

Guidelines on using interpreters

How do I know if an interpreter is needed?

- Ask a few open-ended questions, something that needs an answer that is more than just “yes” or “no” e.g. “Can you explain the route you took to get here this morning?”; “What is your reason for calling/visiting today?”
- Ask the client to repeat instructions back to you—if they can’t manage this, an interpreter is probably a good idea. For example, “You need to take this tablet three times a day with meals”.
- Pick up indicative body language e.g. extra nervousness.
- As a general rule of thumb, if you don’t understand the client or you feel that the message is not getting through it’s time to get an interpreter.
- Use the “Do you need a trained interpreter?” poster and ask the person to point to which language they prefer using.
- NB: Asking if the person needs an interpreter probably won’t help.

How do I work with an interpreter?

The basics:

- Speak directly to the customer as if the interpreter is not there—ignore the interpreter completely
- Speak clearly and unhurriedly
- Take turns to speak
- Pause every couple of sentences
- Wait until the interpreter has finished before continuing.

Be aware of the limits to the interpreter’s role:

- The interpreter is present only to remove the language barrier, not to carry out other tasks or act as a support person for the client
- The interpreter is impartial—avoid asking for his/her opinion or comment
- Maintain control of the interview by checking the client’s understanding yourself—ask exploratory questions that can be interpreted
- Everything said will be interpreted—don’t ask the interpreter to summarize or report on the main points after the fact
- Avoid engaging in personal conversation with the interpreter.

How do I know if an interpreter is competent?

- The interpreter uses direct speech and idiomatic English
- The message is neither excessively longer nor shorter than the original
- The client’s responses are meaningful, and there’s no indication of confusion
- Smooth flow of information both ways, and body language matches message
- The interpreter takes notes, asks for clarification or repetition when needed
- The interpreter reports any side conversations.

How can I tell the difference between a trained interpreter and one who is untrained?

A trained interpreter	An untrained interpreter
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will pass on everything said fully & accurately, not just the main points, but every single detail • Will convey the way of speech and every subtlety, preserving feelings e.g. reservation, doubt, objection, approval • Will tell you and seek clarification if they don't understand • Will take notes to ensure accuracy • May stop you to ask for clarification or repetition to ensure accuracy • Bound by a code of ethics to maintain confidentiality • Is aware of role boundaries requiring them to remain neutral. Will not give personal opinions or advice and will only do interpreting, no other tasks. • Has had specific training for the area they interpret about. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is unlikely to pass on all the main points and details accurately, causing significant distortion of the contents • Tends to sanitise and make cosmetic changes, removing much useful information • May bluff or drop out any information they don't understand or found too complicated or technical • Tends to rely completely on short term memory, which is far from perfect without special training • May sound very fluent because they don't stop to clarify or check facts • Not bound by a code of ethics, which means they could pass on your private details to someone else • Is not aware of role boundaries, and may give personal opinions or advice, or perform other roles, such as providing transport. • Will not have had any specific training.

Don't put yourselves or your clients in danger by using an untrained interpreter or a family member to interpret for you.

To book a trained interpreter:

- phone **(04) 384 2849** or **0508 468 377**
- book online: www.interpret.org.nz/book-an-interpreter

Robyn Pask
Chief Executive
DDI: 04 916 2463
robyn.pask@interpret.org.nz

Maria Fresia
Canterbury Coordinator
Phone: (03) 372 9311
canterbury@interpret.org.nz