

Make The Court Reporter's Day!

Whether you are a freelance judiciary interpreter or a staff court interpreter, you will find yourself working side by side with Court Reporters. Interpreters work with the Court Reporter in the courtroom as well as in any sworn statement. Based on our shared responsibility for the record, Reporters are often a source of evaluation of our performance for Judges and lawyers. Court Reporting firms are frequently relied upon to contract with freelance interpreters, and your reputation with them can enhance or reduce your business. So, here's an additional support that can easily add value to your service and make you stand out with Court Reporters.

Provide the Reporter with the spelling of foreign language names and places on a Spellings Page. It's easy and quick to do and it means so much to the Reporter that you will be remembered for this courtesy. I have been providing these pages for over 18 years but I still hear about interpreters, who won't offer to provide spellings for the Reporter. Often I am called by Reporters to help with spellings from another interpreter's job.

A full understanding of the Reporter's job is important to appreciate the value of this service. What an interpreter sees on the job is just the tip of the iceberg. For every hour of actual reporting any statement under oath, the Reporter faces at least another hour of editing before the transcript is ready to be delivered. The Reporter is writing on a stenography machine in a language called "Steno" which is basically a phonetic script of the syllables heard by the individual Reporter. For example the word "attorney" in steno could be written as "toern", interpreter could be "interp". Real time reporters are producing a near complete transcript aided by a program installed in their laptop which is connected to their stenography machine. Their laptop screens show the testimony already in English because they input case specific terminology as part of the pre job preparation. Unable to predict the pending testimony, they will afterwards need to add spellings.

Reporters often maintain a full dictionary for technical and scientific terms and apply them to long running case depositions and statements. Even with the most contentious, argumentative, English only deposition or courtroom proceeding, the transcript is thoroughly and efficiently produced. Courtroom reporters will already have the specific case names but any new evidence offered in testimony that contains foreign language names will need correct spellings. The time required for hunting down foreign language spellings can increase the workload for a Reporter.

Interpreters should also consider the accuracy of the record as part of their responsibility. Veteran Reporter Rick Smith of Charlotte Smith Reporting in Houston, Texas points out that "For both Reporters and interpreters the focus of our work is to be verbatim and for us Reporters the entire transcript has to be verbatim. I sign a certificate stating that what is contained in the transcript is transcribed to the best of my ability. That includes correct spellings." Another reporter adds: If anything, interpreters providing spellings make us look good by helping to provide a complete and accurate transcript." Consider the potential transcript result in a Spanish interpreted deposition when the reporter hears the following testimony. The witness: *Juanaset Ismael Covarrubios* states his address as *Pasaje Valle #1245, Urbanización Antiguo Cuscatlán, San Salvador, El Salvador*, stating his wife's name: *Aracely*, his children are *Toyoc, Beatriz, Cesar* and *Juanaset Jr.* The qualified interpreter is

pronouncing these names of people and places in correctly accented Spanish, but this sounds like gibberish to the monolingual reporter. The transcript could look like this:

Q Please state your name for the record

A *Jauntiest Israel CoverYour Bus*

Q Please state your address

A *Passage Value #1245, Urban Nation Ant Eater Cruise Atlanta, San Salvador, El Salvador.*

Q Are you married?

A Yes

Q What is your wife's name?

A *Ought to Sell It*

Q And what are your children's names?

A *Toyota, Beaters, Queasier and Jauntiest Jr.*

The exactness of the record is required and regulated by the rules of civil procedure thus protecting each individual's civil rights. This example demonstrates how testimony can be wrongly transcribed. In the discovery process the attorneys may want to rely on contact information. It is doubtful any correspondence would make it addressed to "Ought To Sell It Cover Your Bus" *Passage Value #1245, Urban Nation Ant Eater Cruise Atlanta, San Salvador, El Salvado.* During the process of a witness testifying, Reporters are accustomed to noting an unclear word but this interrupts their concentration and flow. The Reporter is following along and taking down what the interpreter is saying but since we are completely bilingual we will pronounce the foreign language term in the source language pronunciation without skipping a beat. This often throws the Reporter off for a second... unless they know in advance that you will be providing them with the correct spellings.

Here's what you can do: Incorporate the correct foreign language spellings of certain words into your note taking process. The Reporter will need both the accurate spelling and the subject matter to enable finding it for insertion in the transcript. Most of such terms will form part of the witness's response to certain questions. Since most depositions follow a standard format of questioning, you can be prompted to copy the spelling as soon as you hear the question. You can write the word down adding an indication of the subject matter, for example "POB" for Place of Birth. Starring it then will help you find it in your notes afterwards. It is important though to not delay your interpreting flow while you are taking notes. Some interpreters try to spell the words on the record, which can interrupt the flow of questioning and the proceeding in general. It begins to sound like a Spelling bee if too many words are spelled on the record. Practice beforehand will help you with this double tasking process. It is reasonable for you to hurriedly write in "chicken scratch", then at the end of the deposition, copy your list on a fresh sheet of paper for the reporter to take. After a few years of fumbling around with my legal pad to make a clean list, I started printing up special sheets for this purpose. They have my name and contact information on them for further questions. The two-column format has the left column titled **Topic** and to the right titled **Spelling**. I even found lilac colored paper which is easier on the Reporters eyes.

Here is a suggested list of spellings the Reporter will need and the subject matter in which they normally occur:

| <u>Spellings needed</u> | <u>Question Topic</u> |
|---|--|
| People's names and nicknames | Personal history and family, co-workers and other witnesses to incident. |
| Places (streets, towns, foreign company and agency names) | Foreign residence and employment. Be prompted by the Where? question. |
| Titles: individual, employment and degree. School and University names. | Personal history, education and profession. |
| Currency | Employment or purchases made in foreign country. |
| Cultural events and traditions, dishes. | Details about the incident. What action was performed and why. |

Even the most experienced interpreters can improve their service. Smith tells the story of working with an interpreter whose interpreting skill impressed him but who fell short in overall service. "I asked him when he first got there if he wouldn't mind helping me out by spelling the words that have to be on the record in Spanish and to just write them down for me before he left. Hours later, when we finished, he was leaving and I asked for the spellings. He said, I thought you were writing them down. It turns out he had not written any down. I had to explain to him that I can only spell them out phonetically since I don't speak Spanish." Taking the extra few moments to provide this service makes a difference to Reporters. And you will be notably remembered.

By Diane E. Teichman. Copyright © 2004.

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Diane E. Teichman, a Licensed Court Interpreter for the State of Texas and translator has specialized in legal work since 1980. Diane, a member of ATA, NAJIT, HITA, FLATA and AATIA was also the first administrator of the ID and the editor of the Interpreters Voice. She is the Series Editor for the book series [Professional Interpreting in the Real World](#).