Conference interpreting

Throughout history, people of different languages and cultures have made use of interpretation to communicate with and understand each other.

Interpreters have always been involved in the development of international trade and cultural exchange.

But it was only towards the end of the 19th century, with the appearance of the first international organisations and of regular conferences, that some people were able to make a living as interpreters. The Paris Peace Conference of 1919 is widely viewed as the starting point of modern conference interpreting.

With the emergence of simultaneous interpretation in the middle of the 20th century — most notably at the Nuremberg Trials — the profession developed considerably and was shaped accordingly.

Conference interpretation is conveying a message spoken in one language into another. It is practised at international summits, professional seminars, and bilateral or multilateral meetings of heads of State and Government.

Conference interpreters also work at meetings between chief executives, social and union representatives, at congresses and meetings, and so on.

The skills of the conference interpreter

Interpreters must have complete mastery of their working languages, including an excellent command of their native language. They need an immediate grasp of their passive languages and a well-developed capacity to express themselves in their own language.

Another essential requirement is a good mind. Interpreters need

- a good level of general education,
- a lively and flexible intellect,
- analytic capacity,
- the ability to put themselves in the minds of the people for whom they are interpreting.

They also need:

- to be able to concentrate,
- have a good memory,
• have a pleasant voice and **good diction**, 
• be physically and mentally robust.

Interpreters need to be willing to travel, since their work often takes them a long way from home.

**Rigour and professional confidentiality**

Finally, whether they are freelance or staff, interpreters always have to deliver.

They have to be **rigorous**, not only in terms of getting the message across, but also in their everyday professional practice.

A professional conference interpreter is always **well-prepared**, is **never late** (even if the conference participants are), and above all has an absolute obligation to respect professional confidentiality.

---

**Recommended citation format:**