

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS  
ABOUT THE  
VIRGINIA QUALITY ASSURANCE SCREENING

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# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE VIRGINIA QUALITY ASSURANCE SCREENING

## **What is the VQAS?**

The Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS) is a diagnostic and proficiency screening instrument designed to assess the knowledge, skills and abilities of interpreters and transliterators who use sign language or Cued Speech to facilitate the communication process between persons who are hearing and persons who are deaf or hard of hearing.

## **Who administers the VQAS?**

The Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) administers the VQAS in accordance with "[Regulations Governing Interpreter Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing](#)". VDDHH also coordinates interpreting services for needs in the judicial setting throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia and disseminates a "Directory of Qualified Interpreters for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing".

## **What is a Qualified Interpreter?**

Section 63.1-85.4:1 of the Code of Virginia states: "A qualified interpreter shall be one who holds at least one of the following credentials:

1. Certification from any national organization whose certification process has been recognized by the Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing; or
2. A current screening level awarded by the Virginia Quality Assurance Screening Program of the Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing; or
3. A screening level or recognized evaluation from any other state when 1) the credentials meet the minimum requirements of Virginia Quality Assurance Screening and 2) the credentials are valid and current in the state issued.

## **How does certification compare with screening?**

Sign language interpreters throughout the country are often required to demonstrate interpreting skills by participating in a formal or informal certification or screening process. The certification process is generally a proficiency evaluation wherein minimum standards have been established to determine a specific level of competency. Interpreters may become certified on the national or state level, although only a few states offer certification at this time.

The screening process is generally a diagnostic assessment which may incorporate a proficiency assessment as one component. Numerous states and private organizations offer screenings to identify interpreter competencies and determine appropriate placement situations. The VQAS is a screening process, not a certification process.

## What are the components assessed by the VQAS?

### Code of Ethics - Written Assessment

A set of at least fifty (50) questions are presented in multiple choice format to determine the candidate's knowledge of and ability to apply the tenets of the RID Code of Ethics (not the Code of Professional Conduct) to working situations. Practical, real-life situations, professional terminology, trends in the profession and cultural applications are incorporated.

### Performance Assessment - Transliterating and Interpreting

Given six videotaped scenarios (each approximately five-minutes long), the candidate who uses sign language is assessed on ability to transliterate in three situations and interpret in three situations. (Cued Speech candidates participate in transliterating only.) Those situations are:

- A. **Voice to Sign Transliterating** (spoken English to English-like sign language)  
Example: A hearing person speaking to a Lion's Club meeting.
- B. **Sign to Voice and Voice to Sign (Interactive) Transliterating** (interpret for a deaf and a hearing person engaged in a conversation)  
Example: A deaf person in a job interview.
- C. **Sign to Voice Transliterating** (Signed English to spoken English)  
Example: A deaf person making a presentation to a hearing Boy Scout group.
- D. **Voice to Sign Interpreting** (spoken English to ASL)  
Example: A hearing person explaining the ADA to a group of deaf teenagers in class.
- E. **Voice to Sign and Sign to Voice (Interactive) Interpreting** (interpret for a deaf and a hearing person engaged in a conversation)  
Example: A deaf person (using ASL) interviews with a newspaper reporter about witnessing a traffic accident.
- F. **Sign to Voice Interpreting** (ASL to spoken English)  
Example: A deaf superintendent makes a presentation to the school faculty.

### How does Interpreting differ from Transliterating?

To "transliterate" means to convey the messages without personal interjection between two or more parties using different forms of the same language, such as written or spoken English and a manually-coded form of English. According to [Sofinski \(2006\)](#)

Sign language transliteration is a distinct type of transliteration that is defined as employing contact signing as a base. Products of sign language transliteration share numerous ASL and English-influenced linguistic features in common, including the following three clear and readily identifiable English-influenced features: English-like mouthing of (primarily) phrases; ASL and English-like syntactic restructuring of the source message; and, increased use of phonological initialization of ASL lexical items when such is necessary to convey a specific English word.

To "interpret" means to convey messages without personal interjection between two or more parties using two languages, such as a form of English to American Sign Language (ASL).

## **How is the assessment structured?**

The VQAS is administered in two phases: The Written Assessment and the Performance Assessment. The candidate must demonstrate 90% competency on the Written Assessment to become eligible to participate in the Performance Assessment.

## **How is the written assessment scored?**

VDDHH personnel score written assessments at the time the assessment is administered. A second staff person verifies the scores of each assessment to ensure accuracy of the results reported. The percentage of correct responses is computed, and questions answered incorrectly are correlated to the tenets of the Code of Ethics. Candidates are awarded an overall percentage score, and an analysis of the tenets needing to be addressed to further enhance professional development is provided to each candidate.

## **Why is such a high score required on the Written Assessment?**

An interpreter who has been awarded a screening level is considered to be a professional capable of performing in an ethical manner. Regardless of skill level, the interpreter is expected to abide by guidelines established by the RID Code of Ethics at all times. By demonstrating 90% competency on this portion of the assessment, an interpreter has demonstrated a thorough working knowledge of professional ethics and assumes full responsibility for interpreting situations.

## **What kind of skills will be assessed during the rating of the Performance Assessment?**

In addition to demonstrating an interpreter's ability to perform in the role of the interpreter and convey the content and meaning of the total message, the raters also identify specific competencies in the candidate's ability to sign, voice and function as a professional interpreter. Some of the competencies that are assessed include:

1. Voice to Sign Skills (spoken English to Sign Language)
  - A. Clarity of signs
  - B. Accuracy of message
  - C. Accuracy and appropriateness of fingerspelling
  - D. Vocabulary
  - E. Consistency of sign system when transliterating
  - F. Appropriateness of mouth movements when transliterating
  - G. Spatial orientation when interpreting
  - H. Use of ASL structure and syntax when interpreting
2. Sign to Voice Skills (Sign language to spoken English)
  - A. Clarity of speech
  - B. Appropriateness of intonation and inflection
  - C. English vocabulary and grammar
  - D. Appropriate use of processing time
  - E. Accuracy of the message
  - F. Ability to incorporate fingerspelled words
  - G. Smoothness of presentation
  - H. Ability to convey the speaker's affect

3. Both Voice to Sign and Sign to Voice (Interactive) Skills (Simulated interpreting/transliterating situations):
  - A Expressive capabilities
  - B. Receptive capabilities
  - C. Ability to recover smoothly from errors
  - D. Ability to maintain a comfortable flow
  - E. Accuracy of message

During the Performance Assessment, the candidate interprets and transliterates from recorded source material to demonstrate voice to sign and sign to voice skills while being videotaped. Each performance is rated by at least two raters who are deaf, two nationally certified interpreters and two trained hearing people. Videotaped segments for the Performance Assessment are representative of deaf and hearing people in actual situations. The monologues are of people giving presentations to clubs, organizations or meetings. The dialogues for the interactive segments are actual or simulated dyads based on real-life scenarios, such as a doctor's office visit, a parent-teacher conference, or a job interview.

### **What criteria is used for awarding a screening level?**

In accordance with the "Regulations governing Interpreter Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing", VDDHH awards a Level I, II, III or IV to any candidate who demonstrates the minimum competencies required to perform either interpreting or transliterating services. The percentages required to achieve a screening level are:

90% competency on the Written Assessment

To maximize professionalism among working interpreters, this must be demonstrated before a candidate is eligible to take the Performance Assessment, and

50% - 100% on the Performance Assessment (Transliterating or Interpreting)

A screening level may be awarded for either skill area (Transliterating or Interpreting) depending upon the competencies demonstrated. Therefore, it is possible that a candidate could be awarded one level for interpreting and another level for transliterating. To demonstrate proficiency in the ability to convey the overall content and meaning of the message, a screening level is awarded based on the minimum standard achieved in the *lowest* of the competencies assessed (expressive, interactive, or receptive). The standards are:

Level I: 50%  
Level II: 65%  
Level III: 80%  
Level IV: 95%

### **How is the Performance Assessment scored?**

The proficiency score (level awarded) is based upon the information actually conveyed during the interpreting and transliterating performances. Each rater identifies key components of the message that are accurately conveyed. They also note information deleted from the message, inappropriately added to the message, or inaccurately conveyed.

Each rater assigns a percentage score to each of the three transliterating categories and to each of the three interpreting categories (i.e., voice to sign, interactive and sign to voice). The score sheets are submitted to VDDHH for final tabulation. VDDHH is responsible for tabulating the scores and awarding the appropriate screening level. The candidate must demonstrate at least the minimum competency for each performance category to qualify for a screening level. Candidates receive final screening levels corresponding with the segment of transliterating and interpreting on which they scored the lowest.

### **Example:**

Candidate A takes the Performance Assessment and receives the following scores from each rater:

| <b>Transliterating Assessment</b> |                      |                    |   |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|---|
| <u>Rater</u>                      | <u>Voice to Sign</u> | <u>Interactive</u> | <u>Sign to Voice</u>                    |
| 1                                 | 98%                  | 90%                | 84%                                     |
| 2                                 | 90%                  | 94%                | 89%                                     |
| 3                                 | <u>90%</u>           | <u>85%</u>         | <u>80%</u>                              |
| Rater 1-3 average:                | 95%                  | 90%                | <b>84%* = Level III Transliterating</b> |

| <b>Interpreting Assessment</b> |                      |                    |                                     |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <u>Rater</u>                   | <u>Voice to Sign</u> | <u>Interactive</u> | <u>Sign to Voice</u>                |
| 1                              | 80%                  | 76%                | 70%                                 |
| 2                              | 84%                  | 83%                | 72%                                 |
| 3                              | <u>85%</u>           | <u>81%</u>         | <u>76%</u>                          |
| Rater 1-3 average:             | 83%                  | 80%                | <b>72%* = Level II Interpreting</b> |

This candidate would receive a final result of: **Level III Transliterating, Level II Interpreting**

As part of the Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS), VDDHH provides candidates with a *diagnostic assessment feedback report*. The purpose of the diagnostic assessment report is to identify patterns in the interpreter work and will provide all candidates with recommendations for increasing/ improving their skills. The ultimate goal is to improve the overall quality of interpreting services provided to deaf and hard-of-hearing people in the state of Virginia.

The process of scoring/assigning levels and the diagnostic assessment process are separate and distinct from one another. The results of the VQAS scoring are not considered when the diagnostic assessment work is done. *The results of the diagnostic assessment are not considered as part of the VQAS scoring process.* In addition to the benefit you will receive from a Diagnostic report, the cumulative results of diagnostic assessment data will also provide direction to the Department regarding training needs of the general interpreting workforce.

### **When will I receive the results of my assessment?**

In accordance with the "Regulations Governing Interpreter Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing", candidates will be notified of the status of their results within 90 working days from the date the assessment was conducted.

## How long will the results be valid?

The results of any part of the assessment remain valid for three years.

## What happens if I do not receive a screening level?

There are many reasons why a candidate may not demonstrate the minimum competencies required to achieve a screening level on the day the Performance assessment is taken. VDDHH recommends following the suggestions offered by the raters to enhance technical skills and professional demeanor before re-applying to take the Performance Assessment.

Candidates who proceed to take the Performance Assessment have successfully completed the Written Assessment and are therefore considered to be knowledgeable about the profession. The second step, to demonstrate interpreting and transliterating competence in front of a video camera, is often a new experience which requires not only skill, but composure. Candidates have up to three years from the date the Written Assessment was completed successfully to re-take the Performance Assessment and should do so when they feel they have improved sufficiently to demonstrate the minimum competencies to achieve a screening level.

## What happens if I do receive a VQAS screening level?

Candidates who receive a screening level are qualified to perform interpreting services commensurate with their VQAS level, and are given information about contracting with VDDHH to provide such services in the Commonwealth, as well as the opportunity to be listed in the state-wide "Directory of Qualified Interpreters for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing." Screening levels will be recognized for three (3) years from the date the level was awarded. VDDHH provides the following guidance for what types of assignments may be appropriate for screened interpreters:

### **LEVEL IV** – Recommended for situations such as:

- **Medical** – Pre-natal examinations, routine medical appointments, emergency room, NOT LIFE THREATENING OR SURGICAL SITUATIONS
- **Employment** – Job interview, performance evaluation, technical and high-level staff meetings, on-the-job training (computer/technical)
- **Government** – Public hearings board meetings
- **Education** – GED, post-graduate college (master/PH.D.), IEP meeting, PTA, academic adult education
- **Support Group** – All, including 12-step programs

### **LEVEL III** – Recommended for situations such as:

- **Medical** – Routine eye and dental, childbirth classes
- **Social Services** – Eligibility, Welfare
- **Employment** – Non-technical, staff meetings
- **Education** – Pre-K through 12, undergraduate college (bachelor)

### **LEVEL II** – Recommended for situations such as:

- **Education** – Non-academic adult education
- **Employment** – On-the-job training (non-computer, non-technical)
- **Recreation** – Library, parks and recreation, YMCA, arts and crafts

## **What if I want to contest the VQAS screening level I received?**

According to Administrative Code 22VAC20-30-130, if a candidate desires to contest the results of any part of a screening, the candidate must file an appeal with the director within 30 calendar days of the date of the decision. The director, or designee, shall provide for an informal conference with the candidate within 30 working days. The only remedy which the director may award for the Code of Ethics (Part I) is the opportunity to retake the screening at the next scheduled date. The only remedy which the director may award for the performance component (Part II) is the opportunity to be reassessed by additional panelists/raters within 90 working days.

## **What do the levels mean in terms of what I am capable of doing?**

Although it is not possible to list all of the types of situations a qualified interpreter might be asked to perform, some general guidelines should be considered before accepting an assignment.

1. The types of skills demonstrated should always be compatible with the communication modality of the consumer(s). For example, a Level II Transliterators should not interpret for a consumer who depends on ASL.
2. The interpreter should recognize his/her own skills and abilities with regard to demonstrated skill level and realm of experience. For example, a Level II Interpreter/Transliterators should not interpret in court situations.

Additional information listing the types of assignments most appropriate to the skill level as demonstrated on the day assessed is given to candidates who receive a screening level and is provided in the "Directory".

## **Is the VQAS important for educational interpreters?**

Yes. "Regulations governing Special Education Programs for Handicapped Children and Youth in Virginia" became effective July 1, 1990. In response to a federal mandate requiring personnel serving students with special needs to obtain the highest minimum standard available in the state. Additional information about trends and issues in educational interpreting is available by contacting the Interpreter Programs Manager at VDDHH or by contacting the Education Specialist for Sensory Disabilities, Office of Special Education Instructional Services, Department of Special Education and Student Services at the Virginia Department of Education at 804-371-4059.

## **What about Cued Speech Transliterators?**

Cued Speech Transliterators may be evaluated by the National Cued Speech Association or screened by VDDHH using Written and Performance Assessments designed specifically to assess cueing knowledge and skills. The Cued Speech Transliterating Performance expressive and receptive abilities using cued speech hand shapes and mouth movements. You may contact VDDHH for additional information regarding the Cued Speech assessment.

## **Is there a fee to take the VQAS?**

There is a registration fee of \$20.00 for the Written Assessment (note, as of January 1, 2023, the fee will increase to \$30) and \$80.00 for the Performance Assessment (note, as of January 1, 2023, the fee will increase to \$100). Candidates must register and pay the fee prior to taking the Assessment. All registration



fees must be paid online through the online registration system. Cash and checks are not accepted.  
Registration fees are non-refundable.

### **How are the assessments scheduled?**

VDDHH schedules Written and Performance Assessments monthly in the Richmond office and upon request at various locations throughout the state. The sites selected are determined by the number of candidates waiting to take the screening in a particular area and the availability of a suitable facility. When the number of candidates that can be served is limited, VDDHH assigns candidates in the order the registration forms are received. Candidates are strongly encouraged to wait at least six months before re-taking any part of the assessment.

### **What is the best way to prepare for the VQAS?**

Interacting with the deaf community and other interpreting professionals is generally the best way to gain the knowledge and experience necessary to become a proficient interpreter. However, reading, attending professional seminars, and viewing videotapes can also be beneficial. The following suggestions are offered to help you become better prepared to take the VQAS:

1. Know and be able to apply the principles of the Registry of Interpreter for the Deaf Code of Ethics.
2. Join national, state and local professional organizations, such as RID, Virginia Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (VRID), or Virginia Association of the Deaf (VAD).
3. Attend workshops and other training seminars for interpreters.
4. Interact with members of the deaf community.
5. Read current information in the field and practice with a variety of video resources.
6. Strive to become more fluent in the English language, by taking college courses, reading current literature, the daily newspaper, and working to develop your vocabulary.

Note: RID offers a study guide to prepare for the national evaluation which may also be beneficial when preparing to take the VQAS.

### **How do I apply to take the Written or Performance Assessment?**

Candidates apply for an assessment by registering online via the registration link on the VDDHH website. Candidates may register for the Performance Assessment once a score of at least ninety (90) percent is achieved on the Written Assessment.

### **Who should I contact if I have any other questions?**

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