



## Guidelines for Interpreters

Interpreters follow a set of ethical values during their work. These are designed to support the integrity of the interpretation and ensure effective communication.

- a) **Impartiality and neutrality:** Interpreters shall clearly and convincingly express the original speaker's views or opinions on any issue, in any discussion, without allowing their own views to interfere. The content of the message belongs to the speaker, not to the interpreter. The interpreter is responsible for rendering the entire message with the greatest accuracy, regardless of their own position on the matter.
- b) **Conflicts of interest:** Interpreters must disclose any real or perceived conflicts of interest that might affect their professional objectivity. For example, interpreting for family members or friends may violate those individuals' right to confidentiality or otherwise compromise their neutrality.
- c) **Competency:** Interpreters shall not knowingly accept assignments that are beyond their skill level or understanding of the subject matter. To ensure this, interpreters must request information about the subject to be discussed and the type of setting where the work will be performed.
- d) **Confidentiality:** Interpreters shall not divulge or discuss any information obtained through their interpreting assignments except with others also present in the assignment. This prohibition includes social media and the press. When there is a compelling reason, in order to protect the health, safety, and well-being of the Limited English Proficient (LEP) person, interpreters may divulge pertinent information to the public authorities.

- e) **Accuracy:** The interpreter conveys the content and spirit of the original message, taking into consideration its cultural context. They must:
1. Omit or add nothing.
  2. Conserve the tone and spirit of the source message.
- f) **Professionalism:** Interpreters are expected to be punctual, prepare, dress appropriately for the occasion, and report any obstacles that might keep them from performing their interpreting duties successfully.
- g) **Compensation:** Interpreters must not accept additional compensation through gifts or money aside from the fees they are paid for the services they render.

### **Tips for putting these values into practice:**

1. Prepare for your assignments. Ask about the language and the basic topic to be discussed in the assignment, and do some preliminary research on that topic before the appointment if necessary.
2. Introduce yourself to the parties you are interpreting for, and explain your function. For example:

*I am Jane Doe and I will interpret for you today. Everything that is said in language A, I will express accurately in language B. If you have any questions, I will interpret your questions to [the person who speaks the other language], and if I need a clarification or a repetition, I will say something like:*

- *The interpreter requests a repetition.*
- *The interpreter requests a clarification of xxx.*

*I take notes to assist me in my memory retention, but because this appointment is confidential, I do not share my notes with anyone.*

*When a segment is too long, I will give you a signal so you can briefly bring that section to a close, and then I will give you a signal to continue.*

3. Dress appropriately for the occasion, in a manner that reflects the importance of your work.

4. Do not spend unnecessary time alone with the parties you interpret for, or remain alone with them in a room with a closed door. That will help avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest.
5. At the end of the session, say goodbye. Expect the party that requested the interpreting services to schedule the next appointment, possibly with another interpreter.

*Source: A comparison of codes of ethics in the Pacific Northwest, published by Helen Eby on September 21, 2018. This comparison is representative of the codes of ethics followed by interpreters in the United States.*

[20180921-ethics-comparison.pdf \(gauchatranslations.com\)](#)

*The U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties appreciates the network of professional translators and interpreters that produced this document as a resource in support of Operation Allies Welcome, the U.S. operation welcoming vulnerable Afghans to the United States.  
September 2021*