



Getting into interpreting?

interpret: vb to express in another language, using the spoken word

The first step

Think about the type of interpreting you are interested in: conference; business; court; community, and decide which of these categories best suits your personality and job expectations. Give serious thought to the question of whether you are sufficiently qualified to hope for work in an overcrowded profession.

Can you offer the minimum requirements?

- A high standard of education; a degree in interpreting or in languages with a postgraduate training in interpreting are the norm among today's interpreters. You must have total mastery of your mother tongue in a style appropriate to the subject and, for much of the work, a flair for technical subjects;
- Mastery of one but preferably more foreign languages; this, however, is not enough on its own - you must have a thorough knowledge of the institutions, culture, attitudes and practices in the countries where that language is spoken, normally acquired through residence there;
- A broad general knowledge and readiness to keep abreast of what happens in the world in all your languages.

Which type of interpreting interests you?

Simultaneous interpreting is carried out from a booth or whispering directly for one or two people. Simultaneous interpreters generally work into their mother tongue from one or several other languages. If there are only two working languages, the interpreter may be required to work into and from both languages.

Consecutive interpreting occurs when the speaker pauses after each sentence or phrase in order to allow the interpreter to translate into the other language. Usually the interpreter will need to take notes in order not to forget anything that the speaker has said.

These two techniques are used in different situations:

Conference interpreting at national and international conferences, meetings and informal gatherings where the delegates speak different languages but need to communicate, learn and transact business;

Ad-Hoc interpreting which is provided for people who are not fluent or native speakers and who need to communicate with the providers of public services so as to have full and equal access to legal, health, education, social and other public in the official language; the same principle applies to interpreting for the police and for the courts.

What other qualities are needed?

Interpreters should have a high level of intelligence and a broad general education, as well as personal integrity and commitment. They also need great stamina, resistance to stress, good physical health, an excellent memory, powers of analysis - they must be able to tolerate very close working contact with colleagues and clients, sometimes in difficult conditions. Conference and court interpreters must feel confident about speaking in public. Interpreters must have a flexible approach to language since speech is usually less predictable than the written word, and they need to be able to switch subjects without warning and cope with an unexpected topic of conversation.

If you feel you have the necessary background, what should you do next?

- Produce a well-presented curriculum vitae, briefly describing your education, qualifications, the relevant professional associations of which you are a member (ITI, AIIC, APCI), the languages you can work into (mother tongue) and out of and a list of assignments you have had, stating the number of worked days;

- Send your cv and a short covering letter to potential work providers: European Union, international organisations (NGOs), translation and interpreting agencies. Consult Yellow Pages and your local library for addresses, talk to well-established interpreters for tips and advice.
- If you feel further training is necessary join the ITI Interpreters' Network so that you can meet other interpreters, find out more about the kind of work they do, attend valuable workshops and seminars and find out more about sources of work and work providers. You could also consider taking a full time or part time interpreting course.

The EU Commission in Brussels runs a short training course in conference interpreting for suitably-qualified candidates who can speak one of the official EU Community languages as a native speaker and have a thorough understanding of two other Community languages. Many local authorities and some university departments are running short training courses for community interpreters, in the absence of any formal training for this kind of work.

Good luck!

Starting up as an interpreter is tough. The competition is fierce and only the really skilled will succeed. Few organisations employ full-time interpreters and if they do, it is normally on short contracts. It is much more common for interpreters to be freelance. ITI is here to help you if you would like to embark on this demanding and rewarding career.

For any further information on ITI please visit its website at:
www.iti.org.uk

© ITI