

ata American Translators Association

GUIDE TO BUYING INTERPRETING SERVICES



INTRODUCTION

Interpreters help power the global economy, working for businesses, governments, non-profits and individuals. They are an integral part of global communication. Interpreters work with the spoken or signed word. The American Translators Association (ATA) has developed this Guide to Buying Interpreting Services as a resource to help identify, select and work with interpreters. The suggestions in this guide are aimed at reducing stress and helping you get the most out of your interpreting budget.

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



FINDING AN INTERPRETER

ATA is here to help you find the right language professional. Interpreters work with spoken and signed language, whereas translators work with written text. Both individual interpreters 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 AN INTERPRETER

Being an interpreter 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 interpreters communicate complex ideas between languages and cultures.

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

Interpreters come from a variety of different backgrounds and choosing an interpreter involves considering several factors.

LANGUAGE SKILLS

- Interpreters have advanced speaking and listening skills in their **working languages**.
- Effective communication between two cultures is an essential skill for interpreters.
- Most professional interpreters in the U.S. market interpret bidirectionally, such as English to and from Spanish.

INTERPRETER CREDENTIALS

- The **Credentialed Interpreter** (CI) designation in ATA's Language Services Directory recognizes interpreters who are credentialed by certain ATA-approved entities in fields such as medical, legal and conference interpreting.
- The entities that test interpreters and offer credentials evaluate the interpreter's skills based on results of a written test, oral exam, peer review and/or other criteria. Requirements to practice as an interpreter in the United States can vary by location or subject matter.
- Interpreter credentials are not offered for all languages or all areas of expertise.



CHOOSING AN INTERPRETER

CONTINUED

EDUCATION

- Some interpreters have degrees or certificates in interpreting studies. Others have degrees or life experience in other fields.
- Interpreters often have varied educational backgrounds and many have undergraduate or graduate degrees.
- Credentialed interpreters develop and maintain their skills through continuing education.

SPECIALIZATION

- Most legal, medical, community and educational interpreters have specialized training and/or certifications. Conference interpreters interpret for a variety of topics. It's important to hire an interpreter with experience working in the relevant subject area.
- Some settings, such as courts and hospitals, require specific certifications or accreditations depending on the state or locality.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- For more information about a specific interpreter, review their profile in the ATA Language Services Directory or other information they may have published online.
- An interpreter'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 an interpreter.

DELIVERY MODALITY

- **On-site or In-Person:** The interpreter is physically present in the same location as at least one other participant.
- **Over-the-Phone Interpreting (OPI):** Interpreting over a telephone line with at least some of the parties in another location.
- **Video Remote Interpreting (VRI):** Interpreting over a video platform with at least some of the parties in another location.
- **Remote Simultaneous Interpreting (RSI):** Simultaneous interpreting that uses special features of videoconference technology. Attendees can listen to the audio channel transmitted by an interpreter speaking in their language of choice. Multiple languages can be interpreted at the same time using this modality.





MODES OF INTERPRETING

- **Consecutive interpreting:** The interpreter interprets after each speaker pauses. Each speaker speaks in turn. During long statements, the interpreter takes notes to ensure accuracy.

Examples: doctors' appointments or court proceedings

- **Simultaneous interpreting:** The interpreter interprets "live" at the same time as the speaker speaks, with a slight delay. Simultaneous interpreters often work with electronic equipment from a booth, transmitting to listeners wearing headsets.

Examples: large industry conferences or NGO sessions

- **Chuchotage/whispered interpreting:** This is simultaneous interpreting without equipment. The interpreter sits near the individual who needs language services and quietly interprets what is being said to avoid disturbing others in the room.

- **Sight translation:** The interpreter transforms a written text into spoken language. This involves silently reading a short text in one language and speaking it out loud in another.

Examples: communicating contents of a document to parents at a school meeting or reading a text out loud in court



COST OF INTERPRETING SERVICES

- The cost of interpreting services can vary considerably.
- Factors that may impact price include the **language pair**, **mode** and **modality** requested, subject matter, setting and location, lead time and duration of services provided.

WORKING WITH AN INTERPRETER

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



SCOPE

- What languages need interpretation?
- Is a specific language dialect or variant required?
- When and where will the interpreting take place (date, time and location)?
- What subject matter will be addressed?
- What is the expected duration of the interpreting session?
- Assignments lasting more than one hour typically require two interpreters



BUDGET

- The cost of interpreting services can vary considerably
- Factors that may impact price include language pair, services requested, complexity, subject matter and how many interpreters are needed for the event
- Interpreters may charge by the hour, half day, full day or a flat fee
- Minimum fees and cancellation fees are standard
- Requesting a quote from multiple providers is a good way to explore pricing options



PREPARATION

- Share as much information as possible so the interpreter can become familiar with the subject matter being discussed
- Provide video or audio recordings of previous events so the interpreter can become familiar with the speaker(s)
- Decide on video conferencing tools, booth equipment and portable audio equipment so the interpreter is prepared to use the proper technology



COMMUNICATION

- Designate a contact person for questions
- Communicate acceptance of the service provider's quote
- Confirm schedule and acceptance of work
- Update interpreter of any changes
- Manage invoicing and payment
- Provide constructive feedback to the interpreter

CREDENTIALLED INTERPRETER (CI) DESIGNATION



PROVEN COMPETENCY

ATA members who hold a CI designation have demonstrated linguistic competence, oral proficiency and a commitment to continuous professional development.



APPROVED ENTITIES

The CI designation is not a certification. The Credentialed Interpreter (CI) designation in ATA's Language Services Directory acknowledges interpreters who are recognized by certain ATA-approved entities in fields such as medical, legal and conference interpreting.



EASY TO IDENTIFY

ATA Credentialed Interpreters are clearly identified in the Language Services Directory to assist with selecting the right interpreter.

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS



LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS

Some entities are required by law to provide interpreters. 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.



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 interpreting or translation in any countries in which you do business.



LEGAL



HEALTHCARE



CONFERENCE



TERMS TO KNOW



TRANSLATION

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



INTERPRETING

converting spoken or signed **speech** from one language into another

Computer-Assisted Interpreting (CAI):

The use of computer software to increase a human interpreter's productivity and consistency, such as quickly searching glossaries to find the right term. This is different from machine interpreting.

Credentialed Interpreter: ATA's designation for an interpreter who has been assessed as competent in two or more languages by a professional organization or government entity that evaluates interpreting skills and knowledge.

Interpreting equipment: Various types of equipment, such as microphones, headsets, booths or audiovisual technology, may be used by interpreters.

Language pair: The combination of a source and target language in relation to the interpreting process. Examples of language pairs are English to Spanish or Spanish to English. An interpreter may work in more than one language pair.

Machine Interpreting (MI): When a spoken message is converted from one language to another without the involvement of human interpreters.

Modality: Means of delivering interpreting services, such as over-the-phone, in-person or video remote interpreting.

Mode of interpreting: The method for the delivery of language interpreting services, such as consecutive or simultaneous.

Remote interpreting platform: A specialized application used to host interpreting sessions between interpreters and participants.

Source language: Language of the original message.

Target audience: The public for whom the interpreting services are provided.

Video conference platform: Any application used to host meetings, seminars or webinar sessions that may include features for interpretation in one or more languages, such as Zoom.

Working languages: Interpreters may speak or understand 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 interpreters and translators in the world with **members in all 50 states and over 100 countries.**

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



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/



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The Voice of Interpreters and Translators

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