

The Importance of Quality

Insights into Face-to-Face Interpreting



Introduction



Face-to-face interpreting is a specialized service that places incredible demands on an interpreter as they must work in two different languages at the same time, often without the use of dictionaries or reference materials.

By comparison, translators work with written words and have the benefit of dictionaries, libraries and computer memory resources. Plus, their work is proofread by a second person to help achieve a quality end-product.

Quality is important for both services but is achieved in very different ways so expectations need to be set accordingly.

The quality of face-to-face interpreting is affected by a number of factors: language required (e.g. commonly spoken), situational details and the specific interpreter's qualifications and experience – an important human element. Technology is helpful in managing the administrative process, but, in the end, face-to-face interpreting comes down to two people communicating face to face.

From an operational perspective, an Interpreting Service Provider (“ISP”) strives to deliver quality face-to-face services by effectively recruiting and selecting interpreters, following quality assurance processes, surveying customers and maintaining important industry certifications.

This document was written to help you understand why various levels of quality exist, how each is achieved, and how you can help us achieve the quality level you require.



Components of quality



From the language industry perspective, quality is about meeting the specifications of a given project/order and ensuring that all stakeholders (the ordering party, the Limited English Proficiency [LEP] person and the contact person working with the interpreter) understand the level of interpreting quality that is achievable given the requirements.

Factors influencing quality include:

LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS

According to a Statistics Canada survey completed in 2011, over 200 languages were identified as the language spoken at home or mother tongue. Naturally, languages with more speakers have a larger pool of interpreters from which to draw than less diffused (rarer) languages. Given this fact, all stakeholders should manage their expectations accordingly.



When you have an assignment, please provide us with as much lead time as possible to book an interpreter.

SITUATIONAL DETAILS

The interpreting coordinator will gather all the data required to process an order, but there are often subtle bits of information that don't get highlighted and which could affect quality.

For example, an ordering party may be seeking an interpreter to work with an Arabic-speaking person with limited English. The coordinator can easily find an interpreter who speaks Arabic, but to achieve even better quality, an interpreter from the homeland of the person needing assistance is the ideal.



To improve quality, include the language and locale (country or region) where the person with limited English is originally from.



SPECIFIC INTERPRETER QUALIFICATIONS

Many organizations have policies regarding the qualifications of interpreters that can be assigned. The reasoning being that higher quality interpreting can be achieved by using interpreters with higher qualifications. This enables interpreters to be stratified based on their credentials, area of expertise, years of experience and performance record.

In today's market, the majority of ISPs use a simplified rate structure to differentiate the different strata of interpreters. In the future, you will see an expanded model with five levels to achieve an even closer relationship between qualifications and costs.

Context	Examples of Settings	Qualifications	Interpreter Level
Insurance, Medical, Social Services and/or Educational	Doctor's appointments, physiotherapy assessments and treatments, child protection, statements of claim, parent-teacher interviews, home visits	Language testing, community-based training, and/or over five years of setting-specific experience	Basic
Legal, more complex Medical settings	Lawyer-client meetings, discoveries, EOU's, etc. Independent medical assessments, return to work, social work and psychological, capacity hearings	Basic plus: Industry or context-specific education and five or more years of relevant experience.	Medium
Legal and Medical	Neuropsychological assessments, catastrophic injuries, trials, arbitrations, hearings, mediations	Medium plus: Community College Training Program (LITP), Ontario Council on Community Interpreting accreditation (ACI). <i>Legal contexts:</i> Ministry of the Attorney General (MAG) accreditation, Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) certification, ATIO, and OCCI-Accredited Community Interpreters (ACI)	Advanced



THE VENDOR RESOURCE BASE

ISPs select interpreters by following a well-established on-dossier process similar to that used by the Association of Translators and Interpreters of Ontario (ATIO). Factors considered include:

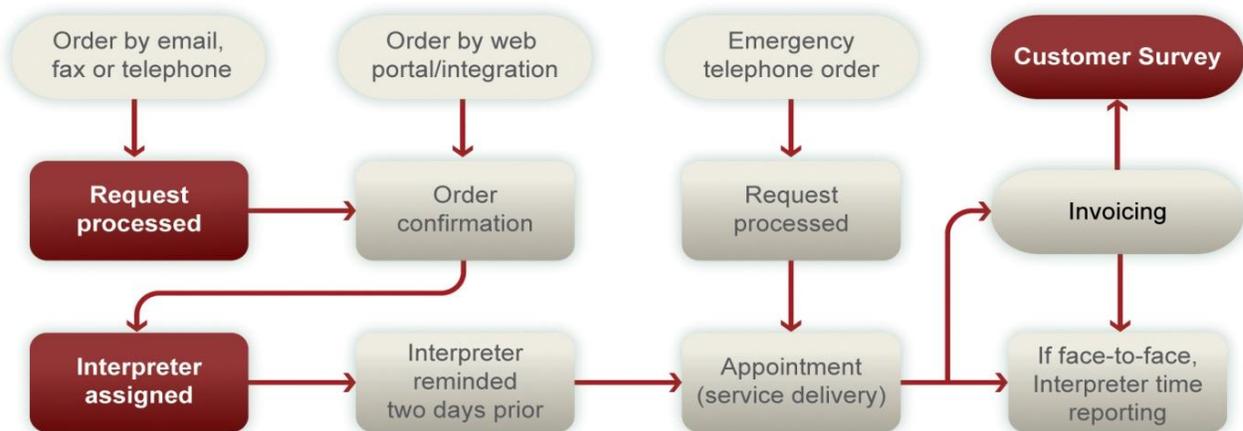
- Languages spoken, linguistic degrees and tests (CILISAT / ILSAT / etc.)
- Completion of LITP and/or other college-level training programs
- Countries resided in and level of education / work experience received in each country, noting years of experience in specific areas of practice
- Certification status by a recognized body such as the IRB, Ministry of the Attorney General or OCCI-ACI accredited interpreter



Increase your budget when requiring higher interpreter qualifications; reduce your budget when requiring less stringent qualifications.

Quality assurance process

Quality assurance takes place at three key stages in the overall workflow process.



- **Request processed** – Best practices are followed when gathering and processing information. A well-developed service delivery infrastructure enables ISPs to quickly and accurately process your order.



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- **Interpreter assigned** – Involves a combination of computer efficiency and human ingenuity to select the best possible interpreter for the assignment.
- **Customer surveys** – Designed to measure customer satisfaction levels. Methods include surveying via e-mail and personal follow-up calls.

ESCALATION PROCESS

When issues arise with an interpreter or customer service, there should be a formal process in place to resolve complaints and ensure issues are not repeated.



Industry certifications

There are only two third-party audited standards for Interpreting Service Providers in North America, both of which are based on the National Standard Guide for Community Interpreting Services (NSGCIS). The key components include:

- Competencies of the interpreters provided.
- The relationship between clients and the Interpreting Service Provider (ISP).
- Management and documentation of service delivery process.
- The responsibilities of all stakeholders (client, ISP, interpreters).



NATIONAL STANDARD GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY INTERPRETING SERVICES

This certification follows the Canadian standard in that NSGCIS-AILIA certified interpreters have one or all of the following qualifications: post-secondary education, preferably a recognized degree in interpretation or a related field, the completion of a language proficiency test, and documented experience in the field.



Summary

1. Quality interpreting is not the same as quality translation. Interpreters are not in a situation to provide mirror images of sentences or paragraphs.
2. Expect higher/lower levels of quality depending on the language required, situational details and specific interpreter qualifications. A good ISP minimizes these variances.
3. Have a clear understanding of the interpreting coordinator's recommendation.
4. The more lead time you provide, the better.
5. The ISP follows well-defined quality assurance processes.
6. Keep the order confirmation number handy should you need to amend the order.
7. Industry certifications are a quick way to identify an ISP's compliance with standards.

For more information

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