

THE ROLE OF THE INTERPRETER

An interpreter's role is to facilitate spoken communication between speakers of two different languages. This means transferring messages from one language to another in a way that makes their intended meaning as understandable to the recipient as possible. Interpreting is a very demanding profession that requires skill, appropriate qualifications, and training as well as continuing professional development.

Interpreters in Australia are certified by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI). Certification from NAATI is available in 61 of the major language groups of the Australian community. Professional, qualified interpreters in Australia adhere to the principles of the AUSIT (Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators) Code of Ethics. These include accuracy, confidentiality, impartiality, and competence.

In Australia, clients who use the services of a NAATI-Certified interpreter are assured that whatever information they divulge during the course of the interpreting service will remain confidential. They can expect the interpreter to remain completely impartial at all times. Generally speaking, contact between the interpreter and the English-speaking and non-English-speaking clients ceases as soon as the interpreting service is completed. This means that the interpreter cannot be expected to clarify any information after the interpreting service has ended nor to provide other help or act as a friend. However, in order to enhance best practice and to improve outcomes, professionals working with interpreters should consider briefing them prior to the interpreting session and/or debriefing them after it.

Interpreters are respected professionals who provide a very valuable service to the community in situations that are often tense and complex. Therefore clients, both English and non-English-speaking, obtain the best service if they use clear language. Professional interpreters ask for repetition, rephrasing, or clarification if a message lacks clarity and should not be held responsible if the non-English-speaking client does not understand the message due to it containing concepts that are linguistically or culturally unfamiliar to them

Interpreters in the public sector work in collaboration with other professionals in health care, social services, education, the legal system, and law enforcement authorities. Their role is very distinct from that of an advocate, legal advisor, or counsellor, since interpreters are responsible only for enabling successful communication. Interpreters receive official payment for their services; in certain cultural settings, they may be offered small tokens of appreciation and they must exercise care and discretion as to whether to accept them.

As a qualified professional, an interpreter facilitates communication between the client(s) and the English speaker(s) by transferring their utterances from one language to another with precision and in an unbiased and non-judgemental manner. The interpreter is not responsible for the information given to the other side during the interpreting but is responsible for enabling that information to be communicated.