

# Best Practices - Working with Interpreters

---

Insights into Face-to-Face Interpreting



# Introduction



Professional interpreters help to assure effective communication between a client (the person interacting with the interpreter) and a Limited English Person.

In face-to-face interpreting sessions, the interpreter's role and responsibilities require them to facilitate seamless real-time conversation. They are also required to adhere to a formal code of conduct and follow best practices.

But what is your role and responsibilities? And what are best practices you should follow when working with interpreters and Limited English Persons?

This document was prepared to help you be more successful when working face-to-face with a Limited English Person and an interpreter. Being aware of, and then following, best practices will contribute to improving the overall experience for Limited English Persons, and help decrease the disparity between them and people without language barriers. Ideally, the Limited English Person should be made to feel that the client and the interpreter are an experienced team.

*One of the keys to effective interpreting teamwork is communication. Following these best practices will help you and your interpreter communicate more effectively.*



# Preparation

A well-informed and well-prepared interpreter will do a better job whether they are working face-to-face with people in a court of law, home, hospital, immigration office, meeting room or construction site.

## INFORMATION THE INTERPRETER WILL HAVE WHEN THEY ARRIVE

When the ordering party places a request with the Interpreting Service Provider, they will be asked to provide standardized information:

- Location, name of contact, start time, expected duration, language, file name (including the name of the Limited English Person), file number, nature of the assignment, risk factors, key issues/sensitive subjects, special requirements (e.g. hard hat or safety shoes) and important background information such as gender-specific interpreter.

The above information enables the Interpreting Service Provider to identify an appropriate interpreter, after which the Interpreting Service Provider sends the interpreter the information, so they may accept/decline the assignment. The interpreter receives a considerable amount of information, but it is essential that you expand on the information base provided.

## PREPARATION

The interpreter is expected to arrive 10-15 minutes prior to the start of the assignment to ensure that they are in the right place at the right time. Often, it is a good idea to book an interpreter anywhere from 15-60 minutes prior to the start time to allow for preparation. This is common in legal situations such as discoveries, civil trials, arbitrations, etc.

## KEY ITEMS TO COVER PRIOR TO STARTING SESSION

- Review the aims of the session to ensure they have not changed since order time;
- Share any additional background information not previously provided;
- If risks were identified in the order, discuss how the interpreter should react;
- Highlight areas where there is ambiguity, strict technical requirements or protocols;
- Discuss the meaning and spelling of specialized terminology; and
- Explain unfamiliar or complex concepts.



# Speaking to the Limited English Person

This section will help you communicate more effectively with the Limited English Person by making it easier for the interpreter to understand the intended meaning of the client's statements and to communicate those thoughts accurately. In short... keep it simple!

## FIVE THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Speak directly to the Limited English Person in the first person (e.g. "Tell me about your injury");
- Speak slowly and clearly;
- Use short sentences;
- Pause between sentences to allow for interpreting;
- Be patient. Interpreted conversations take longer.

## WHAT TO AVOID

- Acronyms and abbreviations. Say the entire name;
- Highly idiomatic speech (e.g. "It's raining cats and dogs", or "In a New York minute");
- Sentence fragments (e.g. "Because my cat loves it", or "Since I came to New York");
- Changing your idea in the middle of a sentence;
- Asking multiple questions at the same time.
- Multiple people speaking at the same time

## SOME CONCEPTS HAVE NO LINGUISTIC EQUIVALENTS IN OTHER LANGUAGES

Professional interpreters are skilled at compensating for concepts that have no direct equivalents. It is important to note that the interpreter will need additional time to restructure information and present it in an appropriate manner.



# Listening to the interpreter

For effective communication, you need good speaking and listening skills. This section will help you maximize your listening skills to help ensure the Limited English Person, and the interpreter, understand your statements/questions and respond appropriately.

## THREE THINGS TO REMEMBER

- There should be no back-and-forth dialogue that the interpreter does not interpret;
- Should you feel that you are not getting the type of response you were expecting (response is vague, off topic, illogical), restate the question;
- If the understanding of a response is very important, ask the Limited English Person to repeat their answer and listen for accuracy.

# Provide feedback to the ISP

A professional Interpreting Service Provider will value your feedback and encourage you to be forthcoming. Your feedback is essential to maintaining high quality interpreting standards.

- Reply to customer satisfaction surveys whenever possible; and,
- If you have an issue, connect with your language service provider as soon as you can.

# Summary

1. Book adequate preparation time
2. Ensure you and the interpreter are well-aligned before start time
3. Follow best practices when speaking to the Limited English Person
4. Follow best practices when listening to the interpreter
5. Provide feedback to the Interpreting Service Provider

## All Languages Ltd

306-421 Bloor Street East, Toronto ON M4W 3T1  
Head Office: 416-975-5000 / Toll-Free: 1-888-975-4468  
[www.AllLanguages.com](http://www.AllLanguages.com)

