



SIGHT TRANSLATION – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (INTERPRETERS)

What is sight translation?

Sight translation is the conversion of written material in one language to an oral version in another language.

When is sight translation required?

Sight translation is often requested of an interpreter during an interpreting assignment, any time there are documents in English that need to be understood, filled in, or signed by a limited/non-English speaking client. It is often performed when an instant oral version of the written material is required (e.g. consent forms, registration forms, affidavits).

Who can perform sight translation?

All community interpreters are trained and expected to be able to perform sight translation as part of interpretation assignments. Community interpreters are expected to comfortably shift the mode of interpretation between consecutive interpreting, whispered simultaneous interpreting and sight translation as required by the circumstances of the assignment.

What are the best practices for interpreters when asked to perform sight translation?

- ✓ Indicate to the Service Provider that you will need some time to go over the entire document and assess if you will be able to perform a high quality sight translation of the text
- ✓ Assess the document and your capacity to sight translate faithfully and accurately
- ✓ Ask for clarification on any specialized words/concepts you do not understand
- ✓ Avoid being left alone with the client. Inform the SP that you can only sight translate in their presence in case the client has any questions regarding the content of the document
- ✓ Sight translate the document faithfully and accurately.
- ✓ As you are sight translating, use your finger as a guide to indicate what part of the document you are sight translating. This allows the client to visually follow the sight translated utterances by the interpreter with the written text.
- ✓ In the event that the client has a question, interpret the client's utterance and the service provider will be able to see on the document at what point the question emerged. The service provider can then provide the appropriate explanation which you will interpret for the client.

What kind of documents am I expected to sight translate?

You may be asked to sight translate virtually any kind of document. Some of the most commonly encountered types of documents are:



- ✓ Medical appointments: medical consent forms, medical history questionnaires, informational brochures (e.g. for a mother whose child needs a certain treatment)
- ✓ Court/legal appointments: legal documents such as affidavits, divorce applications, bail conditions, legal settlements
- ✓ Police appointments: statements made to the police regarding an incident/crime. These statements are very important legal instruments that may be used in court at a later date, perhaps in substitution of direct testimony.
- ✓ Other: rental agreement at a community housing office, social assistance application forms at a social services appointment etc.

Can I refuse to do a sight translation?

In general, community interpreters are expected to be able to sight translate the most common types of documents they might encounter in community settings, such as informed consent forms, registration and intake forms, brochures etc. However, in some situations, SPs may require interpreters to sight translate lengthy documents with complex specialized terminology. Interpreters should objectively assess their ability to perform the sight translation and if they feel the content is beyond their competency and they would be unable to perform the task accurately, they should inform the service provider and the client.

What is the maximum length acceptable for a sight translation?

You may be asked to perform sight translation of very short or very long documents. The length of a document in itself is not a reason to refuse to do a sight translation. A very long document may still be entirely within your abilities. If needed, ask the SP for breaks when sight translating very long documents to ensure you continue to do a good job and the client is able to follow and understand the content.

Regardless of how long the document is, you should only refuse if you have objective reason to believe you would not be able to complete the translation accurately and faithfully and explain your reasons to the service provider. Ask them to call MCIS to make alternative arrangements, as MCIS will be able to advise on the best option available for the SP and client.

Will I be paid more if I am asked to do a sight translation?

No, sight translation is one of the three fundamental modes of interpretation in community settings. As a professional interpreter you are expected to perform sight translation as needed as part of your interpretation assignment.

What should I do if the SP asks me to explain or summarize the document instead of performing a full sight translation?



Ask the SP to provide the explanation or the summary of the document and inform them that you will interpret the explanation/summary they provide.

What should I do if the SP asks me to only sight translate a portion of the document?

You should only sight translate the portion the SP asks you to sight translate, but make sure to always interpret everything that is being said. This includes the SP's instruction to only translate a portion of the document. This way, the client will also know that only a section and not the entire document is being sight translated for them.

What should I do if the SP asks me to sign the document to verify that I have sight translated it?

If asked to sign the document to verify you have interpreted it, do so in the space indicated for the interpreter – or create one if one does not exist. An interpreter should never “witness” a consent form or other legal document that she/he has sight translated.

What should I do if the SP asks me to sign the document to verify that I have sight translated it but I was only asked to sight translate a portion of the document?

Make a note on the document indicating the portions that you have sight translated before signing in the space indicated for the interpreter.

What should I do if the SP asks me to provide a written translation?

Politely inform the service provider that interpretation and translation are different types of service that require different training and qualifications. Interpreters do not provide written translation. If a written translation is required, ask them to contact MCIS to arrange for a written translation of the document by a qualified translator.

What should I do if the SP asks me to revise a written translation done by someone else?

Politely inform the service provider that revision of a translation is outside the role of a community interpreter. Advise them to call MCIS to arrange for a professional reviser to review the translation.

What if the SP writes down my sight translation and then asks me to sign the document to confirm its accuracy?



You may sign such a document but only once you make sure you have made a note describing the circumstances under which the translation was done, clearly stating that you have performed a sight translation and that the text was written down by someone else. To protect yourself from liability, make sure to also ask the SP to sign the disclaimer form.

What should I do if I am asked to sight translate a form and also fill it out on behalf of the client?

As the interpreter, you should refrain from writing down information on behalf of anyone, as this can become a source of liability for you. Sight translation is the oral translation of a written document. If a service provider insists you write down information or fill in any part of a form, you may ask them to sign the attached disclaimer form in order to protect yourself from any liabilities. Make sure you always have a copy of this form with you when on assignments.

How does sight translation work during a telephone interpretation assignment?

Sight translation may be required during a telephone interpretation assignment. In such cases the service provider should send the document ahead of time to MCIS to share with the interpreter. You should take advantage of this and review the document ahead of time so you are prepared to sight translate.

Sometimes, the SP may not have provided the document ahead of time and may ask for your email information to share the document with you during the assignment. You may provide your email address if you are comfortable. As a professional interpreter you should have an email address you use for professional services, separate from your personal address. However, if you are not comfortable sharing your email address, advise the SP and direct them to call MCIS. Never share your email address with the client.

How does sight translation work during a video interpretation assignment?

With more and more appointments being conducted online, it is common for a sight translation to be required during a video interpretation assignment. In such cases, it is common for the SP to share their screen displaying the document so you can provide the sight translation. Alternatively, the document may be shared with you ahead of the appointment or the SP may ask that they email it to you. In such cases, handle the situation as outlined above for phone assignments.

What should I do if the SP books the appointment for the sole purpose of doing sight translation of documents with/without a client present?



In general, it is understood that appointments are booked for the purposes of interpreting the communication between service provider and client, and as such the primary mode of interpreting is consecutive interpreting or whispered simultaneous interpreting for group settings. Sight translation, when required, is generally understood to be only one part of the job. In general, it is not expected that an interpretation appointment will require sight translation exclusively.

However, it is possible, due to many factors, that the service needed is only sight translation, with or without a limited/non-English speaking client. For example, a lawyer may need to get a sense of the content of multiple lengthy documents to decide what is useful for their case so they can have only the required portions professionally translated. This is OK.

However, in such cases, MCIS encourages SPs to disclose this at the time the appointment is booked and will inform the interpreter. MCIS also encourages the SP to provide the documents to the interpreter ahead of time so they may prepare accordingly. As an interpreter, if you do not feel you would be able to do a good job in an assignment that requires sight translation exclusively for lengthy periods of time, you may decline the assignment.