

KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND ABILITIES (KSAs) FOR THE PROFESSION OF COURT INTERPRETATION

The following is a part of and must be read in conjunction with the Court Interpreting Test Results section of the [Overview For Examinees Taking the Court Interpreter Oral Exam \(Overview\)](#).

What knowledge, skills, and abilities are needed to become a court interpreter?

A helpful way to consider the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) of court interpreters is the comprehensive itemization issued in 2007 by a research report commissioned by the Judicial Council of California.¹ The KSAs they determined to be “essential for the performance of court interpretation” appear below.² Again, please ask yourself two questions about **each** KSA: (1) Do I currently have this KSA? (2) If not, what am I willing and able to do to obtain each of these KSAs?

Linguistic Skills

- Native-like proficiency in all working languages;
- Ability to think and react communicatively in all working languages;
- Knowledge and use of a broad range of vocabulary, including legal terminology, subject-specific terminology, and slang; and
- Knowledge and use of cultural nuances, regional variations, idiomatic expressions, and colloquialisms in all working languages.

Speaking Skills

- Ability to speak with proper pronunciation, diction, and intonation in all working languages;
- Ability to speak with a neutralized accent in all working languages; and
- Ability to project and/or speak softly.

Listening Comprehension Skills

- Ability to listen to and comprehend different rates of speech in all working languages;
- Ability to listen to and comprehend various regional accents and/or dialect differences in all working languages; and
- Ability to ignore auditory distractions and focus on source speaker.

Reading Comprehension Skills

- Ability to read and comprehend overall meaning and specific details of written text in all working languages.
- Ability to read and recognize various written contexts, including formal and informal text, subject-specific vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and colloquialisms; and
- Ability to read quickly and with little preparation.

Interpreting Skills

- Ability to concentrate and focus;
- Ability to process linguistic information quickly;
- Ability to make quick linguistic decisions regarding word choice or terminology selection;
- Ability to apply short-term memory skills in retaining small units of information;
- Ability to think analytically;
- Ability to utilize predictive thinking skills to anticipate incoming messages;

1 *Study of California's Court Interpreter Certification and Registration Testing, 2007.*

2 *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

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- Ability to convey meaning;
- Ability to provide transference from one language to another;
- Ability to preserve accuracy;
- Ability to select appropriate equivalents for vocabulary or phrases;
- Ability to accommodate for lack of equivalents in vocabulary or phrases;
- Ability to conserve intent, tone, style, and utterances of all messages;
- Ability to reflect register; and
- Ability to self-monitor and self-correct.

Behavioral Skills

- Ability to practice and follow ethical standards;
- Ability to conduct business in a professional manner;
- Knowledge and awareness of cultural aspects that affect language;
- Ability to work in various settings, situations, or conditions;
- Ability to project self-confidence and self-awareness when interpreting; and
- Knowledge and continued learning of social, technological, and legal changes that affect language.

In his comments on that report to the Judicial Council of California, Robert Joe Lee³ identified several additional KSAs that you should also consider as vital to the day-to-day work of an Arabic court interpreter:

- Ability to exercise situational control appropriately (e.g., knowing how to handle impediments to performing court interpreting duties and having the fortitude to do so);
- Ability to switch back and forth among the various modes of interpretation appropriately;
- Ability to use note-taking techniques effectively to supplement short-term memory;
- Ability to work effectively and productively on a team of interpreters (teams of two or more interpreters are important if not essential in proceedings that last two hours or longer);
- Ability to prepare for assignments, including knowing when and how to request appropriate information;
- Ability to use equipment appropriately, especially simultaneous and telephone interpreting devices; and
- Ability to use professional judgment flowing from professional codes of conduct and conform one's practice to the interpreter's role and functions.

³ "Comments on the Study of California's Court Interpreter Certification and Registration Testing," December 14, 2007.