

Acquiring and using the services of a translator can raise many questions.

The aim of this brochure is to provide the answers to those most frequently asked, such as:

- where to find a translator
- how to pay the right price
- how to prepare the job before giving it to a translator
- how to work effectively with your translator
- what to do when you receive your completed translation

By applying even half the suggestions made, you will improve your chances of receiving a translation that works.

This brochure will help you to get it right.

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

To find out more, visit
www.ausit.org

or call our national number free
1800 284 181

Acknowledgement. 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.

3.5 The job is urgent. Should I give the translator a draft as a start?

Tempting as it may be to get your translation project rolling as quickly as possible, having translators work from a draft-in-progress will almost always be more time-consuming and hence more expensive than waiting for the final text to be ready. Worse yet, the more versions you have, the more errors are likely to creep into the final version.

3.6 My translation is for overseas. How does that affect things?

Above all, avoid culture-bound expressions. References to national sport will probably not be understood, nor will literary or cultural metaphors. So it may be okay in Australia to tell your clients that 'we will hit the opposition for six', but this is hardly likely to work in a non-cricketing country. Try to think in international terms and ask yourself whether a non-Australian would really understand what you want to say.

Your translator is probably experienced in the pitfalls – don't hesitate to ask.

WITH A TRANSLATOR

4 WORKING EFFECTIVELY

4.1 Why should I tell the translator what the translation is for?

A speech is not a website. Sales brochures are not catalogue entries. An article in a newspaper is not a prospectus for an Initial Public Offering. This will affect the type of language used by the translator.

Style, accountability, word choice, phrasing and sentence length will all vary, depending on where your text will appear and what you want it to achieve.

An experienced translator will probably ask you for this information and can then prepare a foreign-language version with maximum impact for that particular audience.

4.2 How about specialist technical terms?

There is a widespread myth that technical terms pose few translation problems. While the word or phrase can almost always be found in a technical dictionary, its translation may often vary from discipline to discipline. (All the more reason to tell the translator what the document is for.) In particular, where the technical term occurs in a short phrase without

any supporting context, be prepared to answer 'what does this mean?' questions from the translator. Even the most experienced professional cannot work miracles without backup material and information from you.

4.3 Is an inquisitive translator a good thing?

Yes, very much so. No one reads the text more carefully than your translator, who is likely to identify fuzzy sections for which clarification is needed. This is good news for you, since it will allow you to improve the original. Good translators ask questions along the way.

A major Paris bank remarked: 'We try to wait for our text to come back from the translators before going to press with the original French. The reason is simple – translators track our subject closely. A critical eye helps us identify weak spots in our original.'

4.4 What other skills can a translator bring to my job?

Depending on the individual, such things as revising, proofreading and editing come to mind. But be sure that what is required is clearly defined. For example, proofreading is restricted to typos, punctuation, missing words and general layout. Editing requires the source document and correction of the translation itself.

5 AFTER YOU RECEIVE YOUR COMPLETED TRANSLATION

5.1 Should I have the translator proofread my final typeset copy?

Yes. Always. Even if you have a sound procedure in place, use reliable translation providers who know your company inside out. Last-minute alterations (headings, captions, word changes) by well-meaning non-linguists can sabotage an otherwise effective document.

5.2 What about typographical conventions?

These vary from one language to the next and many printers and office staff are not aware of this. They then 'adjust' the foreign language text to bring it into line with their own standards. French has a space between the word and the colon that follows. In German, nouns take capital letters. In Spanish and French, neither months nor days of the week take an initial capital.

So leave your translator's typographical conventions alone.

If you convert them back to English conventions in a document which has been translated into a language other than English, the translation will be less credible.



**AUSTRALIAN
INSTITUTE of
INTERPRETERS &
TRANSLATORS Inc**

Translation Getting It Right

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

Translation is written, interpreting is spoken. Thus, whereas a translator translates written documents, an interpreter interprets the spoken message. (This brochure only covers translation.)

1.2 Where do I find a translator?

The three most commonly used sources are:

- The *Yellow Pages* (hard copy or on-line)
- The National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) website, www.naati.com.au
- The AUSIT website, www.ausit.org

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

The *Yellow Pages* is often the first stop. A limited number of individual translators advertise in its pages, but it does list companies and agencies. You will not find companies and agencies on the NAATI or AUSIT websites, but large-scale operators may well be of particular interest (see 2.1).

The NAATI website lists accredited translators who have chosen to register on it. Some may not be practising. This database also provides information on fields of expertise.

The AUSIT website lists nationally accredited translators who are members of this professional association, providing their contact details, specialist fields and additional relevant information. Virtually all are actively 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 translators also have access to a range of professional development activities.

1.4 What about professional qualifications?

Australian universities and technical colleges offer tertiary degrees 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 translator'?

This is a translator who has been approved by NAATI, usually by means of an exam. This assessment tests not only translation skills, but also the candidate's knowledge of the Code of Ethics to which an accredited translator is bound.

Many organisations, especially governments, only accept translations prepared and certified by a duly accredited professional translator.

1.6 Are there different levels of accreditation for professional translators?

Yes. Full details are available on the NAATI website. In summary, there are two levels – professional and advanced. An advanced translator is a practitioner who has worked at the professional level for a minimum number of years and passed an exam in two or more specialist areas of greater complexity. Be aware that many translators with extensive experience in specialist areas never apply for 'advanced' accreditation.

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, meaning that AUSIT interpreters and translators agree to follow the Code in relation to issues such as confidentiality, impartiality, accuracy and reliability.

A translator without a code of ethics is not for you – or anybody else!

1.8 How about teachers and academics?

When faced with a foreign language text, many organisations contact the language department of a local school or university. This may sometimes work for in-house needs, but can be extremely risky for external use, where the requirements are usually far more demanding.

Teaching a foreign language is an activity that requires a special set of skills. These are rarely the same as those needed to produce a smooth, polished translation. Opting for student translators may be cheaper, but it carries potential risks.

1.9 Should I look for a translator who is a native speaker of the language into which I need the translation?

The answer, generally speaking, is yes. There are exceptions and some translators are equally good in both directions. If your translator claims to have this ability, ask to see something he or she has done. If it is accurate, reads well, and the translator guarantees equivalent quality for your text – why not? Practitioners accredited in both directions are around but are certainly a minority.

2 PAYING THE RIGHT PRICE

2.1 What is the cost of using an accredited translator?

Translating is an expensive business. Increasingly, translators have tertiary degrees, like lawyers or accountants, and have to update their skills continually in order to provide an effective service. Be prepared to pay professional fees.

In Australia translation is usually charged on a per word basis. There is a wide range of rates, which can be influenced by the specific language, and the type or complexity of the document.

While high prices do not necessarily guarantee high quality, we respectfully submit that with low prices you are less likely to receive a translated text of a satisfactory standard.

You will probably need to get two or three quotes to get an idea of what you should pay. Large agencies tend to charge more as they have to cover management costs, but if you need someone to assemble and manage a team for a large and/or multilingual project, they may be the best option.

2.2 What do you mean by 'type of document'?

There are two aspects – the complexity of the text to be translated and the complexity of the layout. A simple, straightforward text is obviously less time-consuming to translate than some high-tech article full of specialist terminology. And complex layouts take more time to replicate.

Some translators may have the necessary software for special forms and technical drawings, but this is not the general rule. Discuss the options with your translator. Remember, you are employing a translator, not a graphic artist.

2.3 What are the risks involved in accepting a quotation below the 'market price'?

What you might expect – low accuracy, less attention to detail, failure to meet deadlines, etc. This is fine if you want to gamble, but... A low price could well mean the translator is unaccredited, inexperienced, and has limited ability and professional resources. Only you can decide if it is worth the risk.

3.1 Why can't I translate it myself?

Well, perhaps you can, but be careful. If the translation is just for in-house use, it may well be adequate, but speaking is not writing. Oral fluency does not guarantee smooth, flowing text in an appropriate writing style. This may or may not be important, but generally becomes so if the document is for clients and external use.

Be aware that in most cultures, awkward or sloppy use of language is seldom appreciated and often ridiculed.

Unless you are a native speaker of the language into which the text is being translated, your written translation may be immediately recognisable as 'foreign'.

It is often the case that even professional translators have this limitation in their second language (see 1.8).

3.2 What about machine translation?

Yes, you can certainly do this yourself. It is now readily available on-line, and if you're pressed for time and want to get the gist of something for your own use, machine translation may well be helpful. It is certainly fast. And you can't get much cheaper than free, if you don't mind the errors. However, unless the text to be translated is simple, machine translation is often literal and can yield unintelligible results.

Do you really want your clients to buy a water goat from you rather than your hydraulic ram?

3.3 Ask yourself – does it all really need to be translated?

Rather than blindly having the document translated in full – perhaps hundreds of pages – decide which information is actually required. You can often dispense with some padding and thus produce a shorter document in the original language, then have that translated. But make sure that the sections not to be translated are clearly marked.

3.4 What about the old saying 'a picture is worth a thousand words'?

Judicious use of graphics can be far more effective with international readers than literary ramblings and hyper-technical descriptions.

Your translator's job will be made easier and therefore the price will probably be lower.