



Tips for Working with Interpreters

1. **Offer your client an interpreter** even if your client speaks some English. Limited English Proficient (LEP) clients may not know interpreters are available or may be too embarrassed to ask for one. They should not have to struggle to understand you.
2. **Schedule additional time**
 - Allow extra time for the appointment when you are working with an interpreter. Furnish the interpreter with all the pertinent information or materials concerning the process ahead of time.
3. **Introductions and Confidentiality**
 - Sit facing the LEP just as you would if there were no interpreter. The interpreter should be seated next to the client facing you.
 - Keep eye contact with the LEP (be aware of cultural differences).
 - Trained interpreters will explain their role to you and the LEP client.
 - Explain your role/purpose of the visit to the client. This may include the confidentiality of the conversation.
4. **Direct conversations between you and the client**
 - Speak directly to the client. Speak to the LEP as if you were speaking in the same language, use 1st or 2nd person. *“What happened last night?”*

Do not use the 3rd person (he/she – ask him, ask her) when referring to the client to whom you are speaking. *“Ask him what happened last night?”* is incorrect.
 - Speak clear and concise with logical pauses to allow the interpreter to accurately interpret.
 - Only allow one person to speak at a time.

- Be prepared to explain. The interpreter should not explain anything; only interpret.
 - Understand that the interpreter is not an advocate.
- Be aware of cultural differences and level of education of the client.

4. Speak clearly, pause for interpretation and check for understanding

- Speak in plain English to avoid misinterpretation.
- Avoid double negatives. They result in ambiguity, even in English.
- Do not use long and involved questions. Keep questions uncomplicated.
- Make sure that you and the LEP wait for full interpretation.
- Check periodically with your client to ensure she/he understands. Do not ask the interpreter for his/her opinion of comprehension.
- Do not ask or say anything you do not want your client to hear. Expect everything to be interpreted.

5. Having the interpreter sight-translate important documents

- Speak slower when reading from documents or instructions.
- Do not ask the interpreter to summarize or paraphrase any documents or anything you say.
- Do not interrupt the interpreter. Accuracy is compromised.

Do not leave the interpreter and your client(s) alone.

Frequently Asked Questions

What kind of interpreting do I need?

Simultaneous – this is where an interpreter sits next to the LEP and immediately interprets the dialogue. Special equipment (transmitter and receiver) can also be used for simultaneous interpreting. This type of interpreting is used at conferences, court and large meetings.

Consecutive – this is where an interpreter listens to a segment of speech then interprets. This is used at face to face meetings.

How many interpreters do I need?

This depends on the nature of the work. For simultaneous interpreting, if the assignment is expected to last longer than 30 minutes, you should hire two interpreters, with each interpreter taking turns of 10 to 30 minutes each.

For face to face/consecutive interpreting the requirements differ according to the nature of the assignment. Please be aware that interpreting is mentally exhausting and the interpreter may require a break.