

ata American Translators Association

GUIDE TO BUYING TRANSLATION SERVICES



INTRODUCTION

Translators help power the global economy, working with businesses, governments, non-profits and individuals. They are an integral part of global communication. Translators work with the written word, adapting text from one language to another. The American Translators Association (ATA) has developed this Guide to Buying Translation Services as a resource to help clients identify, select and work with translators.

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(*) Terms highlighted in **green** throughout this guide are defined in the **Terms to Know** section.

FINDING A TRANSLATOR

ATA is here to help you find the right language professional.

Translators work with written text, whereas interpreters work with spoken language. Both individual translators and language service companies are profiled in ATA's Language Services Directory, a free online resource.

Customize your search to find the right provider by filtering by language or service, as well as a number of other search options such as specialty, location, credentials and more.

Search our directory:
www.atanet.org/directory/



CHOOSING A TRANSLATOR

Being a translator entails more than simply knowing two languages—just like knowing how to sing isn't the same as being ready to perform at the opera. In addition to possessing excellent language skills, professional translators communicate complex ideas between languages and cultures.

Membership in organizations such as ATA demonstrates professionalism and a commitment to a formal code of ethics.

Translators come from a variety of different backgrounds, and choosing a translation provider involves considering several factors:

LANGUAGE SKILLS

- Professional translators typically translate into their native language.
- Translators read and write at an advanced level in their **working languages**.
- Effective communication between two cultures is an essential skill for translators.

EDUCATION

- Some translators have degrees or certificates in translation studies. Others have degrees or life experience in other fields.
- Professional translators typically hold at least a bachelor's degree, and many have earned higher degrees at the master's or doctoral level.
- Translators develop and maintain their skills through continuing education.

TRANSLATOR CREDENTIALS

- ATA certification is available in a number of **language pairs**. Translators who pass a rigorous exam are classified as **ATA-certified translators**.
- Various other entities evaluate translation competency using their own exams.
- Credentials can be a helpful way of assessing a translator's skills but are not required for a translator to practice the profession in the United States.



CHOOSING A TRANSLATOR

CONTINUED

SPECIALIZATION

- Some professional translators specialize, while others work as generalists on a wide variety of texts and topics. Documents pertaining to a specific subject area may require a translator to have relevant, specialized knowledge, such as legal, marketing, medical, technical, literary or genealogical expertise.
- Linguistic knowledge is often paired with other skills, such as **localization**, **transcreation**, **transcription**, **subtitling**, the ability to read historical script or other unique competencies.
- Providing any available reference materials to a translator can help ensure content will be translated correctly for the intended **target audience**.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- For more information about a specific translator, review their profile in the **ATA Language Services Directory** or other information they may have published online.
- A translator's résumé, website or LinkedIn profile can provide more information about their background and relevant experience.
- Testimonials or references from previous clients can also be useful in selecting a translation provider.

TOOLS AND TECHNOLOGY

- Professional translators may use specialized software to create and manage glossaries and **translation memories**.
- Many translators are familiar with **computer-assisted translation**, **machine translation** and artificial intelligence and can advise on the pros and cons of using them when appropriate.
- Other specialized tools may be used for certain types of translation, including the **localization** of websites and software, **subtitling** or other areas of practice.

COST OF LANGUAGE SERVICES

- The cost of translation services can vary considerably.
- Factors that may impact price include the language pair, services requested, complexity, subject matter, deadline and volume of text.



WORKING WITH A TRANSLATOR

Properly preparing to work with a translator is key to a positive outcome. The more information you are able to provide upfront, the more successful your collaboration will be. Follow the guidelines below to get started.



1 IDENTIFY YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

- What language do they speak?
- Where do they live?
- Where are they from?
- What is the document about?
- What is the purpose of the translation?



3 ESTABLISH A DEADLINE

- Communicate your timeline
- Finalize the deadline with the provider's input
- Be aware that extra fees may apply for urgent deliveries



5 DESIGNATE A CONTACT PERSON TO

- Answer questions from the service provider
- Track project progress
- Receive final deliverables
- Communicate acceptance
- Manage invoicing and payment



2 PROVIDE RELEVANT MATERIALS

- Documents to be translated
- Style guides
- Glossaries
- Previous translations or **translation memories**



4 DETERMINE YOUR BUDGET

- It is common for translators to charge by either the word, hour, page or project
- Requesting a quote from multiple providers is a good way to explore pricing options



6 WRAP UP THE PROJECT

- Archive original and translated files for future reference
- Provide constructive feedback to the translator

ATA CERTIFICATION



Certified translators may use the designation “CT” after their name and can apply their seal to documents they have translated.



RESPECTED CREDENTIAL

ATA certification is one of the global translation industry’s most respected and recognized credentials. It is also the only widely recognized measure of competence for translators in the United States.



EARNING CERTIFICATION

To earn ATA certification, a translator must pass a rigorous proctored exam. The exam assesses the language skills needed to be a professional translator: comprehension of the **source language** text, translation techniques and written proficiency in the **target language**.



CERTIFIED LANGUAGES

ATA certification is available in over 30 language pairs. While the number of language pairs changes over time, certification is not available for all possible language combinations. Certification is not a requirement to offer translation services in the United States.



PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE

ATA certification offers qualified and independent evidence that a translator possesses professional competence in a specific **language pair**. It recognizes translators who have the knowledge and skills necessary to provide quality translation services.



CREDENTIALED INTERPRETERS

The Credentialed Interpreter (CI) designation in ATA’s Language Services Directory acknowledges *interpreters* who are certified by certain ATA-approved entities in fields such as medical, legal, and conference interpreting.



NOT JUST A ONE-TIME TEST

To maintain ATA certification, a translator must fulfill ongoing continuing education requirements. All members of ATA are required to abide by the organization’s code of ethics.



Certified Languages:
www.atanet.org/certification/guide-to-ata-certification/



ATA-certified translators are clearly identified in the ATA Language Services Directory.
atanet.org/directory/



Verify a translator’s ATA certification status by entering their certification number at atanet.org/verify.

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

1



LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS

Some entities are required by law to provide translated materials. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination on the basis of national origin, which means that any program or activity that receives U.S. federal funding must provide services in a person's native language.

2



BE AWARE

You should consult an attorney to determine whether you are legally obligated to provide language services. In addition, you should be aware of laws or regulations related to translation or interpreting in any countries in which you do business.

TERMS TO KNOW



TRANSLATION

converting **written text**
from one language
into another



INTERPRETING

converting **speech**
from one language
into another

ATA-certified translator: An individual who has passed the American Translators Association certification exam. This is a professional exam assessing a person's translation skills, including comprehension, translation technique and writing ability.

Computer-assisted translation: Abbreviated as CAT, this is the use of computer software to increase a human translator's productivity and consistency. This is different from machine translation.

Editing/Revision: Part of the translation process that involves comparing original and translated documents and making corrections after the translation stage. This step is to ensure accuracy and readability.

TERMS TO KNOW

CONTINUED

Language pair: The combination of a source and target language in relation to the translation process. Examples of language pairs are English to Spanish or Spanish to English. A translator may work or become certified in more than one language pair.

Localization: The process of adapting an entire product or set of content to a specific location in the world or global market through translation and cultural adaptation. Localization is most frequently applied to software, online content and multimedia.

Machine translation: MT refers to using computer technology to automatically translate text from one language to another. Some types of MT use artificial intelligence. Human review is often involved at the final stage of this process. A translation provider can advise on the feasibility of using MT for a specific project.

Proofreading: Part of the translation process that involves checking for typographical, grammatical, structural and spelling errors. This often occurs at the end of the translation workflow as a final quality check.

Source language: The language *from* which a text is translated.

Subtitling: Providing a written, on-screen version of spoken dialogue in a film or video, translated into various target languages.

Target audience: The public for whom translated text is intended.

Target language: The language *into* which a text is translated.

Transcreation: The process of creatively adapting a message's intended meaning from one language to another and creating brand new messaging that is culturally appropriate. Transcreation is often used for literary, marketing and advertising content.

Transcription: The process of converting audio into written text. Within a translation context, audio or video files may be transcribed in order to then translate their content into another language.

Translation memory: A bilingual database containing previously translated content. It helps ensure consistency across phrases, documents and future projects. The translation memory, or TM, is usually maintained by the service provider.

Working languages: Translators may speak or read many languages, but working languages are the ones they use in their professional practice.



ABOUT ATA

Founded in 1959, the American Translators Association (ATA) is the largest professional association of translators and interpreters in the world with **members in all 50 states and over 100 countries**.

Translation and interpreting foster successful communication across the globe. ATA provides industry insights on the translation and interpreting professions. We are here to help you find the right professional to get your message across.

ATA RESOURCES

The ATA Compass Blog:

www.atanet.org/news/the-ata-compass/



ATA Media Kit:

www.atanet.org/about-us/press-room/

Press Releases:

www.atanet.org/news/press-release/





***ata* American Translators Association**
The Voice of Interpreters and Translators

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