

Even before the pandemic changed the way people receive services - and in turn the way we work - there were several different consecutive interpreting techniques. In this article we look at the most common techniques in which an assignment may take place while delivering Level 3 Community Interpreting for public services and other clients: face-to-face, video remote and telephone.

Face-to-face Interpreting (F2F)

Face-to-face interpreting is often the preferred choice for both service users and clients. Having the interpreter physically present means that there's no chance of a poor internet connection or phone line hindering or derailing a session (more on that later). This means that all parties involved will be more relaxed and confident of a successful outcome.

Face-to-face is beneficial for assignments which require the use of the interpreter at different times. For example, an operation in a hospital - the interpreter arrives, introduces themselves to a staff member, then to the service users, then waits 10 minutes before a nurse comes, then works for ten minutes, then waits 15 minutes before a consultant comes, then works ten minutes, and so on. Redialing or re-establishing a video connection with an interpreter for each one of these professionals would be inconvenient, plus additional arrangements would need to be made to ensure it was the same interpreter. If the interpreter is physically there then it is much easier to use them throughout the entire process.

Another advantage is having no audio issues - a person's voice is never going to sound clearer than if you're in the same room as them. Being able to go out and meet people during work is also beneficial to general wellbeing; endless video and phone sessions at home works extremely well for some people but doesn't work for everyone.

From an interpreter's point of view, possible disadvantages are having to travel and not being able to do the assignments from the comfort of their own home. It increases the likelihood of travel issues and late arrivals and for many agencies travel time isn't well-paid, if at all. What's more, if you had two back-to-back appointments in a location, if the first one ends early (or late) this can have a knock on impact on the following assignment as well as your time. If these appointments were on the telephone or over a video call you would be able to relax in your own home rather than, for example, be stuck in a hospital waiting room.

Video Remote Interpreting (VRI)

Since March 2020 many appointments which were previously face-to-face are now via video link or over the phone.

First, we will discuss video calls:

Typically, the interpreter will be sent a link to join a session by the client. Unless the service user is also present with the client (e.g. a doctor's surgery) they will also receive a link. This means that all three parties need to be adept at working different video conferencing software such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams. While this should be a given for the service provider and the interpreter, the service user might never have used video conferencing software before, may not be particularly computer literate, or may not even own a device with a webcam. As such there may be delays, changing of method to a simple phone call, or the assignment may be cancelled altogether. The interpreter should bear in mind and be prepared for these potential outcomes.

Once a video call has been successfully connected, the assignment can proceed in the same way as a face-to-face assignment would. However, there are obvious differences and issues with which you may be faced. There is the potential for poor audio quality, so make sure you've got a good pair of headphones and a good microphone and aren't afraid to ask the two parties to repeat themselves if necessary. The video session may also expire, meaning you have to reconnect, so be patient. In addition, video sessions rarely give you the chance to build up a rapport with either party. While this isn't essential, it does make everyone's life a bit easier to have broken the ice with a bit of (professional) small talk before/in between the times you need to interpret.

The advantages are that you're often in a relatively controlled environment – your own home (although some VRI calls may require you to travel to a client's location to conduct the call from there). As such you can make sure you're as comfortable as you like, that you've got everything you need close by, and that you don't even need to leave your house to work. It also streamlines your work – for example, if you are waiting for a service user to turn up to an appointment on a video call you could be completing some other work or catching up with your admin. However, if you're on site for a face-to-face session this isn't always possible or acceptable.

Telephone interpreting (TI)

Telephone interpreting and video interpreting obviously have a lot in common, so much of the above can also apply to this section.

However, one of the key differences is quite simply not being able to see who you're talking to. This means you can't use lip-reading to aid your comprehension of what the service user is saying (although with mask wearing in many scenarios at present this isn't as relevant as before the pandemic.). Some cultures and languages rely on body language more than others – the absence of this should also be considered. It also means that the parties involved struggle to empathise as much with who they're talking to as they're just a voice on the other end of a phone line. Think about it – there are so many people who would say things on the phone which they would never dare to say in person to someone else. This can lead to greater frustration from service users, so be prepared and patient. The positives are somewhat mirrored in the negatives. Not having to look your best or worry about what your background looks like means that you can focus more on the task in hand. Using telephone interpreting instead of video means that you can set up your landline (TI calls should not be taken using mobile phones) in a place within your home where you are comfortable, and won't be disturbed by background noise such as other members of the household or exterior noise.

Conclusion

There are advantages and disadvantages to every interpreting technique but in reality, the technique you use may be due to personal preference, the context of the assignments you accept or even the availability of work.

Regardless of the technique, the majority of the role is exactly the same and a qualified professional should be able to adapt their style easily enough. Provided you are comfortable in the setting and performing your service to a high standard and to the best of your ability, the interpreting technique itself shouldn't affect you drastically.

To be eligible to accept assignments in any of the techniques that are explained above, you need to be qualified with a minimum of a Level 3 Certificate in Community Interpreting. You can find out more about our high quality Level 3 certificate [here](#).

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