

How to work with interpreters



How do you work with an interpreter on the telephone?

- Introduce yourself to the interpreter.
- Brief the interpreter. Describe the telephone equipment you are using (conference phone, dual handset, single phone) and where you are (counter, office, hospital ward).
- Ensure you can comfortably take notes during the interview.
- Introduce yourself and the interpreter to the client. Describe the purpose of the interview.
- Try to use short sentences in plain English when you speak.
- Speak clearly and modify the speed of your speech.
- Speak directly to the client (eg Mr ____, how can I help you?)
- Pause after two or three sentences to allow the interpreter to speak.
- Clearly indicate the end of the session to the interpreter.
- Make allowances for possible clarification by the interpreter because he/she has no visual cues (eg body language) to assist in the interpreting.
- Ensure that all required information is collected from and provided to the client while the interpreter is on the line – there will be no chance to speak directly to your client after the interpreter hangs up.

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How do you work with an interpreter on-site?

- Plan your interview beforehand if possible. Explain the purpose of the interview to the interpreter.
- Provide an area where you can talk to the client through the interpreter in private.
- Arrange seating comfortably in a triangle or a circle.
- Introduce yourself and the client to the interpreter.
- Allow extra time. Brief the interpreter first and arrange to signal breaks in the dialogue for the interpreter.
- Maintain your role in managing the interview. The interpreter will not conduct the interview. It is not the interpreter's role.
- Tell the person that what is discussed in the interview will remain confidential for you and the interpreter.
- Speak directly to the client. Say "How can I help you?" instead of "Ask him/her how I can help him/her?"
- Summarise during and at the end of the interview where necessary. Ask the client if they have any questions.
- Debrief the interpreter (if required) after the client has left.
- If the interpreter needs to clarify a message with the client in their own language, make sure the interpreter informs you what has been said.
- Similarly, ensure the client is informed about what you discuss with the interpreter (if needed) in English.

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