
Interpreting services — General requirements and recommendations

Services d'interprétation — Exigences et recommandations générales

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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

The procedures used to develop this document and those intended for its further maintenance are described in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. In particular the different approval criteria needed for the different types of ISO documents should be noted. This document was drafted in accordance with the editorial rules of the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2 (see www.iso.org/directives).

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This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 37, *Terminology and other language and content resources*, Subcommittee SC 5, *Translation, interpreting and related technology*.

Introduction

This document responds to the need to provide general service requirements for the provision of quality interpreting services. It provides requirements and recommendations for the delivery of spoken and signed communication across languages and societal contexts and throughout interpreting specializations. This document may be used in conjunction with other interpreting specialization standards.

Interpreters render spoken or signed communication across languages. Interpreting differs from translation, which is the rendering of written content into another written language.

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Interpreting services — General requirements and recommendations

1 Scope

This document specifies basic requirements for the provision of interpreting services. Additionally, it provides recommendations of good practice.

NOTE Interpreting specializations/specialized interpreting services can be covered in other International Standards (e.g. ISO 20228, Legal interpreting).

2 Normative references

There are no normative references in this document.

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.

ISO and IEC maintain terminological databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

- IEC Electropedia: available at <http://www.electropedia.org/>
- ISO Online browsing platform: available at <http://www.iso.org/obp>

3.1 Terms related to people involved in interpreting and to modes of interpreting

3.1.1 interpret

render spoken or signed information from a *source language* (3.4.4) to a *target language* (3.4.6) in oral or signed form, conveying both the register and meaning of the *source language content* (3.4.5)

3.1.2 interpreting

interpretation

rendering spoken or signed information from a *source language* (3.4.4) to a *target language* (3.4.6) in oral or signed form, conveying both the register and meaning of the *source language content* (3.4.5)

3.1.3 interpreter

person who *interprets* (3.1.1)

3.1.4 interpreting service provider

ISP

interpreter (3.1.3) or organization providing *interpreting* (3.1.2) services

3.1.5

client

customer

person, or organization, who enters into a formal agreement for the provision of an *interpreting* (3.1.2) service

Note 1 to entry: The formal agreement can, for example, take the form of a contract or of an interdepartmental service agreement between units of an organization.

Note 2 to entry: The client can be the *end user* (3.1.6), but this does not have to be the case.

3.1.6

end user

person or group of persons that ultimately uses the *interpreting* (3.1.2) service delivered

3.1.7

speaker

person addressing others, using either spoken language or *sign language* (3.4.2)

3.1.8

spoken language interpreting

interpreting (3.1.2) between two spoken languages

3.1.9

sign language interpreting

signed language interpreting

interpreting (3.1.2) between two *sign languages* (3.4.2) or between a sign language and a spoken language

3.1.10

distance interpreting

remote interpreting

interpreting (3.1.2) of a *speaker* (3.1.7) in a different location from that of the *interpreter* (3.1.3), enabled by information and communications technology

3.1.11

mode

established method for the delivery of *spoken language interpreting* (3.1.8) or *sign language interpreting* (3.1.9)

3.1.12

consecutive interpreting

mode (3.1.11) of *interpreting* (3.1.2) performed after the *speaker* (3.1.7) pauses

Note 1 to entry: *Interpreters* (3.1.3) can use special *note-taking* (3.1.15) techniques to help in rendering lengthy passages.

3.1.13

simultaneous interpreting

mode (3.1.11) of *interpreting* (3.1.2) performed while a *speaker* (3.1.7) is still speaking or signing

3.1.14

sight translation

rendering written *source language content* (3.4.5) to the *target language content* (3.4.7) in the form of spoken language or *sign language* (3.4.2)

3.1.15**note-taking**

technique in *consecutive interpreting* (3.1.12) used by *interpreters* (3.1.3) for remembering, conceptualizing and summarizing information

Note 1 to entry: Note-taking is highly individual and can involve a mixture of symbols, abbreviations, words and diagrams.

3.1.16**chuchotage**

whispered interpreting

simultaneous interpreting (3.1.13) where the *interpreter* (3.1.3) speaks very quietly, sits or stands in close proximity to the listeners and uses no interpreting equipment

Note 1 to entry: Chuchotage is used for interpreting to a very small number of listeners, ideally one or two.

3.1.17**protocol**

rule, official procedure or common practice that guides the conduct of members of a profession

EXAMPLE Taking an oath in court to perform accurate *interpreting* (3.1.2), using direct speech when interpreting, or adhering to the code of ethics of a professional association.

3.2 Terms related to translation as distinct from interpreting**3.2.1****translate**

render *source language content* (3.4.5) into *target language content* (3.4.7) in written form

3.2.2**translation**

rendering *source language content* (3.4.5) into *target language content* (3.4.7) in written form

3.3 Terms related to interpreting settings and specializations**3.3.1****communicative setting**

environment where an interaction between interlocutors takes place

3.3.2**community interpreting**

public service interpreting

interpreting (3.1.2) that enables people to access services available to society as a whole, and which they would otherwise be unable to access owing to a language barrier

EXAMPLE Social services, tourist services, disaster victim support services.

3.3.3**conference interpreting**

interpreting (3.1.2) used for multilingual communication at technical, political, scientific and other meetings

3.3.4**legal interpreting**

interpreting (3.1.2) at *communicative settings* (3.3.1) related to the law

3.3.5

healthcare interpreting

medical interpreting

interpreting (3.1.2) that occurs when individuals are accessing services that deal with the prevention and treatment of illnesses and where patients or their families have difficulty communicating with treatment providers or administrators

3.4 Terms related to language and competences

3.4.1

language

systematic use of sounds, characters, symbols or signs by which to communicate

3.4.2

sign language

signed language

language (3.4.1) which uses a combination of hand shapes, orientation and movement of the hands, arms or body, and facial expressions

Note 1 to entry: Sign language can be a regional, national or international language with or without legal status, or an informal sign language with any number of users.

3.4.3

content

information in any form

EXAMPLE Text, audio, video, etc.

3.4.4

source language

language (3.4.1) from which *content* (3.4.3) is *interpreted* (3.1.1) or *translated* (3.2.1)

3.4.5

source language content

content (3.4.3) to be *interpreted* (3.1.1) or *translated* (3.2.1)

3.4.6

target language

language (3.4.1) into which *content* (3.4.3) is *interpreted* (3.1.1) or *translated* (3.2.1)

3.4.7

target language content

content (3.4.3) that has been *interpreted* (3.1.1) or *translated* (3.2.1) from a *source language* (3.4.4)

3.4.8

'A' language

primary *language* (3.4.1) or its strict equivalent of which the *interpreter* (3.1.3) has complete command and into which the *interpreter* (3.1.3) *interprets* (3.1.1) from all his/her other 'A' languages, 'B' languages (3.4.9.) or 'C' languages (3.4.10)

3.4.9

'B' language

language (3.4.1) in which the *interpreter* (3.1.3) is proficient but which is not his/her primary language or its strict equivalent

Note 1 to entry: An *interpreter* (3.1.3) works into this language from one or more other languages.

3.4.10

'C' language

language (3.4.1) from which the *interpreter* (3.1.3) interprets (3.1.1) into his/her 'A' languages (3.4.8) or 'B' languages (3.4.9)

Note 1 to entry: An interpreter can have more than one 'A', 'B' or 'C' language.

4 Basic principles of interpreting

4.1 General

Interpreting shall aim to facilitate non-written communication by rendering a message faithfully between at least two parties who do not share the same language (either a spoken language or a sign language).

NOTE In this context, "faithfully" means to convey/render the information without additions, alterations or omissions affecting its content, style, intent and purpose.

4.2 Interpreting protocols and codes of conduct

4.2.1 Protocols

The interpreter shall adhere to accepted professional practices and protocols; they can vary by interpreting specialization and setting, and by country or region.

A non-exhaustive list of specializations and settings is set out in [Annex A](#).

4.2.2 Codes of conduct

Codes of ethics, codes of conduct and standards of practice exist in many countries. Such documents can be developed by governments, judicial bodies, interpreters' associations, organizations that promote interpreting, and other entities. The interpreter shall adhere to the applicable professional codes of ethics and standards of practice.

4.3 Modes

The interpreter shall discuss with the client the mode of interpreting which is appropriate for the setting (see [Annex A](#) for examples). The modes used are set out in [Table 1](#) below.

Table 1 — Modes

Type of mode	Interpreting takes place	Mode is widely considered appropriate in settings that involve
Consecutive interpreting	each time there is a suitable pause in the speech	Dialogues, question-and-answer sessions, speeches, press conferences
Simultaneous interpreting ^a	at the same time that the speaker is speaking or signing	Conferences using simultaneous interpreting equipment
NOTE Sight translation involves the oral rendering of a written text. It is a common task of interpreters, not translators. The interpreter first reads a document in silence to analyse it, and he/she then renders it orally from the source language into the target language. Sight translation does not constitute a mode of interpreting as such, but can be included as a mode of interpreting in an interpreting assignment. ^a Chuchotage, or whispered interpreting, is a form of simultaneous interpreting. When it is used, care has to be taken to ensure that it does not disturb the participants, including the speaker, since the interpreter, although whispering, can be heard by everybody. For that reason, chuchotage should only be provided for a very small group of people, ideally one or two.		

5 Basic conditions governing interpreting assignments

5.1 Request and offer

The interpreter shall, in advance of the service, specify with the client the pricing, terms, policies, procedures and technical equipment for the requested service, unless there is an existing legal act or collective agreement governing contractual obligations between the interpreting service provider (ISP) and the interpreters employed or contracted by it.

The interpreter shall clarify together with the client at least the following parameters of the proposed contract for preparing an offer:

- a) setting (see Clause [A.1](#) for examples);
- b) interpreting mode;
- c) number of languages required;
- d) number of interpreters per team;
- e) number of teams of interpreters depending on the language combinations required;
- f) remuneration;
- g) working hours;
- h) other working conditions (see [5.2-5.4](#)).

A non-exhaustive list of parties involved in interpreting assignments and their responsibilities is given in [Annex B](#).

5.2 Accepting assignments

5.2.1 General

The interpreter shall only accept assignments for which he/she is linguistically qualified and that match his/her language skills, language combinations, domain competence and expertise. The interpreter shall specify and require by agreement the working conditions that are conducive to the successful delivery of his/her services.

5.2.2 Working conditions

Working conditions shall be specified and agreed upon in advance.

NOTE Working conditions are further specified in other International Standards (e.g. ISO 20228, Legal interpreting).

When interpreters are being engaged, the parties to the agreement or set of agreements governing assignments shall, at a minimum, agree upon basic elements, whether or not there is an intermediary.

Basic elements of an assignment agreement shall include, but are not limited to:

- a) date and venue;
- b) working hours;
- c) breaks between interpreting sessions;
- d) remuneration;
- e) location of the interpreters in relation to the speaker and the audience (whether distance interpreting or not);

- f) approximate number of speakers involved in the communicative event;
- g) project-relevant specifications and/or instructions;
- h) transport, accommodation, per diem payments and other reimbursement arrangements, where applicable;
- i) safety and security (including protective equipment such as hard hats and face masks), if applicable;
- j) interpreting mode (i.e. consecutive or simultaneous);
- k) language combinations;
- l) composition of interpreting teams per language combination;
- m) any relevant background documents or texts to be addressed during the assignment that can be sent to the interpreter in advance;
- n) timeframe given to receive the relevant documents to prepare for the assignment;
- o) interpreting equipment according to the relevant ISO standards and technical assistance during the interpreting service;
- p) measures to provide adequate sound, visibility and comfort;
- q) timely access to the interpreting system;
- r) broadcasting, streaming and recording of the interpreter's output, and any copyright issues involved.

The interpreter shall also have the responsibilities specified in [Clause B.3](#).

5.3 During assignments

During an interpreting assignment, the interpreter shall, wherever feasible and appropriate:

- a) interpret in the first person (direct speech), unless doing so impedes clear communication. Examples of exceptions can include emergencies, and situations when several people speak at once;
- b) manage the flow of communication and turn-taking in dialogue interpreting to ensure smooth communication and accuracy;
- c) refrain from conveying his/her own feelings or any opinions unrelated to the assignment even by way of facial expressions, body language or tone of voice;
- d) intervene only if necessary, and exclusively for the purpose of ensuring clear communication, seeking clarification or rectifying interpreting errors (for example, when parties speak too quickly or misunderstand the interpreted content);
- e) when intervening, adhere to all requirements governing the interventions which are relevant to the particular specialization and setting and to any relevant legal requirements, and clearly identify that the interpreter is speaking as the interpreter;
- f) report any risk of fatigue, burnout or secondary trauma arising from the circumstances of the assignment to whoever commissioned the assignment;
- g) when performing consecutive interpreting, take notes as needed to enhance accuracy;
- h) refrain from complying with requests that violate the relevant codes of ethics and protocols.

5.4 After assignments

After an interpreting assignment the interpreter shall, whenever feasible and appropriate:

- a) debrief;
- b) report critical incidents;
- c) produce the relevant accounting documentation;
- d) engage in appropriate self-care to prevent burnout and/or secondary trauma;
- e) report any risk of fatigue, burnout or secondary trauma arising from the circumstances of the assignment to whoever commissioned the assignment.

Self-care responsibilities of interpreters are given in [Annex C](#).

6 Qualifications and competences related to interpreting

6.1 Qualifications

Qualifications can vary by specialization. Where specialized qualifications are covered by pertinent International Standards, the interpreter shall have at his/her disposal all documented evidence of such qualifications (e.g. ISO 20228, Legal interpreting) to present to the client.

6.2 Competences

6.2.1 General competences

The interpreter shall be proficient in at least two languages (spoken or signed) and shall be able to facilitate communication by interpreting between two or more languages. The terms 'A', 'B' or 'C' languages are used to refer to these languages. Sometimes the interpreter will work face-to-face with individuals or groups who need his/her services; and, sometimes, he/she will work at a distance.

The interpreter shall have the ability to convey a message from the source language into the target language (whether spoken or signed) in an interpreting mode appropriate for a given setting. The interpreter shall accurately, faithfully and impartially interpret the substance of all statements without any additions, omissions or other misleading factors that could alter the intended meaning of the speaker's message. The interpreter shall demonstrate mastery of the various interpreting modes and techniques including consecutive interpreting, simultaneous interpreting and chuchotage along with sight translation, memory and note-taking skills.

6.2.2 Linguistic competences

The interpreter shall demonstrate the required linguistic ability in his/her working languages based on nationally or professionally accepted standards of language proficiency. This ability shall include speaking and/or signing skills, as well as listening comprehension and reading comprehension skills (i.e. the ability to comprehend various regional accents and/or dialectical differences, and recognize various registers, including formal and informal, subject-specific vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, colloquialisms and slang). The interpreter shall also possess the ability to transition between formal and informal speech levels, and to interpret accurately for speakers with different educational and cultural backgrounds.

All interpreters shall have as a minimum an 'A' and a 'C' language, that is to say, at least one source and one target language.

Other linguistic competences required for interpreting may, to some degree, vary by specialization but as a minimum they shall include the ability to:

- a) conceptualize (i.e. form a concept of the content presented);
- b) render the message accurately and idiomatically from the source language into the target language;
- c) make quick linguistic decisions regarding lexical or terminological choices and the appropriate level of formality;
- d) recognize that linguistic and vocabulary choices convey information about the speaker's socio-economic, educational and cultural background;
- e) know if, when and how to conserve paralinguistic features of the source message such as hesitations, false starts and repetitions.

6.2.3 Intercultural competences

The interpreter shall be aware of, and conversant with, cultural differences and be able to address, where needed, permitted and appropriate, a cultural misunderstanding that impedes communication. The interpreter's professional awareness and understanding of relevant cultural factors shall include the ability to assess the meaning of behaviour, tone and gestures of the participants of the communicative event, as well as linguistic differences and similarities.

Effective cross-cultural communication skills shall also include self-awareness to help the interpreter reduce the possible impact of his/her cultural biases.

6.2.4 Interpersonal competences

The interpreter shall show respect, courtesy, tact and sound judgment in his/her interactions with others. As interpreting is a demanding intellectual task, the interpreter shall develop strong communication and interpersonal skills in order to cope with the demands of working effectively in challenging situations amid cultural and linguistic diversity; they include introductions, positioning, turn-taking, and knowing when and how to intervene whether to ask for clarification or for other reasons.

6.2.5 Technical competences

The interpreter shall demonstrate the ability to use interpreting equipment (such as a microphone and audio and video-conferencing technology). This equipment can be required for interpreting in certain modes such as simultaneous interpreting, and with relevant technologies such as audio and video-conferencing. The interpreter shall therefore acquire the skills for operating the equipment effectively (e.g. volume control and microphone etiquette).

6.2.6 Competences in research and in information acquisition

The interpreter's research skills shall include expertise and experience in the use of research and terminology management tools (e.g. databases, relevant software and online search engines) and the ability to develop suitable strategies for the efficient use of the information sources available in order to prepare for assignments.

6.2.7 Domain competences

Interpreters shall make sure that they:

- a) understand the organizational/institutional systems involved in the assignment;
- b) have the domain knowledge relevant to the assignment;
- c) have command of relevant terminology and its functional equivalents in the working languages;

- d) perform in the mode required by the setting;
- e) have the ability to identify the registers to provide accurate renditions of informal, formal and very formal discourse;
- f) communicate orally and express ideas well;
- g) have the ability to self-monitor and self-correct;
- h) have all the professional skills laid out in [6.2.2](#).

6.3 Professional development – Continuous training/education

Interpreters shall:

- a) seek feedback on their interpreting performance;
- b) continue their professional development (training, education, mentorship, etc.);
- c) maintain and expand their qualifications, and be able to provide documentation of all relevant training courses and seminars attended.

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Annex A

(informative)

Non-exhaustive list of settings and specializations

A.1 Settings

An interpreter can work in a wide variety of settings, which may vary. They include:

- a) business and industry (e.g. conferences, meetings, negotiations and presentations);
- b) public agencies and institutions (e.g. community centres);
- c) international organizations;
- d) healthcare/medical (e.g. hospitals, nursing homes and doctor's offices);
- e) legal (e.g. police stations, courts and prisons);
- f) educational establishments (e.g. schools and universities);
- g) social services (e.g. refugee boards, self-help centres, social welfare offices and employment offices);
- h) faith-based organizations (e.g. services and ceremonies);
- i) governmental and inter-governmental conferences, negotiations and meetings;
- j) military or conflict zone;
- k) humanitarian.

A.2 Specializations

An interpreter may choose to specialize in different types of interpreting. Standards can define specific specializations as they are being developed. They include:

- a) community interpreting;
- b) legal interpreting;
- c) healthcare interpreting;
- d) conference interpreting.

Annex B

(normative)

Parties involved in interpreting, the client's responsibilities for the interpreter, and the interpreter's own responsibilities

B.1 Parties involved in interpreting

In an interpreting assignment the following parties can be involved:

- a) interpreters;
- b) users of interpreting services, such as clients and end users, who may be individuals or representatives of large or small organizations/institutions, companies or government entities. Clients are the persons or institutions that typically pay for the interpreter's services.
- c) interpreting service providers (ISPs), including all organizations and departments that provide interpreting services, such as:
 - language companies;
 - independent self-employed interpreters, who may constitute, in effect, a one-person ISP;
 - government agencies;
 - in-house interpreting service departments (such as those in international organizations, multinationals and hospitals interpreting departments);
 - not-for-profit interpreting services;
 - community language banks;
 - employee banks.
- d) professional associations (e.g. interpreter associations).

B.2 Responsibilities of the client towards the interpreter

When an interpreter is engaged, the client should:

- a) clearly establish and document the terms and conditions of the working relationship;
- b) provide the interpreter with detailed information about the assignment with, for example:
 - background materials/documentation as applicable about the requested service, including general information, level of sensitivity, whether potentially sensitive information could be disclosed, texts to be sight-translated, available glossaries, speaker's notes and presentations to assist the interpreter in researching the assignment, together with a case or docket number if required;
 - administrative details such as complete address of the venue, the time the interpreter is expected to be at the venue, contact information, and the date and time of briefing meetings;
- c) ensure appropriate working conditions for the interpreter. These may vary somewhat by specialization and assignment, but should at least include:

- providing an appropriate working environment with quiet rooms, technology of appropriate quality and adequate ventilation;
 - requesting the appropriate number of interpreters or teams of interpreters;
 - checking, where possible, that the work environment is safe for the interpreter to carry out his/her work without any risk to his/her personal safety;
 - giving the interpreter the right to leave a dangerous assignment or situation where his/her personal safety can be at stake, without penalty;
 - reserving adequate time for the service, taking into account that consecutive interpreting involves a longer service time than simultaneous interpreting;
 - informing the interpreter of any known risks;
 - providing written information about safety measures and procedures, and any clothing or equipment needed to protect the interpreter from potential harm;
 - planning for, and providing, the interpreter with appropriate breaks
- d) pay within the timeframe specified in the agreement or terms of engagement;
 - f) inform the interpreter beforehand if the interpreting is to be recorded and/or broadcast (e.g. by streaming), in order to obtain his/her authorization and to factor in any additional cost, if applicable;
 - g) take into account that the interpreting output, because of the nature of the work, cannot be compared with a written translation or a dubbing output, and to allow the interpreter to sign a disclaimer to that effect;
 - h) exempt interpreters from any liability arising from the misconstruction of content and/or, in the event of a dispute between the parties, if technical conditions are not those requested by interpreter or set out in the relevant ISO standards.

B.3 Responsibilities of the interpreter

The interpreter shall:

- a) help the client to hire the appropriate number of interpreters;
- b) ask for information in advance regarding the logistics and the nature of his/her assignment in order to be able to research and adequately prepare for it;
- c) be punctual;
- d) if appropriate and feasible, properly introduce himself/herself to all the parties and explain the interpreter's role in the assignment;
- e) maintain a professional appearance and behaviour, including adherence to relevant dress codes;
- f) follow the protocols, terms and procedures established/agreed upon with the ISP and/or the organization on whose behalf the interpreting services are rendered.