

## Getting the Gig

Several would-be presenters have contacted us to ask for advice on contacting schools and arranging a presentation. Here are some tips.

- **Who do you know?** It's always easiest to go to a school where you have some kind of personal connection. The most obvious one would be the school(s) your children attend, but there are many other possibilities. Maybe the local high school's Spanish teacher is a member of your church, or your sister-in-law is a guidance counselor at a school across town. Perhaps your next-door neighbor or tennis partner is a college professor. If you look around at work or in your community, you probably know someone who can smooth the way for you to speak at a school in your area.
- **But I don't know anyone! Really!** Okay, don't panic. If you don't have a personal connection to a local school, ask yourself these questions:
  1. What local schools/universities are convenient for me?
  2. Of those, which school/age level strikes me as the most appealing or fun?
  3. Would I like to include materials from one of my working languages, and if so, which local schools offer classes in one or more of them?

When you're ready to contact the school, remember that websites aren't just for universities any more—many lower-level schools now have them, too. It's surprisingly easy to get the name, phone number, and/or e-mail address of exactly the right person from the Web. Be sure to ask if the school has a career day, career week, or annual job fair, since many schools are delighted to get speakers for these events. And there's no need to limit yourself to classes that are learning your languages. Many school outreach presentations are entirely language-independent, so it's strictly a matter of preference.

- **Okay, I picked a school and contacted them, but now they want more information. They seem to think I'm some kind of weirdo. What should I do?** You can mail, fax, or e-mail a packet including:
  1. Your resume or professional profile;
  2. The URL for your website, if you have one. If you're listed in ATA's online *Directory of Translation and Interpreting Services*, you can also give them that URL ([www.americantranslators.org/tsd\\_listings](http://www.americantranslators.org/tsd_listings));
  3. The URL for ATA's School Outreach Welcome Page ([www.atanet.org/ata\\_school/welcome.htm](http://www.atanet.org/ata_school/welcome.htm)), which explains why we're interested in school outreach and provides sample outlines and materials;
  4. A copy of the President's Message from the April 2005 issue of the *ATA Chronicle* (also available in pdf form at [www.atanet.org/ata\\_school/welcome.htm](http://www.atanet.org/ata_school/welcome.htm)) that explains how we wish to intensify our school outreach efforts as part of the "2005 Year of Languages" initiative;
  5. A cover letter.

- **You're kidding, right? I don't have time to write a cover letter—and anyway, what would I say?** Try this:

An astonishing number of teachers in the United States are unfamiliar with the translation and interpreting professions and are actually discouraging their students from studying foreign languages because they believe there are no jobs other than teaching—this at a time when language capabilities are more critical to our national security and economic success than ever before.

While many Americans still believe that "everyone speaks English," recent events have begun to undermine this stubbornly entrenched idea. The intelligence failures preceding the attacks of September 11 and the subsequent experience of our troops in Afghanistan and Iraq have made it very clear that the U.S. is in desperate need of competent linguists for our military and intelligence communities. As recently as September of 2004, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* reported that the FBI had still not cleared its backlog of untranslated terror-related material. And a presidential panel recently found that our embassy personnel are failing to communicate with audiences in their host countries, in large part because their language skills are inadequate. At home, translation and interpreting are increasingly important to law enforcement, the courts, healthcare professionals, schools, and local governments as immigrant populations with limited English proficiency move into heartland states such as Georgia, Michigan, and Nebraska.

I would be delighted to speak to your [description of school and class] on these vital and growing careers. My presentation will briefly introduce translation and interpreting and describe the skills and educational background they require. I will include the following points: [Here you can insert your own bullet points or adapt material from the "What to Say" sections of ATA's School Outreach resource center. Go to [www.atanet.org/ata\\_school/welcome.htm](http://www.atanet.org/ata_school/welcome.htm), scroll down to LINKS, click on the appropriate age level, and copy and paste as needed].

I am enclosing/attaching [list whatever you're sending to establish your bona fides—see items 1-5 above]. I would be delighted to answer any questions you may have once you have had a chance to review this material.

To get this text in soft copy, go to the School Outreach Welcome Page at [www.atanet.org/ata\\_school/welcome.htm](http://www.atanet.org/ata_school/welcome.htm), scroll down to LINKS, and click on "Getting the Gig." Just add a complimentary greeting and closing, print it out on your business stationery, and voilà—instant cover letter.

- **What if the school still isn't satisfied?** Refer the school to ATA Executive Director Walter Bacak at ATA Headquarters.