



**OVERVIEW OF
THE CONSORTIUM FOR STATE COURT CERTIFICATION
WRITTEN EXAMINATION
AND THE ORAL SCREENING/QUALIFYING EXAMINATION
FOR COURT INTERPRETER CANDIDATES**

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INTRODUCTION

This information has been prepared for the benefit of candidates seeking to demonstrate their court interpreting skills through the State of Connecticut Judicial Branch's Court Interpreter Screening/Qualifying Program. It contains basic information describing the purpose and general nature of the Court Interpreting Screening/Qualifying Examinations ("tests") offered through the Program.

GOALS OF THE PROGRAM

Court Interpreters play a vital role in court proceedings that involve limited-English speaking individuals as litigants, witnesses, defendants, family members or victims. The Code of Professional Responsibility for Interpreters in the Judicial Branch of the State of Connecticut describes the expectations of the State of Connecticut Judicial Branch Interpreter Services Program with respect to what court interpreters must know and be able to do during interpreted proceedings. In order to meet those expectations, court interpreters must possess high levels of knowledge and fluency in English and a non-English language, a level generally equivalent to that of an educated native speaker of the language. Court interpreters must also possess specialized cognitive and motor skills, have an understanding of court procedure and basic justice system concepts and terminology, and be thoroughly familiar with requirements of appropriate professional conduct.

It is the goal of the Court Interpreter Screening/Qualifying Program to improve the State of Connecticut courts' access to appropriately qualified interpreters to assist Judges in conducting court proceedings involving limited-English speakers or individuals who do not speak English. The objectives of the Court Interpreter Screening/Qualifying Program, therefore, are:

- To identify individuals who possess the required knowledge and skills.
- To expand the pool of qualified interpreters who are available to assist the court in conducting of interpreted proceedings.

TEST DESIGN AND STRUCTURE

The Court Interpreter Screening/Qualifying Examinations are language interpreting proficiency tests. These are Written and Oral Examinations designed to determine whether the candidates possess the minimum levels of language knowledge and interpreting proficiency required to perform competently during court proceedings. These tests are designed and developed by teams of experts from several parts of the country who have extensive knowledge of courts, court proceedings, the job requirements for court interpreters, and advanced training or high levels of fluency in English and non-English languages. These experts include federally certified interpreters, Judges, lawyers, academics and legal professionals.

What do the Tests Measure?

The tests measure language knowledge and fluency in both languages and the ability to successfully render meaning from target to source language in each of the three modes of interpreting that are required of court interpreters:

- Simultaneous interpreting.
- Consecutive interpreting.
- Sight translation of documents.

In short, the test measures what a court interpreter should know to be able to meet the minimum professional requirements.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Court interpreting is a sophisticated profession that requires much more than being bilingual. One must have an educated, native-like ability in both English and the non-English language. In addition, one must have the professional skills to interpret in the sight, consecutive, and simultaneous modes. Performance of the duties included in a court interpreter's job description requires uncommon mental, physical, and emotional stamina.

Please be aware that just because you are bilingual to whatever degree, you are unlikely to pass a professional exam without professional preparation.

In order to enhance one's chances at successfully entering the court interpreting profession, prospective interpreters are encouraged to use the following keys to success:

- Read **everything in this manual carefully and follow its suggestions.**
- Obtain **professional training** in the three modes of court interpreting, especially in the simultaneous mode, from a college or university.
- Obtain practice tapes from any of numerous sources and **practice, practice, practice** all three modes of interpreting.
- **Observe a wide array of different types of court proceedings**, both those that are interpreted (to observe how professional interpreters conduct themselves) and that are not interpreted (to learn legal terminology, courtroom protocol, etc.).
- **Obtain and study thoroughly at least one classic textbook on court interpreting** (such as *Fundamentals of Court Interpretation*, by Roseann Dueñas Gonzalez, et. al.).
- **Obtain an English/non-English legal dictionary and learn the most frequent legal terms in both languages, as well as their respective equivalents.**
- For Spanish-language interpreters, we recommend *The Interpreter's Companion*, by Holly Mikkelson; *Criminal Terms Bilingual Dictionary*, by Virginia Benmaman, et. al.; *Merl Bilingual Law Dictionary*, by Cuauhtémoc Gallegos, Ed.; and *Diccionario de Términos Legales*, by Louis A. Robb.
- **Join a professional association**, such as the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators or the American Translator's Association, read its publications, and attend its annual conference.

DEFINITIONS

At the testing site, there will be individuals performing the following roles:

- **Test administration supervisor.** This individual is responsible for oversight of the entire test administration process as outlined in these standards, including any required troubleshooting. Generally this will be the Program Manager of Interpreter and Translator Services.
- **Test registration clerk.** The test registration clerk is the person to whom examinees report when they appear for the test. The clerk secures identification, registers the examinee, provides them with necessary pre-test information, and maintains security in the waiting area.
- **Test proctor.** The test proctor is the person who will greet the candidates after they have registered and escort them to the testing room. The proctor has been trained to administer the test in the same fashion to all candidates. The proctor will also escort the examinees to the exit when they have finished taking the test.

GENERAL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

- **When Do I Enter the Testing Room?:** Please wait patiently in the area designated in your test appointment letter until you are escorted to the testing room.
- **What Will the Test Room Look Like?:** Both the Written and Oral Tests are normally given in a small room such as an office, a jury room, a classroom, or a conference room. Sometimes they are administered in a courtroom.

For the Oral Screening/Qualifying Examination, there will be a pitcher of water, drinking cups, a cup of water poured for you, a steno pad, pencils or pens, and two tape recorders on a table. One of the recorders is for recording your test and will be turned on as you enter the room (the entire test is tape recorded). There will be a second tape recorder if you have come to take the simultaneous portion of the test.

- **Who Will Be in the Room?:** During the Written and Oral Examinations, ordinarily only a test administrator/examiner or proctor will be present. However, sometimes there will be a test administrator/examiner and an examiner or a test administrator.

When examiners are present for the Oral Examination, each one will have a black binder containing a separate exam set for each person to be tested that day. It is on those papers that the examiners will be making their notes.

- **What Happens Once I'm in the Testing Room?:** First, for both the Written and Oral Examinations, the proctor or test administrator will greet you. Then you will be asked for identification. If examiners are present, you will be introduced to each examiner. Every effort will be made to make you comfortable and put you at ease. If there is an observer, however, you will not be introduced to the observer, who will remain anonymous to you.

During the Oral Exam, there will then be some introductory questions and discussion. For example, if your application was incomplete or had contradictory information, you will be asked for clarification.

When examiners are present, they will have a copy of the test in front of them and may be making notes during your interpreting performance. They may be writing

down such things as scoring units you missed and good things you say. It may be advisable for you to avoid watching them, as seeing them writing might distract your attention, create anxiety, or invite you to give up prematurely.

Remember that any activity on their part is not necessarily negative; it can be a reaction to something you did correctly.

- **What is the Basic Sequence When I Take the Screening/Qualifying Test?:** The test is highly structured and administered the same way, so far as is humanly possible, to every examinee. The basic structure for both the Written and Oral Examinations is as follows:
 1. The test administrator or proctor will come find you wherever you are waiting.
 2. The test administrator or proctor will escort you into the testing room and introduce you to the examiner(s), if any are present. You will be asked to present proof of your identity.
 3. The test administrator or proctor will read general test instructions.
 4. You will complete the exam.
 5. You will be excused from the testing room.
- **When will I know the results?** Your test results will be reported to you in approximately two weeks after the test.
- **Who will know my test scores?** Only you and the Program Manager of Interpreter Services for the State of Connecticut will have access to your test scores.
- **Is there anything in particular that I should do, or avoid doing, when I take the test?:** Absolutely. There are several tips that will be helpful to you if you keep them in mind while you are taking the test. Please study carefully the following suggestions as to what you should and should not do.

DO

- Come dressed the way you would be dressed to work in a real courtroom.

DON'T

- Let yourself be distracted by watching the examiners.
- Let yourself be distracted by anything in the room.
- Let yourself be distracted by sounds coming into the room.
- Guess wildly the meaning of a word or phrase that you don't know.
- Allow yourself to get frustrated when you don't know a word. Just keep going.

SUGGESTIONS

The following are suggestions that may improve candidates' skills and strengthen their interpreting performance:

- **Listening and Concentration Skills:** Since effective court interpreting requires accuracy and speed, it is essential to enhance one's listening and concentration capabilities.
- **Listening:** Practice your ability to listen through earphones and other mechanical devices and to render the meaning of the communication rather than the separate words.
- **Concentration:** Learn to concentrate on what is being communicated by the person for whom you are interpreting. Only concentrate on the actual communication without being distracted by external factors such as physical appearance, gestures, etc.
- **Memory-Building Skills:** The following memory-building exercises may be helpful:

Exercise A. Have someone tape record some fact-filled newspaper or journal articles. Then listen to the passage, stopping the recording after every sentence. Take down in note form any difficult information in the sentence, such as dates, names, time, places, reference numbers, and quantities. Then repeat the statement in the same language. Monitor your progress by recording your rendition on paper or on another tape recorder and then compare it to the original. Proceed with this type of exercise until you have finished with the article. Increase the difficulty by doing two sentences and then three sentences at a time to build your memory ability.

Exercise B. Repeat the process in the previous paragraph. However, do not repeat into the source language. This time interpret the statements into the target language.

Exercise C. The following recall exercise may help increase memory power:

- A. Have someone record passages of varied length and topics, in English & another language.
 - B. Listen to the entire passage. Then turn off the recorder and say the entire passage out loud. Record your response and compare it to the original.
- **Analytical Skills:** Interpretation relies on how well the interpreter understands a message. Understanding a message requires intellectual listening, that is, listening for ideas. An interpreter must listen to a message and simultaneously classify the information in the message into a hierarchy. An interpreter makes instantaneous decisions about which ideas are central and which are supporting or minor. The following is an exercise that may help build this skill:
 - A. Have someone record several passages of approximately 150 words, some in other language and others in English. Choose texts representing a variety of areas. Then listen to each passage. Turn off the recorder. Write down the main idea of the passage. Continue this procedure with all the passages. Then listen to each passage again, confirming the main idea you had recorded earlier.
 - B. Listen to the passage again. Turn off the recorder. Note additional specific information to support the main idea.

- **Specific Suggestions for Simultaneous Interpretation:**

1. Attend state, and federal court proceedings and simultaneously render them to yourself silently. Try to attend as many different kinds of proceedings as possible.
2. Before you come to take the test, practice your ability to listen through earphones and talk or interpret at the same time as you listen.
3. Use television and radio broadcasts as interpreting materials.
4. Shadowing is a basic exercise that may be helpful to strengthen simultaneous techniques. This exercise accustoms the interpreter to perform two tasks simultaneously.
 - A. Have someone record varied paragraph length passages, some in other language and others in English, into a tape recorder.
 - B. Listen to the passage. Then play it again and repeat everything you hear in the same language, staying as close to the speaker as possible.
 - C. Listen to the passage again, repeating it in the source language. While you are focusing on this activity, write numbers 1-100 at the same time.
 - D. Repeat the exercise and simultaneously write numbers 100-1 backwards.
 - E. Repeat the exercise and simultaneously write 1-100 by 5's.
 - F. Repeat the exercise and simultaneously write 1-100 by 3's.
 - G. Repeat the exercise and simultaneously write out a poem you know from memory.
 - H. Repeat the exercise and simultaneously write anything committed to memory, such as the Pledge of Allegiance or the Preamble to the Constitution.
 - I. Repeat the exercise and simultaneously write out the names and addresses of relatives and friends.
5. Paraphrasing is an exercise that may be helpful to improve simultaneous interpretation as well as general memory, vocabulary, concentration, and analytical skills. This exercise simulates simultaneous interpretation, yet it does not deal with the complication of the target language. It isolates the simultaneous technique. (Note: Paraphrasing as an exercise must be distinguished from paraphrasing as a form. Paraphrasing into the target language is *not* appropriate for court interpretation.)
 - A. Listen to the passage you have already recorded for memory and shadowing exercises.
 - B. As you listen, simultaneously restate the message you are hearing in other words in the source language.