

There are a number of reasons why you may wish to [become an interpreter](#). Perhaps you specialise in a [foreign language](#) and want to put it to use? Maybe you have been helped by interpreters in the past and know how valuable they are? You may just want to provide a valuable service to your [community](#) and help those who really need it. Whatever the reason, to work as an interpreter you will need to consider what is required in order to become qualified.

A [career in interpreting](#) can be extremely rewarding, challenging and satisfying. Furthermore, it is a career that can take you to many locations in the UK and abroad as well as providing the opportunity to work in many different industries. If you are considering becoming an interpreter, it can help to learn about the educational and skill requirements as well as the main responsibilities of an interpreter so that you can decide if it is the career for you.

In this article, we are going to look at the role of an interpreter, what is required to become an interpreter and where interpreters work.

## The Role of an Interpreter

Before we delve into this topic in more detail, it helps to understand what an [interpreter](#) does. An interpreter is someone who can speak two or more different languages who helps people who do not both speak a common language to communicate. An interpreter will take the source language and then interpret it into the language of those who are either listening or conversing. Unlike translators who handle written content, interpreters use the spoken language.

**Common interpreter responsibilities include:**

- Rendering messages from one language into another language without influencing or changing the message, being biased, judging or forming an opinion
- [Working in legal](#), healthcare and other public service settings
- Working with people who have [different dialects](#), accents, speaking tempos and diverse languages

- Providing services in a number of ways such as Telephone and Video Remote Interpreting
- Working in highly emotional and stressful situations such as medical emergencies or with [social services](#)
- Using headphones and other technology to listen to speakers at events before interpreting their words in real-time.

Interpreters in the UK need to be fluent in English and one other language as a minimum. Because interpreters are fluent in both languages they work with, they have the scope to:

- understand informal and formal speech including slang, colloquial phrases and idioms etc
- communicate quickly and accurately
- recognise the cultures where their specialist languages are spoken

### [Becoming an Interpreter](#)

If you are thinking about a career as an interpreter, it can help to understand what is required in terms of study.

### **Go to University**

One of the ways of getting into interpreting is by attending university and obtaining a degree in translation and interpreting, languages and interpreting or interpreting studies amongst many other options. Unfortunately, university is expensive and not always an option for the majority of those who become interpreters, meaning there are more popular and practical methods.

### **Gain a Certificate**

The entry level qualification for paid interpreting assignments is the nationally recognised [Level 3 Certificate in Community interpreting](#). The only conditions for signing up for the [Level 3 Certificate in Community interpreting](#) are to be fluent in English and one other language, and you don't need to have studied any interpreting courses prior to enrolling. Learn Q are one of the leading providers of this qualification and provide

excellent quality and value with no need to write any essays. There are other providers in the UK, however, most of them take an essay-based approach to the qualification that can drive costs up and significantly extend the length of the qualification.

A [Level 3 Certificate in Community Interpreting](#) allows students to make their way into the world of interpreting by registering with Interpreting Agencies, (also known as Language Service Providers) and working in several specialisms including healthcare, welfare benefits, social services, housing, local government and more.

After gaining a Level 3 Certificate and building up 2 years or more professional interpreting experience, many interpreters choose to move up to the [Level 6 Diploma in Public Service Interpreting](#), which is provided by the Chartered Institute of Linguists. This allows interpreters to expand into legal interpreting for such clients as the Ministry of Justice or the Police. Before taking the [Level 6 Diploma in Public Service Interpreting](#) exam students need to take a preparation course such as Learn Q's Level 6 Diploma in Public Service Interpreting online preparation course.

## Should I work as an interpreter without any training or qualifications?

Some bilingual people do manage to find a small amount of interpreting work without any [qualifications](#), but this is not something that we would ever condone as there are guidelines that need to be adhered to ensure that the interpreting provision is safe and accurate. Poor or misinformed interpreting can pose a health risk to those being interpreted for or may cause an individual to miss out on financial aid, housing, freedom or other benefits that the UK public services provide. Anyone offering their services as an interpreter (even to friends or family) should always at the very least complete a recognised training programme so that they understand how to provide a professional and competent service.

## Interpreter Skills

Through study, interpreters can learn how to provide a range of services and develop a number of skills. These can include:

- The ability to understand the nuances of languages meaning that they can deal with metaphors, word connotations, idioms and colloquial phrases.

- Listening skills that enable interpreters to hear accurately what is said and quickly process it before interpreting the meaning as closely as possible into another language.
- Analysing and responding in a timely manner once someone conveys a message and interpret that message in real-time.
- An excellent understanding of syntax, grammar and structural components in both languages. Furthermore, they will need to consider figurative language and how that might have an impact on the structure of the language being spoken.
- Emotional resilience is needed when working in certain settings such as social service, welfare, housing and hospitals.
- Interpreters will also need to adopt a diverse approach as they will work with many different people from a range of backgrounds, ethnicities and abilities. As a result, good interpreters will be able to understand the differences and how they can affect communication.
- Interpreting can be highly stressful as certain situations can be highly emotional and prove challenging. Therefore, interpreters need to remain calm and ensure that they are focused on the job at hand.
- Technology is also becoming an integral part of interpreting; interpreters should be able to use technology on the job. This might include video, online technology and phone technology.
- Interpreters must go one step further than just the spoken language because they will also need to understand body language and gestures that different cultures adopt. These nonverbal signs are part of the role and are important for the interpreter to understand and convey.
- Language skills are of vital importance including the ability to learn and understand specialist terminology in both languages. For example, medical interpreters often need to build up their vocabulary on medical conditions, procedures, job titles and departments.

## Different Types of Interpreting

There are three main types of interpreting and often interpreters will work across all three:

Face to face interpreting occurs in a specific location, often a public service location (for instance, a hospital or court), a home or within a business' premises. The client/ Service Provider (doctor or police officer), the Limited English Speaker(s) (LES) / Service User and the interpreter are all present in the same location.

Telephone interpreting is completed remotely with the interpreter joining a conversation via a telephone. Often the client and LES are together in a physical location (e.g., a hospital or Job Centre) while the interpreter is at home, or in a call centre. Telephone interpreting is always consecutive (see below).

Video remote interpreting is also completed remotely with the interpreter joining the conversation via a secure Internet video link. In most cases the client and LES are in the same location (e.g., a police station) and the interpreter joins either from home, or from a centralised client or LSP location specifically for that purpose.

## Different Modes of Interpreting

There are also different modes of interpreting for use in different situations. The more modes an interpreter is competent in, the greater the variety of assignment they can complete. If you wish to acquire an interpreting qualification, the higher the level you choose, the more modes you will have to demonstrate.

The first mode that interpreters generally learn is consecutive, or 2-way interpreting. This is required for nearly all interpreting assignments and is 'turn-based' interpreting where a speaker will speak a short sentence and then wait for the interpreter to interpret what has been said before continuing or awaiting a response.

Next is sight translation from English, where the interpreter reads an English text out loud in the 'target' language (e.g., Polish) so that a non-English speaker can understand the content.

Sight translation to English (the reverse of the above) is often the next skill learned.

Simultaneous interpreting, where the words of the speaker must be interpreted at the same time as they are speaking them is one of the most difficult skills to learn and is often used in specific locations, such as a

courtroom, during a conference, or in mental health interpreting assignments.

Finally, written translation to and from English, which is most commonly used in court assignments. While strictly speaking this is translation and not interpreting, it is a skill that higher level interpreters may need to use.

## Becoming an Interpreter - How Long Does It Take?

The length of time that it might take to become an interpreter will depend on the route you take and how much time you have to dedicate to studying, practising and then finding work opportunities. If you go to university, qualifying alone can take as much as three years which makes it one of the longer options while a [Level 3 Certificate in Community interpreting](#) can be achieved in as little as 4 weeks, and Learn Q students regularly complete the qualification in under 4 months. At Learn Q, we specialise in Quality Qualifications, Quickly, so we ensure that you get the best possible qualification in the minimum amount of time.

As you have learned, there are different things that you can study to become an interpreter but provided you take the right steps, you can soon find yourself forging a career in a very rewarding role.