

# Introduction to VRS Interpreting Curriculum

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## Overview of the Curriculum

- The purpose of the *Introduction to VRS Interpreting Curriculum* is to expose interpreting students to the environment of the Video Relay Service (VRS) and Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) settings, including the inherent challenges and interpreting skills required in this type of work. The intent is to provide students with sufficient information and practical experience to be able to make an informed decision about future work in these settings. It is **not** designed as a training course for working in VRS or VRI settings, nor is it intended to imply to students that they will be prepared to work in these settings upon completion of the course.
- The curriculum was designed with flexibility in mind. It can be used in one-, two-, or three-credit hour courses that meet for a variety of time blocks, and a variety of number of days per week. Lessons may also be used independently of the entire curriculum, although certain scaffolding components will be lost if used in this fashion. There is enough material in each lesson to satisfy a three credit hour course. Instructors teaching 1 or 2 credit hour courses will have to make decisions about which activities to eliminate based on their time constraints.

The entire *Introduction to VRS Interpreting Curriculum* is in electronic format, accessible at the *Introduction to VRS Interpreting Curriculum* website ([www.vrsii.com/vrscurriculum](http://www.vrsii.com/vrscurriculum)). The curriculum website contains the full curriculum in one document, which contains curriculum information and lesson plans with references to materials needed for each lesson. Downloadable lesson plans and all supporting documents, slideshow presentations, and required readings are available on the website in lesson folders.

Each lesson folder contains:

- Lesson plan
  - Slideshow presentation(s)
  - Materials needed (activity descriptions, quizzes, study guides, video links, etc.)
  - Readings for that lesson
  - Folder with readings for the next lesson
- When you access materials on the website, you will be asked to complete a form with your name and contact information. This information is for usage data, and will be used to send occasional emails asking for your experience with and feedback on the effectiveness of the curriculum. It will also be used to notify users of updates to the curriculum.

## Acceptable use of the curriculum and videos

- Instructors using the *Introduction to VRS Interpreting Curriculum* are granted permission to download and use all materials for the purpose of teaching students about interpreting in VRS and VRI settings. It may not be used for individual profit-generating activities or to train

permission to modify PowerPoint presentation slides as needed; however, all modified presentations should include a notation that they were modified from the original versions provided with the curriculum.

- The VRS video vignettes included with the *Introduction to VRS Interpreting Curriculum* are designed for use within the context of the curriculum, as suggested in the lesson plans or as the instructor sees fit. Vignettes are designed to be used for student practice during class time, although they may be assigned as homework in some cases. Please share the actual links or other access to the videos vignettes with discretion, and only when necessary with the purpose of preserving the instructional value of the videos within the *Introduction to VRS Interpreting Curriculum*.

## Instructor Qualifications

- Ideally, the instructor of this course will be an experienced video relay interpreter and a trained, experienced instructor. In some cases, where the instructor is not an experienced VRS interpreter, it is suggested that at the very minimum, the instructor obtain permission from a local VRS call center manager or director to spend two to three hours observing VRS calls. In cases where instructors lack experience in specific lesson topics, it is recommended that they invite guest speakers with expertise in that area to supplement or provide the lesson.

## Scaffolding to Real-World Experience

- Research has demonstrated that “meaningful learning will only take place if it is embedded in the social and physical context within which it will be used” (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989) and that students have a difficult time transferring knowledge learned in a classroom to application in the real world (Newman, Griffin, & Cole, 1984). The curriculum is based on a constructivist, student-centered approach to learning, with value placed on experiential learning.
- The importance of student experience in a real-world context can be found in the literature on interpreter education. For example, experiential learning theory has been used as a framework for the application of a structured approach to observations in real-world contexts where interpreting takes place (Dean & Pollard, 2012). It is clear to interpreter educators that learning takes place in a social context (Bown, 2013), and authentic context is the basis for many activities (Dean & Pollard, 2011, 2012; Major et al., 2012; Swabey & Craft Faber, 2012) reported in the literature. Context is also acknowledged as an important part of mentoring and reflective practice (Hetherington, 2012; Pearce & Napier, 2010).
- The *Introduction to VRS Interpreting Curriculum* is designed to scaffold student learning to increasingly more experience with real and simulated VRS contexts with live interlocutors. Students engage in learning of content, then move to observations of interpreters at work, conversations with interpreters and Deaf community members about VRS work and experiences, engage in VRS practice with videos, practice with other students, and finally, practice mock VRS calls with live participants.

## Planning Mock VRS Calls

- Mock VRS calls are interpreted events arranged by the instructor of the course with the goal of enabling students to interpret VRS calls in a safe environment that feels like a real-world VRS call experience, complete with the demands they may encounter in a real call and the ability to employ similar controls. The factors to consider when arranging mock VRS calls are selection of actors, contexts provided to the actors, ensuring a variety of actors, and consideration of technology.
- Selection of actors and call contexts: The instructor arranges for Deaf and hearing actors to play callers involved in each mock call. Each actor in a call scenario should be given the context, their role and the goal for each call. For example, in a doctor's office call, the Deaf actor may play the role of patient, with the goal of making an appointment for a sick child. This actor's goal may be to get an appointment as soon as possible. The hearing actor may play the role of the office receptionist, who does not have many appointments available. The more details you can provide to the actors, such as encouraging the receptionist to ask details about the child's illness, providing the Deaf caller with the type of illness, etc., the more successful the experience will be. Additionally, actors should be given some other key ingredients to include during their conversation that address the objectives of the lesson for which the mock interpreting experience is designed to address. For example, if a lesson objective is to "practice & implement customer service/call management strategies," key points for the actors may be directed to intentionally overlap their conversations, or to express frustration. In any case, actors should be directed to continue the call for at least 10 or 15 minutes, talking about anything that may be relevant to the context. For several lessons in this curriculum, scenarios for actors are already included.
- Variety of actors: Whenever possible, arrange for a variety of actors, especially of Deaf actors. Actors should vary by gender, age, race, educational background, language use, etc. The more variety that students encounter, the better prepared they are to face a variety of consumers in the real world of interpreting.
- Choices for technology: To simulate mock calls, the hearing caller should connect to the student interpreter on the telephone, and the Deaf caller should connect to the student interpreter through some type of videoconferencing technology, using a tablet, computer or videophone. Ideally, all participants in the call should be in separate rooms, and can even connect remotely. It is recommended that students use a headset and an actual telephone to create as much authenticity as possible. This allows students to practice typing in numbers on a keypad, as is often required during VRS calls.

## Course Description

This course is a knowledge/skills-based course that examines interpreting via distance technology, including video relay and video remote interpreting. The purpose of the course is to present factors that influence interpreting competence via distance technology. Lessons include both information and skill building activities to increase competence in video interpreting. In this course, students will learn federal regulations related to the VRS industry, conversation management techniques in both ASL and English, and hearing phone norms versus Deaf videophone norms. In addition, other topics and activities will include interpreting for IVR systems (phone trees) and automated messages, ad hoc teaming, and how to apply the

demand control schema to the VRS/VRI setting.

## Course Goals

When the entire curriculum is used for a course, at the end of the course students will be able to:

- 1.0 Describe the impact, costs and benefits that video relay interpreting has had on the interpreting field and the Deaf community since its inception.
- 2.0 Explain the current FCC regulations and the impact of the FCC on video relay interpreting.
- 3.0 Distinguish video relay interpreting from community interpreting.
- 4.0 Formulate mock interpretations using simulated video relay technology and telephone systems.
- 5.0 Describe the range of interactions and call types that can occur in the video relay environment.
- 6.0 Demonstrate effective call management skills during mock video relay calls.
- 7.0 Discuss self-care strategies specific to the demands of video relay interpreting.

## Course Goals and Student Learning Objectives

All course goals are addressed in one or more lessons. To support these overarching course goals, more specific student learning objectives have been identified for each lesson. The course objectives that are addressed in each lesson, along with the associated student learning objectives, are listed in the table below.

Topic		Course Goals	Student Learning Objectives In each of the following lessons, students
1	Introduction to the course and to VRS	<p><b>1.0 Describe the impact, costs and benefits that video relay interpreting has had the interpreting field and the Deaf community since its inception.</b></p> <p><b>2.0 Explain the current FCC regulations and the impact of the FCC on video relay interpreting.</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Describe the history of the VRS field.</li> <li>2. Describe the impact VRS has had on the Deaf community.</li> <li>3. Describe the impact VRS has had on the interpreting community.</li> </ol>
2	Continue Introduction to VRS	<p><b>1.0 Describe the impact, costs and benefits that video relay interpreting has had the interpreting field and the Deaf community since its inception.</b></p> <p><b>2.0 Explain the current FCC regulations and the impact of the FCC on video relay interpreting.</b></p> <p><b>3.0 Distinguish video relay interpreting from community interpreting.</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Describe the various competencies required of VRS interpreters.</li> <li>2. Describe how those competencies were developed for VRS interpreters.</li> <li>3. Describe different approaches to improve those competencies within their scope of interpreting work.</li> </ol>

3	Community/ VRI/VRS Interpreting	<b>3.0 Distinguish video relay interpreting from community interpreting</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Compare and contrast the role and function of the interpreter in a community setting and a VRS/VRI setting.</li> <li>2. Describe the working conditions in the VRS industry.</li> <li>3. Explain the cultural competencies required of VRS interpreters.</li> <li>4. Discuss the preparation required for VRS interpreting work.</li> </ol>
4	FCC	<b>2.0 Explain the current FCC regulations and the impact of the FCC on video relay interpreting.</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Discuss the current FCC regulations for VRS companies.</li> <li>2. Explain the impacts of the FCC regulations on VRS companies.</li> <li>3. Describe the history of FCC rates and rate cuts and how these changes have impacted VRS companies.</li> </ol>
5	VRS Center Observations	<b>3.0 Distinguish video relay interpreting from community interpreting</b> <b>5.0 Describe the range of interactions and call types that can occur in the video relay environment.</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Describe the working conditions of VRS interpreters by providing specific examples.</li> <li>2. Explain the cultural competencies required of VRS interpreters by providing specific examples.</li> <li>3. Discuss the types of callers who use VRS.</li> <li>4. Discuss the types of calls that are made through VRS interpreters.</li> <li>5. Discuss the potential demands that may arise from different callers and call types.</li> <li>6. Discuss the controls available to interpreters during VRS calls.</li> </ol>
6	Call & Caller Diversity	<b>5.0 Describe the range of interactions and call types that can occur in the video relay environment.</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Explain the variety of call types they may encounter when working as an interpreter in the VRS setting.</li> <li>2. Discuss various approaches to interpreting when encountering challenging customers and call topics.</li> <li>3. Demonstrate an understanding of turn taking in the VRS setting.</li> <li>4. Describe strategies that can be used to facilitate turn taking in the VRS setting.</li> </ol>
7	Quiz and Video Practice	<b>1.0 Describe the impact, costs and benefits that video relay interpreting has had the interpreting field and the Deaf community since its inception.</b> <b>2.0 Explain the current FCC regulations and the impact of the FCC on video relay interpreting.</b> <b>3.0 Distinguish video relay interpreting from community interpreting</b> <b>4.0 Formulate mock interpretations using simulated video relay technology and telephone systems.</b> <b>5.0 Describe the range of interactions and call types that can occur in the video relay environment.</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Formulate interpretations of a variety of call types that are common in VRS interpreting.</li> <li>2. Apply skills and strategies observed during VRS center observations to their own interpretations of VRS video vignettes.</li> </ol>

8	IVR (Phone Trees & Automated Messages)	<p><b>4.0 Formulate mock interpretations using simulated video relay technology and telephone systems.</b></p> <p><b>5.0 Describe the range of interactions and call types that can occur in the video relay environment.</b></p> <p><b>6.0 Demonstrate effective call management skills during mock video relay calls.</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify various types of IVR systems and canned recordings.</li> <li>2. Identify strategies used to interpret IVR systems and canned recordings.</li> <li>3. Practice and implement strategies for navigating VRS calls that include IVR systems.</li> </ol>
9	VRS Interpreter Panel	<p><b>3.0 Distinguish video relay interpreting from community interpreting</b></p> <p><b>5.0 Describe the range of interactions and call types that can occur in the video relay environment.</b></p> <p><b>7.0 Discuss self-care strategies specific to the demands of video relay interpreting.</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Explain how the diverse range of VRS consumers can create demands for VRS interpreters.</li> <li>2. Discuss varying call types (including register) that VRS interpreters may encounter.</li> <li>3. Identify how interpreters use cultural mediation to navigate through VRS calls.</li> <li>4. Discuss the potential control options interpreters use in order to meet the demands of various call and caller types.</li> <li>5. Discuss a variety of customer service approaches that can create positive experiences for Deaf VRS consumers.</li> <li>6. Describe stress and burnout and potential strategies to help alleviate them.</li> </ol>
10	Teaming and Video Practice	<p><b>5.0 Describe the range of interactions and call types that can occur in the video relay environment.</b></p> <p><b>6.0 Demonstrate effective call management skills during mock video relay calls.</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Explain the role and function of team interpreting in VRS settings.</li> <li>2. Discuss the characteristics of an effective interpreting team.</li> <li>3. Discuss further how these characteristics impact the teaming experience in a VRS environment.</li> <li>4. Describe the typical procedures used when team interpreting a VRS call.</li> <li>5. Identify what situations may cause VRS interpreters to request a team interpreter.</li> <li>6. Discuss the potential control options interpreters use in order to meet the demands of various call and caller types while working with a team interpreter.</li> <li>7. Explain the purpose of requesting and working with a team interpreter to interpret a VRS call.</li> <li>8. Discuss the impacts of team interpreting to both VRS providers and VRS users.</li> </ol>
11	Call Management	<p><b>4.0 Formulate mock interpretations using simulated video relay technology and telephone systems.</b></p> <p><b>5.0 Describe the range of interactions and call types that can occur in the video relay environment.</b></p> <p><b>6.0 Demonstrate effective call management skills during mock video relay calls.</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Define customer service.</li> <li>2. Describe good and bad customer service.</li> <li>3. Identify challenges relating to call management.</li> <li>4. Identify strategies to meet the challenges of call management and turn taking.</li> <li>5. Practice and implement customer service and call management strategies during mock VRS calls.</li> </ol>

12	VRS Consumer Panel	<p><b>1.0 Describe the impact, costs and benefits that video relay interpreting has had the interpreting field and the Deaf community since its inception.</b></p> <p><b>5.0 Describe the range of interactions and call types that can occur in the video relay environment.</b></p> <p><b>6.0 Demonstrate effective call management skills during mock video relay calls.</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Discuss the history of VRS as it pertains to the Deaf consumer’s experience with new technology.</li> <li>2. Explain how the diverse range of VRS consumers can create demands for VRS interpreters.</li> <li>3. Discuss varying call types (including register) of VRS consumers.</li> <li>4. Identify potential frustrations for Deaf VRS consumers when cultural barriers emerge during VRS calls.</li> <li>5. Discuss a variety of customer service approaches that can create positive experiences for Deaf VRS consumers.</li> </ol>
13	VRI Introduction	<p><b>4.0 Formulate mock interpretations using simulated video relay technology and telephone systems.</b></p> <p><b>5.0 Describe the range of interactions and call types that can occur in the video relay environment.</b></p> <p><b>6.0 Demonstrate effective call management skills during mock video relay calls.</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Define video remote interpreting.</li> <li>2. Discuss where and how VRI is used.</li> <li>3. Discuss current the perceptions of and research on VRI</li> <li>4. Interpret a mock VRI call.</li> <li>5. Describe how interpreting through VRI technology impacts the interpreting process.</li> <li>6. Discuss the demands and controls of interpreting remotely.</li> <li>7. Further discuss how they navigated through those demands to make the mock VRI call successful.</li> <li>8. Demonstrate effective soft skills while interpreting mock VRI calls.</li> <li>9. Identify situations that may require a team interpreter during VRI calls.</li> </ol>
14	VRI Practice	<p><b>4.0 Formulate mock interpretations using simulated video relay technology and telephone systems.</b></p> <p><b>5.0 Describe the range of interactions and call types that can occur in the video relay environment.</b></p> <p><b>6.0 Demonstrate effective call management skills during mock video relay calls.</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Interpret a mock VRI call.</li> <li>2. Describe how interpreting through VRI technology impacts the interpreting process.</li> <li>3. Discuss the demands and controls of interpreting remotely.</li> <li>4. Further discuss how they navigated through those demands to make the mock VRI call successful.</li> <li>5. Demonstrate effective soft skills while interpreting mock VRI calls.</li> <li>6. Identify situations that may require a team interpreter for VRI calls.</li> </ol>
15	Self-Care Presentations	<p><b>7.0 Discuss self-care strategies specific to the demands of video relay interpreting.</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Define self-care and assess the state of their own self- care.</li> <li>2. Discuss injury as defined by the interpreting field and as defined by western health care system.</li> <li>3. Cite relevant research on self-care.</li> <li>4. Demonstrate proper standing and sitting posture.</li> <li>5. Cite important biomechanical considerations.</li> <li>6. Recognize high and low biomechanical risk tendencies.</li> <li>7. Describe with physical activity guidelines as a strategy for self care.</li> <li>8. Provide suggestions for symptom management.</li> </ol>

## Sample Syllabus

- A sample syllabus for the lessons in this curriculum has been included for your use. It can be downloaded from the Introduction to VRS Interpreting Curriculum website ([www.vrsii.com/vrscurriculum](http://www.vrsii.com/vrscurriculum)) and modified to satisfy the requirements of your particular course and institution.

## Lesson Plans and Activities

- All lesson plans, activity descriptions and other materials needed for each class are available electronically on the Introduction to VRS Interpreting Curriculum website ([www.vrsii.com/vrscurriculum](http://www.vrsii.com/vrscurriculum)). Folders for each lesson are available on the website that include electronic copies of the lesson plan, slideshow presentations, activity descriptions, materials, video links, website links and required readings.

## VRS Vignette Links

- Seventeen practice videos are included with this curriculum to be used for student practice of VRS calls. They represent a variety of callers, topics, quality of video and types of calls, designed to be representative of typical VRS calls. They are incorporated into the curriculum in the beginning and middle lessons, with the goal of moving toward practice with live individuals during the later lessons in the curriculum.
- Some videos have space for the interpreter to introduce the call as an interpreted phone call and some do not. This provides some variety as well as an opportunity to practice an introduction.
- Each video has been suggested as appropriate for a specific lesson, but may be used at other points in the curriculum. See the VRS Vignette chart for characteristics of videos to ensure that appropriate scaffolding of information has occurred before use in any particular lesson.
- There are two ways to access the videos: via YouTube links and Vimeo links. Vimeo links all have the same password: VRSCurriculum. YouTube links are not password protected, so please use these links with discretion. Vimeo links are in the lesson plans. YouTube links can be found in the separate video links document.

## Development of the Curriculum

- The development team for the *Introduction to VRS Interpreting Curriculum* consisted of trained and experienced interpreter educators who also had training and experience in working as VRS interpreters. Upon completion of the curriculum by the development team, the course was piloted for a semester in two separate and distinct institutions, Rochester Institute of Technology/National Technical Institute for the Deaf and Salt Lake Community College.
- Rochester Institute of Technology/National Technical Institute for the Deaf is located in Rochester, New York. One of two pilot courses for the *Introduction to VRS Interpreting*

*Curriculum* was a three-credit hour American Sign Language and Interpreting Education elective course, taken by fourth-year interpreting students in their final semester before graduation. The course was of average size, with nine students, and taught by a full-time lecturer.

- Salt Lake Community College is located in Salt Lake City, Utah. The other pilot course for the *Introduction to VRS Interpreting Curriculum* was a two-credit hour American Sign Language Interpreting elective course, taken by second-year interpreting students in their final semester before graduation. The course was small, with four students, and taught by an adjunct faculty member.

## The Development Team

- **Daniel Maffia** is a full-time lecturer with the department of American Sign Language and English Interpreting Department's Interpreter Education Program at National Technical Institute for the Deaf. He obtained his bachelors degree in American Sign Language/English Interpreting from the National Technical Institute for the Deaf at the Rochester Institute of Technology in 2009. In 2010 he became certified and in 2014 earned his masters in interpreting studies with an emphasis in teaching interpreting from Western Oregon University. Previously Daniel served as a staff interpreter in the Department of Access Services at the Rochester Institute of Technology. Daniel continues interpreting in the video relay, community, and hospital settings. Daniel has shown his commitment to the field by serving on the board of directors for his local RID chapter. Daniel's research interests relate to reflective practice and demand control schema. He continues to present workshops on the above-mentioned topics for interpreters nationally and internationally.
- **Katie Maxwell** is as an adjunct professor at Salt Lake Community College's Interpreter Training Program and a full time VRS interpreter. Katie received bachelor's degrees in both ASL/English Interpreting and Deaf Education from California State University, Fresno. Since graduation, Katie has 11 years of interpreting experience in settings such as: video relay, community, and post-secondary education. In addition to interpreting, she works as a mentor with the VRS Interpreting Institute, serves on the board of The Sego Lily Center for the Abused Deaf and has spent several years as a Student Involvement Committee Chair for her local RID chapter. In 2013, Katie earned her Master's of Education degree from Utah Valley University, focusing on second language learning in adults. When not interpreting, Katie enjoys spending time skiing, hiking, camping, and dancing.
- **Annette Miner** is a faculty member at the VRS Interpreting Institute (VRSII) in Salt Lake City, Utah. She is currently working on her Ph.D. in Interpretation, focusing on pedagogy and research at Gallaudet University. She has a Master's degree in Psychology and an Educational Specialist degree from Western Michigan University. She has been interpreting for 25 years and teaching interpreting for almost 15 years in various types of settings. She served for over 15 years on the Board of the Conference of Interpreter Trainers as President, Regional Representative, and most recently, as Director of Research and Publications. She holds a Certificate of Interpretation and a Certificate of Transliteration from the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, NAD/RID National Interpreter Certification (Master Level) and Professional certification from the American Sign Language Teachers Association.

## Acknowledgments:

- Thanks to Carolyn Ball, Emily Beech, Robyn Dean, Joellen DiGiovanni, Lynn Finton, Wayne Kennedy, Kim Kurz, Connie Spanton-Jex, Teddi von Pingel, and Chris Wakeland without whose support this project would not have been possible.
- Thanks to Clint Behunin, Samond Bishara, Emmalee Christensen, Julio Enriquez, Brooke Grossinger, Suzi Holland, Rebecca Lundberg, Carol MacNicholl, Dan Mathis, Anita Nelson-Julander, Holly Nelson, Rosa Neumayr, Lisa Packer, Cory Packer, Sue Peebler, Lance Pickett, Andrea Scott, Emisha Sill, Steve Swain, Alvaro Trujillo, and Susie Wee, for their involvement in development of the VRS video vignettes.
- Thanks to Michael Bothel, Antonio Goodwin, Kathleen Holcombe, Barbara Mykle-Hotzon, Faith Powell, Gretchen Roman, Sammie Sheppard, Amanda Smith, Leia Sparks, Kellie Stewart and the VRS Curriculum Infusion training participants for their feedback and curriculum contributions.
- Thanks to the Deaf community members, students, and video relay interpreters who were part of our pilot project.

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