

11 Helpful Tips for Working with an Over-the-Phone Interpreter

1. **BRIEF THE INTERPRETER** - Identify the name of your organization to the interpreter, provide specific instructions of what needs to be done or obtained and let him/her know whether you need help with placing a call. If you need the interpreter to help you place a call to the limited English proficient (LEP) customer, you may ask the interpreter for a dial-out. There is a limited amount of time allotted for placing a dial-out once the interpreter is on the phone. Therefore, it is important that you provide a brief introduction and specific instructions to the interpreter in a timely manner.
2. **SPEAK DIRECTLY TO THE CUSTOMER** - You and your customer can communicate directly with each other as if the interpreter were not there. The interpreter will relay the information and then communicate the customer's response directly back to you.
3. **SPEAK NATURALLY, NOT LOUDER** - Speak at your normal pace, not slower.
 - **SEGMENTS** - Speak in one sentence or two short ones at a time. Try to avoid breaking up a thought. Your interpreter is trying to understand the meaning of what you're saying, so express the whole thought if possible. Interpreters will ask you to slow down or repeat if necessary. You should pause to make sure you give the interpreter time to deliver your message.
 - **CLARIFICATIONS** - If something is unclear, or if the interpreter is given a long statement, the interpreter will ask you for a complete or partial repetition of what was said, or to clarify what the statement meant.
4. **ASK IF THE LEP UNDERSTANDS** - Don't assume that a limited English-speaking customer understands you. In some cultures a person may say 'yes' as you explain something, not meaning they understand, but rather they want you to keep talking because they are trying to follow the conversation. Keep in mind that a lack of English does not necessarily indicate a lack of education.
5. **DO NOT ASK THE INTERPRETER FOR THEIR OPINION** - The interpreter's job is to convey the meaning of the source language and under no circumstances may he or she allow personal opinion to color the interpretation. Also, do not hold the interpreter responsible for what the customer does or does not say. For example, when the customer does not answer your question.
6. **EVERYTHING YOU SAY WILL BE INTERPRETED** - Avoid private conversations. Whatever the interpreter hears will be interpreted. If you feel that the interpreter has not interpreted everything, ask the interpreter to do so. Avoid interrupting the interpreter while he/she is interpreting.
7. **AVOID JARGON OR TECHNICAL TERMS** - Don't use jargon, slang, idioms, acronyms or technical medical terms. Clarify unique vocabulary and provide examples if they are needed to explain a term.
8. **LENGTH OF INTERPRETATION SESSION** - When you're working with an interpreter the conversation can often take twice as long compared with one in English. Many concepts you express have no equivalent in other languages, so the interpreter may have to describe or paraphrase many terms you use. Interpreters will often use more words to interpret what the original speaker says simply because of the grammar and syntax of the target language.
9. **READING SCRIPTS** - People often talk more quickly when reading a script. When you are reading a script, prepared text or a disclosure, slow down to give the interpreter a chance to stay up with you.
10. **CULTURE** - Professional interpreters are familiar with the culture and customs of the limited English proficient (LEP) customer. During the conversation the interpreter may identify and clarify a cultural issue they may not think you are aware of. If the interpreter feels that a particular question is culturally inappropriate, he or she might ask you to either rephrase the question. You may or ask the interpreter to help you to get the information in a more appropriate way.
11. **CLOSING OF THE CALL** - The interpreter will wait for you to initiate the closing of the call. When appropriate, the interpreter will offer further assistance and will be the last to disconnect from the call. Remember to thank the interpreter for his or her efforts at the end of the session.

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