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;

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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.