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.
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 will you 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:

I speak Spanish
I need an interpreter, preferably

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.

Why use a professionally trained interpreter?
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.

Should I use face-to-face or phone?