



# Standard Practice for Language Interpreting<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Scope

1.1 This practice defines the minimum professional standard for quality services in language interpreting. It is intended for use by stakeholders with varying levels of expertise in the field of interpreting.

1.2 *This standard does not purport to address all of the safety concerns, if any, associated with its use. It is the responsibility of the user of this standard to establish appropriate safety and health practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.*

## 2. Referenced Documents

2.1 *ISO Standards:*<sup>2</sup>

ISO 2603 Booths for Simultaneous Interpretation—General Characteristics and Equipment

ISO 4043 Mobile Booths for Simultaneous Interpretation—General Characteristics and Equipment

## 3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions:*

3.1.1 *Interpreting*—the process of first fully understanding, analyzing, and processing a spoken or signed message and then faithfully rendering it into another spoken or signed language.

3.1.1.1 *Discussion*—Interpreting is different from translation which results in the creation of a written target text.

3.1.2 *Modes of Interpreting:*

3.1.2.1 *Simultaneous Interpreting*—the rendering of a speaker's or signer's message into another language while the speaker or signer continues to speak or sign.

3.1.2.2 *Consecutive Interpreting*—the rendering of a speaker's or signer's message into another language when the speaker or signer pauses to allow interpreting.

3.1.2.3 *Sight Translation*—the rendering of a written document directly into a spoken or signed language, not for purposes of producing a written document.

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<sup>2</sup> Available from American National Standards Institute (ANSI), 25 W. 43rd St., 4th Floor, New York, NY 10036, <http://www.ansi.org>.

### 3.1.3 *Areas of Interpreting:*

3.1.3.1 *Diplomatic Interpreting*—interpreting performed to facilitate communication between governments and/or international organizations or both.

3.1.3.2 *Liaison Interpreting*—interpreting generally performed in the consecutive mode while escorting visiting individuals or groups.

3.1.3.3 *Conference Interpreting*—interpreting performed primarily in the simultaneous mode for persons attending congresses, conventions, seminars, summits, or other meetings

3.1.3.4 *Media Interpreting*—interpreting performed for media outlets such as television networks, radio stations or the Internet.

3.1.3.5 *Business Interpreting*—interpreting performed in the course of business activities.

3.1.3.6 *Labor Relations Interpreting*—interpreting performed for negotiations between management and their workers, and unions and their members.

3.1.3.7 *Community Interpreting*—interpreting (in community settings) for the purpose of outreach, information, community relations and community services.

3.1.3.8 *Social Services Interpreting*—interpreting in settings where human services programs are provided.

3.1.3.9 *Healthcare Interpreting*—interpreting in settings where medical services are provided.

3.1.3.10 *Educational Interpreting*—interpreting in settings where educational services are provided.

3.1.3.11 *Legal Interpreting*—interpreting in settings where proceedings related to the administration of justice are performed.

3.1.3.1 *Discussion*—Legal Interpreting is divided into Court Interpreting and Out-of-Court Interpreting.

3.1.3.12 *Court Interpreting (also referred to as judicial interpreting)*—interpreting in the courtroom.

3.1.3.1 *Discussion*—Depositions fall into this category because testimony is given under oath, and afforded the same weight as testimony given in the courtroom.

3.1.3.13 *Out-of-Court Interpreting (also referred to as quasi-judicial interpreting)*—interpreting of interviews and hearings in settings that may have a bearing on legal proceedings.

3.1.3.1 *Discussion*—These proceedings include, but are not limited to interpreting for attorney- client interviews, criminal justice or law enforcement agencies, administrative agencies, as well as boards, commissions, or licensing bodies. Quasi-judicial proceedings affect fundamental individual rights and may give rise to an appeal at the state or federal levels. For this reason, the interpreting of out-of-court hearings and interviews shall be of the same quality and accuracy as that rendered in court.

3.1.3.14 *Security-related Interpreting*—interpreting performed in support of government agencies working in law enforcement and national security.

3.1.3.15 *Military and Conflict Zone Interpreting*—interpreting performed in support of the armed forces and their mission and of individuals affected by armed conflict.

3.1.3.16 *Disaster Relief and Humanitarian Interpreting*—interpreting performed in support of humanitarian operations and of individuals affected by disaster or other emergency situations.

#### 4. Significance and Use

4.1 This practice is intended for all stakeholders of interpreting services.

##### 4.2 *Interpreting Supply Chain:*

4.2.1 *Customer*—The person(s) or entity that pays for the interpreting services.

4.2.2 *Requester*—The person(s) or entity that places the order for interpreting services.

4.2.3 *End User or Consumer*—The person(s) in need of interpreting services.

4.2.4 *Interpreting Services Provider*—The person(s), interpreter(s), organization, or language services company (LSC) making arrangements for the provision of interpreting services including, but not limited to, selecting, contracting, scheduling, invoicing, and paying the interpreter.

4.2.5 *Interpreter*—Person who performs the interpreting service.

NOTE 1—The above categories of stakeholders are not mutually exclusive.

4.3 *Characteristics of Interpreting*—Interpreting is a professional activity resulting in a first and final oral/signed rendition of the message from the source language into the target language. It does not serve the same purpose as, nor should it be compared to, an edited, written translation or a scripted voice-over. Interpreting is performed in real time or immediately after a speaker pauses to allow for interpreting.

#### 5. Interpreter Qualifications

5.1 *General Qualifications*—A high level of proficiency in two or more languages, is a necessary prerequisite, but not sufficient by itself to provide quality interpreting. Active working languages shall be at the level of an educated native or near-native speaker. Interpreting is a complex demanding task that requires much more than an excellent command of languages. The interpreter shall have skills and abilities specific to interpreting, a broad general education, and knowledge of the subject matter, including relevant terminology.

5.2 *Interpreting Skills and Abilities*—The interpreting process requires the following skills and abilities that may be acquired through formal training or experience in the professional arena (documented through testing, degrees, certifications, and professional credentials).

5.2.1 *Concentration*—Ability to remain focused for extended periods of time.

5.2.2 *Knowledge of Subject Matter*—The interpreting process requires knowledge of the subject matter and terminology. This shall be supported by thorough preparation.

5.2.3 *Research Skills*—Ability to find and assimilate information on a broad range of topics in support of the interpreting assignment.

5.2.4 *Comprehension*—Ability to fully comprehend meaning, subject matter, pragmatic intent, and cultural subtext of the source message.

5.2.5 *Analytical Skills*—Ability to construe the meaning of the source language message completely and accurately and find target language equivalencies while under severe time constraints.

5.2.6 *Short-term Auditory and Visual Memory*—Ability to retain the source message and reproduce it accurately in the target language.

5.2.7 *Consecutive Note Taking*—Specialized technique used to record key concepts and other information to aid in the reconstruction of the source message.

5.2.8 *Cultural Awareness*—Knowledge of culture-specific references and concepts that allow the interpreter to render the message faithfully.

5.2.9 *Clear Delivery and Signing*—The interpreter shall have public speaking skills such as good enunciation and voice projection and, in the case of sign language, make proper use of sign production, sign space, and affect to render the message faithfully.

5.2.10 *Interpersonal Skills*—Courteous and professional attitude towards peers and others.

5.2.11 *Flexibility*—Ability to adjust to unexpected events or rapidly changing circumstances.

##### 5.3 *Competency Levels or Qualifications:*

5.3.1 Post-secondary education or its equivalent,

5.3.2 Successful completion of interpreter training by a recognized post-secondary institution,

5.3.3 Endorsement by a certifying/credentialing body or professional organization,

5.3.4 Qualifying scores as established by industry recognized certifying bodies (see “Related Material” at the end of this standard) in language proficiency tests,

5.3.5 Qualifying scores as established by industry recognized certifying bodies (see “Related Material” at the end of this standard) in interpreting tests as required by specific areas of interpreting; and

5.3.6 Evidence of expertise and competence in interpreting demonstrated through a performance examination or experience or both as accepted by professionals in the field.

5.4 *Protocol*—The interpreter shall be cognizant of what constitutes appropriate behavior, customary practices, and what practical arrangements may be required for optimal performance.

## 6. Interpreter Certification and Credentialing

6.1 *Sign Language Interpreting Certification*—Sign language interpreting certification is available for sign language interpreters at the national level from the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) and individual states. RID offers a number of generalist and specialist certifications including, but not limited to the National Interpreter Certification, Specialist Certificate: Legal (SC:L) certification, and the Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI) certification (see “Related Material” at the end of this standard).

6.2 *Spoken Language Interpreting Certification*—There is no one single spoken language certification available at the national or state level. However, there is certification available at the national level in specialized fields such as court and medical interpreting. Most states offer certification for court interpreting and a few states offer certification for medical and social services interpreting (see “Related Material” at the end of this standard).

### 6.3 *Spoken Language Credentialing:*

6.3.1 In the absence of national and state level interpreter certification, interpreters may use the results of interpreting tests administered by federal agencies as a valid credential.

6.3.2 Conference interpreters may use membership in professional associations of conference interpreters with stringent peer review admission procedures as credentials (see “Related Material” at the end of this standard).

6.4 *Requirements for Certification and Credentialing*—Government agencies, and other entities that receive public funds, may find themselves bound by legislation and funding conditions to only hire interpreters who have been appropriately certified or credentialed. Private sector entities may also find themselves bound to comply with requirements set by their own industry accrediting organizations (see “Related Material” at the end of this standard).

6.5 Attention should be given to the standard of accuracy and skill that is required for an assignment, and every effort should be made by the stakeholders to match the requirements of the assignment to the level of professional skill of the interpreter, as evidenced by his/her professional credentials or certification.

## 7. Needs Analysis

7.1 This section describes the factors that customers, requesters, interpreting service providers, and interpreters shall take into consideration in planning for interpreting event. To ensure high-quality interpreting, coordination, and agreement between the above-named parties is essential. All stakeholders shall always respect the interpreter’s code of professional conduct (see Section 8).

7.2 *Event Characteristics*—Event characteristics will determine the delivery modality, mode of interpreting, number of interpreters, type of interpreter credentials, equipment, attire, security clearance, and immunizations.

7.2.1 Setting(s) including, but not limited to:

- 7.2.1.1 One-on-one meeting,
- 7.2.1.2 Group meeting,

7.2.1.3 Hearing,

7.2.1.4 Presentation,

7.2.1.5 Conference,

7.2.1.6 Trial,

7.2.1.7 Media, and

7.2.1.8 Depositions.

7.2.2 Venue(s) including, but not limited to:

7.2.2.1 Conference center,

7.2.2.2 Meeting room,

7.2.2.3 Courtroom,

7.2.2.4 Correctional facility,

7.2.2.5 Police stations,

7.2.2.6 Detention centers,

7.2.2.7 Educational facility,

7.2.2.8 Office,

7.2.2.9 Theater,

7.2.2.10 Television/radio studio,

7.2.2.11 Healthcare facility,

7.2.2.12 Business/industrial complex, and

7.2.2.13 Agricultural/outdoors.

7.2.3 *Areas of Interpreting*—See 3.1.3.

7.2.4 *Delivery Modalities of Interpreting:*

7.2.4.1 On-site interpreting provided by interpreters present in the same physical location as speakers and the audience.

7.2.4.2 Remote interpreting provided by interpreters not present in the same physical location as the speakers or the audience or both:

(1) Videoconference interpreting provided by interpreters having a video-mediated view of the speakers or the audience, or both and

(2) Audio-conference interpreting provided by interpreters having an audio feed of the speakers or the audience, or both.

7.3 *Working Languages*—Necessary to determine team composition.

7.3.1 *Language Pair(s).*

7.4 *Interpreter-Specific Requirements:*

7.4.1 *Credentials*—Pursuant to federal and state regulations, certain assignments may require specific credentials.

7.4.2 *Security Clearance*—Certain assignments may require different levels of security clearance.

7.4.3 *Immunizations*—Some interpreting assignments may require proof of health screening and immunization for all employees and independent contractors working at certain facilities.

7.4.4 *Appropriate Attire*—The setting will dictate the type of appropriate attire.

7.5 *Modes of Interpreting*—See 3.1.2.

7.6 *Number of Interpreters Required*—To reduce the risk of error resulting from fatigue, during lengthy assignments interpreters should work in teams and alternate at regular predetermined intervals. Interpreting is extremely mentally taxing because the interpreter is under pressure to preserve the form and full content of the source language message.

7.6.1 *Consecutive Interpreting:*

7.6.1.1 To ensure interpreting quality and accuracy, it is recommended that two interpreters be hired for meetings longer than 2 h or dealing with complex, technical, and/or specialized subjects.

7.6.1.2 For meetings lasting up to 2 h or dealing with general, nontechnical subjects, one interpreter may suffice.

7.6.1.3 If the decision is made to retain only one interpreter for a consecutive assignment, the interpreter will be given periodic breaks at his/her discretion. The number and length of breaks may increase in accordance with the complexity of the subject at hand and the length of the meeting.

#### 7.6.2 *Simultaneous Interpreting:*

7.6.2.1 Two interpreters shall be assigned per language for any event lasting over 1 hour. An additional interpreter may be assigned when the team is required to interpret bidirectionally.

7.6.2.2 Given the intensive cognitive activity involved in simultaneous interpreting, interpreters should alternate every 15 to 30 min as deemed necessary by team members.

#### 7.7 *Interpreter Preparation and Materials:*

7.7.1 To ensure interpreting quality and accuracy, interpreters shall have access to or be briefed on pertinent materials that will be discussed or referenced at the event. These may include, but are not limited to, the following:

7.7.1.1 Program/agenda;

7.7.1.2 Written text of speeches, scripts, handouts, and other printed matter;

7.7.1.3 Reports;

7.7.1.4 Power Point presentations;

7.7.1.5 Materials from previous meetings;

7.7.1.6 Classroom materials;

7.7.1.7 Case files;

7.7.1.8 Jury instructions; and

7.7.1.9 Exhibits.

7.7.2 Because of confidentiality concerns, some of the materials may be available only on site. Upon receipt of the relevant materials, the interpreter may be bound by strict rules of nondisclosure and may be required to sign a statement of confidentiality or a nondisclosure agreement (NDA). At the end of the interpreting event, provided materials may have to be returned or destroyed.

#### 7.8 *Basic Working Conditions:*

7.8.1 *Visibility*—Interpreters need to see the speaker clearly and, if possible, the audience. Nonverbal communication is an essential part of information content for both spoken and signed languages. Thus, the interpreter should have as much visual input as possible including an unencumbered view of the speaker or, in the case of videoconferencing, large screens showing the speaker. Sign language interpreting is particularly dependent upon a clear line of sight between the interpreter and the deaf consumer. For this reason, special seating and lighting arrangements should be made for the sign language interpreter and all deaf audiences. For media interpreting, the sign language interpreter shall be positioned next to the speaker and visible on a large screen.

7.8.2 *Acoustics*—Interpreters need to hear the speaker well. Audibility problems, including ambient noise, compromise the quality of interpreting. In simultaneous interpreting not taking place in a booth (interpreting performed with equipment or in

chuchotage), every effort shall be made by the organizers to provide conditions that ensure the interpreter's voice shall not be at a level that distracts the speaker or audience. In consecutive interpreting, the interpreter's voice shall always be audible to the audience, and accordingly, a microphone solely for the use of the interpreter shall be made available upon the interpreter's request. When interpreting for a speaker at a podium, a separate podium and microphone should be available for the interpreter. When interpreting in a television or radio studio or for a group on a sound stage, the interpreter's headphone shall receive only the voice of the person(s) being interpreted and not the interpreter's own voice.

7.9 *Required Technological Support*—Interpreting requires high-quality sound and video, including adjustable volume levels for both the interpreter and the listener. The technology required for adequate sound and video varies according to mode of interpreting and setting.

#### 7.9.1 *Interpreters' Booth:*

7.9.1.1 As the simultaneous interpreters' workstation, the booth should be soundproof and have silent ventilation. A full-size booth should be used whenever possible.

7.9.1.2 Space constraints may dictate the use of a table-top booth. To isolate the interpreters from ambient noise every effort shall be made to provide appropriate ventilation and good working conditions.

7.9.1.3 There shall be one booth per language or interpreter team and it shall meet ISO 2603 (built-in) or ISO 4043 (mobile) standards or any other future relevant standards.

#### 7.9.1.4 The booth shall contain:

(1) A working interpreter console,

(2) One set of headphones with independent volume control per interpreter,

(3) One microphone with an independent on/off button per interpreter,

(4) One mute/cough button per interpreter,

(5) A writing table for both interpreters,

(6) One silently operating chair per interpreter,

(7) Adequate light for reading documents, and

(8) Silent ventilation.

#### 7.9.1.5 *Technical Personnel:*

(1) Technicians should be available for setting up, connecting, and dismantling the booth(s).

(2) Technicians should be responsible for testing all equipment with the interpreters before the start of the event.

(3) Technicians should be available for monitoring sound quality throughout the event and be prepared to replace faulty equipment or make any modifications necessary to address technological issues.

#### 7.9.2 *Portable Wireless Equipment:*

7.9.2.1 *Transmitter(s)*—One per language.

7.9.2.2 *Receiver(s)*—One per person, with splitters, if appropriate.

7.9.2.3 *Microphone(s)*—One per interpreter.

7.9.2.4 *Headphone(s)*—One per person.

7.9.2.5 Sufficient backup equipment.

#### 7.9.3 *On-Stage Equipment:*



7.9.3.1 *Microphones*—The interpreter(s) should always be provided with a separate microphone; it should be hands-free whenever possible.

#### 7.9.4 *Remote Interpreting:*

7.9.4.1 Remote interpreting is an appropriate and convenient delivery modality when qualified on-site interpreters are not available. The interpreter’s qualifications in a remote interpreting delivery modality remain the same as those for on-site interpreting.

7.9.4.2 The lack of physical and visual proximity makes comprehension, analysis, and processing of information more challenging for interpreters. Quality and accuracy noticeably decline more rapidly, thus requiring shorter interpreting shifts and increased team strength.

7.9.4.3 Remote interpreting requires technical familiarization including readily available technical support by the remote-services provider. Equipment shall be tested allowing sufficient time to ensure that the connection provides clear reception for all sites.

7.9.4.4 *Audio-only Interpreting—Technical Specifications*—All parties involved in audio interpreting services shall strive to use:

- (1) A landline telephone free of interference;
- (2) High-speed broadband connection if audio feed is streaming over the internet; and
- (3) Equipment with noise-cancelling microphone, volume, and environmental noise control.

7.9.4.5 *Video Interpreting—Technical Specifications*—All parties involved in video interpreting services shall strive to ensure:

- (1) Appropriate lighting;
- (2) Seating arrangements, which allow an unobstructed view of video screen(s);
- (3) Appropriate camera positioning;
- (4) The use of equipment with noise-cancelling microphone, volume, and environmental noise control;
- (5) The use of good quality headsets, as needed;
- (6) Settings with appropriate background;
- (7) The use of high-speed broadband connection;
- (8) The use of high-speed broadband connection;
- (9) Direct communication with technical support personnel.
- (10) If available, use of video zoom is highly desirable.

## 8. Code of Professional Conduct

8.1 All parties, including the clients, shall be aware that interpreters perform their duties in accordance with a code of professional conduct.

8.2 This code of professional conduct reflects the standards of integrity, professionalism, and confidentiality by which all interpreters shall abide. It enumerates established standards of professional responsibility to the public, the client, colleagues and the profession at large. Given the variety of settings in which interpreters perform, individual institutions may find it useful to complement the code of professional conduct with guidelines designed to meet the specific demands of the

organizational setting in which interpreters will be expected to work (see “Related Material” at the end of this standard for further reading).

8.3 *Impartiality*—The interpreter shall maintain a neutral attitude during an interpreting assignment. An interpreter shall be able to express clearly and convincingly different views or opinions on any issue in any discussion without allowing his/her own views to interfere.

8.3.1 *Conflicts of Interest*—The interpreter shall disclose any real or perceived conflict of interest that may exist or may create an appearance of impropriety or a potential violation of the code of professional conduct. In the interest of protecting the client and the professional integrity of the interpreter, the interpreter shall not hesitate to withdraw from an assignment.

8.4 *Confidentiality*—The interpreter shall not divulge any information obtained through his/her assignments including, but not limited to, information found in documents or other written materials. Confidentiality may be breached only when it is a legal requirement.

8.5 *Competency*—The interpreter shall not knowingly accept any assignment beyond his/her interpreting ability or for which he/she lacks an adequate understanding of the subject matter or cultural context or both. In situations in which the interpreter cannot easily disqualify him/herself from an assignment, the interpreter shall inform the client of his/her limitations.

8.6 *Accuracy*—The interpreter shall always express the source language message in a thorough and faithful manner. The interpreter shall:

- 8.6.1 Omit or add nothing,
- 8.6.2 Give consideration to linguistic variations in both the source and target languages, and
- 8.6.3 Preserve the tone and spirit of the source language message.

8.7 *Professional Development*—The interpreter shall continually develop his/her skills and knowledge through:

- 8.7.1 Steady practice;
- 8.7.2 Formal professional training;
- 8.7.3 Ongoing continuing education;
- 8.7.4 Ad hoc terminology research;
- 8.7.5 Regular and frequent interaction with colleagues and specialists in related fields; and
- 8.7.6 Staying abreast of current issues, laws, policies, rules, and regulations that affect his/her profession.

8.8 *Professional Demeanor*—Interpreters shall:

- 8.8.1 Be punctual;
- 8.8.2 Be prepared;
- 8.8.3 Be polite, respectful, and tactful towards all parties, including colleagues;
- 8.8.4 Be dressed appropriately; and
- 8.8.5 Avoid attracting undue attention to him/herself.

## 9. Keywords

9.1 language interpreting; professional conduct

**A1. BIBLIOGRAPHY**

A1.1 Refer to [Table A1.1](#) for documents related to this practice.

**TABLE A1.1 Reference Documents**

Documents	Website
Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/47/135)	<a href="http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/47/a47r135.htm">http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/47/a47r135.htm</a>
Overview of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964	<a href="http://www.justice.gov/crt/about/cor/coord/titlevi.php">http://www.justice.gov/crt/about/cor/coord/titlevi.php</a>
Executive Order 13166 Reference	<a href="http://www.lep.gov/13166/eo13166.html">http://www.lep.gov/13166/eo13166.html</a>
Position Papers—National Association of Judicial Interpreters and Translators (NAJIT)	<a href="http://www.najit.org/publications/positions.php">http://www.najit.org/publications/positions.php</a>
Standard Practice Papers—Registry for Interpreters of the Deaf (RID)	<a href="http://www.rid.org/interpreting/Standard%20Practice%20Papers/index.cfm">http://www.rid.org/interpreting/Standard%20Practice%20Papers/index.cfm</a>
2012 Language Proficiency Guidelines—American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL)	<a href="http://actflproficiencyguidelines2012.org/">http://actflproficiencyguidelines2012.org/</a>
Proficiency Guidelines—Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR)	<a href="http://www.govtilr.org/">http://www.govtilr.org/</a>
Skill Level Descriptions for Interpretation Performance—Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR)	<a href="http://www.govtilr.org/Skills/interpretationSLDsapproved.htm">http://www.govtilr.org/Skills/interpretationSLDsapproved.htm</a>
28 US Code 1827 – Interpreters in Courts of the United States	<a href="http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/28/1827">http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/28/1827</a>

### RELATED MATERIAL

NAD-RID Code of Professional Conduct  
 Standard for Performance and Professional Responsibility for Contract  
 Court Interpreters in the Federal Courts  
 AIIC Code of Professional Ethics

NAJIT Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibility  
 U.S. Sign Language Interpreters Credentialing Table  
 Credentialing Opportunities for U.S. Interpreters

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