

Exercises to prepare for a skills assessment.

Simultaneous interpreting:

1. Shadowing: listen to a short story or a news report in your target language. Use *décalage*, -lagging behind- the original message by a few words, enough so that you can listen to a meaningful utterance and repeat it. Do so by speaking softly, in a volume lower than the source. Record your repetition on tape. Play it back to see if you 1) got everything that was said and 2) understood your own words.
2. Dual task: do the shadowing exercise above AND, on a piece of paper, write down a sequence of numbers from 1 to 50 and then from 50 to 1. The purpose of this exercise is to get you to process two types of information at once, and to force you to lag behind the speaker.
3. Paraphrasing: do the shadowing exercise again, but this time, rephrase what the speaker says rather than just repeating it, all the while maintaining the meaning of the source story. Even though a court interpreter cannot paraphrase in a hearing, this exercise will develop your vocabulary because you will be constantly searching for synonyms and alternative ways of phrasing things.
4. Interpreting: interpret a short story from English into your target language. For example, take a fairy tale or children's story you are familiar with. Record it on tape for later playback.

Consecutive interpreting:

1. Have someone record passages of newspaper or magazine articles to work with in the exercises listed below (in all your working languages). Choose texts about general subjects.
 - A. Listen to the passage without taking any notes, and try to repeat as much information as possible.
 - B. Listen to the passage and take down "key words" that will help you remember the content. Then try to repeat as much information as possible. Compare the results you obtained by taking notes to those you obtained without any notes. This will give you an indication as whether or not you need to take notes in the interpreting setting.
 - C. Listen to the passage and try to repeat it verbatim (note taking optional).

1. Have someone record some sentences and questions from a dialog in one source language, allowing for a pause of about 20 seconds between each sentence or question. During that pause, interpret into the target language. Listen to record your answers on tape.
2. Play back your interpretation in the target language while wearing headphones. Interpret consecutively back into the other language. Compare your rendition with the original for accuracy and completeness.

Sight Translation

Do you understand everything you read? Do you understand every word? What is the main idea and the supporting ideas? To whom is the document addressed? Who wrote it and why? Interpreters are often tasked with sight-translating court documents – official and witness-produced – into the record or for the benefit of limited-English-proficient parties, so they need to read them into the “target” language accurately and completely.

Sight translation is the oral translation of a document written in one language and rendered into another.

1. Practice with a 200- to 250-word document. It could be a court form, a police report (a story from the Police Section of your newspaper is a good source), even a handwritten letter to a judge (you can find those in the Internet, believe it or not!).
2. Skim the document. Get an idea of the topic.
3. Scan the document for details. Answer for yourself the “wh-“ questions for comprehension.
4. Understand or look up unknown words.
5. Reformulate – translate – the text into the target language (remember that at this time we test you by giving you a document in English). Ask yourself if a non-English listener could believe that you are reading the story out loud as if it were written in that language.
6. Perform the sight translation. Watch your speed, flow and volume.
7. For feedback, record yourself while you sight translate. Afterwards, play it back for self-feedback. You should have someone else listen to it and give you their opinion.
8. As you prepare for our test, try interpreting simultaneously what you recorded back into the source language of the text. If possible, record that too. Then, play it back to see how faithful to the message you were.