



Trained interpreters  
available 24/7

# Interpreters

...a user's guide



## To request an interpreter

0508 468 377  
request@interpret.org.nz  
www.interpret.org.nz

## 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.

## You will be asked for the following

- Your name, agency and location
- The language required
- The date and time the interpreter is required
- The approximate length of the appointment
- The topic to be discussed (this helps the interpreter to be well prepared)
- The name of the client (this helps prevent conflicts of interest)
- Any particular needs, such as gender of interpreter.



## Why use a professionally trained interpreter?

Interpreting is not a simple matter of being bilingual – language is only one part of the job.

A professionally trained interpreter will:

- transfer a message accurately, clearly and in full – nothing added, nothing omitted
- understand (and be able to translate) technical words and expressions
- be impartial – not take sides, offer opinion or comment
- not have a personal connection to the non-English speaker
- be bound by a code of ethics, which includes confidentiality.

## Why not use a family member, friend or colleague?

A friend, family member or colleague may be:

- less likely to pass on all points and details of the message, possibly causing significant distortion of the contents
- less aware of role boundaries, tending to give personal advice and opinions
- more likely to pass on private information to others since they are not bound by a code of ethics or confidentiality agreement.

The non-English speaker is less likely to speak openly if a family member is interpreting.



## How do I know if I need an interpreter?

First ask yourself how well you understand what the non-English speaker is saying. Can you do your job effectively without an interpreter?

Then, if you're not sure about the other person's English:

- Ask a few open-ended questions, something that needs an answer that is more than just "yes" or "no", e.g. "What brings you here today?"
- Ask the person to repeat instructions back to you, e.g. "Tell me, how you will use this equipment/take this medicine?"
- Look for indicative body language, e.g. extra nervousness, a blank facial expression or constant smiling.

You need an interpreter if:

- You have concerns from the questions above
- Someone phones and says something like "Hello ...Cantonese"
- the customer shows you a card like this:



In each case, they're asking for an interpreter.

Note:

- Asking the person "Do you need an interpreter?" or "Do you understand what I'm saying?" probably won't help.
- If the customer is deaf or hearing-impaired, they may not be responding to spoken language or may be using sign language. If you are unsure write the question "Would you like a NZ Sign Language interpreter?"

## Should I use face-to-face or phone?

Use face-to-face (onsite) interpreting

- for the first consultation with a non-English speaker
- for tricky medical appointments where there are difficult concepts to explain or when there is bad news to impart
- in counselling or mental health situations
- when the client has physical or mental impairment
- in meetings where written documents have to be interpreted, e.g. reports, forms, instruction sheets.

Use telephone interpreting

- for an urgent connection, e.g. medical emergency
- when the interpreting engagement is likely to be simple and short (less than 30 minutes), e.g. to set up or cancel an appointment
- when there is no local interpreter.

## 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.

Additionally:

For face-to-face interpreting:

- Sit opposite the non-English speaker
- Position the interpreter at an equal distance from you both

For telephone interpreting:

- Use a speaker phone whenever possible
- Wait while the interpreter is connected to the call.