

By Kimberly Scamman
Apr 21, 2017
Face to Face Interpretation
Working with an Interpreter

Working with an Interpreter: 11 Tips to Success!

1. Brief the interpreter prior to a conversation.

Familiarizing the interpreter with essential information like who, what, where, and why will give the session a more seamless and professional flow. Also, briefing the interpreter on any point that may be sensitive will allow the interpreter to provide the appropriate tone for such issues.

2. The interpreter is there to purely translate what is being said.

Even when the simplest questions are asked, a trained interpreter will not assume your answer, or answer for you on your behalf. Your interpreter is a neutral presence providing communication and understanding, but is not meant to be involved in the conversation.

3. Ask interpreter not to change or alter any part of the conversation.

A professional, trained interpreter will not alter the conversation. They are there to simply provide interpretation and understanding. If you are not used to working with an interpreter, understanding that the conversation is not being altered, but is a direct interpretation will help you to know that effective communication is taking place.

4. Speak clearly and in a normal tone.

Your interpreter may be trained to work at a quick pace, but it is important for clarity and accuracy to speak clearly and slowly. Speaking too rapidly, not pausing, or being unclear may result in information having to be repeated or clarified. This tip for working with an interpreter ensures minimal delays and disruptions to the interpretation process.

5. Allow more time for interpreted communication.

Sometimes with emergencies and last-minute meetings, time constraints may be a factor, but especially for meetings planned in advance, be sure to allow enough time for the interpretation process. Being rushed for time leads to ineffective communication in any setting, but when language barriers are involved, it is important to have the time to make sure everyone is understood.

6. Be aware of cultural factors.

When language barriers are present, there can also be cultural differences that may impede your meeting if you are not aware of them. Being prepared and understanding cultural differences will result in a more effective conversation and interpretation when working with an interpreter.

7. Refrain from using metaphors, acronyms, slangs or idioms.

While your interpreter is knowledgeable of metaphors and slang which are used frequently, such cultural phrases may not translate well into the target language. You will want to use more plain language, except for industry-related terminologies, such as business, finance, and medical terminology (as it relates). Use simple yet concise wording that will easily be translatable, making the process of working with an interpreter smooth and productive.

8. Remember to pause between sentences or complete thoughts.

Try not to interrupt when the interpreter is translating and listen to the entire string interpretation before responding. Remembering this tip will allow the best use of time, complete expression, and minimize any redundancy, or having to re-explain.

9. Speak directly to the non-English speaker, not the interpreter.

Remember, the interpreter is purely there to interpret for you and to provide understanding, but they are not part of the conversation. Speak directly to the non-English speaker, and look at them (not the interpreter) in a face-to-face or video remote meeting.

10. Treat the interpreter as a professional.

Interpreters are trained professionals and treating them this way will make your client/patient feel at ease with the conversation and give you the best results for effective communication.

11. Permit only one person to speak at a time.

Make sure in a session with an interpreter that only one person is speaking and avoid interrupting. This can confuse the conversation, and take more time if things are needed to be repeated or re-explained. Remembering this tip will provide the most accurate interpretation and flow of conversation.

Arming yourself with these simple tips will help you communicate effectively and get the most out of working with an interpreter.