

ILR SKILL LEVEL DESCRIPTIONS FOR INTERPRETATION PERFORMANCE

PREFACE

These Skill Level Descriptions are primarily intended to serve as guidelines for use in government settings. They are separate and distinct from the ILR Language Skill Level Descriptions for Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing as well as those for Translation Performance.

Interpretation involves the immediate communication of meaning from one language to another. Although there are correspondences between interpreting and translating, an interpreter conveys meaning orally, while a translator conveys meaning from written text to written text. As a result, interpretation requires skills different from those needed for translation.

Interpreting is a complex task that combines several abilities beyond language competence in order to enable delivery of an effective professional interpretation in a given setting. Consequently, extreme care must be exercised in hiring interpreters and interpreting duties should be assigned to individuals within their performance level.

To facilitate this correspondence, the Skill Level Descriptions that follow characterize interpreting performance in three bands: Professional Performance (Levels 3 to 5), Limited Performance (Levels 2 and 2+), and Minimal Performance (Levels 1 and 1+). Only individuals performing at the Professional Performance levels are properly termed "interpreters".

Command of two languages is prerequisite to any interpreting task. The interpreter must be able to (1) comprehend two languages as spoken and written (if the language has a script), (2) speak both of these languages, and (3) choose an expression in the target language that fully conveys and best matches the meaning of the source language.

From the standpoint of the user, a successful interpretation is one that faithfully and accurately conveys the meaning of the source language orally, reflecting the style, register, and cultural context of the source message, without omissions, additions or embellishments on the part of the interpreter.

Language competence is a prerequisite, but it is not sufficient for successful performance as an interpreter. Specialized non-linguistic skills related to the workplace must be acquired through training, practice, or both. Because a high degree of concentration and stamina are required, interpreters must work in teams. Because interpreting takes place in a wide range of formal and informal settings (such as hospitals, courts, and international conferences), applicable protocols and conventions must be mastered and followed. The interpreter must also be able to use special equipment and follow accepted professional practices (such as setting aside personal opinion and maintaining the confidentiality of information).

As with any language mediation, knowledge of socio-cultural factors and familiarity with the subject matter are necessary. Interpretation tasks vary in complexity and often require extensive preparation in advance, particularly if such assignments do not take place regularly or frequently. For example, topics may be highly specialized, and the style of language may vary from street language to erudite speech. Therefore, in addition to broad experience in interpreting, use of language tools and resources, such as monolingual dictionaries, on-line aids, and consultation with experts, serve to enhance the interpreter's performance. Analytical and research skills allow the individual to proceed methodically in order to gain basic knowledge of various specialized fields, develop subject matter glossaries, and verify the appropriateness of the equivalents chosen.

There are three different modes of interpretation: simultaneous, consecutive, and sight translation. All three modes involve highly complex cognitive activity, inasmuch as the interpreter must immediately comprehend, analyze, and convert the source message into the target language spoken equivalent.

Simultaneous interpreting requires the interpreter to convey continuously the full and accurate meaning of what is said in the source language into speech in the target language, lagging just slightly behind the original message. Simultaneous interpretation may take place in settings where no pauses or interruptions are possible, and is typically delivered using specialized equipment in a sound-proof booth.

Consecutive interpretation requires the interpreter to convey the full and accurate meaning of speech from the source language into the target language after the speaker has concluded speaking. Depending on the setting, the speaker may pause periodically to allow for interpreting to take place or continue until the entire speech has been delivered. Interpreters generally take notes as memory aids to reconstruct the message and seek clarification if the request will not disrupt the event.

Sight translation requires the interpreter to immediately convey into the spoken target language the meaning of a document written in the source language. It occurs in such settings as medical interviews, witness interrogations, court proceedings, and international meetings.

The only reliable way to gauge how well an individual will perform in any given assignment is to administer tests that assess interpreting skills in a given setting, reflecting real-world tasks and content. For ratings to be useful in predicting actual performance, test production should be assessed directly by professionally rated practitioners. Self-assessments are neither reliable nor valid.

Language proficiency testing may serve as a screening tool, since an individual's performance will not exceed that individual's proficiency level in any of the prerequisite language skills. (For example, a listening or speaking proficiency rated at level 3 in one of the two prescribed working languages will accordingly limit interpretation performance to level 3 or below.) However, language proficiency testing has limited value in assessing interpreting ability, since interpretation requires knowledge and skills

in addition to language proficiency. Lack of training or practice in interpreting skills will prevent an individual with excellent listening and speaking proficiency from delivering a successful interpretation.

In summary, an individual's interpretation performance level depends on (1) command of two working languages, (2) ability to choose an appropriate expression, (3) familiarity with the cultural context of both languages, (4) knowledge of terminology in specialized fields, (5) observance of protocols applicable to different settings, and (6) mastery of modes applicable to these settings.

It is at the Professional Performance Level 3, as described below, that all necessary skills align to enable a reasonably accurate, reliable, and trustworthy interpretation.

Above Level 3, an individual's competence and expertise combine to produce increasingly accurate and reliable interpreting in a variety of settings.

Below Level 3, the Limited Performance Levels (2+ and 2) are characterized by weaknesses in some of the requisite skills. For this reason, individuals performing at these levels are not able to deliver a professional interpretation but may nevertheless be able to assist with transferring some limited information.

The Minimal and Memorized Performance Levels (1+ to 0+) are characterized by weaknesses in all of the requisite skills. Interpretation is not possible at these levels.

Each level implies control of all functions at the lower levels. The "plus level" designation is used to describe performance which substantially exceeds the next lower skill level but for any reason does not fully meet the criteria for the next higher level.

Skill Level Descriptions

Level 5 (Master Professional Performance):

Able to excel consistently at interpreting in the mode (simultaneous, consecutive, and sight) required by the setting and provide accurate renditions of informal, formal, and highly formal discourse. Conveys the meaning of the speaker faithfully and accurately, including all details and nuances, reflecting the style, register, and cultural context of the source language, without omissions, additions or embellishments. Demonstrates superior command of the skills required for interpretation, including mastery of both working languages and their cultural context, and wide-ranging expertise in specialized fields. Outstanding delivery, with pleasant voice quality and without hesitations, unnecessary repetitions, and corrections. Exemplifies the highest standards of professional conduct and ethics.

Level 4+ (Advanced Professional Performance Plus):

Able to interpret in the mode (simultaneous, consecutive, and sight) required by the setting and provide accurate renditions of informal, formal, and most highly formal discourse. Conveys the meaning of the speaker faithfully and accurately, including most details and nuances, reflecting the style, register, and cultural context of the source language, without omissions, additions or embellishments. Demonstrates mastery of the skills required for interpretation, including command of both working languages and their cultural context, expertise in a number of specialized fields, and ability to prepare other specialized topics rapidly and routinely. Excellent delivery, with pleasant voice quality and rare hesitations, repetitions or corrections. Performance reflects the highest standards of professional conduct and ethics.

Level 4 (Advanced Professional Performance):

Able to interpret in the mode (simultaneous, consecutive, and sight) required by the setting and provide almost completely accurate renditions of complex, colloquial, and idiomatic speech as well as formal and some highly formal discourse. Conveys the meaning of the speaker faithfully, including many details and nuances, reflecting the style, register, and cultural context of the source language, without omissions, additions or embellishments. Demonstrates mastery of the skills required for interpretation, including command of both working languages and their cultural context, expertise in some specialized fields, and ability to prepare new specialized topics rapidly and routinely. Very good delivery, with pleasant voice quality and only occasional hesitations, repetitions or corrections. Performance reflects the highest standards of professional conduct and ethics.

Level 3+ (Professional Performance Plus):

Able to interpret accurately and consistently in the mode (simultaneous, consecutive, and sight) required by the setting and provide generally accurate renditions of complex, colloquial and formal speech, conveying most but not all details and nuances. Expression will generally reflect target language conventions. Demonstrates competence in the skills required for interpretation, including command of both working languages, their cultural context, and terminology in those specialized fields in which the interpreter has developed expertise. Good delivery, with pleasant voice quality, and few hesitations, repetitions, or corrections. Performance reflects high standards of professional conduct and ethics.

Level 3 (Professional Performance Level):

Able to interpret consistently in the mode (simultaneous, consecutive, and sight) required by the setting, provide renditions of informal as well as some colloquial and formal

speech with adequate accuracy, and normally meet unpredictable complications successfully. Can convey many nuances, cultural allusions, and idioms, though expression may not always reflect target language conventions. Adequate delivery, with pleasant voice quality. Hesitations, repetitions or corrections may be noticeable but do not hinder successful communication of the message. Can handle some specialized subject matter with preparation. Performance reflects high standards of professional conduct and ethics.

Level 2+ (Limited Working Performance Plus):

Able to transfer information, not always accurately and completely, during routine, everyday, repetitive exchanges in informal settings, but unable to perform adequately in the standard interpretation modes. May falter, stammer, or pause, and often resort to summarizing speech content. Idiomatic or cultural expressions may not be rendered appropriately in most instances. Language may be stilted or awkward.

Level 2 (Limited Working Performance Level):

Unable to transfer information reliably in most instances. May communicate some meaning when exchanges are short, involve subject matter that is routine or discourse that is repetitive or predictable, but may typically require repetition or clarification. Expression in the target language is frequently faulty.

Level 1+ (Minimal Performance Plus):

Unable to transfer information reliably, even if familiar with the subject matter.

Level 1 (Minimal Performance):

Unable to transfer more than isolated short phrases.

Level 0+ (Memorized Performance):

Unable to transfer more than isolated words.

Level 0 (No Performance):

No functional ability to transfer information from one language to another.