



OREGON JUDICIAL DEPARTMENT Court Language Access Services

Oral Exam Overview Summary

This video is going to give you an overview of the court interpreting oral examination. Passing the Oral Exam is one of the most difficult parts of the certification process, and getting familiar with how the exam is structured is a great place to start.

The Oral exam tests you in the three modes of interpreting, sight consecutive and simultaneous.

On the day of the exam, you will be taken into the exam room by one of our staff, and they will stay in the room with you for the entire exam acting as the proctor. They are there to read you the instructions and to hand you the necessary documents and materials you will need during the exam. Your exam is recorded and is sent out to a team of professional raters to be graded. You will need to score a 70% overall to pass, with at least 70% on simultaneous section, 70% on the consecutive section and a minimum of 65% on each part of the sight translation sections for an overall score of 70%.

Sight translation is the first portion of the Oral exam. The sight translation portion is broken into two parts. In part one you will be handed a document in English and you will be asked to sight interpret the document into the non-English language. In part two, you will be handed a document in the non-English language, and you will be asked to sight translate the document into English.

You have six minutes to review and interpret the document. While this isn't a prep course, I will mention that you should use the first two minutes to completely read the document once if not twice through. This will make sure that your final interpretation is smooth. At the two-minute mark, your proctor will instruct you to begin interpreting. Two minutes may seem like a lot, but it is worth it to use the entire time.

The type of document you might see on the Oral Exam would be a court form, or a letter to the court, or a police report.

Each document will be 225 words, there are 25 points assigned per document.

Consecutive interpreting is the next portion of the exam. During the consecutive portion you will likely be hearing witness testimony between an English-speaking attorney and a non-English speaking witness. You will listen to a recording of the testimony. The first thing you hear will be a question or statement in English. The recording will be paused so that you can interpret that question into the non-English language. When you have finished interpreting, the next segment will be played, which may be in the non-English or in English. Then the recording will be paused for you to interpret. This will continue throughout the test, with you acting as the interpreter.

You will have between 22 and 30 minutes to complete this portion of the exam. There are several segments in the consecutive portion that are more than one sentence long. The longest



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statement will be no more than 45 words long. You can't stop the recording or ask for clarification. But you can ask for two repeats, or repetitions during the entire consecutive portion, not two for each passage. For example, if one of the segments is three sentences long, and you missed part of the second sentence you can say, "The interpreter requests a repetition" and then that entire segment will be replayed for you. Remember you only have two repeats, so use them wisely.

There are 90 points/scoring units in the consecutive portion of the exam.

The final section of the exam is Simultaneous interpreting. During this section you will be wearing headphones and listening to a recording of either opening or closing arguments in English. You will be interpreting out loud into your non-English language so that interpretation can be recorded.

The simultaneous portion is 7 minutes long, about 800-850 words, and will be read at a rate of 120 words per minute. Once the recording starts it cannot be stopped. If you ask to stop, your proctor will encourage you to keep going. If you ask to stop a second time, the recording will be stopped, and the rest of the exam will be counted as incorrect.

There are 75 points or scoring units in this portion of the exam.

You have heard me refer to scoring units several times already. Scoring units are pre-determined words or phrases that you are graded on. If you interpret that word or phrase correctly, you earn a point for that unit, if you do not interpret it correctly then you don't earn a point.

There are several types of scoring units, some of them are self-explanatory, and others need a bit more explanation for them to make sense.

- Grammar – The set of rules that explain how words are used in language. For the Oral Exam pay particular attention to verb tense.
- Language interference - happens when two words sound the same in English and the non-English language but mean different things. The word embarrassed for example. The Spanish word embarazada sounds very close to embarrassed, but it means pregnant. If you make that error on the exam, you will miss that point.
- Vocabulary – Words that are used in ordinary language.
- Legal Terms and Phrases – Any word or phrase that is not used in ordinary language, but that are heard in court.
- Idiomatic expressions. Something that doesn't mean exactly what the words say, but it makes sense because you hear it all of the time. Raining cats and dogs is a common idiom in English that means raining hard. If you were interpreting this into your non-English language, you wouldn't interpret it word for word, rather you would need to find an equivalent to the meaning of this phrase in your non-English language.
- Register - how formal the language being used is. For instance slang would be considered a low register because it is less formal than let's say witness testimony from



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a doctor which would be considered high register. Here you want to make sure that you are keeping the level of formality of the words you are hearing, even if that means interpreting profanity.

- Names and Numbers – any number, measurement or proper name
Markers, Intensifiers, Emphasis and Precision -describing words or words that indicate a moment in time. For example she was very very angry is different than she was angry.
- Position Items - Words that may get lost in the beginning or the end of a long sentence, or are missed because they seem less important. An example of this would be “then I went to the store and he wasn’t working you know?” The “you know” part of that sentence would be considered a position item.
- Slang – informal words that are used in informal conversation

Now that you know more about the scoring units – forget about them! When you are interpreting during the exam, focus on your interpretation only. If you are too focused on if one word or phrase might be a scoring unit, it is likely that you have already missed part of the exam, or may run out of time. So while it is good to know about the scoring units, they are not something you want to worry about.

We have other oral exam study resources on our website.
If you have any questions, feel free to contact our office:
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