



Interpreter Guide

What do court interpreters do?

They interpret for people who come before the courts (or who need assistance in the clerk of courts office or when meeting with their probation officer) and cannot communicate effectively in English. These include defendants and witnesses in criminal courts, as well as litigants and witnesses in family and civil courts.

The interpreter's job is to interpret (translate orally) from one language to another everything that is said, preserving the tone and level of the original language, adding and deleting nothing.

What does it take to become a competent court interpreter?

Native-like mastery of both the language of the court and a second language; a wide general knowledge (as someone with at least 2 years of college-level education); an extensive vocabulary ranging from formal legal language to colloquialisms and slang; mental and verbal agility; ability to deal with attorneys, court personnel, and the public; an understanding of the terminology and procedures used in court; and at least some training and experience.

How do I get interpreting work for the courts?

♦First, you must file an application with the Circuit Court Administrator's office. Then you will get an appointment to meet with the Administrator so your qualifications can be reviewed. If you appear to have satisfactory skills, and if you agree to sign the Code of Ethics, your name will be recommended to the Presiding Judge to be placed on the "roster," the list of people who are available for interpreting. This list is provided to clerks of court and attorneys so that when they have a need, they can choose someone to call.

- Arrangements to interpret.

- When you are called to interpret for a court matter, your services should be requested by the Court Administrator's office, the Clerk of Court, or a Court Services (probation) Officer. If you are called by an attorney, a counselor, or someone else about a court matter, make sure you know where you need to show up, and who is paying for your services.
 - You should arrive at the courthouse on time, preferably about 10 minutes before the hearing or meeting is to start. This gives you time to check-in at the Court Administrator's Office or the Clerk of Courts. They will tell you which courtroom to go to and will take care of any necessary paperwork.
 - You may be asked to, or prefer to, speak with the non-English speaking person before the hearing or meeting starts, so that you can make sure you can communicate with this person. You may explain to them your role and the courtroom process, but do not otherwise engage in conversations with him/her.
 - You may also prefer to review any particular court documents (such as a Complaint or Information) that relate to the hearing about to take place, so that you can acquaint yourself with the names or legal terms that will be used.
- Dress.
 - You should dress appropriately for the courtroom. This is generally the clothing you would wear at any business. A suit is not required, but jeans and tee-shirts are not allowed either.
- What and How to Interpret.

- You work for the Court. You must interpret everything that is said in the courtroom, including vulgarities or threats. This includes every spoken statement, even if it appears non-responsive, obscene, rambling or doesn't make sense.
- You must give a complete and accurate interpretation without changing, leaving out, or adding anything to the meaning of what is said and without explanation. You should interpret everything said, even objections made by the attorneys.
- You are not allowed to engage in any conversation with the parties, witnesses, jurors, attorneys, or with friends or relatives of any party, except in the discharge of your official duties.
- You should not answer questions for the non-English speaking person. If he or she has a question, translate the question for the judge or lawyer and they will respond to the question.
- If you are unsure what a person has said, either because you did not hear or because you have forgotten, do not guess at it or just leave out that part. You have an obligation to interpret everything the person has said, so if you have any doubt, you must ask the Judge's permission to have the person repeat it.
- You are expected to maintain confidentiality and not publicly discuss the case. If you are interpreting a private conversation between an attorney and client, you must maintain the confidentiality of the communications.

- You should speak in the first person when speaking for the non-English speaking person. For example, you should say, “I didn’t do it,” not “He said he didn’t do it.”
- If the non-English speaking person is unable to understand you because of dialect or pronunciation differences, notify the Judge.

Opinions and Advice

* You are not allowed to give any legal advice, or express personal opinions about this matter to the party/defendant/witness.

* As an interpreter, you are not an advocate for the non-English speaker. It is not your job to teach him or her how to behave or give him or her advice.

* Your job as an interpreter is to convey the meaning of the source language and not allow personal opinion to influence your interpretation.

Clarifications.

- If for some reason you need to pause during the proceedings, please raise your hand and speak up.
- If something is unclear, or if you are given a long statement, ask the judge if you need a complete or partial repetition of what was said, or clarify what the statement meant.
- If particular vocabulary is unfamiliar to you, let the judge know you do not understand the word. They may be able to give you examples to explain a term. If there is no equivalent term in the non-English language, let the judge know that and ask permission to paraphrase the intent or meaning.

CONFIDENTIALITY

You must agree to keep everything you observe and hear and interpret in the courtroom or meeting confidential, even if you think it is public information.

Dated: _____

Signature of Interpreter