

Suggestions for Getting the Most Out of the Interpreter

- 1. Do not speak too fast:** Give the interpreter a small margin of time to interpret properly without racing. The defendant will almost certainly understand you better. On the other hand, there is no need to slow down to a crawl.
- 2. When reading anything, consciously slow down.** We tend to hurry when reading things aloud, and the interpreter may be unfamiliar with the material you are reading. Slowing down a little gives the interpreter time to understand the concepts involved and do a more precise translation in the target language.
- 3. Speak in a loud, clear voice or use a microphone.** Like the court reporter, the interpreter must hear and understand what you say.
- 4. Avoid run-on, compound or convoluted questions.** Use a concise, point-by-point or step-by-step format for examining non-English speaking witnesses, and use so-called "plain English," (that is, adjust the register of your speech so that the witness understands you clearly). This can help alleviate frustrating communication bottlenecks between you, the interpreter and the witness. Another factor to bear in mind is that many of the witnesses and defendants with whom we deal on a daily basis are illiterate or barely literate, and sometimes do not understand questions which are too long or complicated.
- 5. An informed, prepared interpreter will invariably do a better job than the interpreter who is "in the dark" or "flying by the seat of his pants."** Whenever feasible, use the courtroom interpreter to prepare your clients or witnesses for taking the stand, or at least to review their testimony ahead of time. Give the interpreter the opportunity to talk with your client and/or witnesses in order to become familiar with their manner of speaking and the subject matter of their testimony. This is always important, especially when you have expert witness testimony and documents to present.
- 6. Showing documents of all kinds to the interpreter ahead of time gives the interpreter the opportunity to assimilate them and research and consult on unknown terms that they may contain, which reduces the likelihood of errors or ambiguities in translation or delays during the proceedings.**

7. The interpreter is not capable of producing an accurate, simultaneous translation of any and all material however technical, complex or fast-paced. Evidence such as tape-recorded telephone conversations or "body mike" recordings cannot generally be simultaneously translated by the interpreter with the required degree of precision. The interpreter can do a sight translation of the English transcripts of such recorded material if necessary, but it may be necessary to set aside time (for example, during a recess) for this to be done, rather than expecting the interpreter to simultaneously translate the material at its natural, recorded pace.
8. Allowing the interpreter the opportunity to develop a prior familiarity with the facts and details of a case can make a world of difference in the quality of the interpretation. Anything and everything the interpreter can learn about and be prepared for in a case (in the previously mentioned suggestions) is crucially important to the interpreter and is deeply appreciated.