



# JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF CALIFORNIA

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## COURT INTERPRETERS PROGRAM

Adapted from Court Interpreting Qualifications,  
National Center for State Courts Research Services

## Qualifications and Self-Assessment For Court Interpreting Certification Exams

### What qualifications should someone have before attempting to become a certified court interpreter?

Professional court interpreters:

- 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: consecutive interpreting, simultaneous interpreting, and sight translation.

In other words, court interpreters must have 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 consistent with Professional Standards and Ethics for California Court Interpreters<sup>i</sup> and court policies regarding court interpreting.

Mastery of two languages at the levels required for court interpreting involves reading and speaking the languages regularly in a wide variety of language contexts and, typically, years of formal education. Acquiring the necessary interpreting performance skills usually involves some combination of aptitude, study, and extensive practice.

The following page contains some questions to ask yourself to help you decide if you are ready to take a court interpreting certification exam. For a more extensive self-assessment, consult Part 5 of the *Federal Court Interpreter Examination for Spanish/English Examinee Handbook* ("Self Assessment of Readiness to Take the FCICE," pp. 47-57 at the following url:

<http://www.ncsc.org/~media/Microsites/Files/FCICE/FCICE%20Examinee%20Handbook%20FINAL%20DRAFT%2012%2030%2014.ashx>

Although designed for Spanish/English self-assessment, both the "Language proficiency self-rating in English and in Spanish" (5.2) and the "Can Do' Interpreter Self-Assessment" (5.3) of the FCICE Examinee Handbook may be used for self-assessment in any language pair.

### 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 (describing 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:

**Questions 1 and 2:** If your answer was "no" to one or both questions, then you are probably **not** ready to take a court interpreter certification exam.

**Question 3:** If your answer to 3 was **c** or **d** then you **may** be prepared 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 **may** be ready to take the exam.

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

**Question 5:** You should be able to answer **c** or **d**. If you answer **d** with confidence, you probably have the required short-term memory ability necessary for consecutive interpretation. If your bilingual language proficiency skills are also excellent, then you **may** be prepared to take the consecutive part of the exam.

Inquiries regarding Court Interpreting may be directed to the following:

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Last Modified: Feb 2, 2015

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/CIP-Ethics-Manual.pdf>