

# 3 reasons businesses need to prioritise SASL training among staff

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*I've arrived for my Covid vaccination. The woman in front of me is talking to me. I can't even lip read at the moment because everyone wears face masks. I point to my ears and try to communicate that I'm deaf. There are at least 100 people here, but no interpreter. People are reluctant to write down their message. Instead, they get angry because I should try to speak. It's not a new experience. It's my daily reality. I do speak, though: my language is South African Sign Language (SASL).*



How many people in your organisation can sign and communicate effectively with a deaf person?

## Deaf people in South Africa

According to the [South African National Deaf Association](#) (SANDA), there are approximately 4 million deaf or hard-of-hearing people in South Africa. That's 7.6% of the South African population—50% higher than the estimated 5% of people worldwide who are classified as deaf or hard of hearing.

It's time for businesses, including government organisations, to prioritise SASL training among staff. We're not talking about paying lip service to the language by sharing the SASL alphabet and hoping you'll never need to use it. We're talking about true communication. Here's why your business should do so.

### 1. Develop a more inclusive culture in your organisation.

Hiring someone to fill a disability quota and not investing in them properly is a disservice not only to the employee but also the organisation. Companies that rely on external interpreters to communicate with deaf staff or clients would do well to consider the value of in-house training of SASL.

Removing the need for an interpreter not only shows a commitment to your deaf staff and/or clients but also to establishing genuine relationships with them. Plus, you'll quickly get a return on the cost of the training by doing away with the need for an interpreter!

## **2. Increase the positivity of your organisation's image.**

What organisation wouldn't want to be known for its inclusivity and ability to engage deaf clients effectively. The bank that offers on-site assistance in SASL will quickly attract new clients. The internet provider that has a technician who can sign will find a niche market of new business. The shop that can assist a customer in finding an item will become a go-to store for many.



Then, there are public services many of us take for granted: shouldn't the police officer taking a victim's statement be able to communicate with them directly? Someone in need of counselling shouldn't need to rely on an interpreter to get the help they need.

## **3. Develop your employees' overall communication skills.**

According to [Psychology Today](#), the common belief is that 55% of our communication is body language, 38% is tone of voice, and 7% is the actual spoken words. However, context matters. Non-verbal communication plays a greater role in the intended message when the verbal and non-verbal messages don't match. What does this mean for businesses though?

Body language, which plays such an important role in SASL (along with facial expressions), accounts for at least 50% of our communication. In addition to being able to interact directly with deaf colleagues or clients, staff trained in SASL would be more aware of their non-verbal communication in their spoken language. If nothing else, wouldn't it be great to receive fewer customer complaints about rude staff?

## **Where to sign up for SASL classes**

[Wits Language School offers SASL courses](#) from a beginner to an advanced level. We'll get you started with the alphabet and take you all the way through to fluency. Whether you stop classes after being able to greet a deaf person and ask how they're doing or continue until you can interpret for that person in front of you in the queue at the municipality, you'll be

opening yourself to an exciting, but busy, silent world that has so much to say. Register today for our final intake of 2021:  
11 September – 20 November | [www.witslanguageschool.com](http://www.witslanguageschool.com) | [wls@wits.ac.za](mailto:wls@wits.ac.za) | 011 717 4208.

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