A Practical Guide to Working with An Interpreter

Trying to communicate across languages and cultures can be frustrating when the two parties don't speak the same language.

But clear and effective communication is vital, especially when the stakes are high. A professional interpreter can help bridge the gap by assisting as a conduit, interpreting what is spoken in one language and rendering it in another so that both parties have equal footing in the interaction. So, how do you effectively work with an interpreter?

This simple guide will walk you through what to expect.

Assess your need for an interpreter. You most likely need the services of a professional interpreter if:

- You are in a setting where it is vital for both parties to understand what is being communicated
- The person you are speaking with prefers to communicate in their native (non-English) language
- The situation may be considered stressful or unfamiliar and may affect the Limited English Proficient (LEP) individual's ability to communicate or understand effectively

Determine the interpreting service you need. There are three main ways to provide interpreting services:

- On-site (face-to-face)
- Over-the-Phone (OPI)
- Video Remote Interpreting (VRI)

The LEP's preference for an on-site, over-the-phone, or video remote interpreter should be respected, whenever possible

- On-site interpreting facilitates better understanding of information and better captures non-verbal communication such as body language. This service is recommended in complex or sensitive situations and settings like hospitals and clinics, court rooms, meetings, etc.
- OPI is useful for short, non-complex communication, or to establish the LEP's primary language and the nature of an inquiry before an on-site interpreter is booked.
- VRI uses audiovisual equipment to provide face-to-face communication between two parties via an off-site interpreter.

You may find that the best solution for your team is a combination of these interpreting services. If you are unsure which service would be most beneficial to you and the LEP populations you work with, our team can help.

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Know what to expect from your interpreter. A professional interpreter will:

- Interpret everything both parties say as precisely as possible, without adding, omitting, or changing anything that is said
- Ask you to speak slowly and clearly, pause frequently, and use short sentences
- Request that you speak directly to the other party, not to the interpreter. For example, ask the LEP individual, “How are you today?” rather than saying “Ask them how they are today.”

Be open to working with a team of interpreters if:

- The interpreting assignment is expected to last more than a couple of hours or requires a half- or full-day’s work
- The setting is a conference session or presentation without frequent breaks
- The information being discussed is complex and/or there are multiple speakers

Use the services of a trained and qualified interpreter

- Family members, friends, and co-workers should not act as interpreters except in the case of an absolute emergency. These individuals may not have the required language competence in both languages, may lack impartiality, and are not bound by the same standard of conduct or code of ethics as credentialed interpreters.

Book an interpreter

- The best way to maximize your interpreter’s expertise is to contract their services early and give them plenty of time to prepare. If there are any special terms or technical language unique to your industry that your interpreter should be familiar with, communicate this before the assigment.
- If you have questions for the interpreter, ask them in advance, when possible, so you know what to expect. Your interpreter will work with you to make sure the communication goes smoothly!

“ATS and their interpreters have changed the way we do business with our global partners. It allows us to truly work together and build our respective businesses through streamlined communication.”

- BIG ASS FANS

We hope this Practical Guide to Working with an Interpreter is helpful. If you have any questions or would like to discuss the details of your interpreting needs, please reach out to us using the contact information below.

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