



## PANGAEA LEGAL SERVICES

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### Top 10 Tips for Interpreters

1. **Know your role as interpreter.** Your #1 role is to be a communication channel. This means accurately transmitting phrases from one language to another, without changing, adding, or omitting anything.
2. **Introduce yourself to the client.** Explain your role to the client before the interview. Tell her that you will be interpreting everything that she says, exactly as she says it; she can look directly at the immigration officer when speaking; she should pause between phrases to give you time to interpret; and you will keep everything she says confidential.
3. **Decide ahead of time where you're going to look.** Options include looking directly at the speakers or keeping your eyes down. Consider doing the latter to encourage the client and immigration officer to speak directly to each other.
4. **Decide ahead of time whether you're going to take notes.** You might find it helpful to take notes while interpreting, especially to remember numbers, dates, places, etc. If you take notes, tell the client in advance and assure her that you will destroy the notes at the end of the session.
5. **Use the first person.** If the client says "I am afraid," you say "I am afraid," rather than "She is afraid." This makes interpreting faster and more fluid. It also reinforces the communication between the client and immigration officer, allowing you to fade into the background.
6. **Interpret everything that is said, exactly as it's said.** This includes pauses, signs, mis-starts, and filler words like "um, like, well" etc. Also try to make your speech reflect the tone of the speaker without sounding disrespectful.
7. **Ask for help if you're stuck.** There might be times where you can't remember the translation of a word. Rather than guess, ask the phone interpreter for help. He/she is there to assist you and ensure accurate communication.
8. **Intervene if necessary.** An intervention is when you step outside of your role as a communication channel and become a clarifier. This literally means interrupting the speaker and inserting your own comment. You may want to intervene in the following situations:
  - **When either party speaks too long.** Try putting up your hand to see if the speaker slows down. If not, interrupt and say you need a moment to interpret. You can also remind the speaker to slow down and pause between phrases.
  - **When you don't understand a word/phrase.** First tell the listener that you need to clarify, then ask the speaker for clarification. Immediately go back to interpreting.
9. **Use transparent communication.** When intervening, always tell both parties what you are doing so that there is no miscommunication. Make sure that everyone in the room knows what is going on at all times. Consider using the third person when intervening to eliminate confusion. Ex: "The interpreter needs to clarify a term that was used."
10. **Ask for a break if you're tired.** Interpreting is mentally exhausting. If you're starting to lose focus, blank on words, and forget what's being said, ask for a quick break. Bring water and easy-to-eat snacks to keep up your stamina.