

Video Relay Services

Video Relay Service is a form of Telecommunications Relay Service that enables persons with hearing disabilities who use American Sign Language to communicate with voice telephone users through video equipment, rather than through typed text. Video equipment links the VRS user with a TRS operator – called a communications assistant, or CA – so that the VRS user and the CA can see and communicate with each other in signed conversation. Because the conversation between the VRS user and the CA flows much more quickly than with a text-based TRS call, VRS has become an enormously popular form of TRS. For more information about other forms of TRS, see the FCC's consumer guide on Telecommunications Relay Service (<https://www.fcc.gov/guides/telecommunications-relay-service-trs>).

How VRS works

VRS, like other forms of TRS, allows persons who are deaf or hard-of-hearing to communicate through the telephone system with hearing persons. The VRS caller, using a television or a computer with a video camera device and a broadband (high speed) Internet connection, contacts a VRS CA, who is a qualified sign language interpreter. They communicate with each other in sign language through a video link. The VRS CA then places a telephone call to the party the VRS user wishes to call. The VRS CA relays the conversation back and forth between the parties -- in sign language with the VRS user, and by voice with the called party. No typing or text is involved. A voice telephone user can also initiate a VRS call by calling a VRS center, usually through a toll-free number.

The VRS CA can be reached through the VRS provider's Internet site, or through video equipment attached to a television. Currently, around ten providers offer VRS. Like all TRS calls, VRS is free to the caller. VRS providers are compensated for their costs from the Interstate TRS Fund, which the FCC oversees.

The benefits of VRS

VRS offers several features not available with the text-based forms of TRS:

- VRS allows those persons whose primary language is ASL to communicate in ASL, instead of having to type what they want to say.
- Because consumers using VRS communicate in sign language, they are able to more fully express themselves through facial expressions and body language, which cannot be expressed in text.
- A VRS call flows back and forth just like a telephone conversation between two hearing persons. For example, the parties can interrupt each other, which they cannot do with a TRS call using a TTY (where the parties have to take turns communicating with the CA).
- Because the conversation flows more naturally back and forth between the parties, the conversation can take place much more quickly than with text-based TRS. As a result, the same conversation is much shorter through VRS than it would be through other forms of text-based TRS.
- VRS calls may be made between ASL users and hearing persons speaking either English or Spanish.

What Consumers Should Know

VRS is different from some of the other forms of TRS in two important ways: the conversation between the VRS user and the CA is made through a video link and sign language, rather than typed text; and the service relies on the Internet, rather than the telephone system, for the connection between the VRS user and the CA. It is a relatively new service and, unlike some other forms of TRS, it is not mandatory. Here are some things you should know:

- VRS providers must answer 80 percent of all VRS calls within 120 seconds. VRS providers must also offer the service 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- VRS providers must provide VRS users with a ten-digit number, so the VRS users are able to make 911 calls, and have their location information routed to the appropriate emergency service professionals.
- Preferential treatment of calls is prohibited. Both VRS and TRS providers must handle calls in the order in which they are received. They cannot selectively answer calls from certain consumers or certain locations.
- Unlike with some of the other forms of TRS, the VRS CA may not be able to offer or handle some call services, such as operator-assisted calls and 900 (pay-per-call) calls.
- However, you must pick one default provider for ten-digit numbering. No matter who your default TRS provider is, you can choose any VRS provider when making a VRS call.
- The TRS rules do not require you to choose or use only one VRS provider. You can choose any of several different providers of VRS.
- Accepting VRS equipment from one provider does not prohibit you from using another VRS provider on other equipment you may have.
- Equipment distributed by a certified VRS provider must be interoperable with the technology of other certified VRS providers.
- VRS and TRS providers may not offer you financial incentives to use their service or to make more or longer VRS or TRS calls.
- VRS is not the same as video remote interpreting that uses an interpreter located at a remote location through a video connection when two people are together and they need an interpreter. VRS may not be used in such circumstances. VRS is a type of telephone call.

Choosing more than one provider

FCC rules do not require you to choose or use only one VRS provider. If you accept VRS equipment and service from one provider, you are free to accept and use VRS equipment and service from a competing provider. A VRS provider (or its installers) may not adjust your hardware or software to restrict access to or diminish the quality of your service from any other VRS provider without your consent. This means that a VRS provider may not force or bully you into providing consent, and may not force or bully you into agreeing to remove or alter the equipment that you received from a competing provider. In other words, a VRS provider may not improperly restrict your access to the service that you are receiving from a competing provider.

Although FCC rules require that you have only one "default provider" associated with each videophone number, you are permitted to have multiple default VRS providers, so long as you have a different videophone number associated with each default provider. This means that you have a choice of having one or multiple default providers. If you choose to have more than one default provider, each of your providers must honor your wishes to have more than one default VRS provider.

For more information



For more information about TRS, VRS or IP Relay, or to learn more about FCC programs to promote access to telecommunications services for people with disabilities, visit the FCC's Disability Rights Office website at www.fcc.gov/disability.

Filing a complaint

If you believe that a VRS provider has not been following the FCC rules, you may file a complaint with us. There are multiple options for filing a complaint with the FCC:

- Visit the FCC's Disability Rights Office at <https://www.fcc.gov/DRO>
- Contact the FCC's Disability Rights Office via videophone (844-432-2275), voice phone (1-888-CALL-FCC or 1-888-225-5322), TTY (1-888-TELL-FCC or 1-888-835-5322)
- E-mail: DRO@FCC.gov
- Write to:

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20554

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