



Your Introduction to Interpreting: Basic concepts and processes, what skills are needed

Translation and interpretation are crucial tools for bridging language barriers and promoting communication across speakers of different languages and cultures.

- **Translation** is the process of converting written text from one language into another.

- **Interpretation** is the act of communicating the contents of spoken messages in real-time between speakers of different languages.

Interpreting makes communication possible, helps navigate complex situations, facilitates meaningful dialogue, and contribute to better outcomes. By giving everyone the same level of access to information, interpretation also promotes cultural understanding and inclusivity. But what does it take to be a good translator or interpreter?

Developing a strong language skill

Many people are bilingual. They might have grown up in another country, had relatives who spoke another language, or they have studied for years to become fluent in their second language. They might even sound like a native in either language, but is this enough?

Let's start by defining what being bilingual means. There are many levels of proficiency, but at the most basic definition, someone who is bilingual can speak, write and read a second language. Professional translators and interpreters have a degree of language proficiency that rises above those who simply understand or have basic competency in a second language. Being bilingual is not enough, however. While it's a prerequisite, interpreters must have an strong command of their working languages, including advanced vocabulary, grammar, idioms, and cultural nuances. Improving language proficiency is crucial, as language skills can deteriorate over time without consistent practice and exposure.

Interpreters should seek opportunities to consume media in those languages, and regularly practicing with native speakers. Continuously developing strong language skills is essential for

accurately conveying messages between languages and ensuring clear communication. Continuously expanding your specialized terminology is a must to improve your interpreting skills. Interpreters who possess in-depth subject matter language ensure precise and reliable communication in complex situations.

Having knowledge of another language isn't the only skill required to be a successful translator or interpreter. Interpreters must also be familiar with the cultural references, idioms and phrases that are unique to the target language. The best interpreters are also able to understand the hidden meaning and inflections of the source language and the second language. They can convey the emotion and intent of both languages, which helps provide the right translation. This requires exceptional memory and/or note-taking skills, the ability to multitask, and real empathy for both parties.

Developing technical interpreting skills

There are two ways of doing interpretation, consecutive interpretation (listen and then talk) and simultaneous interpretation (real-time target-language rendering). Both consecutive and simultaneous interpretation serve the essential purpose of bridging the gap between different languages, but they do so in distinct ways and under varied circumstances.

Choosing the right type of interpreting depends on the setting. For the work you will be providing – interpreting for immigration lawyers and their Spanish-speaking clients – **consecutive** interpretation stands out as the natural choice. It is better suited for small group settings, such as lawyer-client meetings, because it involves direct personal contact, thus helping build rapport between the parties involved. Additionally, it is cost-effective because it does not require special equipment.

Consecutive interpretation is a mode of interpreting in which an interpreter listens to the speaker's message (a few sentences), then relays it in the target language – after the speaker has paused.

It is also known as a "*listen and talk*" technique, because the interpreter takes turns with the speaker to ensure that everyone can effectively communicate, despite the lack of a common language. The interpreter waits for the speaker to finish talking before reproducing what's been said. Usually standing or sitting close to the speaker, the interpreter will generally use a pen and a pad to take note of key points, and will speak only once the speaker has finished.

Unlike real-time/simultaneous interpretation, consecutive interpretation allows the interpreter more time to grasp, comprehend, and convey the message with deeper consideration. This ensures that the message retains its original intent and meaning when interpreting. In the legal system, language barriers can lead to misunderstandings, with potentially severe consequences, including negatively impacting the outcomes of proceedings. Therefore, interpreters play a vital role in ensuring accurate communication, fostering trust, and improving legal proceedings outcomes.

In order to be a good consecutive interpreter, you must be able to listen very actively, analyze what the speaker is saying, take useful notes which will jog your memory of the speech as you give it back, and then be able to make the speech as if it were your own. The consecutive interpretation method includes three main actions:

- Listen actively (understand)
- Analyze (jot down structured notes)
- Reproduce (share, communicate the interpretation)

This approach ensures that the interpreter fully grasps the message's context and nuances, leading to a potentially more accurate interpretation. A number of different skills are involved – beyond the understanding of the languages being spoken.

A consecutive interpreter first has to learn how to '**listen actively**'. The interpreter waits patiently and listens attentively while the speaker delivers a segment of their speech or message. This might sound straightforward but interpreters listen in a very different way to other people – because the purpose of the listening is different. Interpreters are not listening to react or join in the conversation, they are listening to be able to remember and reproduce accurately and faithfully in another language what was said.

Note-taking is part of the second phase of '**analysis**.' Here, the interpreter often relies on a notepad and pen to jot down crucial points or symbols that aid in the interpretation process. – this necessitates the ability to prioritize and distinguish between primary and secondary information. Take brief notes – write down all concrete information such as names, descriptions, colors, numbers, years, and so on.

Once the speaker pauses, the interpreter then conveys the message in the target language. This third and final phase of '**reproducing**' what you have heard requires again a number of different skills – the ability to access short-term memory, understand your notes, communicate in an engaging way to name a few. Stress management and voice care are an important part of this too.

To render what was said accurately and faithfully and “make the speech as it were your own,” it will be important **not** to:

- add anything to the message (no opinion, no editorializing);
- leave out anything that was said in the message (e.g., interpret any profanity/vulgarism you heard from the speaker – do not use euphemisms);
- make changes to the message received, not even changes such as: "she said", "she feels," "she means" (use direct language, the same pronouns used by the speaker).

Here's how the process usually unfolds:

1. **Speaker begins:** The speaker begins by conveying a specific portion of their message. This can be a few sentences or even a full paragraph, depending on the context and the interpreter's preference.

2. **Speaker's pause:** After conveying a part of their message, the speaker pauses, allowing a moment for the interpreter to step in. This pause is crucial because it gives the interpreter time to absorb the meaning, nuances, and tone of the original message.

3. **Interpreter relays message in target language:** The interpreter, having listened carefully to the speaker, now relays the message in the target language. The aim is to capture not just the literal meaning but also any emotional undertones and implicit messages.

4. **Cycle Continues:** Once the interpreter finishes, the speaker resumes with the next portion of their message. This cycle of speaking and interpreting continues until the entire message has been delivered and interpreted.

Be attentive to register, body language, and tone of voice; to maintain the same register – raise or lower your level of sophistication of the language in accordance to what you heard. It will be important to capture the speaker's emotion and tone accurately. Interpreters must not only convey the message's content but also its intent and the speaker's feelings, all while switching between languages.