

# Clothing to Contrast Skin Tone

Visually it is easier to watch someone use sign language if they wear clothing to contrast skin tone. Since individuals may have different skin tones, they will need to think specifically about what colors will contrast well with their complexion.

This may mean it is not appropriate for them to wear black.

## What NOT to Wear

There are some general rules of thumb that apply to all sign language interpreters and their clothing on the job. Patterns, strips, or flowery prints are a no-no as they lead to visual distraction. Deaf and hard of hearing consumers read language with their eyes. Imagine having to stare at the following picture for hours on end while processing linguistic information produced in front of this background.

Do your eyes hurt after just one (1) minute?

Also, keep in mind, jewelry, tattoos, or other visually distracting clothing items may be prohibited based on their size and location on the body.

## What to Wear

The two general skin tones are dark and light. Sign language interpreters who are White wear dark clothing. This may include black, navy blue, or olive green. As sign language is used around the face and chest area, it is vital to wear solid color tops. There is more flexibility with pants or skirts since they are not typically in the signing space.

One of our interpreters contributed her thoughts on what to wear as someone who is African America/Black.

“African Americans/Blacks skin color display a variety of hues. Complexions vary from light to dark brown. In casual settings, you may hear colloquialisms which describe African Americans/Blacks as yellow, light-skinned, brown-skinned, black, etc. I think this is worth noting because it dictates what a contrasting color is. With that stated, it makes sense that the old standard of ‘interpreters should wear black’ has been revised to more inclusive language such as the recommendation that ‘interpreters wear a contrasting color.’

“This recommendation considers the varying complexions of interpreters of color. It does not, however, give us a ‘pass’ to become ‘creative’ in what is professional versus what is comfortable or expedient. If all else fails, follow the advice of your professors, and carry a jacket in your car or some kind of cover that will reduce the possibility of eye-fatigue for your consumer. If you do not have appropriate apparel, you may need to inform the customer or agency you are not available to fill the assignment.” (Angela Hernton)