

## Acquiring and using the services of an interpreter can raise many questions.

**The aim of this brochure is to provide some of the answers you might be looking for. It covers issues such as:**

- **where to find an interpreter**
- **how to pay the right price**
- **how to work effectively with your interpreter**

**By applying even half the suggestions made, you will improve your chances of getting your message across using an interpreter.**

**This brochure will help you to get it right.**

### A Few Useful Definitions

**Simultaneous interpreting** n. A mode of interpreting where speech is translated while it is being spoken (usually with a delay of no more than a few seconds). Often performed with the aid of an interpreter's booth or some other method for acoustic isolation of the interpreter from the speaker and listener/s so as not to distract them.

**Consecutive** (interpreting) adj. A mode of interpreting where the interpreter waits for the speaker to finish an utterance of reasonable length (given the interpreter's memory and/or note-taking skills) before translating it.

**Chuchotage** n. Simultaneous interpreting in a whisper for the benefit of a person or small number of people listening to speech in a language in which they are not fluent. Also known as 'whispering' or 'whispered interpreting'.

**To find out more, visit  
[www.ausit.org](http://www.ausit.org)**

**or call our national number free  
1800 284 181**

AUSIT is a member association of Professions Australia, a national organisation of professional associations, and FIT, the International Federation of Translators.

*This document makes extensive use of the original Getting It Right brochure published by the Institute of Translation and Interpreting in the United Kingdom, and AUSIT thanks the copyright holder for agreement to adapt it to the Australian market.*

Ask your interpreter if they feel comfortable working with the subject matter and time constraints of your job. You can also ask for professional references and about their experience, as with any other profession.

The AUSIT Code of Ethics requires interpreters to inform clients if they don't feel able to accept an assignment for any reason. They will almost certainly be able to refer you to one of their colleagues who can.

### 3.3 Conference interpreting - that's different, isn't it?

No. Conference interpreting usually involves simultaneous interpreting using specialised audio equipment. However, it can also involve other modes of interpreting, such as 'consecutive', where the interpreter takes notes and reproduces a speech, or 'whispered', where the interpreter interprets in a low voice for a single listener or small group.

Most interpreters have experience in all these various interpreting skills. NAATI accreditation as a Conference or Senior Conference Interpreter is an indication of significant experience with conferences. However, 'Interpreter' accredited practitioners also have extensive conference experience. Refer to the AUSIT directory, which describes members' experience, or individual websites, when making your choice.

## WITH YOUR INTERPRETER

### 4.1 Background material

Interpreters are not mind-readers. Poorly informed interpreters cannot do high quality work. Make sure that the interpreter is completely informed on all aspects of the job at hand: the historical context, the aims of the parties, and especially with regard to all printed documents relating to the job or referred to by speakers.

**A professional interpreter will ask many questions. This is a good sign!**

The more information that can be provided to the interpreter prior to the job, the greater the degree of accuracy and faithfulness they will be able to achieve when interpreting.

### 4.2 Regional accents, dialects

There are accents and regional dialects in every language. The English spoken in Mumbai is certainly not the same as in Glasgow!

Interpreters will usually ask for a few minutes alone with a speaker beforehand to accustom themselves to any regional variations. This is all part of making sure they can interpret accurately and faithfully from the very first word.

Follow your interpreter's guidance in this matter – remember first impressions are often lasting!

### 4.3 Do I need to alter the way I speak for the interpreter?

In general, no. Interpreters strive to allow speakers to continue at their natural rhythm. However, they cannot interpret effectively unless they can hear and see the speaker clearly. Good acoustics and sight lines are preferable, and should meet ISO standards 2603 and 4043. Speakers should also be reminded not to read printed material at high speed, as this is virtually impossible to follow.

### 4.4 Do I speak to the interpreter or the other person?

Interpreters always strive to allow the various parties to speak naturally and transparently – as if there were no language difference. Often you can speak completely normally to the other party, provided you pause from time to time for the interpreter!

There are a myriad of different situations in which an interpreter can work: standing beside you in court, sitting between the parties during a business negotiation, or hidden in a booth above a large conference hall interpreting over a headset audio system. Ask your interpreter before you begin and they will be happy to advise on the most effective manner to organise the assignment.

### 4.5 Is the interpreter on 'my side'? I pay them, right?

Wrong. Interpreters are ethically required to remain absolutely neutral and interpret everything that is spoken accurately and faithfully.

The French president, Jacques Chirac, once exclaimed in French during a meeting with Margaret Thatcher: 'What the hell does the old witch want from me!?' The interpreter faithfully interpreted the phrase into English.

Watch what you say in front of an interpreter, as you would during any exchange. They are not there to filter your language or offer advice.

### 4.6 How do I treat my interpreter?

Interpreters are humans too! Interpreting requires intense concentration and an expenditure of mental energy that often leaves interpreters exhausted at the end of the day. Treat them with the courtesy that their work and skills deserve.

### 4.7 How about payment?

Most interpreters are freelancers and rely on prompt payment to maintain a cash flow, so short terms of payment are the norm. As noted above, you may also be asked to make some payment in advance to cover travelling expenses or on large jobs.

# AUSIT

**AUSTRALIAN  
INSTITUTE of  
INTERPRETERS &  
TRANSLATORS Inc**

4 WORKING EFFECTIVELY

**INTERPRETING GETTING IT RIGHT**

### 1.1 What do I need – an interpreter or a translator?

Interpreting is spoken, translation is written.

**Interpreters provide spoken or signed versions that convey, in another language, the content and intentions of the statements by the original speaker.**

People sometimes think translators are more qualified than interpreters or vice versa. This is incorrect. Translators and interpreters are both highly skilled language professionals who offer different services to consumers. An interpreter interprets the spoken or signed message, a translator translates written documents.

### 1.2 Where do I find an interpreter?

The three most commonly used sources are:

- The AUSIT website. To find a translator or interpreter click on the appropriate box on the left hand side of the AUSIT website home page, [www.ausit.org.au](http://www.ausit.org.au)
- The National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) website, [www.naati.com.au](http://www.naati.com.au)
- The *Yellow Pages* (print copy or on-line)

### 1.3 What are the advantages and disadvantages of the three sources?

The AUSIT website lists nationally accredited interpreters who are members of the national professional association, providing their contact details, specialist fields and additional relevant information.

AUSIT interpreters are practising professionals who utilise the various AUSIT resources, including electronic bulletin boards, to access and exchange ideas of practical relevance with their multilingual colleagues. AUSIT interpreters also have access to a range of professional development activities which keep them at the forefront of their profession.

The NAATI website lists accredited interpreters who have chosen to register on it. Some of these professionals may not be active. The site also provides information on fields of expertise.

Many people still turn to the *Yellow Pages* first. A limited number of individual interpreters advertise here, but it does list companies and agencies. You will not find companies or agencies listed on the NAATI or AUSIT websites. Most interpreting assignments will only require a single professional, who will also gladly organise teams of their colleagues for larger jobs. Or you may prefer to engage an agency to manage a large assignment.

### 1.4 What about professional qualifications?

Australian universities and technical colleges offer tertiary qualifications in translating and interpreting, as do overseas institutions. These may or may not be recognised by government and private bodies in Australia. You need to verify the credentials of the people you employ (see 1.5 below).

### 1.5 What is a 'NAATI accredited Interpreter'?

This is an interpreter whose skills have been reviewed and certified by NAATI as meeting official requirements, usually by means of an exam (NAATI is a body set up by the Federal Government to ensure an adequate supply of skilled interpreters and translators for the Australian community). The assessment tests not only interpreting skills, but also the candidate's knowledge of the Code of Ethics developed and overseen by AUSIT.

### 1.6 Are there different levels of professional interpreter accreditation?

Yes. The full details are available on the NAATI website. In summary, there are four levels: Paraprofessional, Interpreter, Conference Interpreter and Senior Conference Interpreter.

'Paraprofessional' is a stepping-stone accreditation created by NAATI for candidates without tertiary qualifications on the way to full professional interpreter accreditation.

'Interpreter', 'Conference' and 'Senior Conference' all denote fully-accredited professional interpreters. These are language professionals who are capable of taking on any assignment, given adequate preparation time and materials. Assignments can include simultaneous, consecutive, 'whispered' (see Section 3.3 and the back of this brochure), or telephone interpreting.

'Conference' and 'Senior Conference' accreditations are awarded to interpreters who can demonstrate a certain amount of experience in the conference interpreting field, are members of the international conference interpreters association (AIIC), or have graduated from recognised university courses.

**Care should be taken when using these accreditations to choose which interpreter is right for your assignment. Accreditations only represent a starting point.**

Many interpreters with extensive experience in conference interpreting never apply for 'Conference' accreditation (there is currently no testing regime in place).

### 1.7 What do you mean by the 'Code of Ethics'?

AUSIT has a Code of Ethics for its members which is endorsed by NAATI and adopted by many organisations. The industry is self-regulating, which means that AUSIT interpreters and translators agree to follow the code in relation to issues such as confidentiality, impartiality, accuracy and reliability.

**An interpreter without a code of ethics is not for you – or anybody else!**

### 1.8 How about using a non-professional?

The stakes are often high in situations requiring interpreters: diagnosing medical conditions in hospitals, defending accused persons in court, or negotiating a critical business deal worth millions of dollars.

You wouldn't want to undergo the wrong operation, be convicted of a crime you never committed, or lose the biggest deal of your life because of problems communicating, would you?

Only you, the customer, know what your needs are. Just because someone speaks another language does not mean they can interpret effectively. Interpreting is a profession requiring years of training. Whatever the interpreting assignment, a professional practitioner needs to apply special techniques which cannot be improvised.

### 1.9 Do I need two interpreters - one for each direction?

No. Interpreters work in both directions, interpreting statements by speakers in both languages. This contrasts with translators, who usually only work from the source language into their mother tongue.

## 2 PAYING THE RIGHT PRICE

### 2.1 What is the cost of using an accredited interpreter?

Interpreting is an expensive business. Increasingly, interpreters have tertiary degrees, like lawyers or accountants, and have to update their skills continually in order to be able to provide you with an effective service. Be prepared to pay professional fees for the services provided. In Australia, interpreting is usually charged on an hourly or daily basis. Rates may vary depending on whether the interpreter is working through an agency or independently.

Because interpreters must be physically present on-site in most cases to perform the work, you may also be billed for travelling

time and costs (e.g. parking, mobile phone use, etc.), or the interpreter may absorb these costs into their overall hourly rate. If the interpreter has to stay away from home overnight, you may also be required to organise adequate accommodation and provide an expense allowance.

A minimum fee may also be charged if the work is only for an hour or two, in order to make it worthwhile for the interpreter.

You will probably need to obtain two or three quotes to get an idea of what you should pay. Call any of the interpreters listed in the AUSIT directory and you'll soon get an idea of the market prices charged by agencies and independent operators.

### 2.2 But how about 'community' interpreting? That costs less, right?

Wrong. There is a false perception that community interpreting is somehow less difficult or important, and thus should be paid at a lower rate.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The stakes involved in interpreting at the community level, which often involves health care, police procedures, or dealings with administration, are just as high as at the 'big end' of town. Interpreters need to be remunerated accordingly.

### 2.3 What are the risks of accepting a quotation below 'market price'?

This is fine if you want to gamble but... A low price could mean the interpreter is inexperienced, has limited professional resources, does it as a hobby for pocket money, or is just plain not very good and cannot get work any other way. Only you can decide if it is worth the risk.

### 3.1 I need a specialist interpreter in my field, don't I?

No. Interpreters are language professionals who can adapt to any situation given sufficient lead time and materials. Like other professions, some individuals limit their practice to specific fields such as law or medicine. However, the nature of an interpreter's professional life generally means they must respond to a dizzying variety of situations.

### 3.2 How can I be sure they are able to do the job properly?

Choosing a NAATI accredited interpreter who is a member of AUSIT is a good first step.