

ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR TRANSLATORS

This course is designed for novice translators and for translators who may not have had opportunities to take training classes taught by professional translators.

The information you acquire in this course will increase your knowledge of professional translating skills, start you off with good habits and encourage you to pursue further training.

*Created by Courtney Searls-Ridge and David W. Cotlove
Developed with the support of the Highline Public Schools in Burien, WA,
and funding from a U.S. Dept. of Education International Research and Studies
grant.*

2.Important Terminology

Let's look at just a few important terms used by professional translators.

2.1 Source text, target text

Source text is the text a translator is given to translate into another language (in other words, the original text or the text you start with).

Target text is the translation of the source text (in other words, the final text or the text you end up with).

2.2 Equivalent effect

Equivalent effect is when your target text has the same meaning and the same impact on the reader as the source text.

For example, if the source text is persuasive, your target text should also be persuasive. Or, if the source text makes the reader laugh, your target text should also make the reader laugh.

2.3 Register

Register is the level of formality or form of language used for a particular situation. Your translation should have the same register as the source text.

Examples of different registers are:

Formal: official or technical language.

Example: I am requesting that you stop talking.

Casual: language used in ordinary conversation or writing, that is, informal or colloquial.

Example: Be quiet!

Slang: language that is very informal, used more in speech than in writing, often used by a specific group of people.

Example: Shut up!

Taboo: language that is unacceptable and/or offensive.
Example: Shut the &%\$# up!

3. Project Requirements

Before undertaking a translation project, you want to find out about the project requirements.

3.1 Investigating the requirements

You want to learn enough about the project to be sure that you have the necessary:

1. **languages**
1. **background and experience**
1. **time and/or other resources**

3.2 The source and target languages

Your dominant language is the language that is strongest, the one you feel most comfortable speaking, reading, and writing. Your dominant language is usually, but not necessarily, your first language.

Professional translators translate *into* their dominant language because they are better writers in their dominant language. They translate *from* their non-dominant languages. So the source text is in your non-dominant language and the target text is in your dominant language.

If the project matches your languages and the direction you translate into, then you will want to inquire further about the project requirements.

3.3 Project details

You will want to know about:

The source text

By looking through the source document you can determine the subject, the purpose of the document, and the size of the translation project.

The deadline

You need to know if you will be given enough time to do a quality job. If you know you can't meet the deadline, then there is little point in asking for more information.

The target text

You need to know if the translation is for publication (any kind of distribution) or for information only (internal use). Or maybe only a summary or outline of the source text is needed in order to decide whether or not the entire text needs to be translated at all.

You also need to know about the intended readership of the translation and how the target text will be distributed and used.

3.4 Are you the right person for this project?

You now have enough information to know whether or not to pursue the project. The key issues are:

Do you have the necessary background and experience to translate a document about this topic for its intended purpose and intended readers?

You should not accept projects for which you are not qualified.

Do you have time and/or other resources to do a good job on this project?

You should not accept projects with deadlines that you can't meet or that would require you to compromise the quality of your translation in order to meet the deadline.

3.5 Additional project details

If the project is a good fit for your languages, background, experience and schedule, then you need more details.

What to translate

You want to pin down exactly what needs to be translated and whether you will receive the source text as a printed document (hard copy) or as an electronic file. It's also important to know if the source text is finalized or if there will be ongoing changes. Ongoing changes complicate the translation process and make your job more difficult.

What resources are available?

If there is already a translation glossary (list of translations for commonly used terms) available, you will want to make use of it. It's also important to know who will be available to answer questions, and to have contact information for that person.

What are the delivery requirements?

The details of delivery must be agreed on. Important points include the delivery format (for example, specific electronic file format, hard copy) and delivery method (for example, e-mail, fax, regular mail).

4. The Process of Translation

Let's look at how a professional translator goes about a translation. The process of translation requires executing a series of steps.

4.1 The 10-Step Process of Translation

Once the requirements of a translation project are clear, the ten steps of the translation process are:

First Draft Translation

1. Analyze the text
2. Research
3. Develop a translation glossary
4. Write the first draft

Intermediate Draft Translations

5. Edit for style
6. Format the translation

Final Translation

7. Review for accuracy

8. Proofread
9. Deliver the project
10. Request feedback about the translation

5. First Draft Translation

You have quite a bit of preparation work to do before you begin to write your first draft.

5.1 Step 1: Analyze the text

The first thing you do is read through the entire source text to get a general understanding and to learn the register (formal, casual, slang, taboo) and tone (for example, polite, angry, humorous, serious).

Experienced translators know that a text is not just a series of words that can be translated one at a time. Rather, the text has meaning and must be thoroughly understood before beginning to translate it. So, one goal of the analysis step is to identify parts of the text — words, phrases, sentences or longer sections — that you do not clearly understand.

Understanding the entire text is just the beginning. You must also be able to translate the text into another language. So, another goal of text analysis is to identify parts of the source text that may be difficult to translate into your target language. It may be that you simply don't know the word in the target language or it may be that there is no exact equivalent in the target language or culture.

During the analysis step, you will also note other issues to consider, such as industry-specific or document-specific words to add to your glossary and document formatting requirements.

5.2 Step 2: Research

During the analysis step, you identified words, phrases, sentences or longer parts that you may not fully understand. Now you can use every available resource (dictionaries, the Internet, native speakers and other translators) to help you understand everything in the source text.

Also, during the analysis step, you identified parts of the source text that may be difficult for you to translate. Now you must determine the best way to express these ideas in your target language. Here again, you can make use of monolingual dictionaries, bilingual dictionaries, the Internet, native speakers and other translators.

If the translation will be read in multiple regions, you have to avoid regional usage. This requires consulting multiple dictionaries or other sources. On the other hand, if the translation is for a specific region, you will have to select appropriate regional usage.

In practice, the analysis and research steps are not separate and distinct. In order to understand the text, you will probably do some research before completing your analysis. Also, during the research step, other issues may come up that require further analysis of the text. The point is you must both analyze and research until

you understand the entire text and have a clear idea how to express the ideas in your target language.

5.3 Step 3: Develop a translation glossary

During the analysis step, you will encounter words, phrases, names, abbreviations and acronyms that are unique to this document or industry. You will determine the best translation for most of these during your research.

It is important that you translate these document-specific or industry-specific words, phrases, names, abbreviations and acronyms the same way each time they are used. Readers get confused when terminology is not used consistently.

So, as you work you develop a translation glossary, a bilingual dictionary for all of these terms. This makes it easier for you to be consistent with terminology.

5.4 Step 4: Write the first draft

Now you are ready to begin your first draft. At this point, it is best if you write freely, striving to let the words flow naturally in your target language.

Despite your best efforts during the analysis and research steps, you will still encounter problems when you actually start your first draft. You can wait to address these issues until you have finished your first draft. If a word does not come to mind, you might simply leave that word in the source language, plan to return to it later, and continue to write freely.

When you get to the end of your draft, you can go back and look at the problem areas. This time around, the right word might just come to you, or you might have to do more research to find a solution.

Now it's time to take a break! A little distance from the text will prove helpful before you begin to edit.

6. Intermediate Draft Translations

Once you have your first draft, you must refine it. This will involve several intermediate drafts.

6.1 Step 5: Edit for style

Editing for style goes beyond making sure there are no grammatical errors. Your translation must sound right in the target language. It should not sound like a translation. Your translation should seem correct and natural to a native speaker of your target language.

Also, translations must have an equivalent effect in the target language. A reader of the target text should react the same way as a reader of the source text.

These are your objectives while editing for style.

It's often helpful to read the text aloud, to hear if the text sounds right and has the same impact.

6.2 Step 6: Format the translation

Your translation should be formatted exactly like the original document. During this step make sure that everything below matches the source document:

Font style

Font size

Spacing

Indenting

Centering

Left or right justification

Special characters

Bold

Italics

Underlined text

Colors

Columns or tables

Borders or shading

Bullets or numbering

Embedded graphics or photos

7. Final Translation

The final translation must be free of errors.

7.1 Step 7: Review for accuracy

Compare the source text and your target text sentence by sentence. Check each sentence to make sure that your translation is accurate and complete and that you did not leave out any sentences.

7.2 Step 8: Proofread

Read the entire document, looking carefully for missing accent marks, incorrect word endings, punctuation errors, capitalization or spelling mistakes, and formatting problems.

It is always a good idea to have someone else proofread your translation after you have proofread it.

7.3 Step 9: Deliver the project

Deliver your translation on time, in the agreed upon form (for example, electronic file or hard copy) and using the agreed upon method of delivery.

File your documents and any notes that might be useful for future projects.

7.4 Step 10: Request feedback about the translation

The final step is to follow up by phone with the person you did the translation for and ask for feedback on the translation. If he or she is in any way dissatisfied, you may be able to correct any problems or misunderstandings. And if everyone is happy with the end result, your follow up phone call may lead to additional work.

7.4.1 Chapter Review

Select the appropriate answer for each question. When you are done, click the **Grade the Test** button to submit your answers and find out your score.

1. Prior to writing your first draft translation, you should:
 A. identify text that you do not understand and then research the meaning
 B. identify text that will be difficult to translate and research the best way to do so
 C. build a translation glossary
 D. all of the above
2. When editing for style, you should make sure that:
 A. your translation flows and seems natural to a native speaker of the target language
 B. your translation has the same effect in the target language as in the source language
 C. both of the above
3. Unless you have been told otherwise, your translation should be formatted exactly like the source document.
 True
 False
4. When reviewing for accuracy, you should compare each sentence in the source text and the target text to be sure that the meaning is faithful to the original and that you have not left out any sentences.
 True
 False
5. The last step before delivering your translation is:
 A. Formatting
 B. Proofreading