

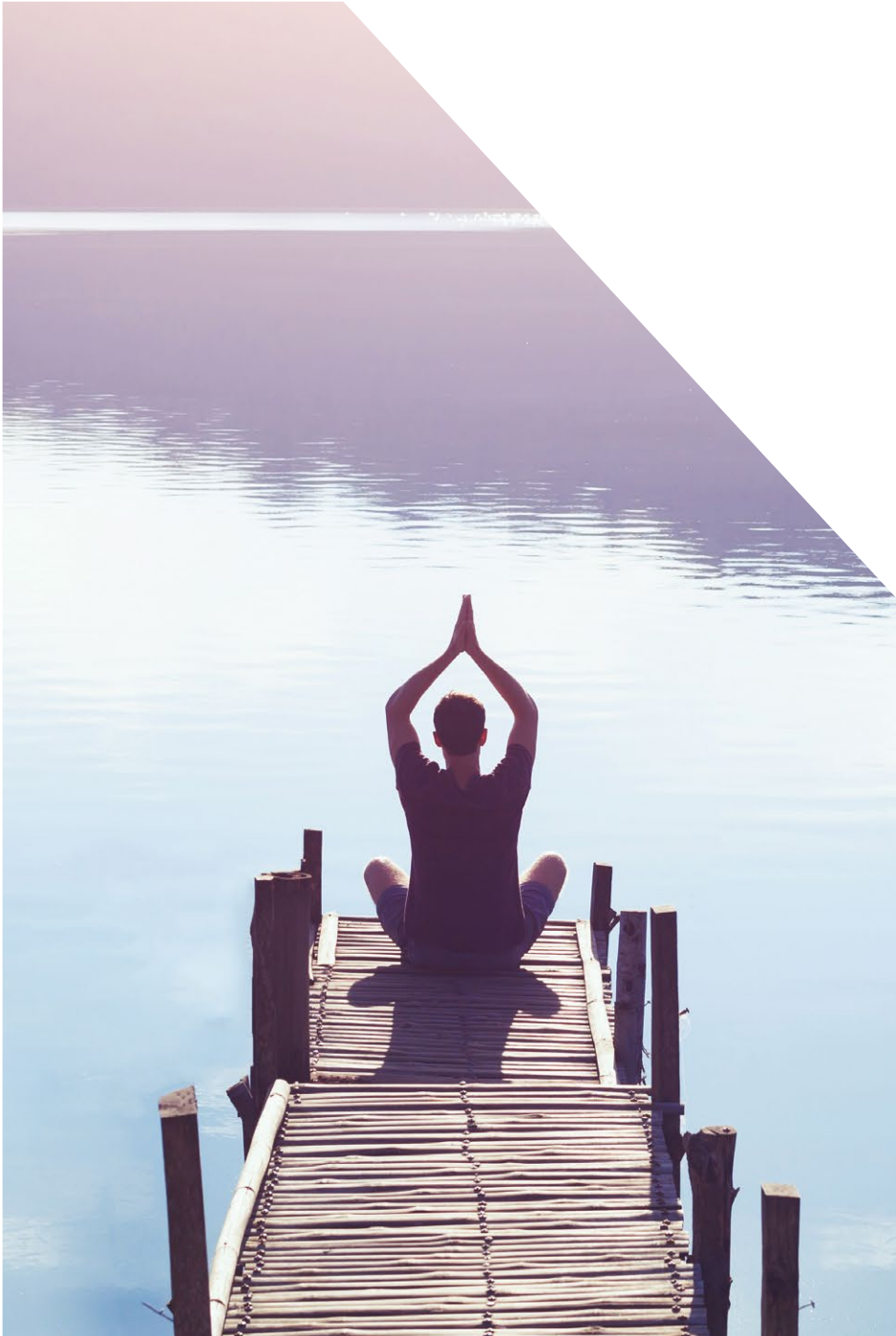
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language professionals
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Health and wellbeing

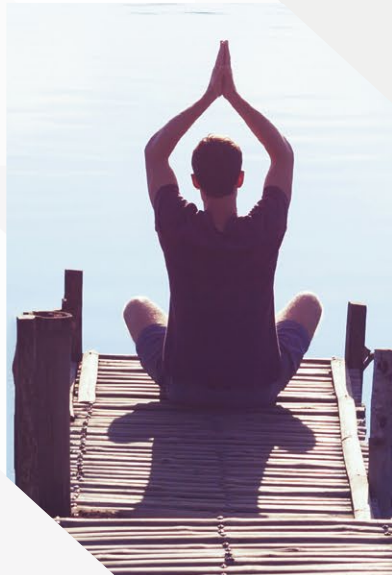
CIOL translating members
offer advice on managing stress

Jenni Radford
Rachel Wingfield
Karine Chevalier-Watts
Natalia Racheyskova
Jo Durning



Introduction

We all know that translation can be a lonely and stressful job. Most translators are self-employed, typically working alone, dealing with clients by email and often not speaking to anyone at work unless there is a problem, or even a crisis. Common sources of stress include tight deadlines and unreasonable expectations from clients, and multi-tasking, with many of us juggling our translation work with other jobs and responsibilities. Especially in the early days, before building up a client base, there is a strong temptation to accept whatever work is offered and that can lead to overwork. However, in a recent CIOL survey of linguists, relatively few of us mentioned a healthy work life balance as one of the professional challenges we face. We must be doing something right. We asked members of the Translating Division working group to tell us about what causes them stress, and how they manage it. We found some common themes, as well as some very individual approaches.



“Taking a proper break makes a real difference”

As freelancers, not saying ‘no’ can often mean we end up putting a lot of pressure on ourselves, a situation I have found myself in on more than one occasion. So for me it’s a question of getting the balance right and ensuring the lines between work and leisure don’t become blurred. There are a couple of things that I find help: I try to plan my working day and make a note of specific tasks that I need to fit in around translation work; I also make sure that I schedule time away from my desk and do some form of physical outdoor activity most days. That could be a walk or a run or half an hour’s gardening, weather permitting, to break up the day, or alternatively a yoga class at the end of the day. Taking a proper break makes a real difference to my ability to relax and switch off when I am not working, and in turn, it means I return to work better able to focus on the task in hand. Work demands sometimes get the better of good intentions, and inevitably, my routine may slip when a deadline is looming, but by adopting these practical techniques, the busy periods, as well as the pressure that comes with fluctuating work levels and the unknown, are not so overwhelming.

Jenni Radford MCIL Chartered Linguist

Jenni is a freelance translator specialising in legal and business translations from Spanish into English. She has worked in the legal and international business sectors and the travel industry and lived and worked in Spain for a number of years. She joined the Translation Division Committee as a co-opted member in October 2018.



“Learn to recognise the initial physical and emotional signs of stress”

Despite being organised and good at time management, I sometimes find that juggling work and family life, including supporting my children through their education journey and exams, can sometimes feel overwhelming, and the increase in stress levels ends up having a detrimental impact on my health.

Over the years, I have learnt that the way for me to manage stress is to first of all learn to recognise the initial physical and emotional signs of stress and then take action to reduce its impact on my wellbeing. I have always loved sports, and for me, going for a run, a gym workout or a spin class are great ways to release tension, clear my head and boost my mood at the same time. Whilst I find that practising such cardio-intensive sports activities is extremely beneficial for my health, I have become mindful of the need to include the regular practice of more gentle sports such as Yoga and Pilates in my exercise routine, in order to stretch my muscles and learn effective breathing and relaxation techniques. Also, on the recommendation of my physiotherapist, I downloaded the Head Space app on my iPhone which is a very helpful meditation tool, and I aim to have regular neck

and upper back massages, to release the tension that builds up when working for a long time at the computer and to prevent long-term neck and shoulder pain. Finally, I am lucky to have a good network of friends to socialise with and who are always there to provide emotional support.

Rachel Wingfield MCIL, BA (Hons) MA, CELTA

Rachel moved to the UK in 1991 after completing her Master's degree in English, German and International Trade in France, and studying at Keele University in England, under the umbrella of the EU funded Erasmus programme. She has since worked in the UK in a number of roles across several sectors including education, international export of industrial goods and international marketing for the media, before moving into international events management and finally settling into EU telecommunications policy and regulation.



“It is vital to know one’s boundaries”

As a freelance French/English translator, private language tutor and director of a small but growing translation agency, my source of stress essentially comes from finding the time to do my own translations (mainly commercial and legal), teach regular students, prepare individual lessons and manage various translating and interpreting projects in multiple languages with a team of specialised linguists, liaising between them and the clients, finding the relevant people to do certain jobs depending on their availability, specialities, rates as well as negotiating competitive quotes to clients and supervising each project.

Whilst I do enjoy the variety of my work, I sometimes find it difficult to juggle so many different activities on my own. As an agent, what I’m finding the most challenging aspect is to react promptly to incoming inquiries as clients can be impatient and expect a reply immediately, something that is not always possible for me as I can be travelling, attending meetings or teaching. However, I always strive to revert to emails within two hours since I always have my mobile phone or laptop on me, if only to acknowledge safe receipt of their emails for the time being. I have to be very organised, focused, and memorise multiple tasks and prioritise them by matter of urgency, so I keep a detailed diary.

To reduce my stress levels in the office, I like listening to relaxing instrumental music on You Tube (type: “Relaxing Jazz Music” for example). I find having some gentle background music soothing as long as there are no lyrics as I find them distracting.

As I do not have the time to go to a gym, I have invested in a good home treadmill and ensure to spend 20 – 45 minutes walking on it at different speeds and incline levels at the end of the day to release the built-in tension in my body which can cause muscle aches and palpitations. I follow this with some weight-lifting and stretching exercises.

Once a month, I visit a physiotherapist to massage my neck and back and when travelling on business, I often choose a hotel with a spa to be able to relax in between meetings.

I try not to work in the evenings past 6pm nor at weekends in order to spend quality time with my husband and my cats, reading, watching films on DVD or going out shopping, eating out and socialising. I find this essential to keep my energy levels and enthusiasm up.

Working alone can be challenging especially when you wish to go on holiday and are temporarily unable to take on new projects. However, I have found that having a “buddy system” with other translators who can cover for you during your absence is incredibly helpful. At a CIOL TD (Translation Division) meeting two years ago, I met another French/English translator specialising in the same subjects as me (law and business). We have decided to join forces to cover for each other whenever one is either too busy, off-sick or on holiday. This requires a little bit of organisation to ensure we are not away at the same time but it otherwise works fine. We just set up an automatic out of office message giving people the contact details of our colleague so that they can contact her directly during our absence for any urgent translations. It is a win-win system and alleviates a lot of worry.

Likewise, if a client wants a large document translated quickly, instead of turning it down or spending my evenings/weekends sweating over it to complete it in time, I sometimes split it with another translator and inform the client of this. This has got the added advantage that both translators can contact each other in case of queries on terminology and can proofread each other’s work. I therefore work with several other French/English translators whom I know well and trust to ensure I never have to let any of my clients down and I don’t miss out on projects due to limited availability.



Outside of work, I do some volunteering for a local feline rescue charity which I find helpful to deal with stress as it allows me to switch off completely from my day-time work and do different activities such as manning our charity shop, meeting different people and spending time fostering cats which I find quite relaxing.

In conclusion, I think that it is important to remember that in order to last in the translating profession, it is vital to know one's boundaries, not to accept huge, complex documents to translate if the deadlines are too short, knowing when to say no or to compromise by possibly sharing the work with another trusted translator or even delegate it completely or negotiating an extended deadline with the client to relieve the pressure. Being aware of one's own capabilities in terms of time availability, energy, physical and mental health, family duties and being honest with oneself and clients before accepting a new job is essential to avoid unnecessary stress. Working with other like-minded translators is also a great way of reducing the stress of a tight deadline or being worried about losing a client completely if unable to accept their offer. Having a regular work schedule and sticking to it and saving enough time for other activities is necessary to keep a good balance between work and leisure and retain one's motivation and long-term enjoyment of the profession.

Karine Chevalier-Watts MCIL Chartered Linguist, BA, CAPES, QTS, DipRSA, DipWSET, owner of KLAS Languages

Karine trained as an English teacher in her native Aix-en-Provence but moved to Wiltshire in 1998 on marrying her English husband. She worked in various sectors including wine, landscape architecture and law before setting up "Karine's Languages and Administrative Services" in 2011. She now runs a busy practice translating both from and into French, as well as teaching French. Karine has been an active member of CIOL since joining in 2015, subsequently gaining Chartered status in both translation and education in 2017.



“A thing that helps me to relax is to transcreate into my native languages”

As a freelance translator, my main sources of stress are the tight deadlines, the quality of the original texts and the complexity of translation.

When I started working as a freelance translator, I agreed to all the translation work that came my way even if I was not happy with the rate of pay. I had to do it because I needed to gain experience and to establish a good client base. It took me about three years to establish myself as a translator, to be able to drop agencies with low rates of pay and to establish good and long-lasting relationship with some reliable agencies and direct clients.

I was often stressed because of endless urgent deadlines, poor quality of the originals and my rushed decisions to agree to all types of translation (including unfamiliar topics which required plenty of preliminary research even before translation began). I was thinking about what helps me relax and came up with the idea of making a list of things that give me pleasure and joy.

My list included reading my favourite books, listening to music, watching my favourite films, knitting, baking, doing water aerobics, walking in the park, spending the day at my favourite seaside resort of Llandudno, meeting with friends or chatting with them on Skype. Every time I was stressed, I looked into my list and selected the activity which suited me best on that particular day. In my case, baking and knitting were the most calming because of the switch from mental to physical activity.

After several years of gaining experience, I decided to do both interpreting and translation (40% interpreting and 60% translation). The constant switch from translating to interpreting is good for the brain and reduces stress levels.

As I do both translation and interpreting, I am able to say a polite “no” to poor quality originals (e.g. texts in JPG format), to negotiate my rates for particular translations and to recommend other translators to an agency or a client if the translation is beyond my level of competence.

Another thing that helps me to reduce my stress levels is textual analysis. Before agreeing to translate a particular text, it is necessary to think about the target reader, and to devise the strategy for translation (register, choice of synonyms, continuity, etc).

Another thing that helps me to relax is to transcreate into my native languages (Russian and Ukrainian) witty and interesting slogans from bill-boards I came across. I write them down and transcreate them when I have spare time.

Natalia Racheyskova MCIL Chartered Linguist, MA

Natalia is an experienced Russian and Ukrainian language translator, interpreter, editor and proofreader. She is also a Russian Language Assessor for MOD and an assessor of literary translation from Russian into English for PEN Translates grants programme. She has an MA in Translation Studies from the University of Bristol and an MA in Romano-Germanic Philology from Kiev State University (Ukraine). She works as a Russian and Ukrainian language Public Service interpreter and translator for Stoke-on-Trent City Council and also for different translation agencies and clients. She has been a CIOL Member since 2014 and became a Chartered Linguist in 2018. She is currently a CIOL Mentor.



“Build in time for, sleep, food and exercise”

The most extreme moment last year, every muscle was so tense I felt as if I might snap. I was working online, using a CAT tool on a client’s server, on a big, complex package with multiple files. The connection had just broken, not for the first time, losing any work I had not saved. The client had changed the source text several times, and every time they updated the package, they changed the keyboard. They also locked all the segments I had completed so I could not use the ‘find and replace’ function, significantly slowing the process of checking and correcting my work. I could see that the revised deadline I had already negotiated was now going to be difficult to meet.

I used my ultimate crisis management strategies. I turned off the computer, ate some chocolate, took the dog for a walk, read a rubbish novel in the evening and did not return to work till the next day, when I had calmed down, the technology was working and I could make decent progress (I met the deadline).

At the other end of the spectrum, the stress can be healthy. Reasonably tight deadlines keep me alert, focused and productive, and that spills over to other aspects of my life. An important skill I have acquired in the years I have been translating is to build in time for sleep, food and exercise when calculating whether I can meet a

proposed deadline. And, because I know that as I am getting older my ability to handle prolonged high levels of stress is declining, I have learned to say ‘no’ to projects that will mean several days of very high stress, unless I can get the client to extend the deadline – as they are often prepared to do.

Jo Durning MCIL Chartered Linguist, BA (Hons), DipTrans, FRSA

Jo specialises in French to English legal and business translation and is a Visiting Lecturer at the University of Westminster, for the DipTrans preparation course. She was a senior civil servant before becoming a translator and draws on wide-ranging experience in central government, working closely with business and lawyers in the UK, France and at European level. She is a member of the Board of Trustees of the Alliance Française de Cambridge, and volunteers for Form the Future, her local careers information organisation, telling teenagers about how languages can open up career opportunities.





Conclusion

While some stress can be good for you, it's important to manage it so that it does not affect your mental – and physical – health. You need to be aware of what causes you stress and take action to prevent it from getting out of hand. All our contributors point to the need to maintain boundaries between work and other aspects of life. Their ways of managing it are very varied: physical exercise, baking, knitting, volunteering and more. Reaching out to others, whether family or friends, working with a colleague or going to a class, is another common theme.

If you have not already done so, perhaps you should take some time to think about your own sources of stress and what strategies will work for you. When you do so, remember the value of social contact. You could join a linguists' group in your area – or set one up. And if that is not possible, online forums offer an easily accessible way of reaching out to and hearing from others.

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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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