

GR 11.2
CODE OF PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR
JUDICIARY INTERPRETERS

(a) Preamble. As officers of the court, interpreters must maintain high standards of professional conduct that promote public trust and confidence in the administration of justice. The purpose of this code is to establish standards of conduct that interpreters must abide by in order to preserve the integrity and independence of the judicial system. It establishes core ethical principles of interpreter conduct in all aspects of their profession.

(b) Scope. The text of each rule is authoritative, while the comments provide important guidance in understanding the rules.

(c) Applicability. All interpreters serving in the judicial system must abide by this Code of Professional Responsibility.

(d) Compliance. Interpreters who violate the provisions of this code are subject to disciplinary action and/or any other sanction that may be imposed by law.

(e) Definitions.

(1) Source language – the original language of the writer or speaker.

(2) Target language – the language of the receiving reader or listener.

(3) Register – the degree of formality of language.

(4) Sight translation – the rendering of a written document directly into a spoken or signed language, not for purposes of producing a written document.

(f) Canons.

(1) *Accuracy.* Interpreters must reproduce in the target language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message without altering it by means of addition, omission, or explanation.

Comment

(1)[1] Interpreters are obligated to conserve every element of information contained in the source and target languages. In doing so, they fulfill a twofold duty: (1) to ensure that legal proceedings reflect in English precisely what is said or signed by limited English proficient individuals and (2) to place limited English proficient individuals on an equal linguistic footing with those who are fully proficient in English.

(1)[2] Interpreters are required to apply their best skills and judgment to render, as faithfully as reasonably possible, the meaning of what is said or signed, preserving the style and register of speech, and the ambiguities and nuances of the source statement.

Everything must be interpreted, even if it appears nonresponsive, obscene, rambling, or incoherent. This includes false starts and apparent misstatements. However, verbatim, "word for word," or literal interpretation is inappropriate if it distorts the meaning of what is said or signed.

Spoken language interpreters should convey the speaker's tone without reenacting or mimicking the speaker's emotions or dramatic gestures. Sign language interpreters, on the other hand, should employ visual cues, including facial expressions, body language, and hand gestures, which are structural elements of sign languages.

(1)[3] Interpreters have the duty to immediately address any situation or condition that impedes their ability to accurately interpret. Examples include, but are not limited to, linguistic ambiguities, unfamiliar terms, inaudible speech, inability to see a speaker, background noise or distraction, and pace of speech.

(1)[4] The obligation to preserve accuracy includes the interpreter's duty to correct any substantive errors of interpretation as soon as possible. Interpreters should be prepared to accept feedback, including challenges to their interpretation, in a professional and impersonal manner.

(1)[5] Due to the difficulty of extemporaneously interpreting recordings (such as 911 calls), the practice of doing so in court should be discouraged at all times. Rather, proper transcripts and corresponding written translations should be prepared in advance. If ordered by the presiding officer to interpret a recording in court, interpreters should comply but state, on the record, that they cannot guarantee the accuracy of the interpretation.

(1)[6] Interpreters should refrain from sight translating documents for the record. Rather, written translations of documents offered in an evidentiary hearing should be prepared in advance. If ordered by the presiding officer to sight translate such documents, interpreters should comply but state, on the record, that they cannot guarantee the accuracy of the sight translation.

(1)[7] The ethical responsibility to interpret accurately includes being prepared for assignments. Interpreters are encouraged to obtain documents and other information necessary to familiarize themselves with the nature and purpose of an assignment. Prior preparation is described below; it is especially important when testimony or documents include highly specialized terminology and subject matter.

Preparation may include but is not limited to:

- (i) reviewing relevant documents, such as criminal complaints, police reports, briefs, witness lists, jury instructions, prior depositions, etc.;
- (ii) asking interpreters previously involved in the case for information on language use or style; or
- (iii) asking attorneys involved in the case for additional relevant information.

(2) *Competence*. Interpreters must not knowingly accept any assignment beyond their skill level. If at any point, before or during an assignment, they have reservations about their ability to satisfy an assignment competently, they must immediately disclose this to all parties and, if applicable, to the court.

In their professional capacity, interpreters must not give legal or other advice or engage in any activity that may be construed as a service other than interpreting or translating.

Comment

(2)[1] Interpreters are duty bound to inquire about the assignment in advance and assess their competence to render services.

(2)[2] Interpreters are not qualified to give written or oral counsel about a legal matter that could affect the rights and responsibilities of the person receiving the advice. GR 24 sets forth what constitutes the practice of law.

(2)[3] Interpreters should maintain and expand competence in their field through professional development. Professional development includes steady practice, professional

training, ongoing education, terminology research, regular and frequent interaction with colleagues and specialists in related fields, and staying abreast of new technologies, current issues, laws, policies, rules, and regulations that affect their profession.

(2)[4] Interpreters should know and follow established protocols for delivering interpreting services. When speaking in English, interpreters should speak at a volume that enables them to be heard throughout the courtroom. They should interpret in the first person and refer to themselves in the third person.

(3) *Honesty and Integrity.* Interpreters have an inviolable duty to provide honest services in which their behavior upholds the values outlined in this code. They must accurately represent their credentials, training, and relevant experience. Interpreters must not engage in conduct that impedes their compliance with this code or allow another to induce or encourage them to violate the law or this code.

Comment

(3)[1] It is essential that interpreters present a complete and truthful account of their credentials, training, and relevant experience prior to an assignment so that their ability to satisfy it competently can be fairly evaluated.

(4) *Impartiality and Neutrality.* Interpreters must faithfully render the source message without allowing their own views to interfere. They must refrain from conduct that may give an appearance of bias and must disclose any real or potential conflict of interest to all parties and the court, if applicable, as soon as they become aware of it.

Comment

(4)[1] Interpreters should strive for professional detachment. They should uphold impartiality by avoiding verbal and nonverbal displays of personal attitudes, prejudices, emotions, or opinions. Interpreters must faithfully render all statements, even those they find personally objectionable, without allowing their own views or opinions to interfere.

(4)[2] As officers of the court, interpreters serve the court and the public, regardless of whether publicly or privately retained. Interpreters must uphold neutrality by avoiding any behavior that creates the appearance of favoritism toward anyone. Interpreters should maintain professional relationships with persons using their services, discourage personal dependence on the interpreter, and avoid participation in the proceedings in any capacity other than providing interpreter services. During the course of the proceedings, interpreters should not converse with parties, witnesses, jurors, attorneys, or friends or relatives of any party, except in the discharge of their official functions.

(4)[3] Interpreters must not serve in any matter in which they have an interest, financial or otherwise, in the outcome, unless a specific exception is allowed by the judicial officer for good cause and noted on the record. Interpreters must not solicit or accept gifts or gratuities from any of the parties, even as a social courtesy, in order to maintain the appearance of neutrality. Interpreters must disclose to the parties and/or the court any circumstance that creates a potential conflict of interest, including but not limited to the following:

(i) the interpreter is a friend, associate, or relative of a party, witness, victim, or counsel;

(ii) the interpreter or the interpreter's friend, associate, or relative has a financial interest in the case at issue, a shared financial interest with a party to the proceeding, or any other interest that might be affected by the outcome of the case;

(iii) the interpreter has served in an investigative capacity for any party involved in the case;

(iv) the interpreter has previously been retained by a law enforcement agency to assist in the preparation of the criminal case at issue;

(v) the interpreter is an attorney in the case at issue; or

(vi) the interpreter has previously been retained for employment by one of the parties.

The existence of any one of the abovementioned circumstances should be evaluated by the parties and the court but should not automatically disqualify an interpreter from providing services. If an actual or perceived conflict of interest exists, the appropriate authorities should determine whether it is appropriate for the interpreter to withdraw based on the totality of the circumstances.

(5) *Confidentiality*. Interpreters must not divulge privileged or other confidential information obtained in their professional capacity. They must refrain from making any public statement on matters in which they serve.

Comment

(5)[1] Privileged communications take place within the context of a protected relationship, such as that between an attorney and client, a husband and wife, a priest and penitent, and a doctor and patient. The law often protects against forced disclosure of such conversations. Interpreters are bound to maintain the confidentiality of all privileged communications.

(5)[2] Interpreters are also routinely privy to communications that, while not necessarily privileged by law, are conveyed in confidence. In order to preserve the integrity of the judicial process, interpreters have an ongoing duty to refrain from disclosing information obtained in their professional capacity. This duty is consistent with CJC 2.10.

[Adopted effective November 17, 1989. Original Rule 11.1 was renumbered as Rule 11.2 effective September 1, 2005; Amended effective April 26, 2016; December 18, 2018; March 12, 2019.]