

Instructions for Interpreters

Introduction

Interpreters help to ensure that the fulness of the gospel is preached to every man in his own tongue and in his own language (see D&C 90:11). Interpretation is perhaps one of the most challenging and rewarding tasks you will be asked to perform.

These instructions are designed to help you understand your assignment and responsibilities as an interpreter. Other, more specific information will be added to this Web site periodically. Please check back often for updates.

Settings

You may be asked to interpret in a variety of settings, each of which will provide a different set of challenges. Most commonly you will be asked to interpret for sacrament meetings. However, you may be asked to interpret for other meetings such as Sunday School, priesthood and Relief Society, bishop interviews, missionary discussions, or in other situations where both the speaker and the listener need help understanding one another.

Methods of Interpretation

There are two primary methods of interpretation: consecutive and simultaneous.

Consecutive Interpretation

In consecutive interpretation, you and the speaker take turns speaking. The speaker says a sentence or two and then pauses while you deliver the message in the target language. This form of interpretation is typically used in a setting where the majority of the congregation speaks a language different from the speaker. Please note that in consecutive interpretation, the time required for the speaker's presentation generally doubles to compensate for the time it takes you to repeat the message in another language. Consecutive interpretation can be used in many settings. A few examples are listed below.

Sacrament meeting. You stand next to the main speaker, usually with your own microphone, and repeat the message of the main speaker. You and the speaker will need to find a back-and-forth rhythm that works for you. Usually after a few minutes, both of you will adjust to the flow and the interpretation will become smooth. Working beforehand with speakers to make them comfortable with this style of interpretation is recommended.

Interviews. Interviews are different from interpreting for a meeting because you normally have to provide two-way interpretation. You interpret the words of the leader into the language of the member and then interpret the member's response into the language of the leader. You should do everything possible to facilitate communication without injecting your own personal feelings or opinions. It is also important to remember that the information discussed in an interview is highly confidential and you must not share it with anyone.

Missionary discussions. You can assist full-time missionaries by helping them teach gospel topics. This type of setting also involves two-way interpretation. Discussions are generally filled with many questions and answers. Remember that your primary role in such a discussion is to facilitate the exchange between the missionaries and investigators and not to lead or direct the conversation. You may be asked to share your feelings with investigators. If this is done, remember to be sensitive to the missionaries and tell them what you shared.

Simultaneous Interpretation

In simultaneous interpretation, the speaker does not pause while delivering a message. You listen to a sentence or two and then begin interpreting as the speaker continues to speak. This method of interpretation is particularly difficult, because you must be able to interpret the previous sentence of the speaker while listening to the next sentence. You might use simultaneous interpretation in a setting where most people in the audience speak the same languages as the speaker, but a few members of the group do not. Some examples are given below.

Sacrament meeting. You are located in a booth or a room away from the main speaker, preferably in an area that will cause the least amount of distraction. Using an electronic transmitter, you interpret for members in the audience who are equipped with receivers and headsets. With you interpreting this way, members are free to sit anywhere and feel more unified with the other members of the ward or branch.

Sunday School, priesthood, Relief Society. You sit behind or next to a person or group of people requiring interpretation. In a hushed voice, you interpret the words of the lesson.

Not all interpretation situations can be described in this document, but understanding the agenda of a meeting and carefully considering and visualizing what will take place during the meeting will help you determine whether simultaneous or consecutive interpretation should be used.

Preparation for an Interpretation Assignment

If you are asked to interpret in your ward or branch, here are some things you can do to prepare for your assignment.

Seek the Spirit. The interpretation of tongues is a spiritual gift. Seeking the guidance of the Holy Ghost and striving to be worthy of His companionship will be invaluable to you as you fulfill your calling as an interpreter. Being able to access the blessings of the Holy Ghost will be the single most important thing you can do to prepare for your new responsibility.

Gather information. If you are to interpret for a speaker in sacrament meeting, find out the subject of the talk and ask the speaker if there are any scriptures or stories that he will use. If you are interpreting for a Sunday School class, find out what the lesson is and ask the teacher to share with you any special lesson material he plans to use. The more you know about your subject ahead of time, the better you can prepare yourself.

Plan how you will use equipment. If you are going to do consecutive interpretation, decide where you will stand, and find out if you and the speaker will use the same microphone or separate ones. If you are doing simultaneous interpretation with a transmitter, make sure that you know how to operate the equipment and ensure that it is functioning correctly.

Tips for Interpreters

Learning how to interpret well does not happen overnight. Even interpreters who have a natural gift to interpret often take several years of hard work to become effective in their callings. Below are several tips that you can use to help you become a more effective interpreter.

Obtain language reference materials. When interpreting, it is extremely helpful to have reference tools in your interpretation language readily available. Some basic tools that are frequently used include the Bible, the triple combination, “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” a hymnbook, and a good bilingual dictionary. Your use of language reference materials will change according to the specific type of interpretation assignments you receive.

Prepare word lists. As you interpret on different occasions, begin building lists of commonly used words and phrases that you can refer to when you interpret again. Set up your word lists in such a way that you can sort them into categories. For instance, you may have a list of words and phrases commonly used in interviews and a different list of words that are helpful for interpreting in a sacrament meeting.

Use teamwork. In many situations, it is good for you to work together in a team with another interpreter, particularly when doing simultaneous interpretation. Interpretation is a high-stress, exhausting activity, and after about 15 minutes it is not unusual to become weary and to have difficulty concentrating. In long meetings with multiple speakers, you and your backup interpreter should plan to switch roles at regular intervals, perhaps with each new speaker. Your backup interpreter should always be listening attentively to your interpretation and be prepared to assist you or switch roles with you at any time if needed.

Speak clearly, softly, and with appropriate emotion. Often times, when interpreting simultaneously with equipment, you will need to speak in soft tones to avoid creating distracting noises in the room. However, speaking softly does not mean that you should whisper. Using voice control, you should reflect the style of the speaker by reflecting the emotions and feelings that the speaker uses. Remember to be culturally sensitive and use a voice that will resonate with the members.

Practice reading aloud in the target language. If you are not a native speaker of the target language, reading aloud will help you learn correct words and phrases, as well as help you train your tongue to pronounce difficult words correctly. Practice reading from the scriptures and other Church materials that have been translated in the target language.

Listen to others. You can learn a lot about what to do and what not to do by observing other interpreters. If there are no other interpreters in your area to listen to, you can listen to other general Church interpreters at <http://lds.org/broadcast>.