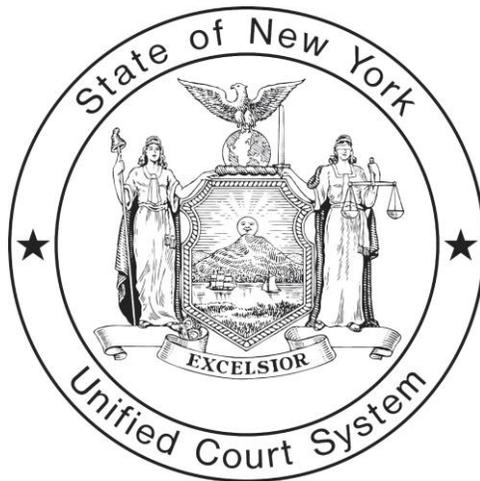


NEW YORK STATE UNIFIED COURT SYSTEM

**ORIENTATION GUIDE
For Court Interpreter (Spanish) Oral Performance Test**



Examination Number 45-818

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This Orientation Guide for the Court Interpreter Oral Performance Test is provided to all applicants who have passed the written portion (Section I) of the Court Interpreter (Spanish) Examination (# 45-818). Applicants will be scheduled in the next few weeks for the Oral Performance Test (Section II) which they must pass in order to be placed on the hiring eligibility list.

The following guide gives a brief summary of the work and importance of Court Interpreters to the New York State Unified Court System and describes the format and content of the oral performance test. It also provides some suggestions to help applicants prepare for the test.

This guide and the general examination announcement (# 45-818) should provide all the information applicants need to take the test for the Court Interpreter (Spanish) position in the New York State Unified Court System.

I. INTRODUCTION

Court Interpreters provide a crucial service in ensuring fair and equal treatment of non-English speaking court users in the New York State Unified Court System (UCS).

It is a basic right of all criminal defendants to be allowed to assist in their own defense by being present at their trial and understanding the proceedings. The New York State Courts have ruled that criminal defendants who do not understand the English language are entitled to have the proceedings interpreted for them in a language that they can understand. Failure to provide an interpreter where one is needed, may render a criminal trial constitutionally defective. Similarly, in civil matters, where a party or witness does not speak the English language, the court has the authority to appoint an interpreter. N.Y. Judiciary law § 387 provides for the temporary appointment of an interpreter in any court if the services of an interpreter are necessary.

All Spanish court interpreters employed by the New York State Unified Court System must be proficient in both English and Spanish languages. Court interpreters must also be able to provide these services in an impartial manner by adhering to strict professional and ethical standards.

II. TYPICAL ACTIVITIES

The duties of a court interpreter vary from day to day and depend on the type of court and its location. Typically, a court interpreter interprets in a civil, criminal or family court proceeding (e.g., arraignment, motion, pretrial conference, preliminary hearing, deposition, trial) for a witness, defendant or a party who does not speak or understand the English language. In performing such functions, court interpreters must accurately interpret for individuals with varying educational backgrounds without changing the *register* (level of language) of the speaker. Interpreters are also responsible for translating written documents, often legal in nature, from English into Spanish and from Spanish into English.

III. DESCRIPTION OF ORAL PERFORMANCE TEST

The oral performance examination is individually administered by a proctor. Applicants are presented with materials that court interpreters typically encounter in courtroom situations. Applicants are required to interpret from English to Spanish and from Spanish to English. The oral performance examination consists of the following six (6) sections:

1. Sight Translation (English to Spanish)
2. Sight Translation (Spanish to English)
3. Consecutive Question and Answer (English and Spanish)
4. One-Voice Simultaneous (English to Spanish)
5. One-Voice Simultaneous (Spanish to English)
6. Two-Voice Simultaneous (English to Spanish)

Sections 1 and 2 are court-related documents and Sections 3 through 6 are simulated courtroom situations presented in an audiovisual format. Each section of the oral performance test indicates the required mode of interpreting to be used. When applicants are interpreting, they should speak in a clear and normal tone of voice; all applicant responses are audio-recorded. The duration of the oral performance exam is approximately one (1) hour.

Section 1 - Sight Translation: English to Spanish

This section of the exam assesses applicants' ability to sight translate from English to Spanish. Applicants are presented with a court-related document in English and are then required to orally translate the document into Spanish. Documents used for this section of the exam typically include excerpts from legal documents or affidavits from witnesses.

Section 2 - Sight Translation: Spanish to English

This section of the exam assesses applicants' ability to sight translate from Spanish to English. Applicants are presented with a court-related document in Spanish and are then required to orally translate the document into English. Documents used for this section of the exam typically include witness statements or other legal documents written in Spanish.

The applicant is presented with both Section 1 and Section 2 (two documents) together and will have five (5) minutes to review the two documents. Then, the applicant is given ten (10) minutes to orally interpret the two documents. The proctor will stop the applicant after the 10-minute mark even if the applicant has not finished interpreting both of the documents.

Section 3 - Consecutive Interpretation: This section of the exam assesses applicants' skills in consecutive interpreting. Applicants are presented with a video of a witness being questioned by an attorney. In this video, the attorney is questioning the witness in English, and the witness is responding to the questions in Spanish. Applicants must wait for the question or statement in English to be completed before beginning to interpret into Spanish. When the witness responds in Spanish, applicants interpret the response into English. Applicants must continue to consecutively interpret from English to Spanish and Spanish to English. Source texts for this section of the exam include excerpts from transcripts of direct or cross-examinations of Spanish-speaking witnesses during actual trials.

Section 4 - One-Voice Simultaneous Interpreting: English to Spanish: This section of the exam assesses applicants' skills in simultaneous interpreting from English to Spanish. Applicants are presented with a video of one person speaking in English and are required to interpret from English to Spanish while the person is speaking (simultaneously). Applicants must be able to listen to what is being said and interpret at the same time, usually, at a speed of only a few words behind the speaker (known as "shadowing"). Source texts for this section of the exam include excerpts from judge's instructions to a jury, opening statements or closing arguments.

Section 5 - One-Voice Simultaneous Interpreting: Spanish to English: This section of the exam assesses applicants' skills in simultaneous interpreting from Spanish to English. Applicants are presented with a video of one person speaking in Spanish and are required to interpret from Spanish to English while the person is speaking (simultaneously). Applicants must be able to listen to what is being said and interpret at the same time, usually, at a speed of only a few words behind the speaker ("shadowing"). Source texts for this section of the exam include excerpts from victim impact statements or depositions.

Section 6 - Two-Voice Simultaneous Interpreting: English to Spanish: This section of the exam assesses applicants' skills in simultaneous interpreting. Applicants are presented with a video of a dialogue between two individuals in a legal proceeding who are both speaking in English. Applicants are required to interpret both speakers from English into Spanish while the individuals are speaking (simultaneously). Applicants must be able to listen to what is being said and be able to interpret at the same time. Source texts for this section of the exam include excerpts taken from transcripts of actual court proceedings. Vocabulary in these materials may include some specialized medical, forensic, and legal terminology.

IV. ADMINISTRATION OF THE ORAL PERFORMANCE TEST

The oral performance test for the Court Interpreter (Spanish) consists of six (6) sections. This test is administered individually and applicants must prepare to spend at least an hour in the testing room, as there will be no breaks during the test.

The first two sections of this test (Section 1 and Section 2) - the sight translations - are written documents presented to the applicants. Sections 3 through 6 are presented in a video format with one or two individuals speaking in a simulated courtroom situation. Applicants are instructed before each section as to what mode of interpreting they should use.

All applicants must ensure that they can see and hear the video monitor adequately. They must notify the proctor if any adjustments are necessary. Once the performance test has started, **neither** the video **nor** the recordings can be stopped. Remember to continue interpreting even if some words or phrases are missed. All applicants' responses (audio only) are recorded to an audio file. Applicants will need to speak clearly into the microphone in a normal tone of voice.

If applicants wish to take written notes to aid them during the oral performance test, the proctor will provide blank paper. However, all notes must be returned to the proctor at the end of the test.

V. RATING OF THE ORAL PERFORMANCE TEST

The audio recordings of each applicant's performance test will be rated by professional (federally certified) bilingual experts. The primary consideration in rating the test is accuracy. Applicants should strive for thoroughness rather than to summarize the material. The oral performance test consists of 115 pre-selected words and phrases called "scoring units" that are embedded across the six sections of the test. The rater listens to the applicant's recordings to determine the total number of scoring units correctly interpreted. A scoring unit is considered as interpreted correctly if this word/phrase is known to the rater as acceptable usage or is found in a standard dictionary and is used at the appropriate register.

Raters also complete a structured global rating for each applicant. This five-point rating scale assesses the applicants' overall performance with respect to fluency, clarity of pronunciation, accuracy and completeness of their interpretation (including vocabulary, grammar, idioms, register, etc.) in both languages. To ensure objectivity in the rating process, the ratings are conducted anonymously and neither the raters nor the applicants know the identities of one another.

VI. FINAL SCORE AND RANKING

It is necessary to pass **both** the Written and Oral Performance Tests to be eligible to be hired as a Court Interpreter (Spanish) in the New York State Unified Court System. An applicant's final score is based on the following weighted combination: Written Examination - 50%; Oral Performance Test - 50%. All candidates passing both tests will then be placed on a ranked eligible list.

VII. EFFECTIVE COURT INTERPRETING

There are several important points for applicants to consider becoming proficient in court interpreting. These include:

A. Register

Register refers to the level of language used, such as formal, conversational or slang. Interpreters should strive to maintain the same register as the speaker when interpreting from one language to another. Formal, official language with more complex syntax and vocabulary in English should be put into comparable Spanish language. Similarly, slang or street expressions should be interpreted in the same register. For example, “soplón” should be interpreted as “snitch”, not “informant”, and “maestra” should be interpreted as “teacher”, not “educator”.

B. Idioms

Idioms or figures of speech should be interpreted to convey their practical meaning, rather than a literal translation. For example, “the apple does not fall far from the tree” should be interpreted as “de tal palo tal astilla”, not as “la manzana no cae lejos del árbol.”

C. Proper Names

All proper names of persons or institutions should be kept in their original language, not interpreted into the other language. For example, “Green County Hospital” should be left in English, not interpreted as “Hospital Condado Verde”; and proper name “Julio Iglesias” should be left in Spanish and should not be interpreted as “July Churches”.

D. Language Usage

The language of the speaker should not be corrected or “improved”. If a speaker uses incorrect grammar, profanities, or improper vocabulary, these words should be interpreted exactly as spoken by the speaker.

E. Incorrect Responses

The responses of the speaker should be interpreted exactly as spoken and not corrected in order to respond to the question asked. For example, if the attorney asks, “At what time of day did this event occur?” and the witness answers, “Jueves”, the interpreter should interpret this as “Thursday,” even though this response does not answer the question.

F. Language Usage

The statements made by speakers are always kept in first person. For example, if a witness says, “Yo no comprendo” the interpreter should say, “I don’t understand,” and not, “She doesn’t understand.”

VIII. GENERAL SUGGESTIONS FOR APPLICANTS

A. Advance Preparation

The oral performance test requires applicants to demonstrate their interpreting skills in the three modes of interpreting: sight translation, consecutive and simultaneous interpreting. These skills need to be developed gradually and can be improved over time. Applicants may use the following techniques to strengthen their interpreting skills:

- Work on building vocabulary and reading speed in both English and Spanish by reading various types of subject matter and practicing orally interpreting these materials.
- Practice memory-building techniques to improve short-term memory. For example, read a 5 - or 6 - word sentence, take it out of sight, then practice interpreting the sentences. Repeat this technique with longer sentences.
- Practice note-taking to facilitate retention of numbers, dates, addresses or other important information.
- Practice sight translation using court forms or other legal documents. Review two documents, one in English and the other in Spanish. After 5 minutes, practice by completing the interpretation of both documents in 10 minutes.
- Practice interpreting radio or television programs using both consecutive and simultaneous modes.
- Watch actual televised courtroom trials and practice interpreting the content.
- Visit a courthouse and observe legal proceedings to become familiar with courtroom procedures.

There are also many excellent books available on improving court interpreting skills. Check a local public library for these resources.

B. The Day Before The Oral Performance Test

Take a few minutes to review the information presented in this Orientation Guide. Gather the materials needed for the test site (admission letter, photo identification, and directions for traveling to the test site).

C. The Day of The Oral Performance Test

Bring all the necessary materials needed for the test. Dress casually; be as comfortable as possible. Plan to arrive at the test site 15 minutes early. Allow extra time for administrative procedures. At some locations, applicants may have to go through a magnetometer (metal detector) before going into the test room. There will be an identification form to fill out prior to the test. Be prepared to spend at least an hour in the testing room, as there will be no breaks during the test.

*****If you have any additional questions, contact NYS Office of Court Administration
Examination Unit at (212) 428-2580 *****