



Washington Court Interpreter Program

Interpreter Testing and Training Overview

Establishment of Court Certification

In the late 1980's the Washington State Judiciary recognized the importance of having trained, credentialed interpreters in court. Yet no outside private or public entity tested and trained interpreters at the level deemed appropriate for court proceedings. Therefore, the Washington Court Interpreter Program was established pursuant to RCW 2.43.070. The Interpreter Commission was also established to oversee the work of the Program, and establish program policies.

For approximately twenty years, the Washington Court Interpreter Program has administered testing to certify court interpreters. The Washington certification exams were quite at the time, as very few states had begun work on court interpreter certification. However, in 1995, Washington became a founding member of the Consortium for Language Access in the Courts (formerly known as the Consortium for State Court Interpreter Certification), which is a multi-state collaboration that uses economies of scale to develop, administer and maintain court certification exams for state judiciaries. The other founding member states are Oregon, Minnesota and New Jersey. Washington donated its testing instruments to the Consortium. Forty states are now Consortium members, and the written and oral exams administered by the WA Court Interpreter Program are Consortium exams. Washington continues to be an active member of the Consortium, and participates in discussions relating to governance, exam development, and collaboration with member states.

The number of languages eligible for certification has evolved over the years, and is based on factors such as (1) in which languages certification exams are available; (2) the demand for those languages in Washington courts; and (3) the resources available to Court Interpreter Program staff. Currently, the languages for which certification is available are the following:

Arabic	Korean*	Somali
Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian	Laotian*	Spanish*
Cantonese*	Mandarin*	Vietnamese*
Chuukese	Marshallese	
French	Russian*	

Those identified with an asterisk* indicate languages for which interpreters have achieved certification. Several of the languages (B/S/C, Chuukese, French, and Marshallese) were just added in 2010. Additionally, there are Washington certified Khmer (Cantonese) interpreters, but that exam is not currently available for testing. Within the next two years additional language exams will likely be made available from the Consortium, and the Commission will likely evaluate whether to add those languages to the certification testing scheme.

Establishment of the Registered Credential

Because of the cost and time required in developing certification exams, relatively few languages are eligible for certification. At the same time, the Washington Courts routinely require the use of interpreters for a wide variety of languages. Therefore in 2007 the Interpreter Commission established the credential of Registered for non-certifiable languages. The registered process differs from the certification process in that interpreters are tested on their ability to speak and understand the foreign language. For certification, interpreters are testing on their ability to interpret in and out of the foreign language. Interpreting requires a much more advanced degree of knowledge and skill than does speaking and understanding. While the registered testing process is available to interpreters of more than forty different languages, to date, the Washington Court Interpreter Program has awarded the registered credential to interpreters of the following languages:

Amharic, Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian, Bulgarian, Czech, Dutch, Farsi, French, German, Hebrew, Hindi, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Romanian, Samoan, Tagalog, Thai, Ukrainian, and Urdu.

Requirements for Becoming Certified and Registered

The following chart illustrates the steps that interpreters must complete to earn the credential of certified or registered court interpreter. These requirements are established in program policy, which is governed by the Interpreter Commission:

Certification Requirements	Registered Requirements
1. Pass Consortium written exam testing English, legal terminology, ethics, and evaluation of foreign language skills.	1. Pass Consortium written exam with all items except evaluation of foreign language skills.
2. Attend one-day orientation class which provides basic information about court interpreting techniques.	2. Attend same one-day orientation class.
3. Pass oral interpretation exam, which tests ability to interpret in the three main modes: sight translation, consecutive and simultaneous interpreting.	3. Pass oral proficiency exam, testing the ability to <i>speak</i> in the foreign language.
4. Undergo a criminal background check.	4. Undergo a criminal background check.

5. Attend a one-day class on ethics and courtroom protocol.	5. Attend same one-day class on ethics and courtroom protocol.
6. Administer the oath of interpreter.	6. Administer the oath of interpreter.

Additional Skills Building Training

Because the process of accurately interpreting in a court setting is extremely challenging, few interpreter candidates enter the testing program with the sufficient skills, education and background to be successful. In fact, the national average passing rate of the oral certification exam is only 25%. (The passing rates for non-European languages tends to be much lower, due in part to the radical difference in sentence structure and vocabulary between English and those languages.) For this reason, the Court Interpreter Program provides additional intensive skills-building training to help interpreter candidates improve their interpreting skills. Depending on the availability of resources, classes may be language-neutral or language-specific. These interactive classes are designed for candidates to practice interpreting techniques, objectively evaluate their abilities, and receive constructive feedback from instructors and peers.

Ongoing Requirements for Certified and Registered Interpreters

Both certified and registered interpreters must meet ongoing requirements to maintain their credentials, and submit the following to the Court Interpreter Program on a biannual basis:

- **Continuing Education:** Certified interpreters must report a minimum of sixteen hours of continuing education credits, at least two of which must be ethics training. Registered interpreters must report a minimum of ten hours of continuing education credits, at least two of which must be ethics training.
- **Court Interpreting Hours:** Certified interpreters must report at least twenty hours of court interpreting. Registered interpreters do not have this requirement.
- **Sworn Oath to Comply with Code of Conduct:** Both certified and registered interpreters must submit a signed, sworn oath affirming to abide by the Code of Conduct for Court Interpreters, and renew their oaths biannually.
- **Criminal Convictions:** Both certified and registered interpreters must sign a statement affirming that they have not been convicted of any crime. Or if they have been convicted, to provide the details.

For further information, contact:

Katrin Johnson

Court Interpreter Program Coordinator
Administrative Office of the Courts
360.704.4061

Katrin.Johnson@courts.wa.gov
www.courts.wa.gov/interpreters

Tina Williamson

Court Interpreter Program Assistant
Administrative Office of the Courts
360.705.5279

Tina.Williamson@courts.wa.gov
www.courts.wa.gov/interpreters

