

Disability Campaign.org

Video Relay Service (VRS)



Photo used courtesy Sorenson Communications

Video Relay Service (VRS) is a form of telecommunication relay service that enables a person with hearing disabilities who uses American Sign Language (ASL) to communicate with a voice telephone through video equipment, rather than through typed text. This allows a person who is deaf, hearing or speech impaired to communicate with a hearing person. Through this guide, you will learn the basics about VRS, its benefits and how to find a VRS provider.

How does VRS work?

Let's use an example. Armando is deaf and communicates in ASL, but he wants to have a conversation with his friend who is not deaf. Using a webcam on his computer, Armando connects with his VRS provider to contact a qualified sign language interpreter. The interpreter then communicates with Armando through sign language and places a telephone call to Armando's friend. Through the video link, the interpreter relays the conversation back and forth between Armando and his friend — using ASL to communicate with Armando and voice to communicate with the friend. No typing or text is involved, and Armando and his friend are able to communicate in their preferred language.

Equipment Needed

- Internet service
- Video conferencing equipment (e.g. webcam) or a videophone (e.g. Smartphone with built-in front-facing camera)
- Additional equipment or programs vary by provider



Image: BestPrepaid.org

Benefits of VRS

- VRS is free to the caller
- VRS allows the person who is comfortable with ASL to communicate using ASL
- Because VRS uses sign language, users with hearing disabilities are also able to express themselves through body language and facial expressions
- The VRS conversation is able to flow back and forth between the two parties, just like a telephone conversation between two hearing persons. You can interrupt each other and you don't have to wait to take turns communicating with the interpreter.
- VRS is offered to ASL users and hearing persons who speak either English or Spanish

Selecting your VRS Provider

To get started with VRS, you must choose a VRS company as your "default" provider. The default VRS provider will assign you a local 10-digit number, provide you with enhanced 911 (E911) service and offer you special features.

Even though you will have a default provider, you can choose from any of the several VRS providers when making a VRS call. All providers must offer service 24 hours a day, seven days a week. These calls are free to the caller; providers are compensated for their costs from government funds (through the Federal Communications Commission), meaning providers cannot offer you financial incentives to use their services.

The FCC has compiled a list of telecommunication relay service providers, including those that offer VRS. Visit <https://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/trs-providers> for the up-to-date list.

For more information about Video Relay Services, visit the Federal Communication's Commissions guide on VRS at <https://www.fcc.gov/guides/video-relay-services>.

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P.O. Box 3333, Agoura Hills, CA 91376

www.joniandfriends.org