General Interpreting Skill Development:
Improving Use of Topic Shifts / Message Cohesion

Exercises

Sequence of Topic Shifts
View an ASL text to determine where topic shifts/markers occur and create a list of all the behaviors that were used by the speaker to convey a shift in topic (examples: head nods, hands down, RHQ form, specific discourse marker like Now, Next, the third thing, etc.). Create an outline or map of the text that reflects the logical sequence of topics - indicates the main ideas and clusters the supporting details with the corresponding main idea. Watch the text again, specifically stopping to label each of the topic markers. Then go through the text again, and shadow each of the markers used by the signer. Then re-tell the story yourself, placing all the topic markers in the appropriate location. Use as many different types of topic markers as are appropriate to the text. If possible, videotape yourself and analyze the effectiveness of your re-telling in relationship to the original text. Then, voice interpret the text generating spoken English equivalents for each of the topic markers which occur. Tape yourself interpreting the text into spoken English and evaluate your effectiveness. This same exercise can be adjusted to begin with an English text and eventually interpret the text into ASL.

Function of Topic Shifts
Isolate all of the topic markers and/or cohesion markers in a text. Identify the function of each marker (ex: to begin a new thought, to contrast two ideas, to create a prepositional phrase, etc.) and then go through the text and interpret ONLY these markers. Then interpret the text again, integrating all the message along with the topic and cohesion markers. This can be done with both English and ASL texts. The goal of the process is to first heighten your recognition of cohesion-creating behaviors in ASL and English. Then, it allows you to focus on interpreting the behaviors in isolation and then in context. Repeat these steps as many times as necessary and with as many texts as necessary until you feel you are clearly and effectively establishing all the topic shifts and cohesion markers.

Silent Movie
Try using spoken English to interpret a silent movie. Your public library will have a small collection of silent movies that have been put on videotape. You should interpret the movie as if you were interpreting for someone who is blind and unable to see any of the action. Focus on being clear and specific about shifts in scenes, who is doing what, the location of things, the context in which events are taking place. This exercise can be redone several times until you are comfortable that you are adequately conveying the information in a clear and cohesive manner.

Books for the Blind
Try the same exercise as above by using tapes for the blind from your public library. This time, interpret the information into ASL, trying to be clear and cohesive as you indicate shifts in topics, events, etc.

Resources

Free Online Materials

ASL Storytime from the Department of Sign Language and Interpretation at Gallaudet University

- This series includes three volumes, each containing stories with a broad variety of ASL features.
- Available on YouTube.

    - Volume 1: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HLxddLdxbOw
    - Volume 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wAGx5CXgmTU
    - Volume 3: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xqx4wCZoCMU
- **NOTE**: These stories are good for practice of many ASL features so use them with other instructional sheets in addition to this one!

TerpTalks from the National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers (NCIEC)

- This series includes diverse ASL and English texts available for practice interpreting.
- There is no charge for accessing these materials, although you may be required to register to access.
- Available on NCIEC's website: http://www.interpretereducation.org/tim/terptalks/browse/

Purchasable Materials

The following resources may be available for use from your local interpreter education program or through your public library. If the library does not have them, request that they purchase them for community use.

American Sign Language: A Teacher's Resource Text on Grammar and Culture from Sign Media (www.signmedia.com)

- The most comprehensive explanation of ASL grammar currently available. The text is written for those with little or no background in linguistics.
- The companion DVD features a deaf person illustrating each of the more than 300 examples in the text.
- Can be used by an individual or with a group.

Interpreter Practice Materials from Sign Media (www.signmedia.com)

- Set of 33 DVDs includes 12 simultaneous texts, 12 consecutive texts, 7 one-to-one situations, 2 small group, 6 ASL texts and 6 English texts.
- Excellent for individual, study group, or classroom skill development exercises.

The "Green Books" Texts and DVDs from Sign Media (www.signmedia.com)

- Set of 6 one-hour DVDs and five textbooks.
- The videos explain and demonstrate difficult concepts in ASL and offer practice situations to improve your sign language abilities. Several lessons relate to pronouns and prolocatives.
- May be ordered as a complete set or as individual books and DVDs.
- Can be used by an individual or with a group.