

To deliver your best performance as a consecutive interpreter it is important to hone your skills to the point where you can successfully execute interpreting tasks. Here are three areas that you can add to your skill set to help you provide a high-quality consecutive interpreting service:

Note taking

While many interpreting settings - such as interpreting instructions during an MRI scan or helping someone to fill in a survey with a housing office - don't require the use of note taking, it is nonetheless a crucial tool to have in your interpreting skillset.

When note taking - and this applies to interpreting in general - focus on the semantic rather than literal meaning. If you focus too much on every word you risk getting bogged down and confused and that will lead to you missing important details.

Devise your own system

if you write down every word you will very quickly fall behind the speaker and you will not be able to replicate what they are saying in the target language. Devising a system is a personal process and ultimately it is about discovering what works for you personally. This means there will be a degree of trial and error in your approach initially while you find out what works for you. You may, for example, decide to use a system of symbols or illustrations. Some of these can be universal- for example, it is common for many interpreters to use basic emojis to convey happiness, sadness, and anger. One might also convey the strength of these emotions (or any adjective) by underlining it in their notes or adding an exclamation mark. Using other basic symbols such as + and - is an obvious way to transform two words totalling eight ('more' and 'less') or sixteen letters ('positive' or 'negative') into just three quick pen strokes.

Don't be too rigid in your approach

it might well be the case that during an interpreting job you find yourself not using a symbol or abbreviation which you have always used, instead using something which just came into your head on the day. This can be a risky strategy as it is possible you will forget what you meant when you refer to it, but as long as you are sure you will remember what it means

when you are interpreting the information that is the most important factor.

As basic and obvious as it may sound, have enough paper with you and several working pens. It would be such a shame to have an interpreting job derailed because you forgot to take care of these small details.

Interacting with the service user and client

Your interactions with the service user and the service provider (e.g. the public service professional) will have a large bearing on the success of your interpreting job.

First and foremost, introduce yourself and make yourself and what you do known to both parties. There's a good chance that either the service user or the service provider (or both!) may not have used an interpreter before, so keep that in mind and don't be too harsh on them (or yourself) if there are misunderstandings. In some settings introducing yourself is more important than in others – for example, if you are working as a medical interpreter, it is helpful to make it explicitly clear that you yourself are not a doctor/nurse/anaesthetist etc. and that your role is to interpret exactly what the service provider says. Some patients confuse the interpreter's role and may assume you are a medical professional, which distorts expectations and can harm the outcome of a session and their opinion of your service.

Once you have introduced yourself, establish that you don't know either of the parties involved, meaning there is no conflict of interest. It is also good to establish that there are no dialectal issues at the beginning – if there are slight variances in dialect, knowing this in advance means that both parties should be understanding and correspondingly more patient. If you discover that due to issues with dialect you have difficulty understanding one of the parties then you should make this known as soon as possible and not proceed with the interpreting job.

Be always patient and don't be afraid to remind both parties that you may not know as much about the scenario as they do. For example, if the session is the fifth out of six appointments and a different interpreter was used for the previous four appointments, then both parties may go into autopilot at times and say things whose meanings hinge on prior knowledge of the case. Feel free to prompt them and remind them that you are new to the case and therefore you are not aware of the point they are discussing.

Don't be afraid to ask for a pause or a break, when appropriate. The service user or provider may forget (or not notice) that they are only speaking around half the amount that you are, plus, they will often not be able to comprehend the mental gymnastics you are having to perform. Consecutive interpreting can be an exhausting process and there is no shame in asking for a small amount of time to take a breather. After all, it's in both parties' interests – fatigue results in the increased possibility of making mistakes, so the quality of your interpreting will improve if you are not exhausted.

Constructive post-session self-criticism

It is important that you see both positive and negative experiences as a way of improving for your next interpreting assignment/session.

If you did well in a particular session, ask yourself why that was the case?

Was it a very familiar topic?

Were both parties amicable?

What would you have done differently if the service user was angry, disappointed, or frustrated with you?

If you found a session difficult, ask yourself why that might have been so.

Was it an unfamiliar scenario?

Should you have prepared more and done more research surrounding the specialism in question?

Was the service user unreasonable with you, while with a different person in the same scenario you might have had a better experience?

Were you just burnt out and needed a rest?

Evaluating your experience is crucial so that you keep on growing as an interpreter. You never know what may be around the corner and letting complacency creep in is a recipe for making mistakes.

Conclusion

The [interpreter's role](#) is a complex one and you need to master several different skills in order to deliver a high quality, professional service. Taking an interpreting course and gaining an interpreting qualification can help you achieve this; there are many online interpreting courses found on websites like LearnQ which deliver highly praised [courses](#) designed to improve your knowledge and skills. You should always strive to learn and

develop your skills so that you and those you are interpreting for can reap the benefits.

By: Jack Taylor, Interpreter & Assessor