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## Standard Guide for Language Interpretation Services<sup>1</sup>

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### 1. Scope

1.1 This guide identifies the components of quality language interpretation services and establishes criteria for each component. These criteria define the minimum standard of quality services in the language interpretation industry with reference to distinctive characteristics of specific settings. The needs analysis identifies a procedure for making an informed choice of interpretation services. In the language industry, translation refers to the translation of a written text, whereas interpretation refers to the translation of spoken or signed communication.

### 2. Professional Judgment Caveat

2.1 *This guide offers an organized collection of information and does not recommend a specific course of action. This document cannot replace education or experience and should be used in conjunction with professional judgment. Not all aspects of this guide may be applicable in all circumstances. This ASTM standard is not intended to represent or replace the standard of care by which the adequacy of a given professional service shall be judged, nor should this document be applied without consideration of a project's unique aspects. The word "Standard" in the title of this document means only that the document has been approved through the ASTM consensus process.*

### 3. Definitions of Interpretation

3.1 *interpretation*—the process of understanding and analyzing a spoken or signed message and re-expressing that message faithfully, accurately and objectively in another language, taking the cultural and social context into account.

3.2 *simultaneous interpretation*—a highly complex cognitive activity that requires the interpreter to listen, analyze, comprehend, convert, edit, and reproduce in real time a speaker or signer's message while the speaker or signer continues to speak or sign, in a specific social context.

3.3 *consecutive interpretation*—a highly complex cognitive activity that requires the interpreter to listen, analyze,

comprehend, convert, edit, and reproduce the original message after the speaker or signer pauses, in a specific social context. Consecutive interpretation is likely to take longer than simultaneous, because the interpreter does not interpret while the speaker or signer is speaking or signing.

### 4. Referenced Documents

#### 4.1 ASTM Standards:<sup>2</sup>

F1562 [Guide for Use-Oriented Foreign Language Instruction](#)

#### 4.2 ISO/IEC Standards:<sup>3</sup>

IEC 60914:1998 [Conference Systems: Electrical and Audio Requirements](#) [Conference Systems: Electrical and Audio Requirements](#)

ISO 2603:1998 [Booths for Simultaneous Interpretation—General Characteristics and Equipment](#) [Booths for Simultaneous Interpretation—General Characteristics and Equipment](#)

ISO 4043:1998 [Mobile Booths for Simultaneous Interpretation—General Characteristics and Equipment](#) [Mobile Booths for Simultaneous Interpretation—General Characteristics and Equipment](#)

#### 4.3 Other Documents:

[Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990](#)  
[Bern Convention for the Protection of Literary or Artistic Works](#)

[Civil Rights Act of 1964](#)

[Executive Order 13166, August 11, 2000](#)

[Guidance Memorandum; Title VI Prohibition Against National Origin Discrimination—Persons with Limited English Proficiency, Office for Civil Rights, Department of Health and Human Services, August 2000](#)

[Patient's Bill of Rights, American Hospital Association, 1978](#)

[Universal Convention on Copyright](#)

[U.S. Department of Justice: Enforcement of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964—National Origin Discrimination](#)

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<sup>2</sup> For referenced ASTM standards, visit the ASTM website, [www.astm.org](http://www.astm.org), or contact ASTM Customer Service at [service@astm.org](mailto:service@astm.org). For *Annual Book of ASTM Standards* volume information, refer to the standard's Document Summary page on the ASTM website.

<sup>3</sup> Available from American National Standards Institute (ANSI), 25 W. 43rd St., 4th Floor, New York, NY 10036, <http://www.ansi.org>.

Against Persons With Limited English Proficiency, “LEP Guidance,” August 11, 2000  
 28 U.S.C. § 1827 Federal Court Interpreters Act (1978 Court Interpreters Act and 1988 Amendment)

5. Terminology

5.1 Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:

5.1.1 *active language*—a working language into which an interpreter interprets.

5.1.2 “A” *language*—a language in which the interpreter has educated native proficiency in speaking and listening (see Tables 1 and 2).

5.1.3 *bidirectional interpreting*—interpretation between two languages where each functions as both a source and target language (for example, an attorney-client interview where each speaks a different language).

TABLE 1 Levels of Speaking Proficiency<sup>A</sup>

Level	Description
0	No Proficiency Survival Proficiency
0+	Able to satisfy immediate needs such as for lodging, meals, and transportation, using memorized or rehearsed speech only. No fluency.
1	Minimal Functional Proficiency Able to satisfy minimum courtesy requirements and maintain very simple conversations on familiar or rehearsed topics. Experiences frequent misunderstandings. Examples—Can exchange greetings, elicit predictable information, and explain routine procedures in a restricted way.
2	Limited Functional Proficiency Able to handle routine daily interactions that are limited in scope. Able to handle confidently, but not fluently, most social conversations on such topics as current events, work, family, etc. Examples—Can typically ask and answer predictable questions in the workplace and receive and provide straightforward direction.
3	General Functional Proficiency Able to speak the language with sufficient fluency and accuracy to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social, and professional topics. However, there are noticeable linguistic and cultural imperfections that limit the individual's ability to participate in more sophisticated interactions such as high-level negotiation. Can typically discuss particular interests and special fields of competence with ease. Examples—Can use the language as part of normal professional duties such as answering objections, clarifying points, justifying decisions, understanding the essence of challenges, stating and defending policy, conducting meetings, delivering briefings, etc. Can reliably elicit information and informed opinion from native speakers.
4	Full Functional Proficiency Able to use language fluently and accurately on all levels pertinent to professional needs. Examples—Understands the details and ramifications of concepts that are culturally or conceptually different from one's own. Can set the tone of interpersonal, official, semi-official, professional, and nonprofessional verbal exchanges with a representative range of native speakers (for all audiences, purposes, tasks, and settings). Can play an effective role among native speakers in such contexts as negotiations, conferences, lectures, and debates on matters of disagreement. Can advocate a position at length, both formally and in chance encounters, using sophisticated verbal strategies.
5	Educated Native Proficiency

<sup>A</sup> A plus sign after Levels 1 through 4 (that is, 1+, 2+, 3+, and 4+) indicates the ability to handle successfully all of the functions of that level and, inconsistently, some of those of the next.

TABLE 2 Levels of Listening Proficiency<sup>A</sup>

Level	Description
0	No Proficiency Survival Proficiency
0+	Able to understand short phrases based on memorized material. Slightly longer phrases may need to be repeated and frequent pauses included to be understood.
1	Minimal Functional Proficiency Able to understand very simple statements, questions, and face-to-face conversations concerning some familiar situations and many basic needs. Repetition and slower speech are necessary for understanding.
2	Limited Functional Proficiency Able to understand most routine conversations spoken at a normal pace relating to social and occupational situations. Some difficulty understanding common structures and vocabulary remains; occasional repetition is still needed.
3	General Functional Proficiency Able to understand almost all conversations spoken at a normal pace without repetitions, including discussions within the individual's occupation; readily understands phone conversations and broadcasts, but still experiences some difficulty with very fast speech, slang, and cultural references.
4	Full Functional Proficiency Able to understand all discussions, no matter how complex, within the listener's experience; able to understand most cultural references as well as manipulations of the language including persuasion, negotiation, conjecture, and humor.
5	Educated Native Proficiency

<sup>A</sup> A plus sign after Levels 1 through 4 (that is, 1+, 2+, 3+, and 4+) indicates the ability to handle successfully all of the functions of that level and, inconsistently, some of those of the next.

5.1.4 “B” *language*—a language in which the interpreter has full functional proficiency in speaking and listening (see Tables 1 and 2).

5.1.5 “C” *language*—a language in which the interpreter has full functional proficiency in listening (see Table 2).

5.1.6 *client*—an individual, institution or other entity that procures interpretation services.

5.1.7 *consultant interpreter*—an interpreter who contracts directly with a client to provide all interpretation services necessary, as well as related administrative and organizational tasks for the event.

5.1.8 *domain*—the subject matter, field, sector or industry.

5.1.9 *language combination*—the set of working languages of an individual interpreter.

5.1.10 *limited English proficiency (LEP)*—a legal concept referring to a level of English proficiency that is insufficient to ensure equal access to public services provided in English without an interpreter.

5.1.11 *multidirectional interpreting*—interpretation between two or more source and target languages.

5.1.12 *passive language*—a working language out of which an interpreter interprets.

5.1.13 *provider*—an entity (for example, an interpretation agency, consultant interpreter, or technological equipment company, that contracts to deliver interpretation services or a component thereof).

5.1.14 *relay interpreting*—using an interpretation of the original message as a secondary source language for interpretation into another target language (for example, an utterance

in Japanese is interpreted directly into English, and that English output is the basis for the interpretation into French).

5.1.15 *remote interpretation*—interpretation provided by an interpreter who is not on site (for example, interpretation via telephone or videoconferencing).

5.1.16 *setting*—the domain and the type of event for which interpretation is provided.

5.1.17 *sight translation*—translation of a written document into spoken/signed language.

5.1.18 *source language*—the language of a speaker/signer who is being interpreted.

5.1.19 *target language*—the language of the person receiving interpretation.

5.1.20 *type of event*—the physical location, number of participants and type of discourse.

5.1.21 *unidirectional interpreting*—interpretation from only one source language (for example, a main speaker’s presentation being interpreted for listeners).

5.1.22 *whisper interpreting*—whispered simultaneous interpretation, without equipment, for one or two listeners.

5.1.23 *working language*—a language an interpreter uses professionally.

**6. Summary of Guide**

6.1 When two or more people are unable to communicate with each other due to language differences, they need an interpreter. The interpreter’s task is to remove the language barrier to the extent possible. The interpreter enables the participants to communicate in real time almost as if there were no language barrier. The participants should be aware that everything said or signed will be interpreted and that all participants should interact directly with each other as if they were in a monolingual environment.

6.2 When interpreting, the interpreter may speak/sign either at the same time (simultaneous interpretation) or after the speaker/signer pauses (consecutive interpretation; see 3.2, 3.3, and 10.1).

6.3 The interpretation may be from one language into another only (unidirectional) or back and forth between languages (bi- or multi-directional).

6.4 The setting in which the interpretation takes place will dictate the particulars of how the interpretation is carried out (see Section 11).

6.5 In certain settings, the provision of interpreters is mandated by governmental and/or regulatory bodies (for example, Executive Order 13166, August 11, 2000 and US Department of Justice “LEP Guidance,” August 11, 2000).

**7. Significance and Use**

7.1 This guide is intended to serve clients and providers of language interpretation services and the institutions providing professional training for interpreters. It is the responsibility of clients and providers of language services to ensure that participants in interpreted events are informed of how to best make use of interpretation services.

7.2 To ensure quality interpretation, the following components shall be considered. These components are discussed in detail in subsequent sections.

7.2.1 *Interpreter Qualifications*—Assists the client and provider in determining the interpreter qualifications appropriate to the need at hand. These qualifications consist of command of languages, interpreting skills, and knowledge of subject matter (see Section 8).

7.2.2 *Needs Analysis*—Assists the client in determining the components of the service which correspond to the most appropriate, reliable, cost-effective, and efficient solution for the need at hand. Provides the client with a process for the procurement of high quality interpretation services (see Section 9).

7.2.3 *Elements Common to All Interpreted Events*—Describes factors that all interpretation settings share (see Section 10).

7.2.4 *Settings*—Assists the client and provider in identifying factors specific to interpretation in a given setting, which may include a description of the domain and type of event, mode of interpretation, interpreter qualifications, responsibilities of all participants as well as limitations and complicating factors in specific settings (see Section 11).

7.2.5 *Technological Requirements*—Describes the equipment for particular modes of interpretation that may be used in specific settings and types of events (see Section 12).

7.2.6 *Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct*—Defines a code of ethics and professional conduct for interpreters. All professional interpreters are expected to adhere to this code (see Section 13).

7.2.7 *Responsibilities of Providers*—Defines the responsibilities of providers to clients and interpreters when offering and implementing interpretation services (see Section 14).

7.2.8 *Responsibilities of Clients*—Describes responsibilities of clients to providers and interpreters that are not covered elsewhere in this guide (see Section 15).

**8. Interpreter Qualifications**

8.1 Interpretation is a complex, demanding task that requires an excellent command of languages, possession of skills and abilities specific to interpretation, and knowledge of the subject matter being interpreted. Bilingualism alone is insufficient.

8.2 *Command of Languages:*

8.2.1 Languages that interpreters use professionally are usually referred to as working languages (see Fig. 1). Interpreters shall constantly maintain their working languages at a high level of proficiency.

Working Languages		
Active Language (Working Language Into and Out of Which One Interprets)		Passive Language (Working Language Out of Which One Interprets)
“A” Language: Educated native speaking and listening proficiency (see Tables 1 and 2)	“B” Language: Full functional speaking and listening proficiency (see Tables 1 and 2)	“C” Language: Full functional listening proficiency (see Table 2)

FIG. 1 Working Languages



### 8.3 *Interpreting Skills and Abilities:*

8.3.1 In addition to the command of languages as described above, the interpretation process requires the following skills and abilities. These interpreting skills and abilities may be documented through formal training in the skill of interpretation, testing, a degree, certification, and professional experience. Interpreting skills and abilities include:

8.3.1.1 *Attention Skills*—In order to listen at a high level of concentration, enabling the interpreter to analyze the meaning of the message completely and accurately at all times;

8.3.1.2 *Analytical Skills*—In order to construe the meaning of the message completely and accurately under severe time constraints;

8.3.1.3 *Memory Skills*—In order to retain the message long enough to render it completely and accurately in the target language while under stress;

8.3.1.4 *Language Transfer Skills*—In order to rapidly and efficiently find the congruent expression in the target language.

8.3.1.5 *Note-taking Skills*—In order to support memory in consecutive interpretation for spoken languages and, in language pairs with greater grammatical differences, simultaneous interpretation. The interpreter should have a note-taking system that is specific to the task of interpretation.

8.3.1.6 *Cultural Awareness*—In order to understand and render the message completely and accurately, including its culturally specific references and concepts;

8.3.1.7 *Clear and Audible Speech/Visible Signing*—In order to be heard and understood by the audience with little effort at all times;

8.3.1.8 *Demeanor Appropriate to Setting*—In order to avoid calling undue attention to him/herself, which detracts from the original speaker's message. Appropriate demeanor reflects the interpreter's professionalism and includes the ability to convey emotional content without mimicking the speaker;

8.3.1.9 *Adaptability*—In order to interpret in a wide variety of settings (see Section 11);

8.3.1.10 *Stamina*—In order to provide high quality interpretation for the duration of the assignment;

8.3.1.11 *Ability to Cope with Stress*—In order to balance the interpretation task and related factors, such as emotionally charged subject matter and settings, travel and public-speaking, which are an inherent part of interpreting.

### 8.4 *Knowledge of Subject Matter:*

8.4.1 The interpretation process also requires knowledge of the subject matter and its terminology.

8.4.1.1 In general, the interpreter should have a broad general education, including familiarity with the latest developments in a wide variety of fields and subject areas, which may include the following:

- (1) Post-secondary education or its equivalent,
- (2) The ability to familiarize him/herself with new fields rapidly and thoroughly, and
- (3) In-depth knowledge in one or more fields of specialization, which, in certain fields, includes certification through testing (for example, in legal and healthcare interpreting).

8.4.1.2 For a specific assignment, the interpreter should have a range of knowledge wide enough to understand and express complex and/or specialized subject matter in the field.

(1) To meet this objective, the interpreter needs to prepare in advance. For this purpose, the client shall provide the following:

(a) Access to all relevant documents, including speaker manuscripts and slides, case files, videotapes and other media, glossaries and terminology, as well as experts in the field, and

(b) The opportunity for organizers and speakers, parties, witnesses, patients and other participants to brief the interpreter before and during the assignment.

## 9. Needs Analysis

9.1 This section describes factors that clients, interpreters, and providers of interpretation services shall take into consideration in planning interpretation services. In order to ensure high quality interpretation, coordination between clients, interpreters and providers is necessary. To this end, the client should be prepared to provide background information on the event. The following factors should be considered during the needs analysis process: the setting and its venue, language needs and staffing, technological needs and the availability of preparatory documents and materials (see Fig. 2).

9.2 *Setting*—The needs analysis of the setting should identify:

9.2.1 The domain (for example, business and industry, health-care, law, public sector agencies),

9.2.2 Type of event (for example, field trip, press conference, classroom instruction, informational interview, live broadcast, negotiation, large meeting or assembly, small meeting, presentation, or telephone interpreting),

9.2.3 Objective of the event,

9.2.4 Duration of event,

9.2.5 When interpretation is needed (that is, scheduling of interpreters),

9.2.6 Number of people requiring interpretation (for example, an auditorium audience or large group, etc.),

9.2.7 Use of remote interpretation, either telephone or videoconference, and

9.2.8 Special needs.

9.3 *Venue*—The needs analysis of the venue should include the following:

9.3.1 Seating appropriate for interpreters and participants requiring interpretation,

9.3.2 Adequate lighting to ensure visibility,

9.3.3 Direct view of the room for the interpreter, as appropriate, and

9.3.4 Adequate working space for the interpreter, including a suitable chair, water and a glass,

9.3.5 *For Meetings:*

9.3.5.1 Type of facility reserved for the meeting (for example, hotel, conference center, office, or boardroom),

9.3.5.2 Reservations for room(s), including sufficient time to install, test, and remove equipment.

9.3.5.3 Size of the room(s) in square feet; number of people in the room requiring interpretation and/or receivers,

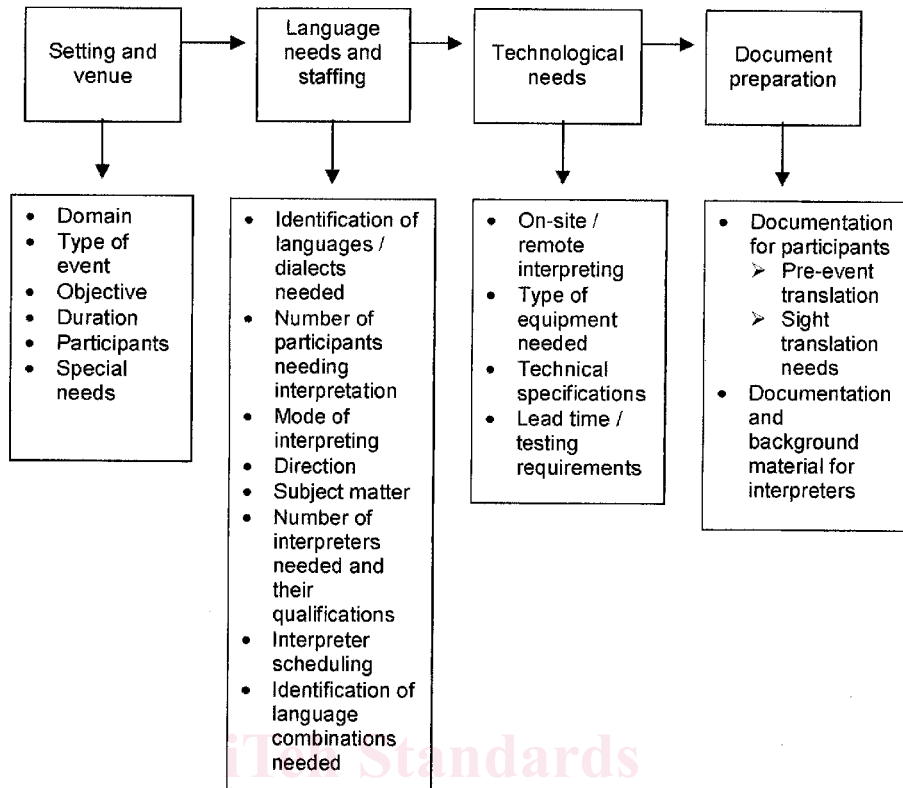


FIG. 2 Needs Analysis Process

9.3.5.4 Configuration of the room(s) (for example, theatre, classroom, hollow square or U-shape, boardroom),

9.3.5.5 Planned use of microphones (table, lapel, lavalier, roaming), both for speakers and participants who may ask questions, or for meetings of less than 10 participants,

9.3.5.6 Positioning of interpreter close enough to speaker(s) to hear/see and be heard/seen clearly by all participants needing the services,

9.3.5.7 For simultaneous interpretation, availability of built-in booths for spoken language interpretation and availability of an appropriate platform for signed language interpretation, and

9.3.5.8 Adequate space for portable booths or platforms, including positioning of booths so that the spoken language interpreters have a clear view of speakers and screens, and positioning of the signed language interpreter's platform so that the the signed language interpreter has a clear view of speakers and screens and the consumer also has a clear view of the interpreter.

9.3.6 *For Trials and Hearings:*

9.3.6.1 Availability of interpretation equipment in the courtroom,

9.3.6.2 Security limitations prohibiting the use of equipment in the courtroom. If so, contact court administrator, bailiff or sheriff,

9.3.6.3 Responsibility for handing out and explaining the use of equipment, and

9.3.6.4 Use of telephone interpreting.

9.3.7 For health-care settings, see Checklist for Health-Care Interpreting.

9.4 *Language Needs and Staffing*—The needs analysis of language should identify:

9.4.1 Language(s) the speakers/signers will use, their countries of origin, and special dialects if relevant,

9.4.2 Language(s) the listeners/signers will use, their countries of origin, and special dialects if relevant,

9.4.3 Source and target language combinations,

9.4.4 Number of listeners and speakers/signers,

9.4.5 Mode of interpretation, either consecutive or simultaneous, with or without equipment,

9.4.6 Subject matter of the event, including complexity of content and availability of background materials or transcripts of materials and presentations,

9.4.7 Number of interpreters needed, their qualifications, and their language combinations,

9.4.8 Match between the interpreters' language combinations and the source and target languages of the event,

9.4.9 Interpreter scheduling,

9.4.10 Linguistic, emotional or other stress factors of which the interpreter should be aware, and

9.4.11 Gender issues.

9.5 *Technological Needs*—Factors to consider:

9.5.1 Availability of adequate amperage in the room,

9.5.2 Special labor requirements,

**TABLE 3 Checklist for Health-Care Interpreting**

Encounter Information	
Patient/Health-Care Provider Name	_____
Time	_____
Date, Address	_____
Exact Location (hospital, department, home, etc.)	_____
Remote/Face-to-Face Interpretation	_____
Preferred Interpreter Gender	_____
Provisions for Privacy	_____
Subject Material	_____
Socio-cultural Considerations	_____
Number of Participants	_____
Number of Interpreters	_____
Encounter Length	_____
Language	
Languages to be Interpreted	_____
Variety, Dialect, Accent, Etc.	_____
Specialized Subject Matter and/or Terminology	_____
Mode/Type of Interpreting	
Simultaneous	_____
Consecutive	_____
Sight Translation	_____
Type of Encounter	
Medical Appointment	_____
Surgical Procedure	_____
Instruction	_____
Mental Health	_____
Rounds	_____
Other (administration, pharmacy, lab, etc.)	_____
Preparation/Support	
Documentation	_____
Briefing	_____
Debriefing	_____
Other	_____
Type of Equipment Needed	
Audio-Visual	_____
Speakerphone	_____
Cordless phone	_____
Video Conferencing	_____
Other	_____

- 9.5.5.5 Visibility between the interpreters and technicians,
- 9.5.5.6 Microphones with on/off switch for each interpreter,
- 9.5.5.7 Lighting with on/off switch for each interpreter that does not produce sound interference,
- 9.5.5.8 Sufficient table space at standard height for the comfortable use of resource materials, and
- 9.5.5.9 Inaccessibility of booths to anyone other than interpreters, except when a technician is needed.
- 9.5.6 *For Telephone Interpreting:*
  - 9.5.6.1 Feasible number of participants for conference calls,
  - 9.5.6.2 Central placement of speakerphones,
  - 9.5.6.3 Avoidance of cellular phones due to poor transmission quality and lack of confidentiality, and
  - 9.5.6.4 Telephone equipment with conference capability or special telephonic equipment that allows the interpreter to work in the simultaneous mode is preferred.
- 9.5.7 *For Videoconference and Broadcast Interpreting:*
  - 9.5.7.1 Prior consultation with interpreters about the feasibility of the project,
  - 9.5.7.2 Professional coordination of sound and video (see ISO 2603, ISO 4043, and IEC 60914,
  - 9.5.7.3 Sound-synchronized and high quality video allowing the interpreter to clearly distinguish facial expressions and gestures of speakers and participants,
  - 9.5.7.4 Awareness of additional stress factors of videoconferencing requiring appropriate workload management (for example, loss of nonverbal information and eye fatigue),
  - 9.5.7.5 Interpreters' ability to see the set or meeting rooms and all participants. If this is not possible for technical reasons, use of two color TV monitors, one showing the image being broadcast to the viewers and the other the rest of the set or meeting rooms, and
  - 9.5.7.6 Ability of the interpreters to communicate with the technicians at all times via an intercom system that does not interfere with the broadcast.
  - 9.5.7.7 *For Scripted and Pre-Recorded Programs:*
    - (1) Availability of script or log of the program for the interpreters,
    - (2) Appropriate synchronization of questions and answers, if applicable, and
    - (3) If visual sequences (video segments) are to be inserted, finishing of the interpretation before it is covered over by the sound track of the insert.
  - 9.5.7.8 *Credits*—Mentioning of interpreters' names, either flashed on screen during the interpretation or listed at the end with the other credits (see Universal Convention on Copyright and Bern Convention for the Protection of Literary or Artistic Works).
- 9.6 *Document Preparation*, including:
  - 9.6.1 Procurement of preparatory documents and materials for interpreters (for example, manuscripts, overhead transparencies, company and product information, and case files),
  - 9.6.2 Arrangements to provide the interpreters with last minute documents,
  - 9.6.3 Determination if translation is necessary, contracting of appropriate translation services, including:
    - 9.6.4 Pre-event translation (written),

- 9.5.3 Adequate testing before beginning interpretation, including:
  - 9.5.3.1 An opportunity to walk through the facility and check the status of the equipment,
  - 9.5.3.2 Testing microphones and earphones of the interpreters and all participants with the interpreters present,
  - 9.5.3.3 A trial run for staged or scripted events,
  - 9.5.3.4 Testing of telephone and/or satellite connections, and
  - 9.5.3.5 Verification that there is no sound interference and that the interpreters do not hear their own voices in their earphones.
- 9.5.4 *Sound:*
  - 9.5.4.1 Sufficient volume and fidelity,
  - 9.5.4.2 Lightweight earphones with no thick padding,
  - 9.5.4.3 Sound in both ears,
  - 9.5.4.4 Monophonic headphones,
  - 9.5.4.5 Interpreter-operated volume control, and
  - 9.5.4.6 Cough button.
- 9.5.5 *Booths:*
  - 9.5.5.1 Soundproofing,
  - 9.5.5.2 Technical capability to work in both directions from one booth,
  - 9.5.5.3 Ventilation without excessive noise,
  - 9.5.5.4 Visibility between booths to allow communication between interpreters,