

*A Project of the National Distance
Learning Center for Interpreter Education*

Entry-to-Practice Competencies

for ASL/English Interpreters

Distance Opportunities for Interpreter Training Center



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Introduction

The aim of this document is to delineate the major skills, fields of knowledge and attributes that underlie competent professional interpreting practice. These competency standards are a statement of what the community can expect from an entry-level professional interpreter. The standards articulated in this document are a formal description of what normally occurs in the workplace of entry-level interpreters working autonomously in low-risk, routine situations, without the benefit of direct supervision by a nationally certified interpreter.

Identifying a set of professional, competency-based standards provides the field and marketplace with a set of explicit statements of what entry-level interpreters need to successfully practice. Having a clear set of standards helps to minimize misunderstandings both inside and outside the profession. As well, competency-based standards offer a sound basis for decisions about entry into and progression within the profession (Toohey, Ryan, McLean & Hughes, 1995).

This set of competencies was developed over time by a collaborative core of experienced and committed interpreter educators, practitioners, and leaders, with input from a wide range of stakeholders. The stakeholders included students of interpreting, interpreter educators, D/deaf and hard-of-hearing consumers, employers, policy makers, organizational leaders, and parents. The competencies are inclusive of and respectful of the needs of D/deaf consumers at various stages in the lifespan and represent multicultural perspectives across a multitude of settings. The development process was informed by research, current theory and practice (Witter-Merithew, Johnson & Taylor, 2004).

Audience

Competency-based standards offer advantages to the fields of interpreting and interpreter education and further important national objectives including maintenance of professional standards, labor market efficiency and equity (Masters & McCurry, 1990). Focusing on competence provides a common frame of reference that can be used and applied by practitioners, consumers, employers, and educators. Agreed upon competencies promote meaningful discussion of professional practice among colleagues. Drawing attention to the complexity and richness of professional knowledge and skills has the potential to encourage excellence and support practitioners (Hager, Gonczi & Oliver, 1991).

Vision

These competency-based standards are driven by a vision of what is required for competent interpreting practice and grounded in the day-to-day experience of practitioners. The vision is to elevate the standards of competent practice for entry into the interpreting profession. When translated into an appropriate scope and sequence of instruction, it is envisioned that these competencies can be mastered within a bachelor's program or equivalent and that graduates who have successfully mastered these competencies will be ready to pass a national interpreting exam.

The standards fall within five domains. The five domains reflect the view that entry-level interpreters must possess a variety of linguistic, interactional, technical, academic, affective, and creative competencies, as well as personal and professional attributes, ensuring they can effectively work in low-risk, routine situations as autonomous practitioners. The competencies reflect a firm foundation of skills, knowledge and attitudes within each domain.

A glossary of terms is provided at the end of this booklet for your reference.

Entry-to-Practice Competencies

Domain 1: Theory and Knowledge Competencies

This cluster of competencies embodies the academic foundation and world knowledge essential to effective interpretation.

- 1.1 Demonstrate world knowledge through a discussion of current and historical events in regional, national, and international contexts and by describing systems that support society (e.g., governmental, educational, religious, social, and judicial).
- 1.2 Demonstrate knowledge of linguistics and cross-cultural and interpretation theories by discussing the implications of each for the work of interpreters in various contexts (e.g., approaches to the process and analysis of task).
- 1.3 Apply linguistics and cross-cultural and interpretation theories by analyzing a wide range of consecutive and simultaneous interpreting samples in a manner that reflects synthesis of the theoretical frameworks as they apply to the interpretations.
- 1.4 Compare and contrast linguistic characteristics in a variety of signed language interpretations.
- 1.5 Identify and discuss personal and professional demands that occur during interpreting and identify strategies leading to an effective interpretation (e.g., strategies to prevent injuries, reduce stress, ensure personal safety, use of team interpreting).
- 1.6 Discuss professional and ethical decision-making in a manner consistent with theoretical models and standard professional practice.
- 1.7 Compare and contrast majority and minority cultures in American society (e.g., social norms, values, identity markers, humor, art forms, language use, oppression).
- 1.8 Identify and discuss the major historical eras, events and figures in the D/deaf Community that impact D/deaf and hard of hearing people, and the resulting implications for interpreting (e.g., audism, Deaf President Now, Clerc, Milan).
- 1.9 Demonstrate critical analysis of current literature in the interpreting discipline by writing a research paper.

Domain 2: Human Relations Competencies

This cluster of interpersonal competencies fosters effective communication and productive collaboration with colleagues, consumers, and employers.

- 2.1 Demonstrate collegiality by showing respect and courtesy to colleagues, consumers and employers, and taking responsibility for one's work.
- 2.2 Advocate for conditions of employment that safeguard the rights and welfare of consumers and interpreters.
- 2.3 Demonstrate respect for ASL, English and contact varieties of ASL by using cultural norms appropriate to each language while conversing and interpreting.
- 2.4 Recognize and respect cultural differences among individuals by demonstrating appropriate behavioral and communicative strategies both while conversing and while interpreting.
Example: In groups comprised of D/deaf people exclusively and groups of D/deaf and hearing people, apply appropriate strategies for introductions, turn-taking, and follow-up.
- 2.5 Collaborate with participants and team members in a manner that reflects appropriate cultural norms and professional standards during all phases of assignments and implement changes where appropriate and feasible.
- 2.6 Demonstrate an understanding of professional boundaries by following generally accepted practices as defined by the code of ethical conduct.

Domain 3: Language Skills Competencies

This cluster of competencies relates to the use of American Sign Language and English.

- 3.1 Demonstrate superior proficiency and flexibility in one's native language (L1) by effectively communicating in a wide range of situations, with speakers of various ages and backgrounds.
- 3.2 Demonstrate near-native like communicative competence and flexibility in one's second language (L2) by effectively communicating in a variety of routine personal and professional situations with native and non-native speakers of varying ages, race, gender, education, socio-economic status, and ethnicity.
- 3.3 Demonstrate advanced and effective public speaking skills in both ASL and English through the spontaneous delivery of an informal and a prepared formal presentation

Domain 4: Interpreting Skills Competencies

This cluster of technical competencies are related to effective ASL-English interpretation of a range of subject matter in a variety of settings.

- 4.1 Apply academic and world knowledge during consecutive interpretation using appropriate cultural adjustments, while managing internal and external factors and processes, in a manner that results in accurate and reliable interpretations in both ASL and English.
Example: In low-risk settings with moderately technical, moderately paced monolog, the individual manages personal filters and intra-personal, environmental, logistical and situational factors by adhering to appropriate norms, rituals, and protocol.
- 4.2 Integrate academic and world knowledge during simultaneous interpretation using appropriate cultural adjustments while managing internal and external factors and processes in a manner that results in accurate and reliable interpretations in both ASL and English.
- 4.3 Analyze the effectiveness of interpreting performance generated by self and peers by applying contemporary theories of performance assessment and peer review.
- 4.4 Demonstrate the ability to effectively team interpret during consecutive and simultaneous low-risk interactional assignments.
- 4.5 Demonstrate flexibility to transliterate or interpret by observing the language use of D/deaf or hard of hearing consumers and/or make adjustments based on consumer feedback.
- 4.6 Negotiate meaning in ASL and English while interpreting in a manner that conforms to recognized linguistic, cultural and professional norms of the speaker(s).
Examples: Identifies where breakdowns occur, applies strategies for seeking clarification in appropriate manner/at the appropriate times, and determines questions to ask to gain further meaning.
- 4.7 Demonstrate the ability to use technology and equipment specific to ASL-English interpreting.
Examples: Video remote interpreting, video relay services, microphones.

Domain 5: Professionalism Competencies

This cluster of competencies are associated with professional standards and practices.

- 5.1 Demonstrate a commitment to career-long learning and critical self-assessment by creating an on-going professional action plan.
- 5.2 Demonstrate planning skills in preparing for assignments and flexibility in adapting to changes that arise during assignments.
- 5.3 Demonstrate self-awareness and discretion by monitoring and managing personal and professional behaviors and applying professional conflict resolution strategies when appropriate.
Examples: Has awareness of personal filters, intrapersonal factors, and reactions to a variety of situations and subject matter. Knows when to request breaks, whether to accept assignments, how to work with a team interpreter, and facilitate replacement in a responsible manner.
- 5.4 Demonstrate professional integrity by avoiding conflicts of interest, adhering to the code of ethical conduct, and applying standard professional business practices.
Examples: Control working conditions, set appropriate fees, perform bookkeeping.
- 5.5 Demonstrate commitment to the interpreting profession by becoming a member of and participating in professional organizations and activities.
- 5.6 Demonstrate commitment to the D/deaf Community by supporting and contributing to D/deaf-related organizations and activities.
- 5.7 Demonstrate awareness of community resources by identifying organizations and agencies that could or do serve D/deaf people.
- 5.8 Discuss state and national interpreter certification and/or licensure and the implications of these systems on the employment of interpreters.
- 5.9 Identify and discuss the scope and authority of state and federal laws impacting D/deaf people and interpreters.
Example: Who is responsible for implementing the law, definition of who is qualified to interpret under the law.

Glossary

Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs): Amplification instruments that are designed to be helpful in specific, but not all listening situations. For instance, there are ALDs that amplify the TV, that amplify the telephone, that amplify in theaters, that amplify in places of worship, and that amplify public speakers. <http://www.earaces.com/ald.htm>

Audism: 1. Prejudice or discrimination based on the sense of hearing; especially discrimination against D/deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals. 2. Behavior, conditions, or attitudes that foster stereotypes of individual or social roles based on hearing loss (Lane, 1993). <http://www.thetactilemind.com>

Bilingual Competence: A bilingual person is, in its broadest definition, anyone with communicative skills in two languages, be it active or passive. In a narrow definition, the term bilingual competence is often reserved for those speakers with native or native-like proficiency in two languages. <http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Bilingual>

Code of Ethics (Code of Ethical Conduct): A written system of standards of ethical conduct. Because of the nature of the relationship between interpreters and consumers in a communication interaction, a high standard of ethics is needed to ensure that the interpreter conveys the message with accuracy, equivalency and impartiality. As well, the interpreter must maintain the confidentiality of communication interactions.

Collegiality: The relationship between colleagues. Colleagues are those explicitly united in a common purpose and respecting each other's abilities to work toward that purpose. Thus, the word collegiality connotes respect for each other's commitment to the common purpose and the ability to work toward it in an open and cooperative manner. <http://www.wordiq.com/definition/collegiality>

Competency: 1. Areas of personal capability that enable people to perform successfully in their jobs by completing tasks effectively. A competency can be knowledge, attitude, skill, value, or personal value. Competency can be acquired through talent, experience, or training.
2. Competency comprises the specification of knowledge and skill and the application of that knowledge and skill to the standard of performance required in employment. <http://www.neiu.edu/~dbehrlic/hrd408/glossary.htm>

Consecutive Interpretation: The interpreter gives his interpretation after the speaker has finished a segment of his speech that may be a sentence or several sentences (Seleskovitch, 1978).

Contact Signing/Varieties: A kind of signing that results from the contact between American Sign Language and English and exhibits features of both languages (Lucas & Valli, 1989).

Cross-Cultural: Having knowledge and skills of both cultures (hearing and Deaf) and languages (ASL and English) (Clark and Topliff, 1983).

Cultural Competence: The ability of individuals and systems to respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, and religions in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values the worth of individuals, families, and communities and protects and preserves the dignity of each. http://highered.mcgraw-hill.com/sites/0072560053/student_view0/glossary.html

D/deaf: The term Deaf relates to a member of a cultural minority with distinctive mores, attitudes and values and a distinctive physical constitution. The term Deaf means “like me”- one of us – in significant cultural ways. The term deaf means a loss of hearing (Lane, 2002).

Discourse: The most comprehensive level of linguistic analysis, which encompasses language use at the level beyond the sentence, such as in conversation, in paragraphs and so on.
<http://ess.ntu.ac.uk/miller/cognitive/langgloss.htm>

Domain: A grouping of competencies with a common focus.

Generalist: An interpreting practitioner who has more than superficial knowledge and competence to accurately and reliably interpret a wide range of low-risk communication interactions.

Interactional: Discourse events involving two or more speakers exchanging information towards an intended outcome.

Interpretation: The process of conveying a message generated in one language into an equivalent message in another language.

L1: The first language of the interpreter and for the majority, that is English. Interpreters with deaf parents whose language is ASL will have ASL as their first language or L1.

Linguistic: 1. Consisting of or related to language; 2. "linguistic behavior"; 3. "a linguistic atlas"; 4. "lingual diversity".
<http://www.cogsci.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/webwn>

Low-risk: Communication events that are common within everyday life, where the outcome of the interaction between participants is not of a critical nature so that the interpretation would not have a detrimental impact. The outcomes in these situations do not have potentially serious ramifications for any of the parties involved.

Monolog: 1. A speech you make to yourself; 2. a long utterance by one person (especially one that prevents others from entering the conversation); 3. a (usually long) dramatic speech by a single actor.

Non-technical: Everyday language used and understood by the general population.

Professional Boundaries: Application of professional and business protocol including the moral and ethical confines, behaviors, and decisions the interpreter faces when determining if accepting work is a conflict of interest, or beyond their skill level or expertise. Refers to limitations that are circumscribed by standard professional practices framed by codes of ethical behavior created by our experts.

Examples might be accepting an interpreting job that involves abortion when the interpreter's beliefs are against abortions, or when personal or emotional factors interfere with the practitioners' ability to deliver an equivalent, accurate interpretation.

Simultaneous Interpretation: Conveys a message into another language at virtually the same moment in time as it is expressed in the first language (Seleskovitch, 1978).

Superior (native-like, near-native): Able to have a fully shared conversation, with in-depth elaboration for both social and work topics. Very broad sign language (or English) vocabulary, near native-like production and fluency, excellent use of sign language (or English) grammatical features, and excellent comprehension for normal signing rate (or normal rate of spoken or written English). <http://www.rit.edu/~wjnncd/scpi/main.html>

Transliteration: The process of receiving a spoken English message and changing it into a signed English message or vice versa (Siple, L. 1993).

Video Relay Service or Interpreting (VRS or VRI) (Relay Services or Interpreting): D/deaf or hard-of-hearing and hearing people communicate through the telephone, using the services of an operator/interpreter at a distance, to relay the communication between the spoken word and the visually presented word. During a VRS call, the operator becomes the interpreter. <http://www.interpretingsolutionsinc.com/FAQs.asp>

VRS provides functional equivalence on the telephone. Calls are facilitated by an operator/interpreter and are between hearing and D/deaf callers. Calls can be initiated by either hearing or D/deaf persons (personal comment, Graham, K. VRS manager, 2004).

Video Remote Interpreting or Remote Interpreting (VRI): Video interpreting services provided for consumers and/or paid for by customers. Video remote interpreting generally occurs when both parties (hearing and D/deaf) are in the same location. For example, a hospital or an employer can use VRI to communicate with a patient or an employee in the same room. The interpreter is generally at a remote site and scheduled. The costs for providing VRI are billed on a fee-for-service arrangement. <http://www.interpretingsolutionsinc.com/FAQs.asp>

World-knowledge: Labels, concepts, ideas, and facts about the world in general; general information shared by people in a given culture. http://itc.gsu.edu/academymodules/a304/support/a304b0_50100.html

Sometimes used as a synonym for "prior knowledge" (information stored in one's long-term memory, knowledge that comes from previous experience). http://cs3.wnu.edu/elearning/a303/support/a303b0_50100.html

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Conference of Interpreter Trainers-Members-Only Online Discussion Board, April, 2004: 78 registrants

Colorado RID Convention, April, 2004: 28 students from 3 IPPs

National Alliance of Black Interpreters (NAOBI) Conference, June, 2004: 12 interpreters

Deaf Studies Conference, June, 2004: 13 participants

National Association of the Deaf Convention, July, 2004:
36 consumers, practitioners, interpreter educators and students representing a diverse national geographic distribution

RID Region IV Conference, July, 2004: 37 students and interpreter educators representing 7 IPPs

The efforts of the core expert work group built on the work of an Authority Opinion Group (AOG) who met in January 2003 to frame the current-state-of-the-art of interpreting and interpreter education. Members of the AOG were:

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