

Getting Started: A Newcomer's Guide to Translation and Interpretation

(American Translators Association, 2001, pp. 3-4)

PROFILE OF A COMPETENT TRANSLATOR AND OF AN EFFECTIVE TRANSLATOR TRAINING PROGRAM

What Standards Should Professional Translators be Expected to Meet?

1. A highly developed sense of intellectual integrity, responsibility, and ethical conduct, which in practical terms means:

- a. Not accepting assignments beyond one's language and/or subject-matter competence,
- b. Continuing the ongoing process of self-education and improvement both in linguistic usage and scientific/technical advances,
- c. Bringing unsolved problems to the client's attention,
- d. Keeping confidential unpublished information the translator is commissioned to translate,
- e. Respecting deadlines mutually agreed to,
- f. Helping upgrade the performance of the profession as a whole,
- g. Sharing knowledge with one's colleagues,
- h. Refraining from unseemly or exaggerated promotional claims, and
- i. Abstaining from unsolicited criticism of translations by others.

2. Language and subject-matter requirements:

- a. Sound knowledge of source language, equivalent to at least four years of intensive and 10 years of sporadic study,
- b. Above-average writing ability in the target language, equivalent to that of (self- or otherwise) educated native speakers,
- c. Reasonable familiarity with the subject matter, equivalent to that which can be acquired by at least one year (preferably two) of formal education or job experience in the particular field,
- d. Access to recent reference books, equivalent to those found in a fairly up-to-date professional library, and
- e. Contact with more experienced fellow translators or more knowledgeable linguists and scientists, and the willingness to consult with them on a reciprocal basis.

What Training is Required to be Able to Attain Such Standards?

1. The following curriculum would seem to be the best way for a college student to prepare for a career in translating.

- a. Courses that provide an extensive knowledge of, and ability to reason in, the subject matter of the translation: mathematics, pure sciences, social sciences, history, business administration, and economics,
- b. Courses that provide a sound reading knowledge and grasp of the language(s) from which one will be translating: four years of a major language, two years of a minor language; as many basic language courses as possible; at least two years of Latin (if nothing else, it will do wonders for one's English), and
- c. Courses that provide the ability to express oneself in lucid and straightforward English: writing courses, including one in newspaper writing and one in technical writing.

2. Periodic participation in advanced "postgraduate" workshops, notably in specialized subject-matter areas.

Reading 1

Where are the Clientele and Markets for Translators?

1. The U.S. Government and its agencies,
2. U.S. and foreign multinational corporations and their subsidiaries,
3. U.S. importers and exporters
4. Commercial and nonprofit research institutions,
5. Pharmaceutical, chemical, machinery, etc., manufacturers not covered by any of the above categories,
6. Engineering and construction firms with foreign connections,
7. Patent attorneys,
8. The publishing industry,
9. The news media,
10. Municipal governments in bilingual U.S. cities,
11. Graduate schools of U.S. universities,
12. The United Nations and its affiliated agencies, and
13. Foreign diplomatic, commercial, scientific, and other representatives in the United States.

What Specific Fields of Translation Have Special Requisites?

1. Literary requires:
 - a. Above-average knowledge of the source language,
 - b. Highly developed writing ability in the target language, and
 - c. Comprehensive background in the culture, history, and social customs of other countries (notably that of the source language).

Rewards: Intellectual satisfaction, public exposure, reasonable deadlines, byline credit.

Drawbacks: Limited economic opportunities ("feast or famine") because of limited market and generally lower rates than in other fields of translation; lack of retirement benefits (unless working in a salaried position).

2. Scientific/Technical requires:
 - a. Moderately extensive scientific/technical knowledge (theoretical and/or practical),
 - b. Familiarity with specific terminology and, in the absence thereof, to "know when you don't know,"
 - c. A reasonably up-to-date sci-tech library,
 - d. Ability to reproduce graphs and figures, and
 - e. In most cases, impeccable typing ability and good layout sense.

Rewards: Fairly steady income, with generally higher rates than in the field of literary translation and a broad market, and the opportunity to expand one's subject-matter knowledge.

Drawbacks: Often "impossible" deadlines, the necessity of being a "Jack/Jane of all trades"; fairly high cost of reference books; lack of retirement benefits (unless working in a salaried position).

3. Commercial requires:

Most of the same qualifications as scientific/technical translation, but perhaps to a lesser degree.