

Building high-quality interpreting glossaries will be an invaluable help to you throughout all stages of your [interpreting career](#). Whilst a LSP (Language Service Provider) may create one or more interpreting glossaries in collaboration with a client or Service provider, many interpreters prefer to maintain specialised glossaries for their own use.

In this article, we'll explore the nature of interpreting glossaries, how they are used, why they are important and how you can begin creating your own.

What are Interpreting Glossaries?

An interpreting glossary is a list of specific terms, descriptions and their translations in one or more target languages, along with examples of their use. Using an interpreting glossary not only ensures that you have accurate terms available to you in all of your target languages, but it also ensures that these terms are interpreted consistently and correctly each time they occur in a conversation.

Interpreting glossaries can be particularly helpful when dealing with highly technical fields like medicine or law. These types of assignments demand clarity and consistency and having a high-quality interpreting glossary to hand can make these assignments far easier and less time-consuming to take on. In the 'Exercise' section below, we use an example from the medical field to explain the importance of having a relevant and extensive interpreting glossary.

How are Interpreting Glossaries Used?

Simply put, you use an interpreting glossary to ensure you are using a word in the correct way and in an appropriate context. Each glossary will be specific to an industry, a client, a type of interaction or even a specific subject, and will mainly contain the context for that interaction.

For example, in the context of a sales or marketing conversation, the word 'pitch' would be defined as 'a sales proposal, often delivered as a quick overview to entice interest. In a sports context, 'pitch' might be defined as 'a sports field, upon which a game is played, such as a 'football pitch.' In the context of music or hearing, the definition would talk about the high or low tone of a sound.

These differences are incredibly important, as these different concepts are not likely to be homonyms (words which sound similar but have different meanings) in any other language. For example, if you are speaking of a football pitch in Spanish, and use the term 'entonar', you will confuse everyone involved.

Why are Interpreting Glossaries Important?

There are three primary reasons why interpreting glossaries are so important to interpreters regardless of the niche you may specialise in:

A good interpreting glossary will save a great deal of money, both in the short and long terms. By standardising parts of the process which come up frequently, you can deliver more consistent interpretations and eliminate the time and expense of researching such terms over and over again. A client who saves money is, after all, a happy client, and one who is likely to commission repeat services.

A good interpreting glossary will save everyone involved a great deal of time. When the interpreter has such a glossary and takes time to review it before beginning the assignment, the entire process proceeds much more quickly. As the confusion of unfamiliar terms is avoided, everyone in the process saves time. Again, this leads to happy clients.

Everyone benefitting from your interpreting services gains from the consistency that a good interpreting glossary produces. This is particularly important in a public service context, where your words can contribute to a service user getting the right advice that means they can follow medical advice, or get much needed financial or legal support. Interpreting poorly could mean that the service user doesn't get the help that they need.

What Makes a 'Good' Interpreting Glossary?

That's the real question, isn't it? It isn't enough to have the biggest or most detailed interpreting glossary. In fact, that can sometimes be a detriment. How do you make it 'good'?

To be most effective, an interpreting glossary should be:

Brief / concise – not so large as to be cumbersome or slow to use

Organised – it should be easy to find the terms you need

Specific – it should only include the most relevant definitions of most terms, and only note common equivalent translations briefly

Comprehensive – it should contain all the necessary and relevant terms
Current – an interpreting glossary should be reviewed before use if it was last reviewed or created more than six months previously. In some specialisms, the usage and relevance of terms changes very quickly.

At first this may all sound rather daunting, but as your career progresses, you'll be able to put together more useful interpreting glossaries. Experience works wonders!

How to Create an Interpreting Glossary

Creating an interpreting glossary may be time-consuming but following these simple steps will make it easier.

Select technical terms which are likely to come up over the course of the assignment. These could include everything from product names to medical conditions, acronyms and abbreviations of relevant organisations, culturally relevant events, or the names of places in a particular geographic area. For more detail, see 'How to research terms' and the exercise below.

Review your list. You'll be choosing which terms to include in your list and discarding others which may not be necessary. Remember, if a glossary is too big and wordy, it will be too difficult to use in practice – and probably won't save you any time at all.

Translate the important terms you identified in Step 2 in detail. Make sure you include the definition, the pronunciation, and an example of usage for the term, both in the source language and in any target languages. Again, see the exercise below for an example.

How to Research Terms

On one level, the process for researching terms is much the same for any interpreting assignment. However, 'the devil is in the detail', and following the same process can lead to vastly different results in different contexts.

Generally, though, you'll want to find a few primary sources online. Start with independent sources which are not commercially motivated, as these will give more generally useful results. In the medical example below, we start with the NHS website. This is an excellent source for medical terminology but would be a poor choice for an assignment involving other niches. Therefore, make sure your sources are relevant as well as trustworthy.

Interpreting is a craft rather than an art. As such, it is better to give a practical example than a theoretical one. The following exercise will show you how to research specific terms and add them to a specialised interpreting glossary. You can follow the same general procedure to research terms for other assignments, of course.

Exercise – Researching Specific Terminology

This is an exercise in developing a specialised interpreting glossary for a medical assignment involving chest pain. It will outline how to research appropriate terms and add them to a specialised glossary.

1. Google 'chest pain.' One of the top results should be the NHS website. Click on that. This page is a great resource because it is comprehensive, up to date, contains many internal links and is presented in the kind of language a doctor would use when speaking to a patient. In addition, it is UK-based, meaning that terminology will be UK centred. This site provides plenty of information, including the many possible causes of chest pain.

2. Identify key terminology, and add it to your glossary. For example, after reading through the website and following a few internal links, you should be able to come up with a list of terms which includes some or all the following:

- Anxiety
- Chest infection
- Chest sprain or strain
- Heartburn
- Indigestion
- Panic attack
- Pneumonia
- Shingles

3. Consider which terms you are already familiar with and which you'll have to do a bit more research on. For each term, you'll need to construct the following entries:

- Term in language 1
- Term in language 2
- Term in language 3, etc (if applicable)
- Pronunciation (for language 1,2, etc)
- Definition
- Usage example (in language 1, 2, etc)

4. Next, look for words you may also be called upon to interpret, but which are less common. In this context, you might consider words like dizziness, mucus, sweating, bloated, etc. Enter them into your glossary in the same way as those above.

5. Consider how the conversation might develop. In this example, what if the chest pain in question ended up not being heartburn, but a more serious medical condition? The conversation would naturally turn to symptoms, which might include a burning sensation in the chest, a sour taste in the mouth, etc.

The doctor is likely to ask when such symptoms occur. So, you can expect to be dealing with phrases such as 'It comes on soon after eating, as well as when I exercise.' or 'It gets worse after I eat.' Anticipate what the patient and the doctor might say, and make sure you add any new terms to your glossary,

Now you have the beginnings of a glossary you can use in a specific medical assignment. From here, you'll be able to add to your glossaries to make them more complete and develop specialised glossaries for different purposes.

Where to Learn more?

Taking an interpreting course from a reputable and established provider, such as the [Level 3 Certificate in Community Interpreting](#) with Learn Q, is a proven way to acquire not only an accredited qualification, but also the skills and knowledge needed to work within this thriving, professional sector. Learn Q offer flexible, affordable, and relevant courses designed around your lifestyle – and our friendly team of experts are always on hand to offer advice or answer any questions you may have.

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