

13 Protocol and practicalities

In this chapter we will look at some very practical things to remember for your assignment and once you arrive there:

- what to do and who to speak to when you arrive at your assignment
- what to take with you to a consecutive assignment – more than just a notepad!

Dress code

An interpreter can be forgiven anything, except being late and not being dressed appropriately.

(Ouvrard 2014: 111)

Dressing appropriately is a mark of respect to your customer (and colleagues), so if you want to be recruited again, do make an effort. A good rule of thumb would be to try to pitch your dress somewhere in the middle of the style that is being worn by your clients and not at the extremes. Be aware also that your clients may well be considerably older than you, something that may affect what is considered appropriate dress.

Men

With the above in mind, there might be one person in jeans and a T-shirt amongst the clients, and/or one in a three-piece suit and/or bowtie. But if most men are going to be wearing straightforward suits and ties, then it will be the same for

you. On the other hand, if you are going to work, for example, for a volunteer NGO or a trade union, you may well know that no one will be wearing a suit or office-wear. In this case, men can safely go in trousers and a shirt (without a tie or jacket) rather than looking out of place in a suit.

Male interpreters should never wear T-shirts, shorts, trainers or sandals on an interpreting assignment.

If in doubt, a suit and tie is a safe bet. Too smart is better than not smart enough and you can always remove a jacket and tie to dress down a bit.

Women

I have to qualify any dress-code advice that I now give to the many women who will be reading this book by reminding you that I am a man, so please also ask advice from senior female colleagues. However, I think I am on safe ground when I say that you should avoid very bright colours, very short skirts and overly revealing tops. You should be comfortable. That means that tight clothing and high-heels are not very practical for itinerant assignments, for example. High-heels also make your speaking position less stable (see p. 17–20). Women have the luxury of being able to wear open-toed shoes in hot weather and still look smart. I leave the details to your common sense.

Whatever you wear – men and women – should be discreet. You don't want to be noticed because of your clothing. Remember also that you are representing yourself and a profession. So some formality is desired even in the most relaxed of circumstances.

Personal hygiene is also part of your general appearance, so try to minimize perceptible odours, be they bodily or perfumes and aftershaves. Wear clothes and/or colours that won't show up perspiration.

EXERCISE – DRESS SMART

As students you won't be dressed very smartly for class, so every month recreate a professional atmosphere by arranging to all come in to practise in your work (smart) clothes. Perhaps you could also arrange for a larger number of people to practise together in a larger room, to make the atmosphere a little different – more like the professional reality of interpreting than your normal classes. If your school organizes mock-conferences for interpreting students, these are an ideal opportunity to “dress up”.

Interpreting equipment

The most obvious and important equipment you'll need for a consecutive assignment will of course be your notepad and pens. And you should take at least one notepad, depending on how much work you think you'll be doing, and several pens. What size and type of notepad do you need?

Reporter's notepad – 10 x 15 cm. This is a convenient size: big enough for clear notes, small enough to carry around. Bear the following points in mind.

- It should be spiral bound from the top so pages turn easily and never get lost, dropped or mixed up.
- It should have a firm sheet of card as the back page. You will often have to take notes and speak standing up. Try doing either of these with a floppy notepad!
- It should have plain pages, or with lines or squares as faint as possible. Pre-printed lines can adversely influence how you position notes on the page and they detract from the visibility of the notes on the page.
- Take a new pad to each assignment so you have the maximum number of pages available to you and don't mix up subjects.
- Write on one side of the page only. The order of the pages gets very confusing if you don't.

Ballpoint pen/ biro – one that writes quickly, smoothly, clearly and quietly. Pencils break. Fountain pens are slow to write with. Rollerballs smudge and felt-tips have a tendency to run out. Biro's are best! The ink in your pen should also be clearly visible on the paper you are using. Take several spare pens: if it can run out, it will.

Sitting or standing, and whichever type of notepad you choose, you must have a firm surface to support the pages you're writing on. That may be the back of the notepad itself, a table or a clipboard.

You may be able to take notes on a tablet computer. That solves the problem of finding a firm surface as a support and eliminates the need for page-turning. However, there are other issues specific to using digital devices for consecutive that are discussed in the next chapter.

If you're standing up to take notes, a 10 x 15 cm pad may be too wide to hold in one hand. Many interpreters use their forearm as a support, as shown here.



Figure 13.1

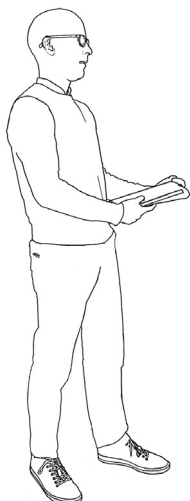


Figure 13.2

A smaller pad, for example 7 x 10 cm, might be easy to carry round with you unobtrusively in a pocket. It's also easier to hold in one hand. However, there's not much space on the page for your notes and the pad will move in your hand as you write.



Figure 13.3

Survival equipment

It would be a mistake to think that a notepad and a few pens are all you will need to take with you on assignment. A rule of thumb is that you should be able to survive the duration of the assignment, personally and professionally, without any help from anyone else. Don't count on anything being available on site. It may be, but you shouldn't count on it. Take with you:

- a small bottle of water (200 or 330 ml). You never know when you won't have a glass of water within reach
- a couple of energy- or muesli-bars to keep you going. Don't count on anyone worrying about whether you have eaten or not
- a small deodorant (e.g. roll-on). You are likely going to be nervous; that may translate into perspiration and body odour which, when you notice it, will make you even more nervous. Unpleasant for everyone! Smokers too should be careful
- a small bag or pouch to keep the above in. Bags with straps for men are not very elegant with suits. Whatever bag you have, put it down before you interpret!

Remember to eat before you go. You may well be working at a meal, but the meal is there for the guests. You are there to work. Also ...

- there is no guarantee that food has been provided for the interpreters
- even if it has, it's awkward and unprofessional to try to interpret or take notes between mouthfuls of food
- if you have a place at a table, then that place is better used for your notepad if you have to take notes
- if you don't have a place at the table, then you won't want to have to find somewhere to put the plate of food that you've been balancing on your lap when you are called on to interpret.

What to do when you arrive on site

The following is a general guide. Be aware, however, that there may already be established institutional or corporate protocol covering your assignment. Find out what those rules are, as they will take precedence over these suggestions.

- Arrive before your customer(s) if you are not travelling with them already.
- If you are the only interpreter, introduce yourself to the head of protocol and/or the speaker(s) at the appropriate time, if any. If you are part of a team of interpreters, ask the team leader if it is appropriate for them or you to do so. This way speakers won't be surprised when you start interpreting; and you will have the chance to establish and/or briefly explain the mode

of interpreting (here consecutive) and length of passage to be spoken/interpreted. Both passages that are too short (sentence by sentence) and too long (10 minutes and more) can cause problems for an audience even if the interpreter is happy with either.

When dealing with meeting organizers or speakers, be polite and remember that the interpreting is only the most important thing going on *to you*. Everyone else will have other priorities. So don't get upset or uppity if what you need is not at the top of people's priorities.

- If it is not already defined by protocol rules, establish with your colleagues who is going to interpret which speakers and/or which half-hours. If there are protocol rules, then find out what they are! (On most diplomatic business each government brings their own interpreters who interpret what their own side says.)
- Do ask your senior colleagues (and to start with, everyone will be senior to you!) for any information they can give you about the speaker, the venue, the event, procedural and protocol rules or the way the assignment will go.
- Ask for a list of names of speakers and significant people present. If you can't, have a guess at who might be there: the mayor of the city you're in; the head of the host institution, etc. (See also Chapter 12.)
- Ask for a fixed microphone on a stand. Holding the microphone and the notepad while speaking, and turning pages all at the same time, is tricky and inevitably leads to paper rustling noises being heard over the microphone.
- If you have been given a handheld microphone, make sure it's off and safely in a pocket or placed somewhere while you listen, and turned on and in your hand when you speak.
- Ask for speaking notes, the text of speeches and any other documents that may have been made available since documents were last sent to the interpreters, including speeches you may not be interpreting – there may be useful information there too.
- Look at your surroundings. Make a mental note of any particularly prominent works of art or architectural features and what they represent. If there are information plaques around the building, and if your assignment allows, read them! It's exactly the sort of information that might get thrown into a speech. Likewise, if you get the chance, ask the venue's staff for pointers about significant facts, people and events relating to the venue.
- If the speaker is using slides, then you and your audience need to see the slides as you talk about them. That means arranging with the speaker to interpret slide by slide or, less likely, someone would have

to re-run the slideshow for you while you interpret parts of or all the presentation.

- Position yourself where you can see and hear the speaker and where you can easily present your interpretation to the same audience as the speaker. In practice, that means close by! Ideally you shouldn't have to move at all or more than a few paces in order to start your interpreting. You won't be able to face the speaker, because both you and they will be facing the audience, but if you're standing just in front or behind and to one side of the speaker, you will be able to see their face as they speak. At an assignment where you are sitting you are most likely to be alongside the speaker or at right-angles to them, without much flexibility to adjust. Don't find yourself on the other side of the room!



Figure 13.4

- Drink enough water to keep your mouth from drying up but not so much you need to go to the toilet all the time! If you do need to excuse yourself, make sure you let someone know you've popped away. That way you can avoid clients fretting about an absent interpreter or leaving the building without you.
- If you know when the interpreting part of the assignment will start, go to the toilet beforehand. If you don't know, because you are following your client around on an itinerant mission, don't pass up any opportunity to go the toilet; you don't know when another one might come your way!
- Turn your phone off!

During the speech and after

- Listen carefully.
- Be prepared for the fact that the extra nervousness of working in a real-life setting may mean you produce some extremely messy notes. Make an effort to listen carefully and write clearly.
- You may have missed something and would like to ask a question of the speaker as you were allowed to in class, even during exams and accreditation tests. Just be aware that in the real world not all situations are equal in this respect. In a small working meeting of 5–10 people, asking a question may seem perfectly normal to all concerned; whereas at a formal event in a big hall of 200 people, you may have to just swallow your pride and leave something out in order not to disrupt proceedings.
- Once you've finished interpreting, get back out of the way. Other meeting participants may now wish to speak.

Tips from other authors

Very few books have addressed the obvious practical questions that arise on consecutive interpreting assignments. And it is perhaps because consecutive has become much rarer that you have to look to two authors whose careers began in the 1950s and 60s to find such advice. I have included summaries of that advice and a more recent text from AIIC below.

Preparation for consecutive interpreting assignments according to Taylor-Bouladon (2007)

- Choose where to sit or stand carefully and/or ask participants where they would like you to sit. Be sure you can hear the speaker clearly. If you are the only interpreter working for two speakers, sit between them. If two delegations are facing each other at a rectangular table, sit at the table centre near the delegation leaders. If you're interpreting for one person, sit just behind them. At a press conference sit next to the person giving the press conference.
- Establish with the client if they want everything interpreted or only certain utterances.
- Arrive before the client; remain available but discreet.
- Dress so as not to be noticed. Men shouldn't wear shorts. Wear cotton, not synthetic materials, if working in hotter climates.
- Keep a programme of the day's events on you so you know what's happening next.
- Get hold of any written copies of speeches beforehand.
- Don't drink alcohol until all the speeches are over.

Preparation for consecutive interpreting assignments according to Becker (1975)

- Dress appropriately for the event. Don't dress too warm – conference rooms tend to get overheated.
- Take two or three biros.
- Use a standard-sized notepad (A5). If you have to stand to take notes, use a smaller pad as they are stiffer and therefore easier to write on when standing.
- Get a list of participants' names before you start. VIPs will most likely be mentioned by name.
- Ask participants about any terms or concepts you haven't understood despite your preparation.
- Don't interpret through applause; you can't be heard.
- Agree with the speaker in advance how long they will speak before you interpret. (So you don't get 20 minutes or three words, neither of which are easy to do!)
- Stand or sit up straight so as to look professional.
- Stay within $\pm 10\%$ of the original speaking time.
- Eat before you go 1) because you may not get time to eat and 2) because alcohol on an empty stomach may upset your interpreting quicker than you thought.
- Ask questions of the speaker, if you have any, only at the end of their speech. Don't interrupt them.
- Only translate interjections from the audience if they are absolutely relevant.

Consecutive interpreting (AIIC 1999a)

Consecutive has been described as the “noblest” mode of interpreting, and there is force in the argument that one who claims to be a fully fledged conference interpreter must master both simultaneous and consecutive.

Before working in consecutive, make sure that you will be interpreting from a position from which you can **clearly hear the speakers**, and that you have a **working surface** to support your notepad, documents and microphone, which should be fixed in position with a **desktop microphone stand**.

In a meeting room, sit at the table with the speakers. In a lecture hall situation, if the organizers have arranged for a podium for the speaker, make sure that there is a second podium or a table and chair set up for your use. It can be a rather harrowing experience trying to support one’s notepad with one hand while taking notes with the other while at the same time juggling a handheld microphone on stage in front of hundreds of people, especially when doing long consecutive on a difficult speech.

In consecutive, it is all the more important to be a good public speaker. Don’t forget to make **eye contact** with the audience, and make sure to project poise and confidence with your **body language**. All the principles of quality interpreting apply, with the additional requirements of the visual dimension and non-verbal performance factors.

Further reading

Becker (1975) *Konferenz dolmetschen*.

Ouvrard (2014) *Les principaux aspects pratiques de la mission d’interprétation consécutive officielle*.

Taylor-Bouladon (2007) *Conference Interpreting: Principles and Practice*.