

So You Want to Become a Court Interpreter?

That's terrific! Let's first take a look at just *some* of the essential knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that are needed for the job:



Native-like proficiency in all working languages



Knowledge and use of cultural nuances, regional variations, idiomatic expressions, and colloquialisms in all working languages



Ability to listen to and comprehend different rates of speech in all working languages



Ability to select appropriate equivalents for vocabulary or phrases



Ability to speak with proper pronunciation, diction, and intonation in all working languages



Ability to conduct business in a professional manner



Ability to process linguistic information quickly



Knowledge and use of a broad range of vocabulary, including legal terminology, subject-specific terminology, and slang



Ability to conserve intent, tone, style, and utterances of all messages



Ability to apply short-term memory skills in retaining small units of information



Knowledge and continued learning of social, technological, and legal changes that affect language



Ability to read quickly and with little preparation

So, how do you know if you have the necessary KSAs for court interpreting? Take a few minutes to participate in the following self-assessment questionnaire to better determine the current skills you may have, as well as the areas for future development and training.



Court Interpreter Self-Assessment Questionnaire

Before you get started, here are a few words about using this questionnaire.

Introduction

Welcome to the Court Interpreter Self-Assessment Questionnaire. This questionnaire is designed to help you rate yourself in the skills required for court interpreting. It is intended to be used by people who are interested in court interpreting and want to see if they have the level of skill needed to take the Bilingual Interpreting Exam, as well as those who wish to identify their areas of strength and weakness for the purpose of self-study and skill-building.

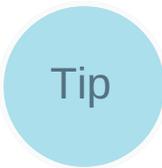
The questionnaire is divided into two parts:

- **Part 1:** Rating yourself in the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for court interpreting
- **Part 2:** Assessing your current level of experience interpreting in a professional courtroom setting

In Part 1, you will assess your skills in the following areas: Linguistic, Speaking, Listening Comprehension, Reading Comprehension, and Interpreting. These skill areas are required for successful court interpretation. For a complete list of the KSAs essential for court interpreting, see the [Knowledge, Skills and Abilities Essential for Court Interpretation](#) on the Judicial Council of California website.

In Part 2, you will rate your level of experience interpreting as well as with using the three modes of interpretation: sight translation, consecutive interpretation, and simultaneous interpretation.

After each part, you will use the key provided to help you determine how ready you are to take the Bilingual Interpreting Exam, or if you need further skill development. After completing both parts of the questionnaire, you may then wish to go on to the companion document, Court Interpreter Self-Assessment Practice Exercises. This contains materials and exercises to help you prepare for the exam and to use for interpreter skill-building.



Tip

This questionnaire is fillable in its current form. However, for ease of use, such as in referring back to the rating scales, you might want to first print out a hard copy.

Court Interpreter Self-Assessment Questionnaire

Part 1:

This part of the questionnaire is designed for you to rate yourself in the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) required for court interpreting.

Instructions

Rank how knowledgeable or skilled you believe you are in each skill area required for court interpreting using the following scale:

Rating Scale	Description of Scale
1	I am very knowledgeable or skilled in this.
2	I know a good amount about this but it would be useful to learn more.
3	I have some knowledge or skill in this but it would be useful to learn more.
4	I currently know little to nothing about this but would like to learn more.

Linguistic Skills

Court interpreters are required to have a high level of language proficiency in all languages for which they will interpret. Successful candidates will possess an extensive knowledge of general vocabulary, legal terminology, slang, and idiomatic expressions. This means that they can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion, despite the use of subject-specific or colloquial language.

I am able to speak English fluently and can incorporate specialized terminology, regional colloquialisms, and slang terms with ease.



I am able to speak my non-English language fluently and can incorporate specialized terminology, regional colloquialisms, and slang terms with ease.



I am able to identify and provide an equivalent interpretation from English to my non-English language for the legal terms listed in this legal glossary (click [here](#)).



1= 90%–100% of the terms; 2 = 70%–90% of the terms;
3 = 50%–70% of the terms; 4 = 0%–50% of the terms

Speaking Skills

Court interpreters must possess strong speaking skills to ensure that all parties involved understand them. Competent speaking skills include proper pronunciation and intonation, neutralized accent, good diction, and the ability to speak softly or project when necessary.

When speaking English, native speakers of English can understand me without any significant effort.

1 2 3 4

When speaking my non-English language, native speakers of the non-English language can understand me without any significant effort.

1 2 3 4

I can adjust the volume of my speech so that I am clearly audible to the intended audience in small settings as well as those that require that I project my voice.

1 2 3 4

Listening Comprehension Skills

Attentive listening and comprehension are integral parts of the interpretation process. Court interpreters must be able to understand different rates of speech as well as different accents.

I am able to understand English speakers with different regional accents (Southern, Boston, Midwestern, etc.) without any significant extra effort.

1 2 3 4

I am able to understand speakers of my non-English language from any country or region where it is spoken, regardless of dialect or use of regional colloquialisms.

1 2 3 4

I am able to understand varying rates of speech in English whether slow, conversational, or fast.

1 2 3 4

I am able to understand varying rates of speech in my non-English language whether slow, conversational, or fast.

1 2 3 4

Reading Comprehension Skills

Court interpreters are required to review and comprehend a broad range of documentation that includes grammatically complex structures and specific terminology. Successful candidates must also be able to read documents quickly and understand the meaning and detail of those documents with very little or no preparation.

I am able to read and understand newspapers, magazines, and online articles of general interest written in English.

1 2 3 4

I am able to read and understand newspapers, magazines, and online articles of general interest written in my non-English language.

1 2 3 4

I am able to read and understand technical material written in English, such as legal documents, police reports, medical reports, etc.

1 2 3 4

I am able to read and understand technical material written in my non-English language, such as legal documents, police reports, medical reports, etc.

1 2 3 4

Interpreting Skills

Successful court interpreters are able to communicate effectively using the three modes of interpretation: sight translation, consecutive interpretation, and simultaneous interpretation. To effectively use these modes, interpreters must possess mental agility and alertness while processing and reacting to information rapidly.

Sight Translation

Sight translation is the oral rendering of text written in one language into another language.

Consecutive Interpretation

Consecutive interpretation is the rendering of speech from one language into another, using a turn-taking approach.

Simultaneous Interpretation

Simultaneous interpretation is the rendering of speech from one language into another at the same time it is being spoken.

I can read any English document out loud in my non-English language promptly and accurately without hesitation, omissions, or additions.

1 2 3 4

I can read any non-English document out loud in English promptly and accurately without hesitation, omissions, or additions.

1 2 3 4

I am able to render accurate interpretations from English to my non-English language without omissions or additions.

1 2 3 4

I am able to render accurate interpretations from my non-English language to English without omissions or additions.

1 2 3 4

When interpreting from English into my non-English language, I am able to maintain the speaker's register (formal versus informal language) in terms of level and complexity of vocabulary and sentence construction.

1 2 3 4

When interpreting from my non-English language into English, I am able to maintain the speaker's register (formal versus informal language) in terms of level and complexity of vocabulary and sentence construction.

1 2 3 4

I can render interpretations from English into my non-English language promptly and without hesitation.

1 2 3 4

I can render interpretations from my non-English language into English promptly and without hesitation.

1 2 3 4

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

1 2 3 4

I am able to interpret what a speaker is saying consecutively in both directions.

1 2 3 4

When interpreting consecutively in either direction, I am able to comprehend and retain conversation or testimony in units of about 30 words in order to render an accurate interpretation.

1 2 3 4

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 heard word-for-word even if the passage is as many as 40-50 words long.

1 2 3 4

When interpreting in a long session, I am able to maintain my mental alertness and accuracy.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
I am able to take notes effectively when interpreting consecutive utterances that vary in complexity and length.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
When interpreting consecutively or simultaneously and when going in either direction, I am able to monitor my own interpretations and correct my own mistakes.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
When interpreting consecutively or simultaneously and when going in either direction, I am able to interpret effectively under pressure of time constraints, adversarial settings, and in emotionally charged circumstances.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
When interpreting consecutively or simultaneously and when going in either direction, I am able to anticipate incoming messages.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4

Key

If you answered “1” or “2” to all of the questions above, you may be ready to take California’s Bilingual Interpreting Exam. If you answered “3” or “4” to more than a few questions, particularly within a particular skill area, you may want to attain further experience as an interpreter before taking the examination, or you may want to pursue additional formal study or training in your identified languages.

Areas for Professional Development

Looking back over the list again, which are the **three competency areas** (out of Linguistic, Speaking, Listening Comprehension, Reading Comprehension, or Interpreting) where you would most like to improve your knowledge, skills, and abilities? (You may want to start with those areas where you marked your abilities as “3” or “4,” i.e., “I have some knowledge or skill in this” or “I currently know little to nothing about this.”)

Competency Area 1:	<input type="text"/>
Competency Area 2:	<input type="text"/>
Competency Area 3:	<input type="text"/>

Next, identify ways to improve your skills in each of these competency areas. Refer to the graphic on the next page for tips, examples, and exercises you may want to use to strengthen your skills.

The Path to Improving Interpretation Skills

Linguistic Skills

Use resources such as dictionaries, glossaries on various topics, and a range of media sources to achieve a mastery of grammar, terminology (including legal terms), slang, and colloquialisms in English and your language. Create and update your own working glossaries.

Interpreting Skills

Practice interpreting daily. Interpret news programs, lectures, speeches, podcasts, and other formal and informal sources covering a range of topics. Read a variety of texts and interpret them orally. Attend courtroom proceedings to learn about courtroom processes and common occurrences and terms.

Reading Skills

Read text from various fields in all working languages to build up your vocabulary and speed. Practice breaking the text up into smaller, more manageable units (chunking) and rendering it into English or your language. Study commonly used court documents including any pre-translated versions.

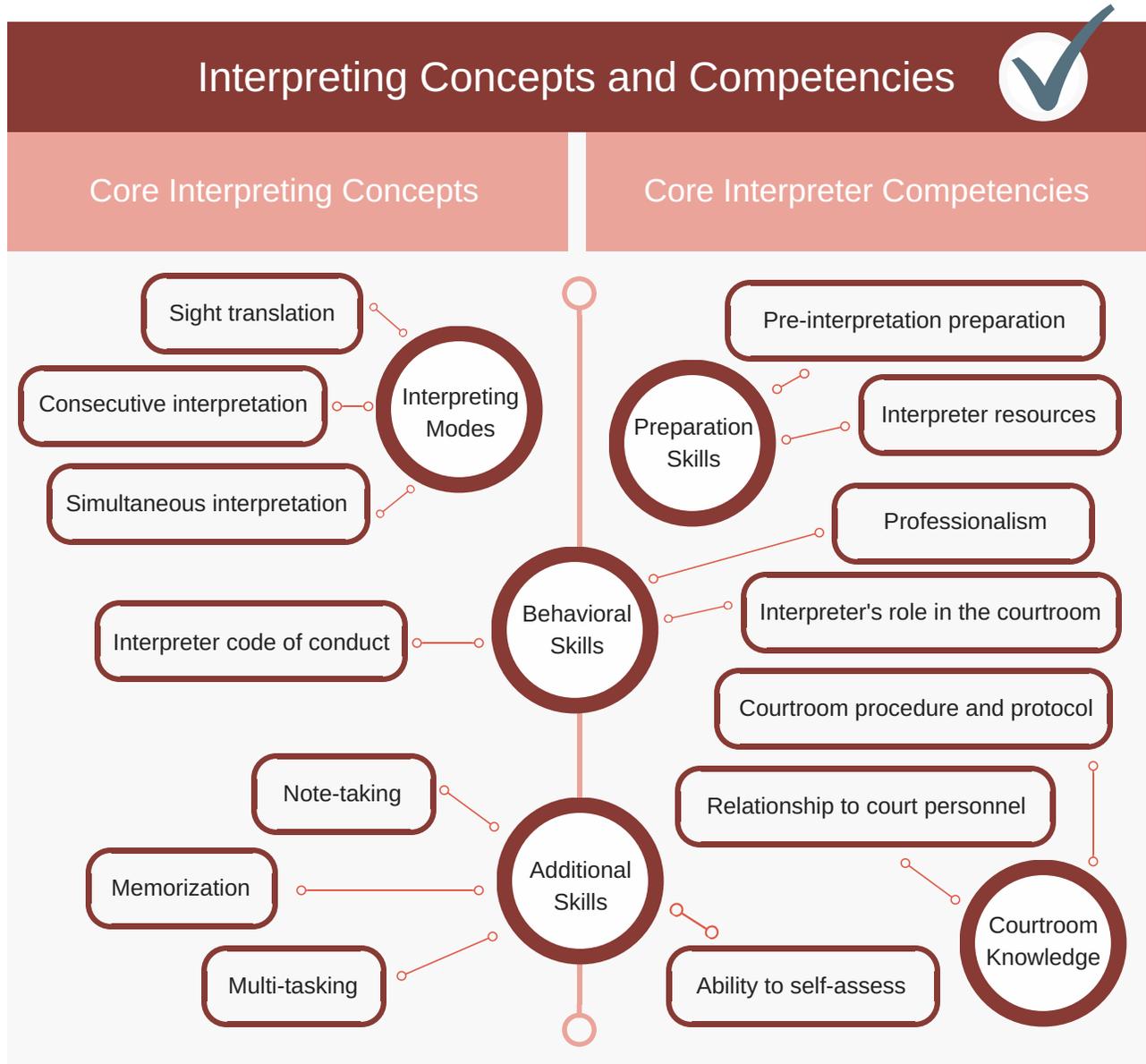
Speaking Skills

Practice speaking in front of other people. Engage them in feedback regarding your accent and intonation. Record your voice to assess your own speech and to identify your strengths and weaknesses. Shadow other speakers to adapt to different styles and registers of speech. Practice deep breathing as well as speaking softly and projecting.

Listening Skills

Listen to speakers with different accents as well as rates and patterns/styles of speech. Record yourself interpreting a television show or podcast. Listen to your recording and notice if you left anything out. Practice note-taking/short-hand skills and repeating information back from short-term memory.

In addition to the main skill areas (Linguistic, Speaking, Listening Comprehension, Reading Comprehension, and Interpreting), court interpreters have to be skilled in a number of other core concepts and competencies as shown in the chart below:



For the items listed under "Core Interpreting Concepts," it is recommended that you attend a court interpreter orientation or similar introductory course for interpreters, as well as a basic skill building seminar, to improve your skills in these categories or to prepare yourself for the Bilingual Interpreting Exam. For the items listed under "Core Interpreting Competencies," it is recommended that you research courtroom protocol and terminology and check to see if it is possible to shadow active court interpreters in your area.

In Part 1 of this questionnaire, you rated yourself in the skills required for court interpreting. It is also essential to have interpreting experience. Please continue to Part 2 of the questionnaire, where you will find questions to assess your level of interpreting experience.

Court Interpreter Self-Assessment Questionnaire

Part 2:

This set of questions is designed to assess your level of experience interpreting in a professional courtroom setting and with using different methods of preparation.

Instructions

For each of the statements below, rank your level of experience using the scale below:

Rating Scale	Description of Scale
1	I actively participate in this.
2	I have a lot of experience in this.
3	I have some experience with this.
4	I have little to no experience with this.

Interpreting Experience

I have performed a sight translation before in a professional legal setting.

1 2 3 4

I have performed a simultaneous interpretation before in a professional legal setting.

1 2 3 4

I have performed a consecutive interpretation before in a professional legal setting.

1 2 3 4

I have participated in interpreter or language training workshops.

1 2 3 4

I have shadowed a certified court interpreter before.	<input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4
I have spent time in a courtroom setting/observing court proceedings.	<input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4
I have recorded myself performing an interpretation before.	<input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4
I routinely create and update my own glossaries.	<input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4
I have over six months of experience in all three modes of interpreting.	<input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4
I have asked a professional interpreter to evaluate my performance.	<input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 4

Key

If you answered “1” or “2” for the majority of these items, then you may be ready to take the Bilingual Interpreting Exam. However, if you answered “3” or “4” for some or most of these items, you may want to consider further professional development in the form of courtroom observation, training workshops, and self-study.

Additional Tips

If you’ve never shadowed a legal interpreter before, it’s highly recommended, and many larger court systems have an existing shadowing program you may be able to participate in. If you’re not familiar with one of the three modes, it’s recommended that you spend some time on the corresponding practice exercises. If you don’t already have your own glossary, now is a perfect time to begin collecting words, phrases, and concepts that you hear in court and creating your own list of definitions and translations. Making your own glossary has the advantage of increasing your familiarity and comfort with legal terminology.

Court Interpreter Self-Assessment Questionnaire

Congratulations! You have completed the Court Interpreter Self-Assessment Questionnaire.

In Conclusion

This Court Interpreter Self-Assessment Questionnaire has provided you with an opportunity to:

- rate yourself in the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for court interpreting; and
- assess your level of experience interpreting in a professional courtroom setting and with using different methods of preparation.

If the Self-Assessment Questionnaire has led you to start preparing for the Bilingual Interpreting Exam or seek further self-study, please see the accompanying document, Court Interpreter Self-Assessment Practice Exercises, for additional information to assist you with your oral exam preparation and interpreter skill-building.

End of Questionnaire