
  - 7 Do you know where to plug in or charge the equipment?
  - 8 Do you have extension cables and safety pads (if you need them)?
  - 9 Have you set to record in 'long play', if available?
  - 10 Have you reset the counter to zero?
  - 11 If you are using batteries, do you have spares? (Avoid using old batteries.)
  - 12 Is the appropriate clapperboard available?



## Checklist for filming deaf signing candidates: Candidate preparation

- ✓
- 1 Does your candidate know their Scottish Candidate Number?
  - 2 Does your candidate know the dates and times of their exams?
  - 3 Does your candidate know the location of their exams?
  - 4 Does your candidate know the principle personnel involved in the exam ie invigilator?
  - 5 Does your candidate have the correct equipment for the examination?
  - 6 Have you checked that the clapperboard contains the correct information?
  - 7 Has your candidate signed the 'filming of signed responses' declaration sheet? (See next page.)
  - 8 Have you checked that your candidate understands the procedure for requesting questions to be signed?
  - 9 Has your candidate practised signing to camera?
  - 10 Has your candidate practised reviewing their responses to camera?



## Filming of candidate's signed responses in SQA examinations

<b>Candidate name</b>	
<b>Scottish Candidate Number</b>	
<b>Centre name</b>	
<b>Centre number</b>	

I have completed a list of exams, indicating the exams in which I might sign my responses.

I have checked that the clapperboard containing my personal information is correct.

I agree to the filming of my signed responses in the exams.

I understand that the videos will be sent to SQA.

I understand that persons unknown to me will review this video.

The video will be returned to my centre as soon as possible.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



# **After the exam: what happens to candidate scripts, and the work of SQA's Sign Transcription Reviewers**

After the exam, both candidate scripts and transcriptions are sent out to SQA's teams of Markers with all the other candidate scripts. They are then sent to our team of reviewers, who review a sample of translations/transcriptions from each centre alongside the video evidence, to ensure that signed responses have been accurately transcribed.

Where concerns are raised by a reviewer about the transcription, eg if the transcript has missed out some pertinent points, the scripts are sent to the appropriate Principal Assessor for further consideration and, where appropriate, marks are amended.

The filmed evidence is then returned to the centre as soon as possible after review.

***Remember to retain these videos/DVDs as evidence to support any assessment appeals.***

SQA's Sign Transcription Reviewers are a team of practising teachers of the deaf and experienced Sign Language Interpreters from as wide a spread of geographical locations as possible. They have the appropriate skill and level in signing for the subject and level they review.

# **Transcription: further guidance on transcribing your candidates' work**

- ◆ Transcription should take place when the exam is finished.
- ◆ Transcription should be from sign into the most reasonable and accurate English in the context of the subject. No additional information must be added.
- ◆ If a word is finger-spelled wrongly, transcribe it correctly, ie correct the spelling error.
- ◆ If at all possible, get a colleague to help with the transcription. One of you must be the subject specialist who has been working with the candidate.
- ◆ Transcribers must have appropriate levels of sign.
- ◆ Annotate on the paper if there is a break in the tape, eg toilet break, fire alarm.
- ◆ Send a covering letter with the transcript if the candidate has specific signing skills, eg uses initials a lot of the time — this is incredibly helpful to SQA's Sign Transcription Reviewers.
- ◆ Remember to sign and date the transcripts.
- ◆ If the transcription cannot be completed the same day as the exam, the tapes/DVDs and papers must be securely stored overnight.
- ◆ Do not involve the candidate in any way with the transcription.
- ◆ If possible, liaise with the head teacher regarding additional time to transcribe.
- ◆ Do not make or keep copies of the tapes/DVDs or the transcripts.
- ◆ A filming schedule for each of the questions that are signed is incredibly helpful. An exemplar is available on the next page.



## For further information

For help and information on Assessment Arrangements for deaf candidates, contact the Assessment Arrangements team:

Assessment Arrangements team  
Tel: 0131-561 6890  
**aarequests@sqa.org.uk**

For further details on SQA's Signed Transcription Reviewers and SQA's policy on the use of sign, contact:

Annette Foulcer  
Tel: 0845 213 5559  
**annette.foulcer@sqa.org.uk**

Patricia McDonald  
0845 213 5558  
**patricia.mcdonald@sqa.org.uk**



English as an  
Additional Language  
in SQA Exams



## Appendix 1: Clapperboard

<b>Name</b>			
<b>Scottish Candidate Number</b>			
<b>Centre name</b>			
<b>Centre number</b>			
<b>Exam title</b>			
<b>Level</b>		<b>Date</b>	

This should be filmed along with the candidate's piece of work in the event of the video labelling becoming detached.