



Designation: F2089 – 24

Standard Practice for Spoken and Sign Language Interpreting¹

This standard is issued under the fixed designation F2089; the number immediately following the designation indicates the year of original adoption or, in the case of revision, the year of last revision. A number in parentheses indicates the year of last reapproval. A superscript epsilon (ε) indicates an editorial change since the last revision or reapproval.

1. Scope

1.1 This practice defines the minimum professional standard for quality services in language interpreting. It is intended to assist stakeholders with varying levels of knowledge about interpreting so that they can make informed decisions when procuring signed and spoken language interpreting services.

1.2 This practice establishes criteria for providing interpreting services and covers interpreter qualifications, certifications, credentials, and working conditions.

1.3 *This standard does not purport to address all of the safety concerns, if any, associated with its use. It is the responsibility of the user of this standard to establish appropriate safety, health, and environmental practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.*

1.4 *This international standard was developed in accordance with internationally recognized principles on standardization established in the Decision on Principles for the Development of International Standards, Guides and Recommendations issued by the World Trade Organization Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Committee.*

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 ISO Standards:²

ISO 2603 Simultaneous Interpreting – Permanent booths – Requirements

ISO 4043 Mobile Booths for Simultaneous Interpretation—General Characteristics and Equipment

ISO 20109 Simultaneous Interpreting – Equipment – Requirements

ISO 23155:2022 Interpreting Services – Conference Interpreting – Requirements and Recommendations

3. Terminology

3.1 Definitions:

¹ This practice is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee F43 on Language Services and Products and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee F43.01 on Language Interpreting.

Current edition approved Sept. 1, 2024. Published September 2024. Originally approved in 2001. Last previous edition approved in 2015 as F2089 – 15 which was withdrawn January 2024 and reinstated in September 2024. DOI: 10.1520/F2089-24.

² Available from International Organization for Standardization (ISO), ISO Central Secretariat, Chemin de Blandinnet 8, CP 401, 1214 Vernier, Geneva, Switzerland, <https://www.iso.org>.

3.1.1 *interpreting*—process of fully understanding, analyzing, and processing a spoken or signed message in one language and faithfully rendering it into another spoken or signed language.

3.1.1.1 *Discussion*—Interpreting is different from translation which produces a written target text.

3.1.2 *language combination(s)*—language pair(s) (for example, Spanish–French; English–Japanese) necessary to ensure effective communication.

3.1.3 *register*—degree of formality of language.

3.1.4 *relay interpreting*—practice of interpreting from one language to another through one or more intermediate languages.

3.1.4.1 *Discussion*—Relay interpreting is necessary when no single interpreter commands the required language combination (for example, interpreting from English to Spanish to K'iche').

3.1.5 *source language*—the original language of the message being interpreted.

3.1.6 *target language*—the language into which the original message of the speaker or signer is being interpreted.

3.1.7 *working languages*—the languages an interpreter uses professionally.

3.1.8 *Areas of Interpreting:*

3.1.8.1 *business interpreting*—interpreting performed during commercial activities.

3.1.8.2 *community interpreting*—interpreting performed to facilitate access to community services and events.

3.1.8.3 *conference interpreting*—interpreting performed primarily in the simultaneous mode for persons attending congresses, conventions, seminars, summits, trainings, or other meetings.

3.1.8.4 *court interpreting (also referred to as judicial interpreting)*—interpreting that allows access to and participation in court proceedings and other court-related services.

(1) *Discussion*—Depositions, grand jury testimony, and examinations fall into this category as well as related legal proceedings where testimony is given under oath.

3.1.8.5 *diplomatic interpreting*—interpreting performed to facilitate communication between governments or international organizations, or both.

3.1.8.6 *disaster relief and humanitarian interpreting*—interpreting performed in support of humanitarian operations and of individuals affected by disaster or other emergency situations.

3.1.8.7 *educational interpreting*—interpreting performed to facilitate access to school services, programs, and activities.

3.1.8.8 *entertainment interpreting*—interpreting performed to facilitate access to live production, performances, or other events in the entertainment industry for both talent and the audience.

3.1.8.9 *healthcare interpreting*—interpreting performed to facilitate access to medical services.

3.1.8.10 *labor relations interpreting*—interpreting performed for negotiations between management, workers, and unions.

3.1.8.11 *legal interpreting*—interpreting performed in settings related to the administration of justice.

(1) *Discussion*—Legal interpreting is divided into court interpreting and out-of-court interpreting. Requirements for credentialing and certification may vary by jurisdiction.

3.1.8.12 *liaison interpreting*—interpreting generally performed in the consecutive mode while escorting visiting individuals or groups.

3.1.8.13 *media interpreting*—interpreting performed for information/cultural/social outlets such as television networks, radio stations, or the internet.

3.1.8.14 *military interpreting*—interpreting performed in support of the armed forces and their mission.

3.1.8.15 *out-of-court interpreting (also referred to as quasi-judicial interpreting)*—interpreting provided during events that may have a bearing on legal proceedings.

(1) *Discussion*—These may include, but are not limited to, arbitration, mediation, court-ordered services, and attorney-client interviews for criminal justice or law enforcement agencies, administrative agencies, as well as boards, commissions, or licensing bodies. Quasi-judiciary proceedings affect fundamental individual rights and may give rise to an appeal at the state or federal levels. For this reason, out-of-court interpreting services shall be of the same quality and accuracy as those rendered in court.

3.1.8.16 *security-related interpreting*—interpreting performed in support of government agencies working in law enforcement and national security.

3.1.8.17 *social services interpreting*—interpreting performed to facilitate access to human services programs.

3.1.8.18 *worker's compensation interpreting*—interpreting performed in relation to work-related injuries or occupational disease.

3.1.9 *Modes of Interpreting:*

3.1.9.1 *consecutive interpreting*—the rendering of a speaker's or signer's message into another language when the speaker or signer pauses to allow interpreting.

3.1.9.2 *simultaneous interpreting*—the rendering of a speaker's or signer's message into another language while the speaker or signer continues to speak or sign.

3.1.9.3 *sight translation*—the rendering of a document written in one language directly into another spoken or signed language, not for purposes of producing a written document.

4. Significance and Use

4.1 This practice is intended for all stakeholders of interpreting services.

4.2 *Interpreting Services Stakeholders:*

4.2.1 *Customer*—The person(s) or entity that pays for the interpreting services.

4.2.2 *Requester*—The person(s) or entity that places the order for interpreting services.

4.2.3 *End User or Consumer*—All persons communicating through an interpreter.

4.2.4 *Interpreting Services Provider*—The person(s), interpreter(s), organization, or language services company (LSC) arranging for the provision of interpreting services including, but not limited to, selecting, contracting, scheduling, invoicing, and paying the interpreter.

4.2.5 *Interpreter*—Person who performs the interpreting service.

NOTE 1—The above categories of stakeholders are not mutually exclusive.

4.3 *Characteristics of Interpreting*—Interpreting is a professional activity resulting in an immediate and final oral/signed rendition of the message from the source language into the target language. It does not serve the same purpose as, nor should it be compared to, a written translation or a scripted voice-over. Interpreting is performed in real time (simultaneously), immediately after a speaker pauses to allow for interpreting (consecutively), or as an oral or signed rendition of a written document (sight translation).

5. Interpreter Qualifications

5.1 *General Qualifications*—A high level of proficiency in two languages is a necessary prerequisite, but not sufficient by itself, to provide quality interpreting. Active working languages shall be at the level of an educated native or near-native speaker. Interpreting is a complex demanding task that requires much more than an excellent command of languages. The interpreter shall have skills and abilities specific to interpreting including the ability to quickly and accurately convert meaning between two languages, a broad general education, and knowledge of the subject matter including relevant terminology.

5.2 *Required Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities*—The interpreting process requires the following knowledge, skills, and abilities that may be acquired through formal training or experience in the professional arena and may be documented through testing, degrees, certifications, or professional credentials.

5.2.1 *Concentration*—Ability to remain focused for extended periods of time.

5.2.2 *Knowledge of Subject Matter*—An understanding of the topic and its terminology. This shall be supported by thorough preparation.

5.2.3 *Research Skills*—Ability to find and assimilate information on a broad range of topics in support of the interpreting assignment.

5.2.4 *Comprehension*—Ability to fully understand the meaning, subject matter, intent, and cultural nuances of the source message.

5.2.5 *Analytical Skills*—Ability to render the meaning of the source language message completely and accurately and find target language equivalencies while under severe time constraints.

5.2.6 *Memory*—Ability to retain the source message and reproduce it accurately in the target language.

5.2.7 *Note Taking in Consecutive*—Specialized technique used to capture key concepts and other information to support and aid in the reconstruction of the message into the target language.

5.2.8 *Cultural Awareness*—Knowledge of culture-specific references and concepts that allow the interpreter to render the message faithfully and effectively in the target language.

5.2.9 *Clear Delivery and Signing*—The interpreter shall have public speaking skills such as good enunciation and voice projection and, in the case of sign language, make proper use of sign production, sign space, and affect to render the message faithfully.

5.2.10 *Interpersonal Skills and Professional Conduct*—Courteous and appropriate demeanor toward peers and others.

5.2.11 *Protocol*—Knowledge of what constitutes appropriate behavior, customary practices, and what practical arrangements may be required for optimal performance.

5.2.12 *Adaptability*—Ability to adjust to unexpected events or rapidly changing circumstances.

5.3 The knowledge, skills, and abilities of an interpreter shall be documented through a combination of the following:

5.3.1 Post-secondary education or its equivalent,

5.3.2 Successful completion of interpreter training by a recognized post-secondary institution,

5.3.3 Endorsement by a certifying/credentialing body or professional organization,

5.3.4 Qualifying scores as established by industry recognized certifying bodies (see Refs (1 and 2)³) in language proficiency tests,

5.3.5 Qualifying scores as established by industry recognized certifying bodies (see Refs (3-5)) in interpreting tests as required by specific areas of interpreting, and

5.3.6 Evidence of expertise and competence in interpreting demonstrated through a performance examination or experience or both as accepted by professionals in the field.

6. Interpreter Certification and Credentialing

6.1 *Sign Language Interpreting Certification*—Requirements for credentialing at the national, regional, and local levels vary depending on the area of interpreting. Credentials include quality assessments, performance assessments, and certifications. Certification varies based on the testing entity, type, and level of testing, and is available at both the national and regional levels (for example, state and provincial certification in the United States and Canada, respectively).

³ The boldface numbers in parentheses refer to a list of references at the end of this standard.

Interpreters shall be appropriately credentialed to comply with regional requirements (see Ref (6)).

6.2 *Spoken Language Interpreting Certification*—There is not a generalist Spoken Language Interpreting Certification available at the national, regional, or local levels. However, there is certification available at the national level in specialized fields such as court and medical interpreting. Most regions (for example, state and provincial certification in the United States and Canada, respectively) offer certification for court interpreting, and some offer certification for medical and social services interpreting (see Refs (3 and 4)).

6.3 *Spoken Language Interpreting Credentialing*:

6.3.1 The preferred method to determine the qualifications of an interpreter is through a performance-based interpreting examination, which results in certification when available. In the absence or unavailability of interpreting certification or testing by government agencies or professional associations, qualifications may be evaluated using other criteria, such as language proficiency testing in the required working languages (see Refs (1 and 7)).

6.3.2 In conference interpreting, credentials include passing an interpreting performance examination such as those administered by the United Nations, U.S. Department of State, and the European Union. Interpreter qualifications may also be evaluated using other criteria, such as membership in professional associations with a stringent vetting procedure (see Ref (8)) or a graduate degree in conference interpreting.

6.4 *Requirements for Contracting Certified and Credentialed Interpreters*—Government agencies, and other entities that receive public funds, may be bound by legislation and funding conditions to only hire interpreters who have been appropriately certified or credentialed. Private sector entities may also be bound to comply with requirements set by their own industry accrediting organizations.

6.5 Stakeholders should make every effort to match the requirements of the assignment to the level of professional skill of the interpreter, as evidenced by the interpreter's professional certification(s) or credentials.

7. Needs Analysis

7.1 This section describes the factors that customers, requesters, interpreting services providers, and interpreters shall take into consideration in planning for interpreting events. To ensure high-quality interpreting, coordination and agreement between the above-named parties is essential. All stakeholders shall know and respect the interpreter's code of professional responsibility (see Section 8).

7.2 *Event Characteristics*—Event characteristics will determine the delivery modality, mode of interpreting, number of interpreters, type of interpreter credentials, equipment, attire, security clearance, and immunizations.

7.2.1 Type(s) of events including, but not limited to:

7.2.1.1 One-on-one meeting,

7.2.1.2 Group meeting,

7.2.1.3 Hearing,

7.2.1.4 Presentation,

7.2.1.5 Conference,