

Key Principles, Qualities and Ethics of Interpreting

[Interpreting](#) is a highly skilled and demanding profession that requires not only an excellent [command of languages](#) but also a range of other key qualities, principles and ethics. Interpreters act as the voice of those who do not speak the same language as their intended audience, and therefore play a vital role in enabling communication and promoting understanding between people from different cultures. In this blog, we will outline the key principles, qualities, and ethics of interpreting, and discuss why they are essential for delivering high-quality interpreting services.

What are the essentials of good interpreting?

[Good interpreting](#) is about more than just translating words from one language to another. It is about facilitating communication between people from different cultures and ensuring that the meaning and intention behind the words are accurately conveyed. The most important facet of interpreting is to ensure what is interpreted is as accurate as possible, but being a professional interpreter goes beyond this core quality. To provide a professional interpreting service, interpreters must have a good understanding of the qualities, principles, and ethics that they adhere to when interpreting.

Key interpreting principles

The following are some of the key principles that underlie good interpreting:

Access to services

Interpreting services must be accessible to all who need them. For interpreters this means registering with agencies, clients or registers and clearly communicating the tasks and specialisms that they are competent in. Interpreters should be available to assist with a wide range of interpreting tasks, including face-to-face interpreting, telephone interpreting, and video remote interpreting.

Booking of interpreters

Interpreters should be easy to book, and clients should be able to arrange interpreting services at a time and place that is convenient for them. This

means that interpreters should follow and comply with the booking systems and processes used by interpreting agencies and other clients. In This allows interpreting agencies to have clear and simple booking processes, meaning clients are able to access interpreters quickly and easily.

Timeliness of access

Interpreting services should be available in a timely manner, and clients should not have to wait for long periods for an interpreter to become available. Often clients do not know in advance when an interpreter is needed and will need to make an ad-hoc interpreting or an on-demand interpreting requests that require a prompt response. Interpreting agencies will have a system in place for ensuring that interpreters are available when clients need them, and that they can respond to requests for interpreting services quickly and efficiently. Most successful interpreters will be available at short notice to help fulfill these requirements.

Personalised approach

Interpreting services should be provided in a personalised way that meets the specific needs of each client. Interpreters should take the time to understand the client's requirements, or the general requirements of a particular specialism and the public services in their local area and should tailor their interpreting services to meet those needs. This also includes adapting their interpreting style to mirror the participants communication style, and providing interpreting services in a particular setting or context.

Professionalism and safeguarding

Interpreters should be professional at all times and should take all necessary steps to protect the confidentiality and safety of clients. Interpreting agencies should have systems in place to ensure that interpreters adhere to the highest standards of professionalism, and should have safeguarding policies in place to protect clients from abuse or exploitation. It is also a responsibility of interpreters to ensure they have completed relevant safeguarding training and know what is expected from them if a safeguarding concern arises. If you want to be, or are, an in interpreter and have never completed any safeguarding training, Learn Q offer a free '[Basic Safeguarding for Interpreters](#)' course which can be accessed on their website.

Compliments, comments, concerns and complaints

Interpreting agencies will have a system in place for receiving compliments, comments, concerns, and complaints from clients. Clients should be able to provide feedback on the interpreting services they have received, and interpreting agencies should use this feedback to make improvements to their services. You will be able to find out about the individual Interpreting agencies policies directly from them and it will differ between agencies and even service providers.

Translation of documents

At some levels, particularly at [Level 6](#), interpreters may also be expected to translate documents. This could include the written translation of legal documents, medical records, or any other documents that are required to facilitate communication between people who do not speak the same language. Although written translation is not taught or tested at [level 3](#), occasionally [level 3 interpreters](#) may be asked to provide interpreting services also. Interpreters at Level 3 should only agree to do so if they have received specific training on this and are comfortable to do so - otherwise, they should inform the agency that booked them for the job.

Quality assurance and continuous development

Quality assurance will be carried out by individual Interpreting agencies and each will have a slightly different system in place for ensuring quality, which may vary depending on the service provider. This often involves listening to live interpreting assignments or carrying out additional scenario based assignments specifically for the purpose of quality assessment. Interpreters must be committed to continuous learning and improvement, and they must be able to demonstrate that they are providing high-quality services that meet the needs of service users. This requires interpreters to engage in regular self-reflection, to seek feedback from others, and to take action to improve their practice and performance.

As the majority of interpreters are freelance, they are expected to manage their own continual professional development (CPD). CPD can take many forms including attending courses, researching vocabulary, reading articles or even listening to podcasts or watching television. All CPD activities must be logged by the interpreter and may need to be presented to interpreting agencies or professional organisations.

Key ethics for interpreting

The following are some of the key ethics that interpreters will be expected to adhere to:

Accountability

Accountability is one of the most important principles of interpreting. Interpreters must be accountable for their actions, and they must be able to demonstrate that they have acted in the best interests of service providers and service users at all times. Interpreters must also be able to demonstrate that they have acted with accuracy and fidelity, providing accurate and reliable information and support.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is another key ethical principle of interpreting. Interpreters often work in environments, such as hospitals, where sensitive information is disclosed so it is essential that they are able to maintain the confidentiality of the information they come into contact with and they must be able to demonstrate that they have acted with integrity and professionalism at all times. This requires interpreters to be familiar with confidentiality policies and to be able to apply these policies in practice. It also means any notes taken should be handed in to the service provider at the end of a session, and /or destroyed.

Competence

Continued competence is an important ethical principle of interpreting. Interpreters should never accept an assignment, or task, that they do not have the competence to deliver. This includes competence in terms of language, interpreting skills and knowledge of specialism. Interpreters must be able to demonstrate that they are keeping up-to-date with developments in their field, and that they are continuously developing their skills and knowledge. Interpreters must also be able to demonstrate that they are impartial and objective, providing support that is free from bias and preconceptions.

Impartiality

Impartiality is another key ethical principle of interpreting. Interpreters must be able to provide support that is free from bias, and they must be able to demonstrate that they have acted objectively and impartially at all times. Interpreters must be able to work with people from a range of different backgrounds and cultures, and they must be able to provide support that is culturally sensitive and appropriate.

Maintaining role boundaries

Interpreters must be able to maintain their role boundaries, and they must be able to demonstrate that they have acted professionally and with integrity at all times. Interpreters must not become involved in personal or confidential relationships with service users, and they must be able to maintain the professional distance that is required in their role. This can be a challenge as service users will sometimes see the interpreter as an 'ally' during assignments and can put the interpreter in difficult positions with their requests.

Professionalism

Interpreters must be able to demonstrate that they are professional in all of their work, and they must be able to provide high-quality services that meet the needs of service users. This requires interpreters to be well-prepared, have a thorough understanding of the interpreter code of conduct and know what is expected of them from both the interpreting agency and the service provider.

Patience and tolerance

One of the most important qualities of an interpreter is the ability to be patient and tolerant. Interpreters must be able to work with a wide range of people from different cultural, educational and linguistic backgrounds, and must be able to remain calm and professional, even when working in challenging and highly emotional situations. In some cases, they may need to interpret things that are not aligned with their own morals or beliefs. They must be able to remain impartial and maintain their role boundaries, even when encountering conflicting viewpoints or challenging clients. This requires a high level of emotional intelligence and self-awareness, as well as the ability to remain composed and focused in the face of stress or pressure.

Cultural awareness and sensitivity

Another important quality of an interpreter is cultural awareness and sensitivity. Interpreters must be able to understand and respect the cultural norms, beliefs and values of the people they are working with, and must be able to adapt their interpreting style to meet the specific needs of each client. This requires a deep understanding of different cultures, as well as the ability to put oneself in the shoes of others and to see the world from their perspective. Interpreters must be able to work with people from all walks of life, and must be able to establish a rapport with their clients, building trust and fostering a sense of understanding.

Good communication skills

Although not clearly related to ethics, good communication skills are essential for interpreters. They must be able to communicate effectively, both verbally and non-verbally, and must be able to convey the intended message accurately and unambiguously. This requires excellent active listening skills, as well as the ability to use language effectively and to express complex ideas and concepts in a clear and concise manner. Interpreters must be able to articulate themselves well, and must be able to articulate the thoughts and feelings of others in a way that is true to the original message.

Conclusion

In conclusion, interpreting is a complex and challenging profession that requires a wide range of skills, qualities and ethics. Interpreters must be able to work with people from all walks of life, and must be able to establish a rapport with their clients, building trust and fostering a sense of understanding. They must be able to remain impartial and maintain their role boundaries, even when encountering conflicting viewpoints or difficult clients. They must be able to understand and respect the cultural norms, beliefs and values of the people they are working with, and must be able to adapt their interpreting style to meet the specific needs of each client. By adhering to the key principles, qualities, and ethics outlined in this article, interpreters can ensure that they provide the best possible service to their clients and maintain their professional standards and reputation.