

## Life as Ardern's sign-language interpreter

### Level 1 • Pre-intermediate / Intermediate

#### 1 Warmer

Rank these jobs in order from 1 (most stressful) to 5 (least stressful). Give reasons for your choice.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ a. airline pilot
2. \_\_\_\_\_ b. interpreter
3. \_\_\_\_\_ c. firefighter
4. \_\_\_\_\_ d. journalist
5. \_\_\_\_\_ e. taxi-driver

#### 2 Key words

Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text. The paragraph numbers will help you.

sign language

contest

amazing

massacre

interpreter

1. A \_\_\_\_\_ is a competition. (para 1)
2. An \_\_\_\_\_ is someone who translates what a speaker is saying in one language into another language. (para 1)
3. If something is \_\_\_\_\_, it is both surprising and impressive. (para 1)
4. \_\_\_\_\_ is a way of communicating with people who cannot hear, using hand signals instead of words. (para 2)
5. A \_\_\_\_\_ is a situation where a lot of people are killed. (para 3)

bilingual

stuffy

convey

reassuring

mosque

6. If something is \_\_\_\_\_, it makes you feel less worried. (para 4)
7. A \_\_\_\_\_ room is too warm and has an unpleasant smell because there is no fresh air in it. (para 5)
8. A \_\_\_\_\_ person can speak two languages extremely well. (para 6)
9. A \_\_\_\_\_ is a building in which Muslims worship. (para 7)
10. If you \_\_\_\_\_ ideas or feelings, you communicate them indirectly. (para 8)

#### 3 Find the information

Find the following information in the text as quickly as possible.

1. How old is Alan Wendt?
2. What is his job?
3. How often does the New Zealand prime minister hold press conferences?
4. Which four languages does Wendt speak?
5. When did he take his sign-language course?
6. In which New Zealand city was there a terrorist attack on a mosque?

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#### 'Like juggling and doing gym': life as Ardern's sign-language interpreter

Eleanor Ainge Roy

7 June, 2019

- 1 When Alan Wendt was a child, he used to watch the Miss Universe contest with his mother. She liked looking at the dresses, but young Wendt was more interested in the interpreter who translated for the Spanish-speaking women. "I thought it was complete magic, that he could do it so fast for a live TV audience. It was amazing," says Wendt.
- 2 Thirty years later, Wendt, 40, has become a regular on New Zealand television screens as Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's sign-language interpreter – the first ever employed regularly by a New Zealand prime minister.
- 3 Interpreters were occasionally used during natural disasters by previous governments. But Wendt is now on TV every week after Ardern requested that a sign-language interpreter be by her side at her weekly press conferences. He is also with her during other major press conferences, including after the Christchurch massacre.
- 4 Ardern says having Wendt by her side totally changed the atmosphere for her and gave her more confidence when facing a noisy group of journalists. "Press conferences used to be quite a long and lonely experience. Now I have Alan by my side every Monday," says Ardern. "It's great to have him there because his only aim is to make sure as many New Zealanders as possible know what is going on at parliament. And he does it with a smile. I find it really reassuring."
- 5 Wendt says he will never forget his first press conference. A stuffy and overheated room in parliament house. A group of noisy journalists. And the tense dialogue that happens at the prime minister's public meeting with the media every week, which is livestreamed on Facebook and other platforms. "What I remember most is being nervous ... I felt the pressure," says Wendt, who also speaks Samoan and German.
- 6 Wendt grew up in a bilingual home speaking English and Samoan and had no connection to the deaf community before taking a sign-language course at Victoria University 20 years ago.
- 7 Wendt was there when the prime minister delivered her first words after the Christchurch mosque attacks and admits it is sometimes difficult to control his emotions. "The purpose of interpreting is to give access to communication. So you have to do your best to control your own emotions and sensitivities and your own fears."
- 8 Wendt's work has helped him to understand the prime minister. "She is a good speaker. She is speaking about quite complex ideas, but for me at least, it is never in a way that is impossible to convey. And that certainly makes my job easier. The care with which she speaks makes it easier."
- 9 When people are very emotional – such as after Christchurch – Wendt says he uses his face to convey meaning; reflecting Ardern's emotions, and on some days, the emotions of a nation. "With sign language, you generally need to use your face," says Wendt. "But if the prime minister is showing emotion, that's something I don't need to be interpreting because you can see it right there."

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#### 4 Comprehension check

Match the beginnings and endings to make statements about the text.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. When Alan Wendt watched Miss Universe with his mother as a child, ... | a. ... when Wendt is standing beside her at press conferences. |
| 2. He is the first sign-language interpreter to be ...                   | b. ... this makes Wendt's job easier.                          |
| 3. Jacinda Ardern feels more confident ...                               | c. ... forget his first press conference.                      |
| 4. Wendt had no connection to the deaf community ...                     | d. ... he was most interested in the skill of the interpreter. |
| 5. The prime minister speaks carefully, and ...                          | e. ... before he took a sign-language course 20 years ago.     |
| 6. He says he will never ...   | f. ... employed regularly by a New Zealand prime minister.     |

#### 5 Chunks

Rearrange the words to make phrases from the text.

- do best you your have to
- Ardern's prime Jacinda minister sign- interpreter language
- weekly conferences her at press
- lonely and experience a long
- ideas about speaking complex quite
- my easier makes that job

#### 6 Two-word expressions

Match the words in the left-hand column with those in the right-hand column to make expressions from the text.

- |            |               |
|------------|---------------|
| 1. sign    | a. minister   |
| 2. press   | b. ideas      |
| 3. prime   | c. disaster   |
| 4. natural | d. community  |
| 5. deaf    | e. language   |
| 6. complex | f. conference |

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### 7 Word stress

Put these words from the text into two groups depending on their word stress.

complete  
admit

noisy  
control

forget  
pressure

platform  
complex

nervous  
convey

A o o	B o o

### 8 Discussion

- Would you like to be an interpreter? Why? Why not?
- What is the most difficult job in the world?

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#### KEY

##### 1 Key words

1. contest
2. interpreter
3. amazing
4. sign language
5. massacre
6. reassuring
7. stuffy
8. bilingual
9. mosque
10. convey

##### 3 Find the information

1. 40
2. sign-language interpreter
3. every week
4. English, Samoan, German, sign language
5. 20 years ago
6. Christchurch

##### 4 Comprehension check

1. d
2. f
3. a
4. e
5. b
6. c

##### 5 Chunks

1. you have to do your best
2. prime minister Jacinda Ardern's sign-language interpreter
3. at her weekly press conferences
4. a long and lonely experience
5. speaking about quite complex ideas
6. that makes my job easier

##### 6 Two-word expressions

1. e
2. f
3. a
4. c
5. d
6. b

##### 7 Word stress

A 0 0	B 0 0
noisy	complete
platform	forget
nervous	admit
pressure	control
complex	convey