

California Certified Interpreter Oral Performance Evaluation Guide



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INTRODUCTION

This guide includes information related to the court interpreter oral test evaluation rating scale used to identify and classify candidates' test performance. The following pages include descriptions of test performance behaviors that are associated with each rating point.

Oral Test Performance Dimensions

Language Proficiency

Degree of control over language use in the following linguistic areas:

- a) phonology (e.g., pronunciation and intonation)
- b) syntax (e.g., grammatical structures and accuracy)
- c) lexicon (e.g., vocabulary control, accuracy, and usage)
- d) semantics (e.g., meaning)
- e) pragmatics (e.g., appropriateness of language use and sociolinguistic skills).

Proficiency in English and in the foreign language is judged separately.

Interpreting Skills

Skills to render information from English into the foreign language and from the foreign language into English while maintaining originally-intended meaning, nuance, and register. Such skills include maintaining the style and register of the original language, keeping pace with the speaker, and preserving meaning. A complete list of interpreting skills appears later on in this guide.

Interpreting skills are demonstrated in three contexts:

Consecutive Interpreting (English to Foreign Language and Foreign Language to English): This mode is typically performed during testimony from the witness stand. The interpreter is silent until the witness, judge, or other party stops speaking, at which time the interpreter's rendition of the complete utterance is given. This component is designed as a role-play exercise. Typically roles for a judge, attorney, and witness are included. All of the roles are tape-recorded. Passages are played aloud from a scripted tape recording that simulates a court proceeding. Passages are up to 40 words in length. Candidates may take notes but are cautioned that note taking should not interfere with their ability to interpret promptly. Notes must be turned in to the chairperson before leaving the examination room. The applicant must render his or her interpretation immediately after the passage is played.

Sight Translation (English Language Sight to Foreign Language and Foreign Language Sight to English): The candidate orally translates one document written in English into the foreign language, and one document written in the foreign language into English. The candidate reviews each document for one minute before rendering his or her oral translation. Translations must be rendered within four minutes.

Simultaneous Interpreting (English to Foreign Language): This mode is usually performed at the defense table for the defendant where the interpreter must render interpretations of all utterances. The interpreter lags slightly behind the speaker, interpreting the utterances simultaneously. During the examination, the candidate listens to a recording in English using a headset. The recording begins with introductory instructions, which the applicant has the option to simultaneously interpret as a warm-up for the actual exercise. A brief pause follows the instructions; then the examination material is presented in English for interpretation into the foreign language. The material is representative of presentations likely to be given during a court proceeding. The material is recorded at a rate of 120–140 words per minute. The exercise is approximately 3½ minutes in length.

These contexts appear in the exam as four components:

- 1) Consecutive Interpreting
- 2) English to Foreign Language Sight Translation
- 3) Foreign Language to English Sight Translation
- 4) English to Foreign Language Simultaneous Interpreting

PASS/FAIL DETERMINATION

Holistic Evaluation of Performance

Test performance ratings are holistic evaluations of ***language proficiency*** and ***interpreting skills***. Holistic evaluation is a structured method of rating that takes into account the candidates' entire test performance. Raters evaluate candidates' performance on each test component (e.g., consecutive, sights and simultaneous) **and** the candidates' overall language proficiency and interpreting skills as a whole.

To become a certified interpreter, a candidate must pass **both** the language proficiency **and** interpreting skills dimensions of the oral examination.

Raters use a five-point scale to classify candidates' test performance. Additional information on the ratings required to pass each component are presented below.

Language Proficiency

Language proficiency ratings are given for each test component.

- Passing candidates must score 4 or above in *all* language proficiency component ratings.

Language Proficiency Rating Example

An example of a **passing** performance for the **language proficiency** component is presented below:

Oral Exam Component	Performance Dimension	Rating Example
Consecutive	English Language Proficiency	4
	Foreign Language Proficiency	4
English to Foreign Language Sight Translation	Foreign Language Proficiency	4
Foreign Language to English Sight Translation	English Language Proficiency	4
English to Foreign Language Simultaneous	Foreign Language Proficiency	4

The description of the passing standard for Language Proficiency is on page 9.

Interpreting Skills

Interpreting Skills ratings are given for each test component.

- Passing candidates must either:
 - 1) score 4 or above in *all* interpreting skill components, **or**
 - 2a) score 4 or above in three of the four interpreting skills components **AND**
 - 2b) score 3+¹ in any one remaining component except the Consecutive, which must remain at 4 or above.
- Components where **ONE** 3+ rating is permitted for passing:
 - English to Foreign Language Sight Translation
 - Foreign Language to English Sight Translation
 - English to Foreign Language Simultaneous Interpreting

¹ The 3+ rating indicates that the candidate's performance is predominantly at the 4 level but not sustained all the time. The candidate demonstrates limited periods of performance at the 3 level.

Interpreting Skills Rating Examples

Four examples of **passing** performance for the **Interpreting Skills** component are presented below:

Oral Exam Component	Performance Dimension	Rating Example A	Rating Example B	Rating Example C	Rating Example D
Consecutive	Interpreting Skills	4	4	4	4
English to Foreign Language Sight Translation	Interpreting Skills	4	3+	4	4
Foreign Language to English Sight Translation	Interpreting Skills	4	4	3+	4
English to Foreign Language Simultaneous	Interpreting Skills	4	4	4	3+

Four examples of **NON-passing** performance for the **Interpreting Skills** component are presented below:

Oral Exam Component	Performance Dimension	Rating Example A	Rating Example B	Rating Example C	Rating Example D
Consecutive	Interpreting Skills	4	4	3	3
English to Foreign Language Sight Translation	Interpreting Skills	4	4	4	2
Foreign Language to English Sight Translation	Interpreting Skills	4	3+	3	3
English to Foreign Language Simultaneous	Interpreting Skills	3	3+	3+	2

A description of levels 3+ and 4 for Interpreting Skills is presented on page 15.

Objective Measures of Performance

Raters evaluate the test sample both holistically and objectively. Objective rating is based primarily on the number of key words and units of meaning that the candidate is able to render correctly. The key words and units of meaning are selected by the test developers to measure the breadth and depth of the candidate's linguistic repertoire.

The numbers of key words/units of meaning for each component appear below:

Oral Exam Component	Number of Keywords/Units of Meaning
Consecutive	50
English Language Sight	25
Foreign Language Sight	25
Simultaneous	50

Raters use two scales to identify and classify candidates' test performance. One scale is used for Language Proficiency and one scale is used for Interpreting Skills.

Following are the **Language Proficiency** and **Interpreting Skills** rating scales that raters use to evaluate candidates' test performance. Both rating scales contain detailed descriptions of performance associated with each rating scale point.

The scales define test performance starting with Level 5. Level 5 is the highest score a candidate may achieve on this examination.

The next description is for Level 4. Level 4 is defined as the level at which a candidate **meets minimum standards** of competence (also known as the passing standard or passpoint).

Levels 3, 2 and 1 follow the description for Level 4. These are failing levels of test performance.

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY RATING SCALE



Performance Description Level 5

Candidate's proficiency **consistently exceeds** minimum standards of competence as defined in Language Proficiency Rating Level 4 (refer to description of Level 4 on next page for definition of minimum standards of competence).

- Performs well in language situations that may change unexpectedly or are unfamiliar
- Discourse is cohesive and coherent
- Grasps and clearly conveys meaning; is able to differentiate shades of meaning between words and process complete content of message in a cohesive discourse
- Demonstrates broad vocabulary and ability to convey abstract concepts
- Demonstrates extensive knowledge of specialized vocabulary (e.g., legal, medical, business, administrative)
- Uses words appropriately (distinguishes among words of similar meaning and selects the most appropriate term for the context). Distinguishes between denotative and connotative meanings
- Recognizes and appropriately uses a broad range of idioms, proverbs, collocations, and sayings
- Demonstrates full grammatical and structural control (absence of patterns of error)
- Demonstrates sociolinguistic competence and full control of register
- Demonstrates knowledge of cultural nuance and references
- Rate of delivery (fluency) is adequate (reasonable intervals between utterances)
- Accent does not interfere with the listener's comprehension
- Speaks clearly (enunciation, pronunciation, stress, intonation, and tone) and conveys meaning and nuance

Performance Description Level 4

Candidate's proficiency **meets minimum standards** of competence.

- Language proficiency is sufficient for situations that may change unexpectedly or are unfamiliar
- Discourse is cohesive and coherent
- Grasps and clearly conveys meaning; is generally able to differentiate shades of meaning between words and process complete content of message
- Demonstrates broad vocabulary and ability to convey abstract concepts
- Demonstrates requisite level of specialized vocabulary (e.g., legal, medical, business, administrative) needed to competently perform the duties of an interpreter
- Generally uses words appropriately (distinguishes among words of similar meaning and selects the most appropriate term for the context). Distinguishes between denotative and connotative meanings
- Demonstrates familiarity with idioms, proverbs, collocations, and sayings
- Demonstrates full structural control (absence of patterns of error). Occasional errors in complex and/or low-frequency structures do not interfere with meaning
- Exhibits infrequent grammatical errors that do not interfere with meaning
- Generally uses language in a sociolinguistically appropriate manner (i.e., tailors the language to the situation at hand; reflects the speech patterns of a wide variety of sociocultural backgrounds); varies register appropriately
- Demonstrates knowledge of cultural nuance and references
- Rate of delivery (fluency) is adequate (reasonable intervals between utterances)
- Accent does not interfere with the listener's comprehension
- Demonstrates general ability to speak clearly (enunciation, pronunciation, stress, intonation, and tone) and to convey meaning and nuance appropriately

Performance Description Level 3

Candidate's proficiency **does not meet minimum standards** of competence as defined in Language Proficiency Rating level 4, due to deficiencies in performance which, *taken in aggregate*, affect meaning. These may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Language proficiency is limited to the familiar
- Discourse lacks cohesiveness and coherence
- Demonstrates limited comprehension (grasps meaning in fragments but is unable to consistently process complete content of message in a cohesive discourse)
- Demonstrates knowledge of basic vocabulary (familiar); however, may be unable to convey abstract concepts
- Lacks requisite level of specialized vocabulary (e.g., legal, medical, business, administrative) needed to competently perform the duties of an interpreter
- Demonstrates some knowledge of specialized vocabulary but ability to contextualize it is limited
- Misuses words (unable to distinguish among words of similar meaning and select the most appropriate term for the context). Fails to distinguish between denotative and connotative meanings
- Occasionally distorts and/or invents words.
- Occasionally uses the wrong word for the context
- Demonstrates limited familiarity with idioms, proverbs, collocations, and sayings
- Demonstrates partial structural control (patterns of error in language structure interfere with meaning), requiring the listener to compensate for missing or erroneous structural elements
- Demonstrates patterns of grammatical errors
- Demonstrates a limited ability to use language in a sociolinguistically appropriate manner (i.e., deviates from the rules of social discourse; is unable to reflect the speech patterns of a wide variety of sociocultural backgrounds); exhibits lapses in ability to vary register appropriately
- Demonstrates limited knowledge of cultural nuance and references
- Rate of delivery (i.e., fluency) is sometimes inadequate (lengthy pauses, hurried speech) and may interfere with communication
- Accent sometimes interferes with the listener's comprehension
- Demonstrates basic ability to speak clearly (enunciation, pronunciation, stress, intonation and tone), but fails to convey meaning and nuance

Performance Description Level 2

Candidate's proficiency is **below minimum standards** of competence as defined in Language Proficiency Rating Level 4, due to deficiencies in performance which, taken in aggregate, affect meaning. These may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Language proficiency is limited to basic communication (i.e., everyday and concrete topics)
- Fails to communicate beyond the paragraph level
- Demonstrates very limited comprehension; ability to process complete content of message is limited
- Demonstrates basic level of vocabulary
- May demonstrate superficial knowledge of specialized vocabulary but is unable to contextualize it
- Frequently misuses words (unable to distinguish among words of similar sound, form, or meaning)
- Frequently distorts and/or invents words
- Demonstrates minimal familiarity with idioms, proverbs, collocations, and sayings
- Demonstrates minimal structural control (frequent patterns of error in language structure interfere with meaning)
- Demonstrates patterns of significant grammatical error
- Demonstrates very limited ability to use language in a sociolinguistically appropriate manner (i.e., frequently deviates from the rules of social discourse; is unable to reflect the speech patterns of different sociocultural backgrounds); unable to vary register appropriately
- Rate of delivery (i.e., fluency) is often inadequate (lengthy pauses between utterances interfere with communication)
- Accent constantly interferes with the listener's comprehension
- Frequently fails to demonstrate a basic ability to speak clearly (enunciation, pronunciation, stress, intonation, and tone) and to convey meaning and nuance

Performance Description Level 1

Candidate's proficiency is **significantly below minimum standards** of competence as defined in Language Proficiency Rating Level 4, due to deficiencies in performance which, *taken in aggregate*, affect meaning. These may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Language proficiency is limited to basic communication with frequent and severe errors
- Fails to communicate beyond the word or sentence level
- Demonstrates almost no comprehension (i.e., unable to grasp meaning of words or sentences)
- Demonstrates rudimentary vocabulary
- Consistently misuses words (unable to distinguish among words of similar sound, form, or meaning)
- Consistently distorts and/or invents words
- Demonstrates little or no familiarity with idioms, proverbs, collocations, and sayings
- Demonstrates some awareness of some structures, but unable to use them correctly
- Demonstrates patterns of serious and persistent grammatical error
- Demonstrates an inability to use language in a sociolinguistically appropriate manner; demonstrates no awareness of the rules of social discourse or speech register
- Rate of delivery (i.e., fluency) is inadequate (lengthy intervals between utterances interfere with communication)
- Accent is so severe that it makes communication nearly impossible
- Consistently fails to demonstrate a basic ability to speak clearly (enunciation, pronunciation, stress, intonation, and tone) and to convey meaning and nuance

INTERPRETING SKILLS RATING SCALE



Performance Description Level 5

Candidate demonstrates the ability to perform requisite mode of interpretation/ translation. Candidate's interpreting skills **consistently exceed** minimum standards of competence as defined in Interpreting Skills Rating Level 4 (refer to description of Level 4 on next page for definition of minimum standards of competence). Performance **consistently** has the following characteristics:

- Demonstrates equivalent language proficiency (English and Foreign Language)
- Demonstrates bicultural sophistication
- Fully comprehends source language
- Employs effective strategies to ensure high quality rendition
- Retains and renders information accurately
- Preserves paralinguistic elements (e.g., filler utterances such as “hmm” and “um” and hedging in source)
- Fully conveys nuance, tone, and style of the speaker
- Preserves the speech patterns of the speaker (e.g., stopping in mid-sentence, sudden changes in tense, etc.) and renders them faithfully
- Conveys register accurately
- Speaks at an appropriate speed
- Makes effortless transitions between languages
- Speaks audibly and enunciates
- Appropriately compensates for lack of exact equivalent
- Constantly monitors performance and makes corrections when necessary; however, need for corrections is very infrequent
- Anticipates speech patterns and/or word placement to ensure that the target language syntax is rendered correctly
- Stays apace of speaker / allows lag time

Performance Description Level 4

Candidate demonstrates the ability to perform requisite mode of interpretation. Candidate's interpreting skills meet **minimum** standards of competence. Performance generally has the following characteristics:

- Dominant language structure does not interfere with rendition
- Demonstrates bicultural awareness
- Fully comprehends source language
- Employs compensation strategies for minor lapses of competence
- Retains and renders information accurately
- Preserves paralinguistic elements (e.g., filler utterances such as “hmm” and “um” and hedging in source)
- Preserves the speech patterns of the speaker (e.g., stopping in mid-sentence, sudden changes in tense, etc.) and renders them faithfully
- Conveys the nuance, tone, and style of the speaker
- Conveys register accurately
- Speaks at an appropriate speed
- Makes smooth transitions between languages
- Speaks audibly and distinctly (i.e., enunciates)
- Appropriately compensates for lack of an exact equivalent
- Maintains an awareness of one's performance and makes corrections when necessary
- Anticipates speech patterns and/or word placement to ensure that the target language syntax is rendered correctly
- Stays apace of speaker / allows lag time

Performance Description Level 3+

The candidate's performance is at the 4 level, but not completely sustainable. Therefore, the candidate demonstrates limited periods of performance at the 3 level. Components where one 3+ rating is permitted for passing:

- English Language Sight
- Foreign Language Sight
- Simultaneous

Performance Description Levels 3, 2, and 1

Candidates receiving a rating of 3 or below in Interpreting Skills fall below the minimum standard of competence as defined in Level 4. The lower the candidate's rating, the greater the deviation will be from Level 4 performance standards. Some or all of the interpreting deficiencies listed below, **when taken as an aggregate**, result in the candidate's failure to meet the minimum standard of performance.

Level 3 Candidate demonstrates **some** of the requisite interpreting skills as defined in Level 4, but **performance lacks consistency**. Therefore, candidate's interpreting skills do not meet minimum standards of competence.

Level 2 Candidate's interpreting skills are **below** minimum standards of competence as defined in Level 4. Performance is flawed due to the frequency and severity of the deficiencies listed below.

Level 1 Candidate's interpreting skills are **significantly below** minimum standards of competence as defined in Level 4. Performance is seriously flawed due to the frequency and severity of the deficiencies listed below.

The following is a partial list of interpreting deficiencies used to identify levels 3 and below:

- Lack of comprehension of source material
- Omission
- Invention
- Embellishment
- Paraphrasing
- Summarizing
- Changes in meaning
- Incorrect word choice and use
- Literal translation (inappropriate application of lexical and syntactic patterns of source language)
- Inappropriate language mixing
- Note taking that interferes with a timely rendition in the Consecutive component
- Long pauses/hesitation/inappropriate hedging not in source language
- Difficulty keeping pace with the speaker
- Limited retention
- Backtracking (offering alternative phrasing of the same segment)
- Inappropriate multiple synonyms
- Hypercorrection (overuse of certain structures)
- Poor audibility
- Poor enunciation (e.g., garbled speech, mumbling)
- Lack of self-monitoring (Failure to maintain an awareness of one's performance and/or to make corrections when necessary)

ADDITIONAL CANDIDATE INFORMATION

Note to candidates preparing to re-take the oral test

Unsuccessful candidates are provided with the following information:

- Language Proficiency ratings
- Interpreting Skills ratings
- Candidate Test Performance Feedback

Candidate Test Performance Feedback

In addition to the numerical ratings provided, candidates will receive a performance evaluation feedback report that indicates deficiencies in the performance. It may also be helpful to review *Typical Candidate Errors* located at www.prometric.com/California.

CONCLUSION

This guide is intended to provide interpreters and potential interpreters with the information needed in order to understand the standards of oral performance required to be a certified interpreter in California. Professionalism in interpreting is achieved by meeting the criteria set herein for language proficiency and interpreting skills. A full understanding of the criteria and the rating process could enhance the chances of passing the tests. We wish everyone the best of luck.

CALIFORNIA COURTS

THE JUDICIAL BRANCH OF CALIFORNIA

