



# Tips for beginners

What you need to know to make your first steps into the profession.

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## **Potential employers and colleagues in your area need to know:**

- **that you have completed your training and you are available on the market;**
- **your precise language combination;**
- **how to contact you.**

## **You cannot expect work to be handed to you on a silver platter, so it is up to you to take the initiative:**

- Make yourself known to the profession
- Develop sound professional practice
- Adhere to strict principles like all professional interpreters
- Understand your business
- Manage your career
- Know when to say yes and when to say no to job offers
- Learn how to avoid unpleasant surprises
- Realise that you are not alone - AIIC is there to support you

## **Make yourself known**

- To International Organisations worldwide where your languages are an asset
- To local employers as well as to interpreters groups and secretariats;
- To all colleagues (not just those who work into your language);
- Do not restrict yourself to your part of the world.

## **Develop sound professional practice**

- Monitor your own performance: practice consecutive and work in a "dummy" booth with colleagues;
- Keep abreast of current affairs;
- Find out what interpreter jargon means: *option, firm offer, loss-of-earnings, relay, pivot;*



- Develop good booth manners;
- Always keep your diary up to date.

### **Adhere to strict principles like all professional interpreters**

Conference interpreters are organised both nationally - often jointly with translators - and **internationally within AIIC**.

Since it was established in 1953, AIIC has established a Code of Ethics and Professional Standards; it has also negotiated several Agreements with major International Organisations and has published a wide range of checklists, research and advice for professionals and users.

Thanks to sustained efforts in favour of better training for conference interpreters, AIIC has become the point of reference for all conference interpreting courses (university degrees and masters alike).

### **Understand your business**

The dynamics of meetings and conferences are basically the same, although the scale may vary. You must bear in mind that a conference interpreter is part of a team.

Put simply, an interpreters task is to **ensure accurate and efficient communication across language barriers**. Yet every conference involves the interaction of several factors. A meeting is successful when all the different players work effectively together.

Freelance interpreters usually require an individual contract for each job outlining assignment details and laying down working and financial conditions. Individual contracts are binding on clients and interpreters and are essential to ensure that the event runs smoothly.

Forewarned is forearmed: when you work for the first time for International Organisations specific tips and data concerning them may help you find your way

*Suggested reading: First Contract Series*

### **Manage your career**

A career in the interpreting profession does not follow a linear path nor does it advance by gradual promotion as in academic life or public service.



The world of conferences is made up of different markets:

- Private national market: companies, government agencies;
- Private international market: international trade associations, multinational companies, television, international sporting events;
- Institutional international market: International Organisations, NGOs.

### **What are your options?**

Depending on your language combination, where you live and your personal preferences, you can choose to work as a freelance or as a staff interpreter with an organisation.

To gain access to these markets you should:

- Leverage the contacts you have developed through training
- Get in touch with consultant interpreters in your region who recruit teams and make yourself known to local interpreter groups
- Introduce yourself to colleagues who have your language combination
- Contact the language service of international organisations that require your language combination, including the EU, the UN and UN agencies.

Once established and with a few years of practice under your belt, you may decide to become a consultant interpreter yourself. Consultant interpreters recruit teams of interpreters for a variety of customers on the private market. Experience, common sense, people skills and business acumen are required. The work calls for quick reactions, a rapid mind, a keen sense of business ethics and high level professionalism. You will need a firm grasp on what goes into organising an event (preparing quotations and contracts, dealing with the legal and technical issues) to get started as a consultant interpreter.

### ***Suggested reading:***

- An ordinary weekend in the life of a consultant interpreter
- What your consultant interpreter needs to know
- SOS: consultant interpreter adrift

### **Know when to say yes and when to say no to job offers**

#### **First step:**

- Consider the information you have been given or been asked to provide.
- Call a more senior colleague for advice.



## **Second step:**

- Respond to an enquiry as soon as you can.

## **Factors in deciding whether to take up an offer or not:**

- Are you available?
- Does your language combination match the assignment's?
- Are the conditions on offer acceptable?

## **Alarm bells should ring if:**

- No employment contract is provided;
- The composition of the team is inadequate - languages are not correctly covered, team strength does not correspond to workload, or the organiser is evasive when asked questions about other team members;
- The working conditions leave to be desired: no documents to prepare the conference, inadequate fees, no daily subsistence allowance when working away from home, no distinction between working and travel days, sub-standard booths or technical equipment

Check our list of routine questions to help you make the right decision when offered work, be it from a known or unknown source.

## **Learn how to avoid unpleasant surprises**

It is quite natural for beginners to want to work as much as possible and accommodate whoever asked you. But willingness to compromise on working conditions can work against you in the long run.

Unless you are really alert to the potential pitfalls, many things can go wrong, for instance:

- You find yourself doing simultaneous alone for the whole morning or even the whole day;
- You are expected to work from/into languages that are not part of your language combination;
- Booths are partitioned by curtains with no proper sound insulation;
- Booths face the wall with a single TV monitor for all booths showing the conference proceedings;
- No technicians are available on site;



- There is just no interpretation booth but you are expected to work in the technicians booth next to lighting controls and sound mixing equipment;
- Unfortunately the list goes on...

Interpreting in sub-standard working conditions can be a very nasty and off-putting experience. Conference interpretation requires extreme concentration and poor conditions will inevitably impact your performance. You are by no means the first person to have been caught out by a dodgy job offer. When in doubt ALWAYS seek advice from an experienced colleague!

### **Realise that you are not alone - AIIC is there to support you**

The quality of your performance depends both on how good you are AND on the conditions in which you work.

It is useful to be knowledgeable about the congress industry in both the domestic and international private markets, international organisations and the colleagues you work with. This is why AIIC's networking role is so valuable.

AIIC - the International Association of Conference Interpreters - was founded in 1953 when conference interpreting was a fledgling profession. Today AIIC has over 2,600 members in more than 80 countries. Membership of this professional body indicates the interpreters commitment to professional standards and business-like approach to the job.

If you are considering membership, AIIC interpreters will be happy to offer advice and support.

### **What AIIC does**

AIIC is the only internationally recognised association of conference interpreters.

AIIC represents the whole profession. Over the years it has established itself as a point of reference for the whole interpreter community, clients and users of interpretation services.

Since 1953, AIIC has set standards for the profession in several areas: working conditions, interpreter training and simultaneous interpretation equipment.

The standards apply to the United Nations, the European Union and almost all inter-governmental organisations where conference interpretation is used. AIIC also negotiates



remuneration and other monetary conditions with international organisations worldwide on behalf of all freelance interpreters, members and non members alike.

AIIC has several codes of best practices, which apply particularly to work on the private (non-institutional) market. They help promote working conditions for professional conference interpreters and ensure high standards and professionalism throughout. They cover matters such as:

- Health
- New technologies
- Training
- Business ethics
- Copyright

AIIC also publishes advice and recommendations for conference organisers, monitors technical issues and helps with checklists for meeting rooms and guidelines for speakers.

AIIC conducts surveys on various aspects of the profession, undertakes research projects in the area of training, and strives to raise awareness for professional standards.

AIIC is at the forefront in the following areas:

- Conference interpreter training and training of trainers
- Multidisciplinary research on cognitive processes
- Refresher courses for practising professionals
- Drafting standards for simultaneous interpretation equipment
- Securing the definition and recognition of the profession via a UNESCO Recommendation.
- Promoting the profession at international events

Wherever you live, there will be AIIC interpreters near you. Locally AIIC members have established relations with other organisations that represent the profession at a national level (unions, associations of translators and interpreters).

You need not enter this profession unaccompanied. AIIC members are there to ease your early career steps and to help you develop professional standards. Membership shows your commitment to your chosen profession.

## **How to join**



- CACL Guide for Applicants
- AIIC basic texts
- AIIC application forms

**Feel free to contact us.** We look forward to your questions and comments.

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