Court Interpretation
Qualifications for Court Interpreting

What qualifications should you have before attempting to become a certified court interpreter in federal or state courts?

Professional court interpreters are individuals who:

- possess educated, native-like mastery of *both* English and a second language;

- display wide general knowledge characteristic of what a minimum of two years of general education at a college or university would provide; and

- perform the three major types of court interpreting:
  sight interpreting
  consecutive interpreting, and
  simultaneous interpreting.

Thus, proficiency in applied interpreting skills involves the two-fold elements of 1) a high level of mastery of two languages, and 2) specific performance skills in the modes of interpreting. Court interpreters must perform each type of interpreting skillfully enough to include everything that is said, preserve the tone and level of language of the speaker, and neither change nor add anything to what is said. Interpreters must deliver services in a manner faithful to all canons of a Code of Professional Responsibility and court policies regarding court interpreting promulgated by the judiciary.

Mastery of a language at the levels required for court interpreting requires reading and speaking the languages regularly in wide variety of language contexts, and, usually, years of formal education. Acquiring the specific performance skills presupposes some element of innate ability and **practice, practice, practice!**

On the following pages are: 1) some questions to ask yourself to help you decide if you are ready to take a court interpreting certification exam, and 2) references to books you can obtain to learn more about court interpreting.

A FEW Self Assessment Questions Related to Court Interpreting

1. Do you have experience interpreting simultaneously in court or conference settings?

   ___Yes
   ___No

2. Have you ever recorded yourself while simultaneously interpreting, and compared your performance to a transcription of what was originally said?

      ___Yes
      ___No

3. If your answer to 2 was "yes", how successful were you?

    a) ___I could not keep up.
    b) ___I could keep up most of the time.
    c) ___I omitted very little of the original information.
    d) ___I rendered the complete meaning of what was said with very few exceptions.

4. When watching the nightly news on television, I can simultaneously render the newscaster's speech into my specialty non-English language without falling behind.

    a) ___always
    b) ___most of the time
    c) ___often
    d) ___rarely
    e) ___never

5. If someone reads a passage to me that is descriptive (what something looks like, or something that happened), I can remember and repeat back what I hear word-for-word:

    a) ___I have never tried this, and have no idea
    b) ___Only if the passage is less than 20 words in length
    c) ___Usually, even if the passage is as many as 30 to 40 words long
    d) ___Usually, even when the passage is more than 40 words long.

KEY:

Question 1: If your answer was "no", then you are very likely **not** ready for this exam.

Question 2: If your answer was "no", you probably are not ready for this exam.

Question 3: If your answer to 3 was **c** or **d** then you are a **good** candidate for the exam. If you answered **b** to 3, ask yourself whether you might have accurately rendered as much as 80% of the source language. If you think "yes", then you might pass the exam.

Question 4: You should be able to answer **a** or **b**. You are **not** ready if you answered **d** or **e**.

Question 5: You should be able to answer **c** or **d**. If you answer **d** with confidence, you have the required short-term memory ability necessary for consecutive interpretation. Then, if your bilingual language skills are very good, as described above, then you are a good candidate to pass this part of the exam.

Inquiries regarding **Court Interpreting** may be directed to the Research Division Office via email or by calling 1-800-616-6109.