

## DPSI Preparation seminar

The purpose of these notes is to help both candidates who are sitting the Diploma in Public Service Interpreting (DPSI) and centres which prepare them for this Diploma. Although these notes expand and complement the training video produced by the IoL Educational Trust for use by centres, they can be used on their own. The notes are meant to be guidelines for best practices and are based on good performances by candidates and professional interpreters. The IoL Educational Trust hopes that the notes, which will be revised on a regular basis, will positively assist candidates and centres.

NB Please note that these notes are also meant for candidates who are not attached to any centre.

## Interpreting

Interpreting is usually defined as a process involving the transfer of a message from one language to another. In order to transfer a message, however, interpreters need to be able to understand and speak both languages very well, as well as having an in-depth knowledge of both cultures.

## Knowledge of chosen DPSI option

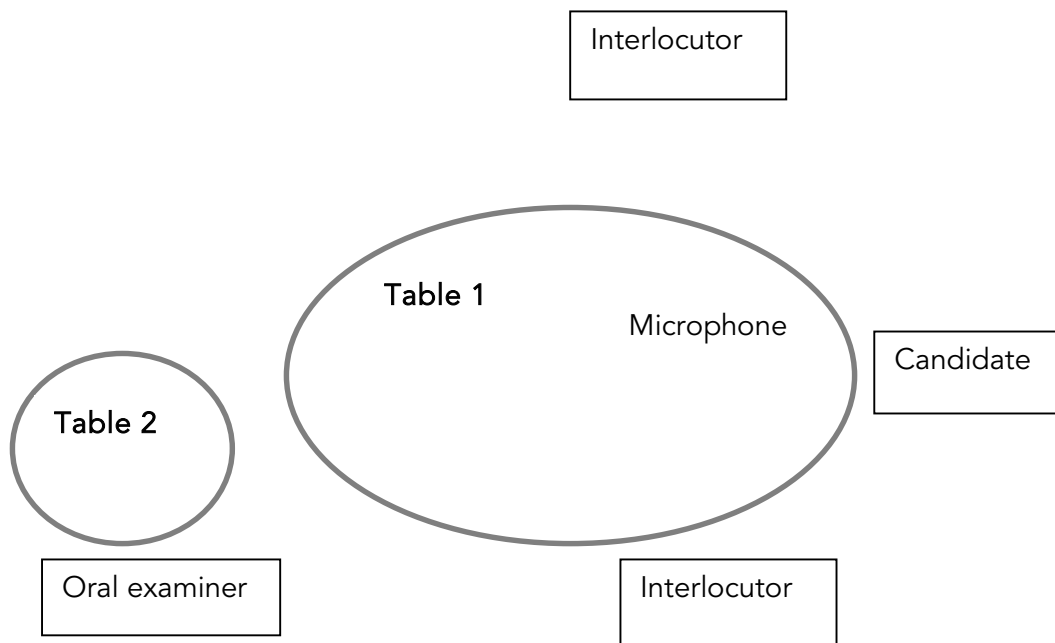
The second requirement to successfully sit the DPSI is a solid general knowledge of the chosen option(s): Law, Local Government and Health (see also the Recommended Bibliography on Interpreting on this website. This knowledge can be acquired by reading semi-specialised articles and magazines on the subjects (in both languages), consulting relevant websites and being aware of the peculiarities of both cultures. For instance, the UK law, known as Common Law, has a totally different approach from the French droit or the German Recht. Another example would be the different frequencies with which languages use Latin-based words to indicate medical conditions. Obviously, Public Service interpreters have to be aware of these major differences. It goes without saying that consulting previous DPSI exams would assist in candidates' preparation. An order form for past papers can be downloaded from the Institute's website, [www.iol.org.uk](http://www.iol.org.uk). Alternatively, past papers can be ordered directly from PWP FS Print and Design, tel: 01992 503821, e-mail: [pastpapers@pwpfs.com](mailto:pastpapers@pwpfs.com).

## Showing confidence and being presentable

Even though this might sound patronising, it is important that candidates walk into the room where they will be tested looking confident, smiling and presentable without going over the top. This is because the DPSI is a professional qualification and therefore confidence, affability and presentability would immediately help interpreters gain the trust of their clients who, after all, will be paying for their services. It is also important that candidates acquire techniques needed when practising as interpreters, in order to keep

their nerves under control. Being nervous during an exam is quite normal and some allowances are made for this. If, for example, in exceptional circumstances, a candidate felt they needed a break, then they would of course be marked down but would not necessarily be failed. A useful 'trick' to control nerves is to try and keep one's back straight (candidates will also come across more confident if they have an erect posture) and to learn to breathe into the stomach. In order to assist candidates and, hopefully, make them feel more confident on the day of the exam, it is useful to know what the recommended layout of the exam room is like.

### Room layout



### Preparation at the exam

Candidates are given 5 minutes to study the notes on the two role plays in which they will be asked to interpret consecutively and "simultaneously", ie by whispering the interpretation to the interlocutors. Reading the notes is important because they set the context of the role plays and give some basic ideas to candidates as to what to expect. During these 5 minutes, candidates can do some "inner brainstorming" and try and recall (perhaps jotting them down on a note pad) the terms that might be associated with the situations. For instance, if the notes say "You will act as an interpreter between a duty solicitor in a Magistrate's Court and a non-English-speaking client who has been arrested and charged by police following a visit to a football match", candidates might want to jot down the translation of "duty solicitor", "Legal Aid", "racist chanting" and so forth.

## Looking professional

While interpreting it is also important not to come across sloppy and casual but, for instance, to sit upright (this would also help with concentration) and show interest in what is going on (without being overbearing and overpowering). Treating the exam as if it was a real-life situation will definitely help in adopting a professional attitude and approach. It is also strongly recommended that candidates make an effort at making eye contact with the interlocutors while interpreting as, again, this will show involvement in the interpreting situation and will also assist in building trust towards the candidates. It will also make the interpretation much more credible and acceptable.

Another small but significant point to stress is the use of a note pad whilst interpreting. Sometimes it is very difficult to recall elements of the dialogue such as dates, figures, times and names. Therefore, jotting them down while the interlocutors are talking will assist in their exact recall and translation. The use of a note pad looks professional too in that it shows clients that the interpreter is using tools which assist them in providing an efficient service.

## During the exam

The above-mentioned interpreting skills can be acquired and worked on through practising while preparing for the DPSI. Again, using past DPSI role plays will be an invaluable tool for this.

Whilst interpreting, it is possible to miss the odd word for whatever reason and the candidates will need to ask for it to be repeated. Therefore, asking for repetition is allowed but has to be done reasonably and should not impede the flow of dialogue. Obviously good concentration and noting down unusual terms or proper nouns will help avoiding asking for repetitions. For instance, if one of the interlocutors moves and makes a noise with his/her chair just when s/he is pronouncing the verb of a sentence, then asking to repeat is perfectly acceptable. Sometimes, the interlocutor might have spoken too fast and the candidates might have missed someone's name and surname or the name of an organisation. In that case it is acceptable to ask for a repetition because understanding proper names well can be difficult whilst interpreting.

The use of foreign words – particularly English words – in the other language is allowed but with discrimination. We recommend that only commonly used foreign words be used. Two examples would be 'entente cordiale' and 'faux pas', two French words commonly used in English.

Sometimes candidates might have to interpret a word for which there is no perfect translation in the other language because it explains a typically, say, English cultural situation (a good example would be 'housing benefit' as in some countries there is no such benefit). In that case it is advisable to explain what housing benefit is by paraphrasing this term and, if the term recurs and the paraphrase is too lengthy, consequently using it in English. Obviously, it is important, particularly in whispered interpreting, to be as concise as possible so as not to miss what is being said afterwards by the interlocutor.

In order to be understood, it is important that candidates do not rush into interpreting but take some time (but not too much as this would show lack of preparation and knowledge of the languages) to properly formulate the speaker's messages in another language. To this end, a solid knowledge of both languages and trying to explain and paraphrase the messages will definitely assist candidates, particularly when they are not using their mother tongue. Whilst using a language which is not one's mother tongue, it is also recommended that straightforward constructions and uncomplicated sentences are used. In short applying the KISS principle (Keep It Short and Simple) will definitely help. Speaking clearly and at a good pace is also important to make sure that the message is understood.

Taking some time to properly formulate the speaker's message will also assist candidates in avoiding transliterations, thus making the message clearer.

The tone used by candidates in rendering a message is important. When, for example, interpreting a caution in a legal context, it is important to sound serious and not casual.

It is also recommended that candidates develop their concentration and focus which will definitely come in handy in the exam and in their professional life. Paying great attention to what is being said and using the note pad to jot down important elements of the messages are two ways of keeping focused and concentrated.

Whispered interpreting requires great concentration and, obviously, a different approach from consecutive interpreting. Candidates are advised to not let anything else distract them and, if necessary, to take charge of the interpreting situation – indeed this applies, in different ways, to any type of interpreting – by, for instance, leaving out fill words if the interlocutor is going too fast, provided that all the important information is still conveyed.

Candidates can also ask interlocutors to speak faster or slower but are strongly advised not to overdo this because the situation has to be as real-life as possible and, very often, speakers slow down or speak faster just for a few seconds, only to resume their normal speed.

## **Sight translations**

The basic skills required for the sight translation are identical to those for the written translation (see section on Translation skills under Written Translations below). Candidates have 5 minutes to read through each text that they are asked to sight-translate and, therefore, to identify difficult sections and formulate a rough translation of these sections in their head. On top of that candidates need to make sure that:

- a) their pronunciation is generally clear;
- b) their knowledge of the syntax and grammar of their language combination is strong; and
- c) that the pace of the translations is adequate.

## **Written translations**

### **Translation skills**

Even though this aspect should be a given, it is important to reiterate that acquiring good and solid translation skills by attending relevant courses and translating previous DPSI texts or other relevant documents and getting them checked by teachers of translation, professional translators and/or peers will assist DPSI candidates enormously. Knowing two languages and their cultures well does not automatically mean that one is a translator or an interpreter.

### **Knowledge of formal style**

Very often, DPSI holders are asked to translate formal documents. It is therefore necessary to be aware and be able to use a formal style in both working languages. Because many DPSI translations are letters, it is also vital that candidates are aware of target language conventions in letter writing.

### **False friends**

False friends are one of the most common traps for translators. Easily available books and articles have been written for the most common language combinations and candidates are advised to refer to them. If in doubt, it is always useful – indeed essential - to have a good English dictionary handy while tackling the DPSI written translations.

### **Double solutions**

Candidates will be penalised if they write down two translations for the same word or expression (eg We decided/intended to go...). It is therefore essential that they only submit one choice otherwise markers will not know which one to accept and will mark down candidates.

### **Reading on the chosen DPSI option**

Candidates are strongly advised to read articles and books on their chosen option (Law, Local Government and Health) in both languages. This will enable them to improve their knowledge and be au fait with recent developments and terminology. One useful source of information is, obviously, the Internet which, however, has to be used wisely. Official websites by, for instance, governments of the countries where the languages of the candidates are spoken are very reliable and useful to expand knowledge of the chosen options.

### **Dictionaries**

Investing, where possible, in specialist dictionaries according to the DPSI option chosen and using them for the written translations is definitely recommended. In this way, candidates will be able to better deal with the semi-specialised nature of the DPSI translations and will be able to come up with appropriate terminology. Sometimes, it is not possible to find specialised bilingual dictionaries. In this case, it might be an idea to buy

monolingual dictionaries, say an Italian Law dictionary and an English Law dictionary to compare notes.

### **Time management**

Very often, DPSI candidates do not leave enough time to read their translations to make sure that they sound as if they are original texts written in the target language. This would also enable them to check their use of punctuation and verb tenses, two common problems amongst DPSI candidates. It is therefore important to allot some time for this task.

### **Handwriting**

Finally, a very small point but still important. DPSI markers rely on clear handwriting to judge the translations. The Institute, therefore, recommends that candidates write clearly and legibly to enable markers to be at their most effective. Illegible words or sentences will obviously mean that the candidates will be penalised.

### **Practice and preparation**

IoLET cannot stress too much the importance of practising interpreting and translating and preparing for the exams as thoroughly as possible.

And finally, good luck!

Useful links: [DPSI Handbook for Candidates](#), [Bibliography](#) and [Appendix 2](#) of the [DPSI Chief Moderator's Report 05: Advice for Candidates](#)