Initial training

Are you an articulate graduate with an excellent knowledge of one or more foreign languages, good general knowledge and a liking for working under pressure? Could you make it as an interpreter?

Who can train to be a conference interpreter?

You are a graduate, more than averagely articulate in your native language, with an interest in current affairs and excellent general knowledge. You have an inquisitive mind, you can think on your feet and you can cope with stress.

What about languages?

You know at least one language other than your native language extremely well.

Do I need to have studied languages at university?

No, as long as you know the languages you want to interpret from and into well enough. Some people even think it's an advantage to have studied something else entirely as this broadens your general knowledge.

Similarly you can train as an interpreter at any age. Having worked in different sectors and having a bit of life experience is a great advantage.

How well do I need to know a foreign language?

Your understanding of the language should be comparable to that of an educated native speaker of the same language.

You understand everything said to you in normal conversation in that language, and basically everything in the newspapers and on TV. There may be the odd word you've never seen before: no one knows everything! You've read the standard literature in that language and you're comfortable talking about the major historical events, and political and social trends in that country.

To achieve this sort of proficiency you will usually have spent a year or more in that country.

What's the difference between conference interpreting and other
Community interpreting, liaison, court are all types of interpreting you may have heard of. Click here for an explanation of the difference.

Conference interpreters can interpret between their native language and one foreign language, for example, from English into French and from French into English. Or they work from several foreign languages only into their native language, for example French, German and Spanish into English. Or they can do both.

The requirements for these two types of language combination differ. If you want to interpret into and out of a foreign language then not only will your understanding of the language be comparable to that of an educated native-speaker but you also need to speak the language to a similarly high level.

To interpret from several languages into your native language you will have to understand the foreign languages extremely well, but this time you won't need to be able to speak them in your work as an interpreter. You probably can speak them, as you will have spent many months or years in those countries, but speaking the foreign language is not essential to interpreting from those languages into your native language.

To succeed in both of the above types of combination you need to be extremely articulate in your native language.

Where can I train?

See AIIC's Interpreting Schools Finder.

What type of Interpreting course should I look for?

Check AIIC's recommendations for Interpreting courses.

Internships

See AIIC Guidelines for Conference Interpreting Internships.

Recommended citation format: