



Australian Government
Department of Home Affairs



Bridge the communication gap guide for agencies

Bridge the Communication Gap

Thousands of non-English speaking Australians face a communication gap every day. Across Australia, the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) helps bridge that gap.

TIS National has more than 70 years' experience in the interpreting industry and access to more than 2700 interpreters in more than 150 languages. Whenever English speakers and non-English speakers need to communicate, TIS National can provide an interpreter to help 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

Who needs interpreters?

Australia is a dynamic and culturally diverse society, whose population speaks hundreds of different languages. In Australian society interpreters are the language link that bridges the communication gap between English and non-English speakers.

There are a variety of reasons why non-English speakers need interpreters. Initially, the Australian Government introduced a telephone interpreting service (now known as TIS National) to provide interpreting assistance to meet migrant information and welfare needs.

TIS National continues to deliver this service and is available to any person or organisation in Australia who needs an interpreter. TIS National provides interpreting assistance to enable non-English speakers to access government agencies and services, police and legal services, education, healthcare and community groups, as well as services offered by private businesses.

English speakers are increasingly seeking to engage interpreters to communicate with non-English speakers. These individuals and agencies recognise the importance of reaching out to non-English speakers to further business opportunities, satisfy community needs and provide accessible and equitable government and other services.

What is the role of the interpreter?

The role of the interpreter is to ensure accurate communication between people of different languages, while taking into account any sensitivities. Interpreters are bound by the Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT) Code of Ethics which requires them to:

- interpret accurately and honestly without adding or omitting anything being said
- maintain absolute confidentiality
- be impartial and objective: and
- act in a professional manner at all times.



Is it appropriate to use someone who speaks the same language?

Interpreting is a specialist skill that goes beyond a person who merely speaks the same language. It requires a high level of fluency in both language directions and the ability to be able to quickly, accurately and appropriately convey the whole message from one language to another.

The use of an appropriately qualified and accredited interpreter, as opposed to relatives or acquaintances, is essential whenever there are language differences. A situation may arise where you may even be held legally liable if injury, loss or damage is suffered because you failed to use a professional interpreter where it was deemed reasonably necessary.

What qualification should I look for?

Interpreters and translators in Australia are awarded a certification level from the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) according to their degree of competence. NAATI certification is available at the following levels:

- Certified Conference Interpreter
- Certified Specialist Interpreter - Health or Legal
- Certified Interpreter
- Certified Provisional Interpreter

NAATI may also provide a recognition credential in languages where certification testing is not available as acknowledgement of recent and regular work experience. These interpreters are Recognised Practising Interpreters.

TIS National assigns work to interpreters on the basis of their NAATI certification level and availability in order to ensure you receive the most qualified available interpreter.



What do I need to consider when booking an interpreter?

Language

In many countries a range of languages are spoken. For example, a person born in Cambodia may require interpreting assistance in Khmer, any of the Chinese languages or French. Ask TIS National for advice if you are unsure about which language is appropriate for your client's needs.

Specialist knowledge

Identifying whether your client will require interpreting of sensitive or complex information, such as interpreting for legal or medical matters, will help TIS National to provide the most appropriate interpreter for your needs. Please record any specific needs when you are submitting your booking.

Gender

In some circumstances you may require a female interpreter for a female client. This especially applies for medical appointments or situations when to be discussed, such as domestic violence.



Telephone, video remote or on-site interpreting

Consider your requirements when deciding to request either a telephone, video remote or on-site interpreter.

The quickest and most affordable way to obtain interpreting help is over the telephone. Telephone interpreting also provides a more anonymous service, which may provide the non-English speaker with fewer concerns about privacy or confidentiality. Engaging a telephone interpreter may be inappropriate in cases where the non-English speaker is under some mental or physical stress or where a lengthy interview is anticipated.

TIS National can provide advice on the most appropriate service channel to meet your requirements.

How can I make the most of my interpreting booking?

Telephone interpreting

The following tips can help you to get the best results when engaging a telephone interpreter:

- Speak directly to your client, not to the interpreter. (Interpreters are trained to interpret in the first person).
- Talk a little louder than usual to ensure the interpreter can hear properly.
- Keep sentences short and succinct, with only one idea per sentence.
- Include a pause after each sentence so that participants don't talk over each other or cut each other off.
- If you have the non-English speaker with you, sit and face them and watch their body language.
- If you have the non-English speaker with you, we recommend you use a hands-free/speaker phone to avoid having to pass the phone back and forth. This will enable much more efficient and effective communication.
- Offer the interpreter breaks for long sessions, interpreting can be very demanding. This is particularly important for complex or lengthy jobs, such as telephone interpreting jobs of more than 60 minutes duration.

Video remote interpreting

The following tips can help you to get the best results when engaging a video remote interpreter:

- Choose a professional background.
- Place your camera at eye level or higher.
- Check your meeting link works before the start of the video remote assignment.
- Check your technology in advance.
- Make sure that you have good internet speed.
- Introduce yourself before you speak.
- Make sure to mute your microphone while not speaking. Offer the interpreter breaks for long sessions, interpreting can be very demanding. This is particularly important for complex or lengthy jobs, such as video remote interpreting jobs of more than 90 minutes duration.

On-site interpreting

The following tips can help you to get the best results when engaging an on-site interpreter:

- Briefly explain the purpose of the interview to the interpreter.
- During the interview, speak directly to your client, not to the interpreter. (Interpreters are trained to interpret in the first person)
- Speak clearly, slowly and succinctly. Pause after every few sentences to allow time for the information to be interpreted.
- The ideal seating arrangement is a triangle, with participants at equal distances from each other, so that eye contact can be maintained at all times.
- Avoid private discussions with the interpreter—this may make the other party feel anxious or uncomfortable.
- Clarify any problems that arise with the interpreter. The interpreter may also need to have brief discussions with the non-English speaker to respond to concerns or explanations about your questions or comments.
- Offer the interpreter breaks for long sessions, interpreting can be very demanding. This is particularly important for complex or lengthy jobs, including on-site jobs longer than 90 minutes.

How much does interpreting cost?

Charges for interpreting services vary according to the type of service provided. You can calculate an estimate of TIS National's interpreting service charges using our [online cost calculator](https://tisonational.gov.au/costcalculator) (tisonational.gov.au/costcalculator) or by contacting one of our Client Liaison Account Managers by email at tispromo@homeaffairs.gov.au.



Free interpreting services

The Australian Government through TIS National provides free interpreting services for non-English speakers communicating with the following approved groups and individuals:

- Medical practitioners: when delivering Medicare-rebateable services in private practice. Nurses, reception and other practice support staff can also access the service when working with the registered medical practitioner.
- Pharmacies: when dispensing medication, providing general advice and delivering other general pharmacy services.
- Non-government organisations: when providing casework and emergency services, where the organisation does not receive substantial government funding to provide these services.
- Real estate agencies: to discuss any private residential property matter.
- Local government authorities: to communicate with residents about most local government services.
- Trade unions: to assist members in accessing support and advice.
- Parliamentarians: for constituency purposes.

You can check your eligibility for the Free Interpreting Service using the [eligibility calculator](#) on the TIS National website (tisnational.gov.au/fis).

EVERY HOUR EVERY DAY

Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National)

131 450

General and account enquiries

Client Liaison

Email: tispromo@homeaffairs.gov.au

1300 655 820

Free Interpreting Service

tis.freeinterpreting@homeaffairs.gov.au

1300 575 847

Finance Administration

Email: tis.invoice@homeaffairs.gov.au

Enquiries about existing bookings

Email: tis@homeaffairs.gov.au

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Find us online at www.tisnational.gov.au