



A guide to

INTERPRETING

in business and corporate environments

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Supporting and developing
language professionals
worldwide





About the author

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Since starting my business Translator in London in 2008, I have been offering English-Spanish translation and consecutive interpreting services to corporate, government and professional clients in the UK, Spain and Latin America. I have a BA Degree in English-Spanish Translation and a BA Degree in English Teaching from the National University of Cordoba. I studied International Relations & Cross-cultural Communications at the University of Westminster and Translation for Media at City University. I work as a consecutive English-Spanish interpreter in business meetings and trade fairs in London. In 2013, I interpreted on live television for ITV's 'This Morning' show. My areas of interest include media, personal development, sustainability, diplomacy and education. I have been a member of The Linguist Editorial Board since 2015 and a CIOL Council Member since 2017. More information on www.translatorinlondon.com.





A guide to interpreting in business and corporate environments

In business and corporate environments, meetings involving international stakeholders are commonplace.

When the participants of those meetings speak different languages, the presence of an interpreter is often required to make communication possible.

These types of meetings may take place in a restaurant over a meal, in a coffee shop, in a corporate room around a table, in an exhibition centre, in an office or even remotely, over video conference. The number of participants in the meetings may vary and the interpreter may end up working with two speakers or a group of ten people.

Consecutive interpreting is generally the preferred interpreting style chosen by clients during small-scale business meetings.

Nevertheless, to allow those clients to make informed decisions about the type of interpreting services that would work best in

their corporate meetings, the interpreting options available and the differences between each interpreting style should be clearly explained from the outset.

FIRST STEPS

The general public sometimes struggles to see the difference between interpreters and translators.

A client may get in contact requesting the services of a 'simultaneous translator'. When this type of request is received, taking the time to explain the main differences between translators and interpreters, in addition to the different interpreting styles available – simultaneous interpreting, consecutive interpreting or liaison interpreting – would allow your clients to have a better understanding of the interpreting alternatives that will be more suitable during their international encounter.



FIND YOUR NICHE IN THE CORPORATE SECTOR

Within business and corporate settings, you can focus on targeting specific clients. An important aspect of that decision should be based on a thorough understanding of the sector in which you would like to break into, their participants, roles, demands, expectations and on those personal interests and skills that could set you apart from other professionals within the corporate world.

Do you prefer to deal with food producers and manufacturers or do you have an interest in fashion and jewellery? Would you like to interpret during business meetings of a global sports retailer or of a major airline?

In almost all sectors and specialisations, businesses grow beyond local borders and interpreters are required to facilitate the development of international business relationships and effective negotiations through successful communication.

Regardless of the sector or industry, some of the following topics may be recurrent in business interpreting:

- Business administration and management
- Accounting and bookkeeping
- Branding, marketing and sales strategies


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- Management of operations
 - Product development
 - Exporting and importing
 - Distribution channels
 - Manufacturing challenges
 - Human resources and personnel
 - Customer services

Understanding the products and services that are offered by a particular corporation is useful for preparation purposes, but a wider vision and deeper knowledge about how businesses operate and grow will give you an edge in business interpreting.

KEY QUESTIONS

To provide an adequate response and a suitable interpreting solution to an initial enquiry regarding business interpreting services, these are some questions that you could ask:

- When and where will the meeting take place?
- What are the main business topics that will be discussed?
- What are the starting and finishing times?
- How many people will take part? How many of them speak [X] and how many of them speak [Y]?

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- What is the structure of the meeting? Is anyone giving a presentation? For how long?
 - Are there any breaks planned for the meeting?
 - Do the participants know each other or will they meet for the first time?
 - What sort of resources could be provided in preparation for the meeting?
 - What is the ultimate objective that the participants have in mind for the meeting?

The parties who speak different languages may get together with different aims in mind, which could have an impact on the way the meeting develops and, in turn, on how interpreting is carried out.

PARTICIPANTS MAY WISH:

- to discuss opportunities for a business deal
- to talk about their current operations, business management or staffing issues (if they are already in business together)
- to present an innovative proposition
- to consider possibilities of importing/exporting
- to analyse their accounts, business reports and books
- to exhibit their products at a trade fair

- to visit an international trade show for networking purposes or to look at what their competitors are doing
- to pitch for investment

The rate of interaction between participants may vary depending on their ultimate intention for the meeting, and therefore the demands on the interpreter may be different.

For instance, you may find that two delegates who are visiting different stands at a trade show will mainly require liaison interpreting of short questions and answers while they walk around an exhibition centre, whereas an interaction between executive managers and their foreign franchise representatives in a boardroom meeting may demand consecutive interpretation and much more note-taking.

Any background information about the meeting could be used to assess if the requirements for the job match your knowledge, expertise and skills before taking on the project.

Interpreting options for business and corporate settings

The following details about the interpreting alternatives available can be used to inform your end-clients about the limitations and benefits of using an interpreter in different business situations and corporate settings.

SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETING DURING BUSINESS PRESENTATIONS AND CONFERENCES

Simultaneous interpreting may be required in meetings and conferences where participants listen to a presentation and where interaction is not overly frequent.

While speakers convey their ideas in their own language, an interpreter renders what is being said into another language in real-time during simultaneous interpreting.


Clients should be aware that two interpreters working in the same language pairs are required to take turns every 30 minutes during simultaneous interpretation.

In big events and conferences, the interpreters work from a booth and headsets are offered to those who do not speak the language of the speakers. Conference organisers generally manage the interpreting requests and provide the equipment required for large-scale events.

In small meetings, however, simultaneous interpretation may be carried out through a portable tour-guide system or in the form of whispered interpreting.

A tour-guide system consists of a small set including headphones and receivers for the listeners, a transmitter for the interpreter and a microphone for the speaker.





Portable systems are easy to set up. The interpreters sit at the back or in a corner of the room where the meeting takes place, they listen to what is being said and whisper their interpretation through their transmitter microphone. The participants listen to the interpretation instantly through their headsets.

WHISPERED INTERPRETING OR CHUCHOTAGE

Chuchotage, or whispered, interpreting may be useful when one – or up to two people – do not understand the language spoken by most of the participants of a meeting, and when short presentations of less than 45 minutes are introduced in the language of most of the people taking part in that meeting.

In such a situation, the interpreter sits next to the participant who does not understand the dominant language and whispers what is being said in real time.

The rest of the participants should be informed about the role of the interpreter in those situations. If the listeners who do not need interpreting are not aware that the interpreter is doing his/her job, they may consider that whispering is disrespectful and disturbing within that context.

For that reason, it is advisable that the person who requires interpreting sits with the language professional in a place where the interpreter's voice would not disturb the rest of the audience during the presentation.

In chuchotage, interpreters are not able to listen to the voice of the main speaker as well as through headsets, and whispering poses extra demands on how the interpreter's voice is used. Due to the above mentioned limitations, whispered interpreting is only appropriate for short meetings.

CONSECUTIVE INTERPRETING IN MEETING ROOMS, BOARDROOMS AND OFFICES

Consecutive interpreting is one of the preferred forms of interpreting for business and corporate meetings for groups of up to ten people and where two different languages are spoken.

Business meetings generally take place in a meeting room or office. The interpreter is in the room with the participants.

During consecutive interpreting a person utters a statement, the interpreter takes notes, the speaker pauses after an idea is finished and then the interpreter interprets.

The discourse of one person is broken down into segments to allow for the interpreter to convey the message in the language of the other participants. The interpreter uses the notes to recall the information that has been given and to render the meaning of the message in the other language. This process makes meetings longer.

Since the presence of a consecutive interpreter is quite visible in small meetings, some people may be tempted to talk to the interpreter instead of addressing the people they want to do business with.

Stakeholders should be asked to interact with their listeners as if they understood their language, and create rapport with them beyond linguistic limitations.

They should also be reminded to speak to their interlocutors directly and to avoid introducing their sentences by speaking to the interpreter saying "Tell him" or "Please tell them".

Consecutive interpreting is suitable for interactive conversations. No equipment is required but the interpreters need to sit in a place where they could take notes comfortably and hear all the speakers taking part in the meeting without difficulties.

LIAISON INTERPRETING FOR TRADE SHOWS AND NETWORKING


Liaison interpreting is a form of consecutive interpreting used for very small groups during brief interactions between the interlocutors of two different languages.

The interpreter works as a type of chaperone, accompanying their clients during dynamic events, while they walk around a venue and talk to different people.

In those situations, note taking is restricted and pauses in speech are frequent for the interpreter to render what has been said without missing important details.

Liaison interpreting, also known as ad-hoc interpreting, does not require special equipment. It is mainly appropriate for informal meetings, networking events, trade fair visits and factory tours.





Preparation

Preparing for an interpreting assignment is crucial. It enhances your confidence before facing a new situation and meeting new people.

The answers to the key questions listed above can give you an overall idea of what the meeting will be like.

Doing research about the companies involved, names of the participants, their roles and location is also useful.

Ask for any documents and resources that will be circulated during the meeting. The agenda, minutes of previous meetings, a written proposal, a contract, slides for a presentation, a business report or any type of background information will give you a deeper understanding of the vocabulary, topic and of the conversations that will develop during business meetings.

Prepare a glossary with the terms that are specific to the company or to any business-related jargon.

Location and context are not always clear indicators of dress code, subject matter and issues to be discussed in a corporate meeting. For that reason, always ask and do your research.

Do not assume that wearing jeans for interpreting at a leisure and hospitality event will be appropriate. You may end up interpreting for the owner of an international hotel chain and the manager of its Spanish branch who want to discuss accounts, annual profits and HR problems in a meeting room within the fair.

In business meetings is not common practice to record the conversations that take place, but it may be worth asking if there is a plan to do so, especially if any members from the media are present.

Consider any issues regarding transport that may affect your journey on the day of the meeting. Make the necessary arrangements beforehand to ensure that you always arrive in good time.



On the day of the assignment

On the day of the assignment, take some water with you, a notepad, at least two pens, or a digital notepad for taking notes.

These are some crucial aspects to consider on the day of interpreting at a business meeting.

Punctuality

Arrive least 15 minutes before the time of the meeting. Nothing can be more upsetting to clients than the uncertainty that an interpreter will not show up or will be late for the meeting.

Arriving early gives you the opportunity of introducing yourself to the people taking part in the meeting, having a briefing, getting familiar with your surroundings and feeling more comfortable about the seating arrangements planned.

This is the time when you can ask the attendees to be precise in their speech and make reasonable pauses while speaking – in the case of consecutive interpreting – to help you perform your job well.

Professional conduct and confidentiality

If the people involved in the meeting have not contacted you directly, and you are working for an agency, you should look after their clients as if they were yours.

If the clients ask for your details or business card, you should refer them to the Project Manager who has hired your services. This is covered under point 6.5 of the CIOL Code of Professional Conduct.

Details discussed in the meeting should remain confidential at all times. As an essential aspect of an interpreter's job, confidentiality is a key aspect of the profession which is also covered on point 6.4 of the CIOL Code of Professional Conduct.

Impartiality

Only interpret what you have heard and never give your opinion or advice during an interpreting project. Even if you do not agree with certain ideas, interpret objectively without any biases. It is our obligation as interpreters to remain neutral at all times.

First Person

As mentioned previously, some clients tend to talk to the interpreter instead of addressing the other participants of the meeting directly.

When you brief your clients, you should tell them to talk directly to the parties they want to address. Explain to them that you use "I" or the first person as if you were their voice while interpreting, instead of saying "S/He asked me to tell you that..."

Clarity

Sometimes certain expressions may not be totally understood when we are engaged in a dialogue or conversation.

As interpreters and human beings we may also need to ask for repetition if a phrase or statement was not clearly heard or understood.

It is better to ask for clarification than to assume that something has been said in one way, and then render a wrong interpretation.





Rates and cancellation

Since the interpreting contexts and business situations may vary, there are different opinions about interpreting rates.

The minimum rate for the first hour of interpreting should cover your time for preparation and travelling, unless you decide to issue a detailed quote specifying all the charges separately. Consider travelling expenses as well.

In many cases within the interpreting profession, half-day and full-day interpreting rates apply, instead of hourly fees.

A surplus charge may be quoted for last minute, weekend or out-of-business hours projects.

Bear in mind that meetings may be extended beyond the time initially scheduled. Would you be able to stay for longer? What is your overtime rate? Have you discussed this with your client prior to the meeting?

Some contingencies may result in a change of plans after you have been booked for an interpreting project.

Before those situations occur, it is advisable to have discussed your payment and cancellation policy with your clients in advance.

You should decide whether you will request upfront payment of the total amount, or of a percentage, or whether you will invoice your clients after interpreting. You should consider if 100% of the quoted rate will apply upon a cancellation or if you allow for some flexibility and reimbursements.

It is a good idea to attach your cancellation policy to the quotation you issue, so that clients are informed about your terms and conditions if they decide to work with you.



About CIOL

CIOL (Chartered Institute of Linguists) is the leading professional body for people using foreign language skills at work, setting the standard for linguists worldwide. Membership offers professional recognition, and our range of membership grades leads to Chartership, recognised worldwide as the gold standard for practitioners, whatever their profession, publicly understood as a badge of quality and competence. We offer many benefits and services, such as mentoring and access to networks. Our awarding organisation, CIOL Qualifications, delivers fully regulated professional language qualifications, such as the Diploma in Public Service Interpreting and the Diploma in Translation, recognised by government departments, agencies, business, universities and schools.

For more information on membership and qualifications, visit ciol.org.uk

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