Translating and Interpreting

What is a Translator or Interpreter?
Translators and Interpreters enable the cross-cultural communication necessary in today’s society by converting one language into another. Although some people do both, interpretation and translation are different professions. Translators convert written materials from one language into another. Interpreters convert one spoken language into another.

The services of translators and interpreters are needed in a number of subject areas. While specializing in a particular field or industry is not required, many translators and interpreters focus on one area of expertise.

Literary translators adapt written literature from one language into another. Localization translators constitute a relatively recent and rapidly expanding specialty. Localization involves the complete adaptation of a product for use in a different language and culture. Conference interpreters work at conferences that involve non-English-speaking attendees. Guide or escort interpreters accompany either U.S. visitors abroad or foreign visitors in the United States to ensure that they are able to communicate during their stay. Judiciary interpreters and translators help people appearing in court who are unable or unwilling to communicate in English. Medical Translators and Interpreters provide language services to healthcare patients with limited English proficiency.

What can I expect from a career in translation and interpretation?
Because many interpreters and translators freelance, their schedules are often erratic, with extensive periods of no work interspersed with others requiring long, irregular hours. For those who freelance, a significant amount of time must be dedicated to looking for jobs. In addition, freelancers must manage their own finances, and payment for their services may not always be prompt.

How to find a job or internship?
To find work, self-employed interpreters and translators may submit resumes to 100 or more employment agencies, and then wait to be contacted when an agency matches their skills with a job. After establishing a few regular clients, interpreters and translators often hear of subsequent jobs by word of mouth; or, they may receive enough work from a few clients to stay busy. Many who freelance in the occupation work only part-time, relying on other sources of income to supplement earnings from interpreting or translation. Translators and Interpreters can learn firsthand about the profession by working for an in-house company; however, such jobs are not very numerous.

Advice for new entrants to the field is to begin getting experience whatever way they can—even if it means doing informal or unpaid work. Mentoring relationships and internships are other ways to build skills and confidence. Interpreters might also find it easier to break into areas with particularly high demand for language services, such as court or medical interpretation. Once interpreters and translators have gained sufficient experience, they may then move up to more difficult or prestigious assignments.

Resources for Translating and Interpreting

American Translators Association
www.atanet.org
Information on translation and interpretation professions. This association offers accreditation to translators. Website includes job postings and list of regional chapters. There is a membership fee to join the association.

Language Automation
www.lai.com
Language Automation is located in the Silicon Valley and is a provider of translation services (especially Japanese) for the videogame, Web, and software industries.

Transref.org
www.transref.org
Click on “Newcomers” for information on how to get started in becoming a professional interpreter or translator and job search advice. Links to several job posting listservs are also available.

foreignword.com
www.foreignword.com
Click on “Translators” tab for information and lots of links.

The American Association of Language Specialists
www.taals.net
This association represents language specialists working at the international level, either at conferences or in permanent organizations, and determines their qualifications and standards. It includes a membership of interpreters and translators based in many countries, which may be useful for networking.

The National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators
www.najit.org
NAJIT is a non-profit organization dedicated to the court interpreting and legal translation profession. General information about the profession is included in the “Frequently Asked Questions” section.

National Council on Interpreting in Health Care
www.ncihc.org
The NCIHC is a multidisciplinary organization whose mission is to promote culturally competent professional health care interpreting. Forsyth Tech offers medical interpreting classes using NCIHC’s guidelines. Call 336-734-7703 for more information.

American Literary Translators Association
www.utdallas.edu/alta/
ALTA is dedicated to the promotion of literary translation through services to literary translators, forums on the theory and practice of translation, collaboration with the international literary community, and advocacy on behalf of the literary translator. A link to ALTA Guides to Literary Translation offers practical advice for both beginning and experienced translators.

International Medical Interpreters Association
http://www.imiaweb.org
With over 2,000 members, who provide interpreting services in over 70 languages, the IMIA is the oldest and largest medical interpreter association in the country.

Department of State Language Services
http://languageservices.state.gov
Language Services facilitates communication with non-English speaking governments and people by providing high-level interpreting (spoken word) and translating (written word) support to the Executive Office of the President, the Department of State and other federal agencies.