WASHINGTON COURTS
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS

Frequently Asked Questions
Certified Court Interpreters

In which languages may one become a certified court interpreter?

Washington offers certification in the following languages: *Arabic (Egyptian), Arabic (Levantine)* Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, Cantonese, French, Khmer, Korean, Laotian, Mandarin, Marshallese, Russian, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

Anyone who wants to interpret in these languages in a legal proceeding must pass the state certification exam, which consists of a written component and an oral component. Candidates are tested on their knowledge of vocabulary, ethics, and court terminology on the written portion of the exam. Those who pass the written component are eligible to take the oral component, which tests their skills in simultaneous and consecutive interpretation and sight translation.

What is the difference between certified and registered court Interpreters?

To become certified, interpreters must pass a rigorous exam testing their ability to interpret accurately in English and their non-English language in the three interpreting modes: consecutive, simultaneous, and sight translation.

These national certification exams are costly and time-consuming to develop and maintain, and therefore are only available in the most commonly used languages.

The registered credential was adopted in Washington in 2007 to provide a measurement of quality for interpreters of non-certifiable languages. To become registered interpreters are not tested in *interpreting skills*, but rather their ability to *speak and comprehend* the non-English and English language. All other requirements (written exam, mandatory classes, oath, and criminal background check) are the same as for interpreters seeking to become certified.

What are the criteria to become a certified court interpreter?

1. Pass the written exam administered by the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) with a score of 80% or better.
2. Attend a one-day orientation program on interpreting skills sponsored by the AOC.
3. Pass the oral interpreting exam administered by the AOC with a score of at least 70% in each section.
4. Submit a completed fingerprint card and application fee to the AOC. (The AOC will submit the fingerprint card to the Washington State Patrol for processing.)

5. Attend a mandatory class sponsored by the AOC on courtroom protocol and interpreter ethics.
6. Take the Oath of Interpreter to abide by the Court Interpreter Code of Conduct.
7. Obtain an interpreter ID badge for court proceedings.

What is the cost to become a certified court interpreter?

The cost to take the Written Exam is $75. The cost for the Oral Exam is $300 for Washington State residents and $500 for out-of-state residents. The classes are offered at no charge. The cost of the criminal background check is approximately $30.

What advantages do I have as a certified court interpreter?

By securing your credentials as a certified interpreter, your contact information will be available on the Administrative Office of the Courts' website, which is accessed by courts, interpreter coordinators, law offices, and other agencies seeking credentialed language interpreters.

Courts are required by RCW 2.43.030(1)(b) to use the services of only those interpreters who are certified by the Administrative Office of the courts, unless good cause is found and noted on the record. By being a certified court interpreter, you will have an advantage to be hired over un-credentialed interpreters in your language.

What is a court interpreter?

A court interpreter is anyone who interprets in a civil or criminal court proceeding (e.g., arraignment, motion, hearing, deposition, trial) for a witness or defendant who speaks or understands little or no English. Court interpreters must accurately interpret in the simultaneous and consecutive modes for individuals with a high level of education and an extensive vocabulary, as well as persons with very limited language skills without changing the language register of the speaker. Interpreters are also sometimes responsible for sight translating written documents, often of a legal nature, from English into the target language and from the target language into English.

What kinds of skills does it take to be a good court interpreter?

In addition to total fluency in both English and the foreign language, a court interpreter should have excellent public speaking and interpersonal skills. Sometimes the testimony to be interpreted is shocking and traumatic and the interpreter must be able to deal with such matters without becoming emotionally involved. The interpreter must also be able to refrain from expressing personal opinions or acting as an advocate for one side or the other in a court case, and must be able to work unobtrusively. The interpreter must be willing to work well under pressure and react quickly to solve complex linguistic and ethical problems as they arise. On the other hand, when a problem cannot be solved by the interpreter alone, the interpreter must demonstrate the good judgment required to inform the court of that fact and take whatever steps are necessary to resolve the situation. Finally, good court interpreters constantly strive to

improve their skills by reading from a wide variety of sources, attending conferences, researching new terms and concepts, and honing their interpreting techniques.

Is special training required to become a court interpreter?

Yes, court interpreting is a very demanding profession that requires complete fluency in both English and the foreign language. The level of expertise required for this profession is far greater than that required for everyday bilingual conversation. The interpreter must be able to deal with the specialized language of judges and attorneys, as well as with the street slang of witnesses and the technical jargon of criminologists, police officers, and expert witnesses. Most people do not have full command of all registers of both English and the foreign language and, therefore, require special training to acquire it. Although there are no minimum requirements that must be met in order to apply to take the state certification test, applicants are encouraged to complete formal, college-level course work and training in both languages and modes of interpreting before applying for the examination. Bellevue College offers some courses. We encourage you to contact local colleges and request information about their programs. If no college-level courses are available, the following self-study techniques are suggested: (1) expand your vocabulary, (2) develop your own glossaries, and (3) develop interpreting techniques. In order to pass the certification examinations you must enhance your skills in (1) consecutive interpretation, (2) simultaneous interpretation, and (3) sight translation.

What is the job market like for court interpreters?

There is a great demand for court interpreters in areas with large immigrant populations. Most court interpreters work as freelance interpreters, meaning that they are hired on an hourly basis, rather than being permanent employees of the trial courts. A freelance interpreter must be willing to travel from one trial court to another, perhaps even from one county trial court system to another depending on the language, in order to make a living as an interpreter. Court interpreters are generally paid by the hour.

How will courts recognize my status as a certified court interpreter?

As a certified court interpreter, you will receive an ID badge to wear during your work as an interpreter. We encourage you to wear your badge at all court-related jobs and we request that judges, court clerks, and court administrators ask to see your badge when you appear for jobs.

Who establishes the rules and requirements for becoming a certified court interpreter?

The Supreme Court established the Court Interpreter Commission through General Rule 11.1. The Commission is responsible for maintaining a policy manual for the interpreter program and staffing committees on Issues, Discipline, and Judicial and Court Manager Education.

Once I become a certified court interpreter, are there ongoing requirements to remain certified?

Yes, to maintain a certified status, at the completion of each two-year compliance period, interpreters must complete and submit the following to the Administrative Office of the Courts:

- 16 hours of continuing education (two of which must be ethics)
- 20 hours of courtroom interpreting
- A declaration regarding personal conduct
- A signed, sworn oath stating that the interpreter will uphold the Code of Conduct for court interpreters

All continuing education classes must be approved by the Administrative Office of the Courts. Interpreters are required to keep documentation of proof of compliance for five years.

How are providers of continuing education activities for court interpreters selected?

Interested continuing education providers must adhere to the guidelines developed by the Court Interpreter Commission. The providers must comply with guidelines for application procedures and provider responsibilities.

Where can I obtain more information about becoming a court interpreter?

Professional associations may offer workshops and conferences at which novices are welcome. Introductory courses in court interpreting at colleges and universities are also good sources of information. We encourage you to contact them. Attending court sessions at your local courthouse will give you a good idea of the kinds of proceedings in which you will be expected to interpret, and you may be able to observe a court interpreter at work.

How do I sign up for the testing and training process?

The process of becoming a certified court interpreter begins with taking and passing the written exam. That exam is typically administered in February in both Eastern and Western Washington. Registration is open during the month of January, and at that time, all necessary forms are available on our website.

Who do I contact to find out more about the Certified Court Interpreter Program?

If you have additional questions after reviewing the certified court interpreter information, please contact Tina Williamson at tina.williamson@courts.wa.gov.

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