

How to

work with public service interpreters



How to series / WPSI2007

Interpreters will help you get your message across. You can help them by following some simple advice:

DO:

- ✓ Brief your interpreter in full before a meeting. Give them as much advance warning as possible and details about the assignment. This should include date, time, location, building, room, contact people and their phone numbers, transport arrangements, subject matter, language and dialect.
- ✓ Check whether the interpreter will work simultaneously (speaking

nearly at the same time as you speak) or consecutively (relaying the info after you speak). Ask the interpreter for a run through of how it works for clarity.

- ✓ Allow the interpreter to take notes.
- ✓ Consider the subject matter and decide whether you need an interpreter to be male or female.
- ✓ Contact us if you are struggling to find out which language you need.
- ✓ Give details of the people involved beforehand in case

they are known to the interpreter and it might affect the interpreter's impartiality.

- ✓ Speak slowly and clearly.
- ✓ Allow extra time and pauses for interpreters to catch up
- ✓ Avoid long, complex sentences, and do not use slang, jargon, or

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colloquial expressions. Explain organisations or concepts that might be unknown to non residents.

- ✓ Allow time for interviewees to get to the point. In some cultures this can take time.
- ✓ Allow breaks
- ✓ Allow 5 minutes for the interpreter to introduce themselves and explain their role and the fact that they are impartial and will treat all matters as confidential. You can also establish how names should be spelt and introduce yourself and explain your own role, as many public service roles will be unknown to people from different cultures.
- ✓ Check that everyone understands each other by asking the interviewee to explain the important points back to you.
- ✓ Give a summary at the end.
- ✓ Be aware of body language – different

movements and gestures mean different things in different languages. Ask the interpreter for guidance and consider mimicking his or her stance. Also consider asking for tips on what you should do to be polite.

DON'T

- ✗ Position the interpreter on your side of any meeting table. It is important that the interpreter is perceived as impartial and should therefore be positioned in the middle or at the side of a meeting.
- ✗ Speak to the interpreter directly. Always speak directly to the interviewee.
- ✗ Say things “off the record” - it is the interpreter’s duty to interpret every word that is said.
- ✗ Forget to check the interpreter’s security clearance and disclosure status before or on arrival.



Other documents in the How to series:

- How to work with interpreters
- How to plan a multilingual meeting
- How to save money on translation costs
- How to use free translation tools online

See our website for all these guides and more.

Call us if you need help or advice.

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