

A guide to conference interpreting

Organising interpreting services
for your event.

It's simpler than you think!



POLISH ASSOCIATION OF
CONFERENCE INTERPRETERS



Whether you are organising **an international conference, a corporate event with participants from abroad, or a training session for your multilingual team**, you will need **a professional interpreter.**

What does a conference interpreter do?

An interpreter serves as a **'bridge of communication'** between the speaker and their audience, providing seamless and effective communication across languages.



Thanks to interpreters, participants will be able to understand everything the speaker expresses, regardless of the language used, and enjoy the precision their mother tongue gives when taking the floor themselves.

DID YOU KNOW?

It takes nerves of steel to be a conference interpreter. In civil professions, it is second only to air traffic controller in its demands on concentration and its stress levels.

When working in simultaneous mode, an interpreter is:

1. listening to the speaker,
2. analysing what is being said (including such nuances as implicit references, humour, etc.),
3. translating this into a target language in a grammatically correct and precise way,
4. and speaking in that target language.

And all this at the same time!

Interpreters very often work in front of large audiences, so **stage fright is not an option.**

Why would I need an interpreter? I already speak the foreign language I need.

In today's globalised world, many people speak foreign languages – especially **English** – well enough to communicate in everyday situations. However, it is often more of a challenge to give a presentation in front of an audience or to discuss complex matters in a language you don't speak perfectly.

For professional interpreters, languages are tools they have been honing their whole lives. Interpreters also have **advanced communication skills and a deep understanding of cultural nuances and references.**

They know how to use the various language registers, from informal to official to ceremonial; and they can handle the many regional accents which might otherwise be challenging for an international audience.



With an interpreter, **you can focus on what matters most – what you want to say**. You do not need to worry that language problems will hamper your communication or tarnish your reputation.

You take care of the message, and the interpreter will make sure it gets across.

An interpreter and a translator – aren't they the same?

Both a surgeon and an ophthalmologist are doctors, but you would probably prefer only the former to perform a surgical operation on you.

The same goes for translators and interpreters:

- translators specialise in written translation,
- interpreters specialise in oral interpreting.

A great translator will not necessarily be able to provide good interpretation services.

It takes more than just knowing a foreign language

A fluent command of the language (e.g. a degree in philology or being bilingual) is merely the first step to becoming a professional conference interpreter.

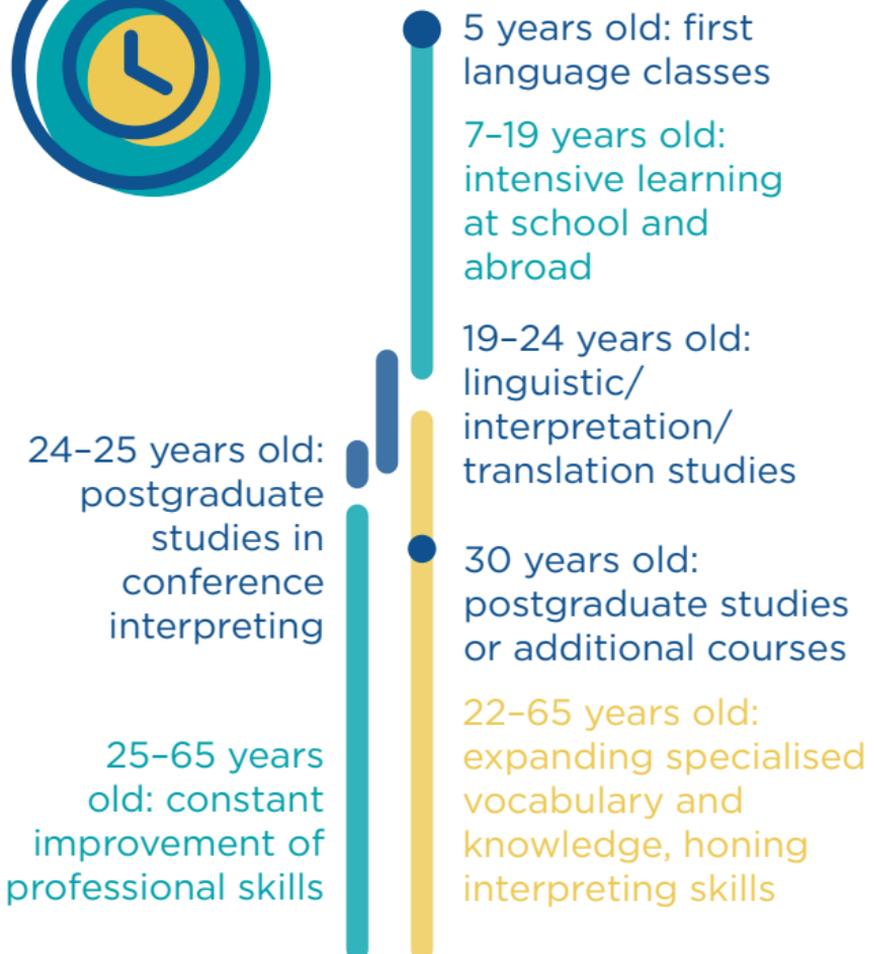
Learning how to interpret simultaneously; mastering note-taking techniques for consecutive interpretation; learning about international institutions, diplomatic protocol, and voice production; and acquiring vocabulary for many specialised fields — all of this takes a great deal of time and money.

It usually takes a few years of intensive training and practice before you can become a professional interpreter.

DID YOU KNOW?

Thanks to **special note-taking techniques and mnemonic systems**, a professional interpreter can interpret up to several minutes of speech at a time into a different language.

Lifelong learning – here is one of several paths to becoming an interpreter.



The most common modes of interpreting are: simultaneous, consecutive, and chuchotage. Each of these are best suited to different situation.

1. **Simultaneous interpretation**

Two, or sometimes even three interpreters work in a soundproof booth and interpret in real time, with the interpretation available through users' headsets. This is the most prestigious form of interpretation, and is used by such organisations as the European Union and United Nations.

This is the recommended option, and the most comfortable for participants. It saves time and the interpretation is very precise.

Situation: conferences, corporate events, management board meetings, training courses, lectures, TV interviews, live broadcasts, etc.



2. ■ Consecutive interpretation

The speaker and the interpreter take turns in speaking. When the speech is long, the interpreter makes notes. This mode of interpretation is used when it is not possible to install simultaneous interpretation equipment; or when the speaker, the listeners, and the interpreter are on the move.

Attention! You will need to provide enough time in your event's schedule for interpretation!

Situation: negotiations, business meetings, press interviews, short stage appearances, visits to production facilities, etc.

DID YOU KNOW?

On stage, the interpreter usually stands behind the loudspeakers and they very often cannot hear what is being said as well as the audience. This is why a stage speaker (foldback) is needed. A microphone on a stand is also necessary, so the interpreter is free to take notes.

3. Chuchotage

This is a more difficult form of simultaneous interpretation, and used only with a small number of listeners (max. 2 persons). Interpreters are seated right next to the listeners and whisper the interpretation to them in real time. For participants this is the least comfortable mode of interpretation as they need to stay focused to make out what the interpreter is saying. Other, nearby members of the audience may also be disturbed in this situation. Chuchotage is challenging for interpreters too, because without a soundproof booth they cannot hear the speaker as well, so the interpretation might be less precise.

Situation: If interpretation is to be provided for one or two people only, and it is not possible to install a booth for simultaneous interpretation.



Simultaneous interpretation

- time-efficient
- the conference proceeds smoothly without interruptions
- very comfortable for listeners
- the most prestigious option



Consecutive interpretation

- speakers have to pause often
- adds to the duration of the event
- not particularly comfortable for listeners
- interpreters and listeners can be mobile



Chuchotage

- a maximum of two listeners
- interpreters and listeners can be mobile
- not particularly comfortable for listeners
- may disturb the speaker and other participants

DID YOU KNOW?

Simultaneous interpretation was used for the first time during the Nuremberg Trials.

The International Military Tribunal was composed of representatives from the UK, the US, France, and the USSR, while the defendants spoke mostly German. Interpretation had never before been provided in simultaneous mode, so IBM designed dedicated equipment for the trial. Despite numerous difficulties, the experiment was such a success that this new mode of interpretation was adopted by the newly established United Nations.

Today, simultaneous interpretation is used by the European Commission, European Parliament, and hundreds of other institutions and companies around the world.

How to find an interpreter

When looking for an interpreter for your event:

- 1. Remember that conference interpreters provide, principally, interpretation services.** This is the core of their professional activity and, because of this narrow area of expertise, they are able to constantly develop their skills to provide high quality services. If you find out that your potential interpreter is in fact a full-time English teacher and only interprets from time to time, you should think twice!
- 2. Ask around.** Maybe your colleagues have used interpretation services and can recommend a reliable professional. Good interpreters come with good references.
- 3. You can always ask a professional association for advice,** for example, the Polish Association of Conference Interpreters (PSTK).

REMEMBER!

A professional interpreter always works according to the standards recommended by interpreters' associations (e.g. the PSTK standards that are available on our website).

The standards developed by professional associations are based on decades of experience gained by interpreters across many countries, so be vigilant if you get a 'special offer' that does not seem to comply with such standards. For example, if an interpreter agrees to work alone in simultaneous mode or offers a much lower price than others, you are probably not dealing with a professional. This is likely to result in a significantly lower quality of service, or a breach of confidentiality.

CONFIDENTIALITY

In the course of their work, conference interpreters often have access to confidential information. They treat professional secrecy as seriously as do lawyers and doctors. Whether it is a marketing campaign, a new company strategy, or as yet unpublished financial results – your confidential information will be kept safe.



REMEMBER!

Someone who only provides interpretation services occasionally, might not realise how important confidentiality is, or might not know how to protect sensitive data.

A professional team of interpreters — is it worth it?

The cost of interpretation is normally just a fraction of total costs of an event. If you hire professionals you can be sure the communication will be smooth and every nuance of your speech will be accurately rendered into the target language.



**You can focus on
WHAT you want to say
instead of thinking about
HOW to say it
in a foreign language.**

Getting prepared

Conference interpreters deal with a variety of topics. An insurance conference one day, business negotiations at a pharmaceutical company the next, or an interview with a novelist the day after – this is interpreters' bread and butter. So they can provide excellent standards of quality, interpreters will spend several hours doing research and studying vocabulary. Specialised courses and training are also a regular investment for interpreters as part of their professional advancement.

Professional interpreters have broad general as well as specialist knowledge, but no one is an expert in everything. **Getting prepared for an interpreting assignment requires a lot of work.** This is why it is so important to provide interpreters with all materials which might be of use (such as speakers' presentations, agendas, brochures, relevant links etc.). All of this will contribute to the quality of the interpretationservice, and therefore to the success of your event.

Why do interpreters work in pairs?

Interpreting requires huge concentration and resistance to stress. This is why simultaneous interpreters always work in pairs and swap over every 20 to 30 minutes.

On average, simultaneous interpreters process 130 to 180 words per minute. Scientific research conducted at the University of Geneva has proven that the risk of making a mistake in interpretation (i.e. distorting the message) increases drastically after 30 minutes due to psychological and physiological stress.*

Even worse, an overtired interpreter may not realise that the quality of their work is deteriorating so dramatically, and becomes less and less aware of mistakes, which may then result in serious misunderstandings.

*B. Moser-Mercer et al., Prolonged turns in interpreting. Effects on quality, psychological and physiological stress. 'Interpreting' 3:1, 1998

Be wary of anyone who agrees to work alone in simultaneous mode.

Professional interpreters always work in pairs.



THE BENEFITS OF PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

Precision

Even if you communicate easily in everyday situations, giving an important presentation in a foreign language can be quite a challenge. If you employ a language professional, you can be sure they will convey your message accurately.



Your comfort

It is only natural to feel awkward when speaking in a foreign language. With interpreters at your event, you do not have to worry about grammatical and lexical correctness – you can focus on what you want to say.

Good investment

Are you organising a training session for your employees? Surely, you want them to learn as much as possible. If you engage interpreters everyone will be able to understand all the details. If your team misses out on some of the content just because they have not mastered the language sufficiently, the session would end up being a waste of time and money.

If you hire professional interpreters for your event, workshop, or conference, you can be sure that all the participants will be able to **follow the presentations and be able to express themselves freely.**

A few tips to help you organise a multilingual event.

Before the event

Content

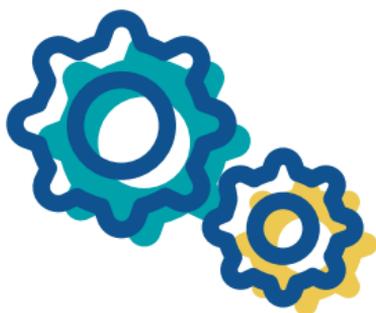
- Do the interpreters have a detailed agenda/schedule of the conference?
- Have they had a chance to read the materials?
- Have they received copies of presentations, speeches, and all other necessary documents in advance?
- Will the interpreters be given a chance to contact the speakers before the conference or at the venue?

Logistics

- Do the interpreters have the contact details of the organiser who is to be present at the venue?
- Do the interpreters know when and where the conference will take place?

If the interpreters need to travel to the conference:

- Do you know how the interpreters will get to the venue?
- Have the interpreters been provided with accommodation?
- Is their accommodation close to the conference venue?
(The same hotel is best.)
- Are meals provided for the interpreters?



Relevant for all interpretation modes

- Has everything been agreed upon with the technicians (booths, audio system)?
- Is the provider of the interpretation equipment also responsible for the audio system? Do you need to contact the manager of the venue?
- Can the interpreters see the speakers?
- Can the interpreters see the slides?

Consecutive interpretation

- Is there a stage speaker (foldback) and a microphone stand for the interpreter?

Chuchotage

- Can the interpreters hear the speakers well? (Where is the closest loudspeaker, is there a stage speaker?)
- Is there a table for the interpreters?

About PSTK

The Polish Association of Conference Interpreters (PSTK) promotes best practice and professional standards among interpreters and clients within the Polish market. We organise training courses, publish educational materials, and intervene in the case of tenders whose terms violate industry standards.

Still have questions?

Write to us at:

kontakt@pstk.org.pl

Prepared by: Diana Jankowiak, Leszek Król,
Weronika Mincer, and Krzysztof Zabrzęski
Coordinated by: Barbara Maciąg, and Katarzyna
Stachowiak-Szymczak

English version by: Anna Chwedczuk-Szulc,
Weronika Mincer, Joanna Maria Spychała
Proofread by: Laurence Taylor

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