

Interpreters do the talking

Interpreters work with the spoken word, converting speech from a source language into a target language. This is far more than speaking two languages fluently. The interpreter must also communicate the style and tone of the speaker, while taking into account differences of culture, dialect, and setting. The listeners should hear the interpreted message as if it had been originally spoken in their own language.

Interpreters usually work in two directions

Most interpreters work bi-directionally, meaning that an interpreter often works both to and from the target and source languages.

Good speakers in their native languages

Interpreters not only understand the source language but also communicate extremely well in the target language.

The setting determines the method of interpreting

- **Simultaneous interpreting**

Simultaneous interpreting requires the interpreter to listen and comprehend in one language (source) while "simultaneously" providing an interpretation in a second language (target).

Settings for simultaneous interpreting include court proceedings, international meetings, television news broadcasts, and press conferences. The sessions at the United Nations are the most commonly recognized use of simultaneous interpreting.

- **Consecutive interpreting**

Consecutive interpreting requires the interpreter to hear several complete sentences in one language (source) before the speaker stops to allow the interpreter to provide an interpretation in a second language (target)..

Settings for consecutive interpreting include small meetings, person-to-person communication, and question-and-answer sessions, such as attorney-client interviews and physician-patient encounters.

- **Sight translation**

Sight interpreting requires the interpreter to orally translate a written document, typically with little or no preparation. This is usually to relay key information that allows a meeting or other session to proceed.

Settings for sight interpreting include social services encounters, trial preparation meetings, and healthcare education sessions.

Often specialize by subject areas

Interpreters often specialize in certain subject areas, such as law, medicine, business, banking, technology, science, and literature. Specialization requires an in-depth knowledge of the subject and its terminology in both the source and target languages

One common requirement

To perform effectively and accurately, interpreters must be able to hear the speaker clearly. It is also helpful—and preferable—if the interpreter can see the speaker.

Usually paid by the job

Interpreters set their rates by the length of the job—hourly, half day, or full day. If you need an interpreter for an entire day, be sure to specify whether the day is 7, 8, or more hours.

Keys to successful interpreting

1. Hire an interpreter who is skilled in communicating in his or her native language
2. Look for an interpreter who specializes in the subject area of your job
3. Provide the interpreter with as much information as you can about the assignment
4. Establish the basis for the fee—hourly, half day, or all day—and the number of hours in a day
5. Check references