

Examinee Handbook



UNITED STATES COURTS

Federal Court Interpreter Certification Examination

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES COURTS

Court Services Office

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Contents

PART 1 BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW OF THE FEDERAL COURT INTERPRETER CERTIFICATION EXAMINATION	1
1.1. Background of the Federal Court Interpreter Certification Program	1
1.2. Court Interpreting	1
1.3. Qualifications for Federally Certified Court Interpreters	2
1.4. The Examination Process	2
1.5. Practice Tests and Readiness to Take the FCICE	3
1.6. FCICE Support	4
PART 2 REGISTRATION, ACCOMMODATIONS, AND DISPUTE RESOLUTION	5
2.1. First-Time Registration Tips and Examinee Identification Number	5
2.2. Cancellation and Rescheduling	6
2.3. Registration	6
2.4 Accommodations	7
2.5. Fee Information	8
2.6. Taking the Examination	8
2.7. Score Reporting Procedures and Timelines	9
2.8. Confidentiality of Exam Content	10
2.9. Dispute Resolution Policy	11
PART 3 THE WRITTEN EXAMINATION	13
3.1. Description of the Written Examination	13
3.2. Scoring the Written Examination	13
3.3. Development of the Written Examination	14

3.4.Suggestions on How to Prepare for the FCICE Written Examination.....	15
3.5.Procedures for the Day of the Written Examination	16
3.6.Suggested Study References for the Written Examination	17
3.7.Discussion and Sample Items	18
 PART 4 THE ORAL EXAMINATION	 27
4.1.Description of the Oral Examination	27
4.2.Development of the Oral Examination	27
4.3.Examination Validity, Reliability, and Field Testing	29
4.4.Administering and Scoring the Oral Examination	29
4.5.Discussion of the Individual Sections of the Oral Examination	30
4.6.More on Scoring Units	31
4.7.Suggestions on How to Prepare for the Oral Examination.....	33
4.8.Practical “To Do” List for the Oral Examination.....	33
4.9.Procedures for the Day of the Oral Examination	34
4.10.The Examination Itself – What You Can Expect	35
4.11.Tutorial Instructions.....	35
4.12.Sources for Practice Materials.....	41
 PART 5 SELF-ASSESSMENT OF READINESS TO TAKE THE FCICE	 43
5.1.Introduction.....	43
5.2.Language Proficiency Self-Rating in English and Spanish.....	43
5.3.“Can Do” Interpreter Self-Assessment	47

PART 1 BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW OF THE FEDERAL COURT INTERPRETER CERTIFICATION EXAMINATION

1.1. Background of the Federal Court Interpreter Certification Program

The Director of the Administrative Office of the United States Courts (AO) oversees “a program to facilitate the use of certified and otherwise qualified interpreters in judicial proceedings instituted by the United States” as required by the Court Interpreters Act, 28 U.S.C. §§ 1827-1828. The Act authorizes the Director to establish criteria for, and certify, interpreters that serve federal courts. A list of AO-certified interpreters and otherwise qualified interpreters, along with their contact information, is maintained in the AO’s National Court Interpreter Database (NCID) used by federal courts to locate and select interpreters.

The Director administers the criterion-reference, performance-based Federal Court Interpreter Certification Examination (FCICE) – one of the first of its kind. The FCICE is currently offered only for Spanish because that is the primary language need for individuals requiring interpreting assistance in proceedings conducted in federal courts. The FCICE reflects the highly technical and complex knowledge, skill, and ability that an interpreter must have to successfully perform federal court interpreting.

The AO has certified more than 1,250 interpreters since 1980. These AO-Certified interpreters, also known as Federally Certified Court Interpreters (FCCIs), are an important resource for federal courts across the country. FCCIs not only support access to justice for case participants, but also serve as raters that score candidates’ FCICE performance, and as consultants to the AO and courts in the development of interpreting skills tests and training programs.

1.2. Court Interpreting

Interpretation is necessary during court proceedings when parties or witnesses speak only or primarily a language other than English. Federal courts are required to provide an interpreter only in proceedings instituted by the United States (i.e., usually criminal cases, but very occasionally government-instituted civil matters). Accurate interpretation allows a criminal defendant to hear everything that is being spoken in their language and enables them to participate meaningfully in their case. For witnesses, an interpreter enables their testimony to be heard in English and become evidence in the case. If interpretation is inaccurate, defendants may misunderstand what is taking place, or the evidence heard by a judge and jury may be incomplete or distorted.

Because accurate and complete interpretation is so critical, court interpreters are vested with the ethical obligation to interpret everything that is said, without additions, omissions, or changes to the intended meaning by the speaker, and without summarizing the content. Court interpreters must preserve the nuances and level of formality or informality of speech (register). Offensive, crude,

insulting, or embarrassing language, including profanity, must be accurately interpreted to carry the same weight in the target language. In addition to rendering spoken English into the target language and vice versa, court interpreters are sometimes required to perform sight translation, that is, reading documents and interpreting them orally from English into the target language or from the source language into English.

1.3. Qualifications for Federally Certified Court Interpreters

Federally Certified Court Interpreters (FCCIs) are highly skilled professionals who have specialized language and interpreting skills, impartiality, and propriety in dealing with parties, counsel, the court, and the jury. Court interpreters must have the following knowledge, skills, and abilities:

- Superior proficiency in both English and the target language (i.e., Spanish, as the AO certifies only Spanish/English language interpretation at this time),
- Impartiality,
- Ability to accurately turn the message from the source language into the target language without altering the intended meaning of the message from the speaker,
- Ability to perform simultaneous interpretation (the most frequent form of interpretation used in the courtroom), consecutive interpretation, and sight translation,
- Ability to communicate orally, including appropriate delivery and poise, and
- High professional standards for courtroom demeanor and professional conduct.

Professional court interpreters must have an educated, native-like mastery of English and Spanish. Mastery of both English and Spanish includes the ability to speak each language in a way that does not interfere with understanding by native speakers of either language, as well as reading and speaking the languages in a wide variety of contexts and levels of formality, which usually requires years of formal education and direct interaction in both languages. Accented speech may be noticeable, but must not interfere with listeners' ability to understand.

Besides superior proficiency in both languages, FCCIs must be able to perform the three modes of interpreting: consecutive interpreting, simultaneous interpreting, and sight translation of documents. Acquiring these specific skills presupposes some element of innate ability, but mostly requires extensive practice and commitment to developing the skills.

1.4. The Examination Process

The FCICE is a two-phase examination of language proficiency and interpretation performance, consisting of a Written Examination and an Oral Examination. The two examinations are usually, but not always, administered in alternating years.

The first phase – the Written Examination – is a computer-administered screening examination consisting of multiple-choice questions in English and Spanish to test proficiency in both languages.

There is a two-hour and thirty-minute time limit to complete the examination, excluding the time required for instructions and other procedural requirements. Candidates should plan for a four-hour time frame to complete the examination, accounting for all the steps involved in administering and finishing the exam. A passing score for the Written Examination is 75 percent. Candidates must pass the phase one Written Examination to be eligible to register for the Phase Two Oral Examination.

The second phase – the Oral Examination – tests a candidate’s ability to perform the three modes of court interpreting: sight translation, and simultaneous and consecutive interpretation, at a level that accurately reflects authentic interpreting functions encountered in the federal courts. Simultaneous interpreting is required in court proceedings even when participants speak very rapidly in English. Accordingly, the simultaneous portions of the Oral Examination include discourse at speeds as high as 160 words per minute. For the consecutive interpretation portion, examinees must be able to hear and retain lengthy questions and responses in memory, with some utterances as long as 50 words. Efficient note-taking skills are often used by interpreters to supplement memory. Therefore, note-taking is allowed during testing. For the sight translation portion of the exam, examinees must be able to orally translate a document in English and a document in Spanish. The rendition should be smooth, without frequent false starts, and must accurately convey the style and contents of the document.

The Oral Examination takes about 45 minutes, excluding instructions and other procedural requirements. There is a pre-established time limit to complete each portion of the exam. Candidates should allow at least one hour to complete the Oral Examination. A passing score for the Oral Examination is 80 percent.

Those who pass the Oral Examination will receive a communication, including a certificate, from the Director of the AO verifying that the candidate has earned the credential of “Federally Certified Court Interpreter.”

1.5. Practice Tests and Readiness to Take the FCICE

Practice Tests for the FCICE written and oral examinations are available online at <https://www.prometric.com/en-us/clients/aousc/Pages/landing.aspx>. The practice tests were developed using the same process as the official examinations, and are designed to be equivalent to the official exams, except that the practice tests are shorter. Candidates should practice the examinations under the same constraints as the official examinations (e.g., using no dictionaries or other aids, using the same time limits, etc.)

The practice oral examination is half the length of the official examination and includes written text material and practice recordings that must be sight-translated and interpreted. The oral practice test will help candidates estimate the likelihood of being ready to pass the official Oral Examination. For those candidates viewing this handbook online, the recordings are provided via Windows Media Player or Real Audio Player on the FCICE website at the “[Oral Practice Exam](#)” link. For the real oral practice material, candidates must record their performance and play it back while scoring their performance. Examples of scoring keys are provided to assist with self-scoring.

While there is no guarantee that your performance on the practice written and oral tests will ensure successful performance on the official examinations, the practice tests can help you estimate your readiness for the FCICE.

Before registering, candidates can use the following questions as guidelines to determine their readiness:

1. Have you read the entire Examinee Handbook?
2. Did you complete the Self-Assessment Exercise in the Examinee Handbook?
3. Did you take the Practice Written Examination in the Examinee Handbook?
4. Do you feel qualified to take and pass the FCICE Written Examination?
5. Did you take the Practice Oral Examination in the Examinee Handbook?
6. Do you feel qualified to take and pass the FCICE Oral Examination?

A “no” answer to any of these questions should lead candidates to carefully review the qualifications needed to perform in both exams.

Part 5 of this Examinee Handbook (Handbook), Self-Assessment of Readiness to Take the FCICE, offers a self-assessment tool to help you determine if you have the qualifications listed in section 1.3 and are ready to register for the FCICE.

1.6. FCICE Support

The AO’s Federal Court Interpreting Program administers and develops the FCICE tests in coordination with the AO’s vendor, Prometric. For questions or support regarding the FCICE, contact AO staff at FCICE@ao.uscourts.gov and see the FCICE website at [Federal Court Interpreter Certification Examination | United States Courts \(uscourts.gov\)](https://www.uscourts.gov/fcice).

PART 2 REGISTRATION, ACCOMMODATIONS, AND DISPUTE RESOLUTION

The Federal Court Interpreter Certification Examination (FCICE) is a two-phase test comprising a Spanish/English Written Examination (Phase One) and a Spanish/English Oral Examination (Phase Two). The two phases are generally offered biennially, with Phase One and Phase Two administered in alternating years. Candidates must first pass the FCICE Written Examination before they are permitted to register for the FCICE Oral Examination.

Examination dates, locations, and registration deadlines change annually and are posted online. Visit the FCICE site periodically to access registration information at <https://www.prometric.com/en-us/clients/aousc/Pages/landing.aspx>.

2.1. First-Time Registration Tips and Examinee Identification Number

If you have never registered for a Federal Court Interpreter Certification Examination, you should know that:

- **You must register online.** Refer to section 2.3 – Registration, for detailed instructions. ***It is important that the name you use to register for an examination exactly matches the name on the official identification you plan to use.***
- The examination **fee must be paid via credit card** when scheduling your exam.
- You **must appear at their scheduled date and time** for both examinations.
- It is your responsibility to **monitor the FCICE website** to learn the registration deadlines and dates of testing. If you have passed the Written Examination and qualify to register for the Oral Examination, it is your responsibility to learn of the registration deadlines, and request registration information from the AO or its vendor.
- If you do not yet have an **Examinee Identification Number**, you will be asked to enter your first name, middle name, last name, address (including city, state, and zip code), daytime phone number, evening phone number, e-mail address, and other information. You will then be issued your Examinee Identification Number. **That number is very important, and is needed for subsequent communications** regarding your FCICE examinations. (If you have registered to take an FCICE exam since 2018, you may have already received your Examinee Identification Number.)

- Candidates who register for the FCICE may be asked to complete a background questionnaire. The background questionnaire is a critical element in the quality control of the FCICE testing program.

2.2. Cancellation and Rescheduling

Written Examination: To cancel a Written Examination registration and be eligible for a partial refund, the cancellation request must be submitted through the Prometric scheduling system at <https://www.prometric.com/test-takers/search/aousc> no later than five (5) calendar days before the appointment date. No refunds will be given for registration cancellations received after the deadline or to candidates who do not appear for the Written Examination.

Oral Examination: The registration fee is non-refundable. Candidates must advise the exam administrator as soon as it becomes known that they must cancel their Oral Examination registration so exam schedules can be adjusted, if necessary. Tests may be canceled by using the Prometric scheduling system at <https://www.prometric.com/test-takers/search/aousc>.

2.3. Registration

Register Online. You may register for the Federal Court Interpreter Certification Examination online at: <https://www.prometric.com/en-us/clients/aousc/Pages/landing.aspx> during the registration period and follow the instructions for online registration for the Written or Oral examinations. ***It is important that the name you use to register for an examination exactly matches the name on the official identification you plan to use.***

Register On Time. You must register during the registration period indicated on the website. You will not be allowed to register outside of the registration period.

Accommodation Requests. You will be prompted to indicate whether you request special accommodation. If you indicate that you require special accommodation, you will be taken to a web page describing the process for requests made under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The contact information for the Prometric Testing Accommodation team is included on that page, and they will help you with the registration process. All testing accommodations requests must be received no more than 45 calendar days before the date the testing period is scheduled to begin.

Pay the Examination Fee. To complete your registration process, you will be prompted to pay for the examination.

Retain your Confirmation. Your demographic information and examination location choices will be saved in a secure database; a confirmation page will notify you that your registration has been accepted.

- **Written Examination:** After successfully registering for the Written Examination, please read the confirmation page for important information about your confirmed exam location and time.

It is strongly recommended that you print the confirmation page and keep it in a safe place for later reference.

- **Oral Examination:** When registering online for the Oral Examination, you must choose the exam date, location, and time of your choice. Oral Examinations are scheduled to take place over one or more weeks, depending on the number of candidates scheduled. Candidates are tested individually during the Oral Examination and thus are scheduled for a specific date and time. After successfully scheduling the Oral Examination, you will receive a confirmation email confirming the date, location, and time of your exam. Print the confirmation page and keep it in a safe place for later reference to remember your specific testing date, location, and time.

2.4 Accommodations

Candidates who require adjustments in the testing procedure because of disability or impairment may request special accommodation by providing written medical documentation and completing the accommodation form available at <https://www.prometric.com/test-takers/arrange-testing-accommodations>. Candidates must include the following information on the accommodation form:

- An explanation of the nature of the disability, and
- A detailed explanation of the accommodation being requested.

Religious accommodations: For special accommodations due to religious affiliations, candidates must submit a letter indicating their religious affiliation and what days of the week are acceptable for testing. The letter must be on the religious organization's letterhead, signed by the religious professional, and must be submitted by the registration deadline.

Requests for special accommodations will be reviewed case-by-case after all documentation regarding the requested accommodation has been received. Those requests that meet the criteria detailed above for disabilities, impairments, or religious considerations will be accommodated. Foremost among the related considerations is whether the accommodation will undermine exam validity, given the job requirements for interpreters and the test constructs.¹ For example, accommodation for a hearing impairment would likely not be approved because the ability to hear well is an essential job requirement. An accommodation for impaired memory would likely not be approved because short-term memory skills are essential for successful court interpreting.

¹ A “construct” is an attribute of a person reflected in test performance, for example, the ability to perform the activities of a court interpreter.

2.5. Fee Information

The FCICE Written and Oral examination fees are posted, and updated annually, on the Prometric website. Fees must be paid by Visa, MasterCard, or American Express only, in accordance with the posted fee schedule. Fees are subject to change. The payment transaction will occur upon receipt of the registration.

- 2022 Nonrefundable Oral Examination Fee - \$300.00,
- 2023 Nonrefundable Written Examination Fee - \$210.00.

2.6. Taking the Examination

Arrive Early. Registered examinees must arrive at the testing site early, preferably 30 minutes before the test is scheduled to begin. If you are late for either the Written Examination or the Oral Examination, test proctors will not allow you to enter the testing room, and it is unlikely that you will be rescheduled within the current test cycle. Examination proctors may move on to the next scheduled candidate, and you will lose your scheduled time slot. If you are the last examinee of the day, proctors will wait no more than 15 minutes for your arrival. A candidate who is late to their scheduled Oral Examination administration may have to wait up to two years for the next regularly scheduled Oral Examination administration.

Bring Required Identification. Test administrators will sign you in and provide instructions. You must bring with you your government-issued identification, which is required for all examinations. Only the following IDs will be accepted:

- Current Driver's license or State ID card,
- Current U.S. passport or passport issued by a foreign government, or
- Current U.S. Military ID card.

It is important that the name you use to register for an examination exactly matches the name on the official identification you plan to use. Proctors may prevent you from signing in for the examination if the names do not match exactly.

Examination Room.

- Everything you need in order to take the exam will be provided to you, including pencils and note paper.
 - Under no circumstances will you be permitted to take items with you into the test room. This includes cell phones, tablets, recorders, briefcases, backpacks, jackets and other outerwear, etc. Test staff is not responsible for the security of these items while you are taking an examination.
 - Do not bring dictionaries, books, notes, reference materials, or any other aids to the exam center. You will not be allowed to use them.

- You may be asked to empty and turn your pockets inside out and be scanned with a metal detector before entering the test room to confirm that you have no prohibited items.
- Any candidate found to have access to equipment or material that could be used to assist in taking the examination or that could be used to record or transmit any portion of an examination will be permanently disqualified from taking any exam in the federal court interpreter certification examination program.
- Test administrators strive to ensure that the temperature in the testing rooms is comfortable and that the rooms have the appropriate heating and air conditioning controls. However, since it cannot always be guaranteed that the room temperature will be pleasing for every examinee, prepare accordingly.
- Smoking, eating, and drinking are not permitted in the exam room.
- No visitors, except for official observers, are permitted in the testing room (AO staff and Prometric staff may observe some examination administrations).
- Please use the restroom before you enter the testing room. If you request a break during the administration of the Oral Examination, you will interrupt your pace and interfere with your concentration. If you request a break during the administration of the examinations, no additional time will be granted for you to finish.

2.7. Score Reporting Procedures and Timelines

Written Examination: You will receive your score immediately following the administration of the Written Examination; score results letters will be made available online. A master list of candidate demographics and test scores will be provided to the AO when results have been compiled.

Candidates may appeal the results of a Written Examination based only upon the following grounds (see the Dispute Resolution Policy below):

- Significant irregularity in the exam administration,
- Discrimination,
- Bias,
- Fraud, or
- Inappropriate application of ADA or other accommodations.

You will not be provided a breakdown of your equated scores by exam. It is important for you to understand that, taken individually, the score on one part of a test will not serve as a diagnostic tool (only the total scores on the English and the total scores on the Spanish sections of the exam comprise your “official score”). Partial scores will not accurately inform you about particular strengths or weaknesses in that part of the test simply because there are not enough items in each section to

confirm a strength or weakness. Partial scores are provided only for informational purposes. As discussed in section 1.6 – Practice Tests, you might obtain more detailed feedback about your skill level by taking the practice test, although, like the score breakdown, it is not intended to be a diagnostic tool.

Oral Examination: Candidates who pass the Written Examination are eligible to take the phase two Oral Examination. It is the responsibility of the candidates who have passed the Written Examination to monitor the schedule for the upcoming Oral Examination by checking the website frequently and by requesting registration information during the registration period. Candidates must pay the appropriate fee to schedule the Oral Examination. A master list of candidate names and test scores will be provided to the AO when results have been compiled.

The official score report letters will be mailed approximately twelve weeks following the administration of the Oral Examinations. Candidates will be notified via the email address provided during registration when the official score report letters are issued. The Director of the AO will confer certification on candidates who pass the Oral Examination. Certificates are usually mailed to successful candidates several months after the exam scores. Candidates are not considered certified until these certificates are received. Certificates can only be issued once and cannot be replaced if lost.

Candidates may appeal the results of an Oral Examination based only upon the following grounds (see the Dispute Resolution Policy below):

- Significant irregularity in the exam administration,
- Discrimination,
- Bias,
- Fraud, or
- Inappropriate application of ADA or other accommodations.

We make every effort to ensure that the test room and surrounding environment will be free of noise or other distractions. However, experience has shown that regardless of these efforts, events that may be distracting to some examinees (construction noise, sporting events, air conditioning noise, etc.) will sometimes occur. These types of environmental noises are normal and are not considered significant irregularities.

2.8. Confidentiality of Exam Content

The contents of the Federal Court Interpreter Certification Examination (FCICE) Written and Oral Examinations are strictly confidential. Any person who takes an examination or who is authorized to have the examination in her or his possession, however briefly, must agree to protect the confidentiality of the examination. For examinees, this means that it is strictly prohibited to in any way discuss, copy, record, share, post, or divulge the contents of the exam. This includes taking or keeping notes of test content in personal files, keeping or sharing them electronically or via any other form of oral or written disclosure, or using any portion of the testing instruments. All notes taken by examinees during the administration of the test will be collected at the end of testing and will be destroyed immediately by the proctor.

Every examinee is required to sign an oath of confidentiality before taking an examination. Any individual who violates this security policy or is found in possession of any equipment or materials that could be used to assist in taking the examination or to record or transmit any portion of the examination is subject to denial of certification and will be permanently disqualified from taking any exam in the FCICE program.

2.9. Dispute Resolution Policy

2.9.1 Complaints and appeals

Complaints and appeals are written communications to the exam administrator concerning an examinee's score on a written or oral examination.

- Complaints include any communication received in writing from an examinee about an exam administration or exam score report,
- Appeals are written communications that specifically request an action to reconsider the scores reported to the examinee, and
- Only those written communications showing evidence of the grounds for appeals in section 2.9 of this handbook will be considered.

Appeals based on alleged inappropriateness of exam content, any specific exam item(s), or on grounds other than those listed above will not be accepted or acted upon. A standard form response is used when an appeal fails to meet the required criteria or when a complaint or appeal is based on exam content or specific exam items. This does not imply that candidates are discouraged from providing thoughtful feedback about their exam experience. All feedback in the form of comments and inquiries is reviewed and given consideration.

Contact information for complaints and appeals is available online at

https://www.prometric.com/contact-us?category=Test%20Taker&subject=general_inquiries.

2.9.2 When and How Should Complaints and Appeals be Filed?

The procedure for filing complaints and appeals is the same for both the Written Examination and the Oral Examination. Complaints and appeals must be submitted in writing within thirty (30) calendar days from the applicant's results report letter date.

A complaint must clearly state what information or activity the examinee is requesting, or, if there is a question, what the question is. All complaints will be reviewed and will receive a response in writing.

An appeal must state the basis for the examinee's belief that a "fail" status on the examination meets the criteria for an appeal under section 2.9 of this handbook. Evidence that supports the examinee's belief must be included in the appeal. Only letters of appeal written and submitted by the examinee or the legal representative of the examinee are accepted. Letters written on behalf of an examinee by anyone other than the examinee or legal counsel are not accepted or acted upon. A standard form response is used under these circumstances.

2.9.3 When Will a Response to a Complaint or an Appeal be Received?

If a complaint or appeal meets the above-mentioned criteria, acknowledgment is sent within ten days, and a final, official response is mailed within 120 days of receipt of the appeal, indicating either the resolution of the issue or advising the complainant/appellant that an investigation is ongoing.

If an appeal is disallowed because it fails to meet the requirements, it is considered a complaint, and a final, official response is sent within 120 days.

2.9.4 Confidentiality of Investigation Findings

All investigations of disputes are confidential and internal. Summaries of findings may be sent to the examinee, but the examinee is not entitled to review original papers or access discussions resulting from an investigation.

2.9.5 Finality of Decisions

Decisions based on the findings of the exam administrator are final. Unless otherwise directed by the AO, the exam administrator will take no further action and will forward all related correspondence and calls to the AO.

PART 3 THE WRITTEN EXAMINATION

3.1. Description of the Written Examination

The Written Examination has two sections: English and Spanish. Each section has a total of 100 multiple-choice items divided into five parts. Some of the items may be field test items and will not be scored. The five parts are:

Part I: Reading Comprehension. Reading Comprehension items measure the ability to read and understand texts that reflect the language proficiency required of a Federally Certified Court Interpreter (FCCI).

Part II: Usage. Usage items measure the knowledge of grammar and idioms that are representative of the high level of general language proficiency required of an FCCI.

Part III: Error Detection. Error Detection items measure the knowledge of grammar that an FCCI must possess to carry out job-related responsibilities.

Part IV: Synonyms. Synonym items measure the breadth of general vocabulary that an FCCI must possess.

Part V: Best Translation of a Word or Phrase. Best Translation items measure the ability to correctly translate an underlined word or phrase, tapping the knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and idioms required of an FCCI.

The five parts of the English section are followed by the five parts of the Spanish section. The Written Examination has a total of 160 items.

3.2. Scoring the Written Examination

The English and Spanish sections of the Written Examination are administered on the same day and the scoring of the sections is conjunctive rather than compensatory. That is, the minimum passing score must be achieved on each of the exam sections. The minimum passing score is 75 percent, which is the standard set by the AO. **A candidate who passes only one section must retake and pass both sections at a subsequent administration.**

There are multiple forms of the examination. Since exam forms cannot be developed to be identical in difficulty level, the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (2014) recommends that test

forms be statistically equated.² The equating process ensures fairness to all examinees, regardless of what form of the test was administered.

The examination is designed to measure proficiency in English and Spanish and only a total score for each language section is reported. In accordance with the project psychometrician, you will not be provided with a breakdown of your equated scores by test part. The score on a test part will not serve as a diagnostic tool and the score may not accurately inform you about particular strengths or weaknesses in language skills. (See **2.11 – Score Reporting Procedures and Timelines**.)

Your proficiency in each language is measured using a variety of question types and formats. If you wish to obtain more detailed feedback about your skill level for each type of question, we encourage you to review the Practice Test. The Practice Test is designed to be equivalent to the official test forms and will provide you with an idea of how well you might perform.

3.3. Development of the Written Examination

The specifications for the written portion of the examination were developed by a diverse team of language professionals whose areas of expertise included language testing, language teaching, linguistics, and court interpreting. Content specialists were also consulted to ensure the authenticity of language usage in legal and other specialized contexts.

The Written Examination, like the Oral Examination, requires a high degree of literacy in the source and target languages and familiarity with a range of language varieties and registers (formality of the language.) The Written Examination complements the Oral Examination in that it tests comprehension of written text, knowledge of vocabulary and idioms, recognition of grammatically correct language, and the ability to recognize appropriate target language rendering of source language text.

The examination specifications for the Written Examination guide the development process, ensuring that each form of the examination is reliable, valid, and like the others, in content, structure, and level of difficulty. Examination reliability, the consistency of measurement of the examination, and validity, the extent to which the examination measures what it is intended to measure and is useful for its intended purpose, are established through an expert review of the examination specifications and the examination forms and through field testing of the exam items.

Reliability is a prerequisite for validity; that is, an examination such as the Written Examination cannot measure what it is intended to measure and be useful for its intended purpose unless there is the consistency of measurement across and within examination forms. New forms are developed periodically as needed, according to the examination specifications. Each form has new test items, which are field tested to ensure equivalent form reliability and internal consistency, and each is

² Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (2014), American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and National Council on Measurement in Education, Standard 4.10.

administered to a population of candidates as similar as possible to the population of individuals expected to take the examination routinely.

Statistical analyses of the items and tests are conducted to establish the internal consistency of each test form and to allow statistical equating of the forms. Item analysis allows verification that individual items, both existing and new, function as they are intended. If items on a new test form do not function as they are intended, they are not considered during scoring and are deleted from the score and from the final operational form. New test items that are added to existing test forms are not considered for scoring purposes but are statistically analyzed and, if they function well, placed in a test “bank” for use in subsequent test forms. This process ensures that each item is related to the skills tested by other items and by the exam as a whole. The item analysis also guides any minor revision of examinations that are needed. The result is a high degree of internal consistency for each exam form. The examination forms themselves are statistically equated, removing the inevitable differences in difficulty that occur across multiple forms of an examination. The scores reported to the examinee in the score results letter are the equated scores, ensuring that identical scores on different forms reflect the same level of competency.

Test validity, the extent to which the exam measures what it is intended to measure, is supported by the examination specifications and the exam development process. The specifications and examination forms undergo a series of rigorous reviews by language professionals who verify that the specifications and exam are comprehensive and that they identify and measure the tasks, skills, and knowledge required of a Federally Certified Court Interpreter. These reviews support both the construct³ and content validity of the Written Examination. A high degree of internal consistency and equivalent form reliability also help ensure the validity of the examinations.

3.4. Suggestions on How to Prepare for the FCICE Written Examination

The Federal Court Interpreter Certification Examination program is designed for an examination candidate who is highly proficient in both English and Spanish. If you do not have such proficiency, you should focus on improving your general language proficiency before registering for an examination. Some strategies for doing this include:

- enroll in university-level courses in a country where the language is spoken,
- read in both languages, routinely using a dictionary to look up unfamiliar words,
- write down and memorize new vocabulary words and phrases,
- write often, using the new vocabulary you have learned,
- correct and ask others to correct your writing, and
- translate a variety of texts into the target language and have a competent, independent translator correct the translation.

³ A “construct” is an attribute of people, reflected in test performance; for example, the language proficiency needed to perform the activities of a court interpreter.

If you already have high-level proficiency in both English and Spanish, to prepare for the exam, you may wish to do the following:

- Read
 - major newspaper editorials and articles, as well as news items related to legal matters and law enforcement, in both English and Spanish. Look for the main point and supporting arguments,
 - laws, codes, international treaties and conventions, contracts, and other legal writings, in both English and Spanish,
 - U.S. court documents such as indictments, sentences, probation and police reports, affidavits, etc. and,
 - documents such as wills, contracts, powers-of-attorney, and birth and death certificates, which are typically written in Spanish-speaking countries by a notary public, attorney, and government agencies.
- Practice translating texts related to legal matters, such as those mentioned above.
- Brush up on grammar, especially areas such as verb tenses and modes, as well as irregular verbs, pronouns, agreement, comparatives and superlatives, and the use of passive versus active voice.
- Practice translating sentences that contain the grammar points mentioned above as well as sentences where the syntax in English and Spanish is not parallel.
- Expand your vocabulary by adding terms in all registers as well as idiomatic expressions. Focus on nouns, verbs, slang, and adjectives that might be used in the testimony of a wide variety of witnesses, including expert witnesses.
- Become familiar with court proceedings, including the terminology and syntax involved. It might be advisable to take a court interpreting course or to acquire court interpreting experience in state courts. The latter is particularly useful in preparation for the FCICE Oral Examination.

3.5. Procedures for the Day of the Written Examination

On the day of the examination:

Before the test

- Do not call test center proctors in advance. They have neither the authority nor the information necessary to admit anyone until the day and time of the exam.
- Arrive early. The exam takes two hours and thirty minutes. You should expect to be at the test center for up to four hours to complete pre-exam and post-exam tasks. If you are late for the exam, the test proctors will not allow you into the testing room.
- You will be admitted to the testing room only if you have an acceptable form of government-issued picture identification. The name on your government-issued picture identification must match the name you used to register for the examination.

- Leave dictionaries and reference materials at home or in the car. Leave your cell phone and other electronic devices at home or in the car. These items will not be permitted in the testing room, and testing staff will not be responsible for their security while you are taking the examination. Everything you need to take the exam will be provided. Before the Written Examination, you will be instructed to empty and turn your pockets inside out to confirm that you have no prohibited items. You may be disqualified from taking a federal examination in the future if you are found to have any electronic devices on your person while taking the exam.

Any candidate who is found to have access to equipment or material that could be used to assist in taking the examination or that could be used to record or transmit any portion of an examination will be permanently disqualified from taking any test in the Federal Court Interpreter Certification Examination program.

- Use the restroom before the exam begins. If you go to the restroom during the examination, you will not be allowed extra time to complete the exam.

During the test

- Follow test center procedures. The staff at each center observes certain standard procedures to ensure that every examinee has equal testing time and that the operation of the center meets the criteria established by the AO for standardized administration. The success of the exam administration depends in part on your following these procedures.
- The proctor will tell you when to start the examination. The computer will have a timer on the screen, showing you the remaining time to complete the exam.
- Visitors are not permitted in the testing room, except for official AO observers.

3.6. Suggested Study References for the Written Examination

Barron's 1001 Pitfalls in English Grammar. (1986). Barron's Educational Series (ISBN 0-8120-3719-7).

Escarpanter, J. (1995). *Cómo eliminar los errores y dudas del lenguaje*, Editorial Playor (ISBN 84-359-0388-5).

Fernández de la Torriente, G. (1997). *Cómo aumentar su vocabulario 1*, Editorial Playor, (ISBN 84-359-0124-6).

Mikkelson, H. (1995). *The Interpreter's Edge; Turbo Supplement*, Monterey, CA: ACEBO (ISBN 1-880594-13-7).

Moliner, M. (1998). *Diccionario de uso del español*, Editorial Gredos (ISBN 84-249-1974-2).

3.7. Discussion and Sample Items

In the following discussion, English and Spanish examples are provided for each section of the examination; however, in an operational examination, the five parts of the English section are presented first, and then the five parts of the Spanish section are presented. There are 20 items in each of the five parts of each section, English and Spanish.

Part I: Reading Comprehension

These items assess understanding of main ideas and supporting information. Inferred meaning can also be assessed. There are four types of reading comprehension texts on the Written Examination: general interest texts, non-specialist legal texts, specialist legal texts, and language-specific legal texts.

Language-specific texts for Spanish are typical of the types of documents drafted by a notary public, a government agency, or a court and may include contracts, wills, birth and death certificates, marriage certificates, court decisions, etc. Language-specific texts for English are typical of documents that are likely to be part of criminal court proceedings or files, such as foreign or domestic police reports, probation reports, complaints, indictments, affidavits, etc. Typically, texts are 400-600 words long.

Here is an abbreviated example of an English non-specialist legal text with several example questions. Note that this sample text, which is about 220 words in length, is shorter than the examination texts, which are 400-600 words in length.

Supreme Court Reverses Lower Court

The Supreme Court ruled Monday that police cannot conduct an extensive search of a murder scene without first obtaining a warrant. The unsigned opinion in the case of a West Virginia minister who murdered his wife reinforced a 1978 decision and reversed a lower court's ruling that the scene of a homicide is exempt from the constitutional prohibition on warrantless searches.

The defendant had called the police to a cabin that he and his wife were renting, telling them that a man had broken in and knocked him unconscious. When he awoke, he found his wife dead, beaten to death. Police arrived and began searching the cabin. Opening a briefcase, they found an envelope containing photographs of a man who appeared to be taking off his jeans. It was later revealed that the man was a friend of the defendant and a member of his congregation. Prosecutors charged the minister with his wife's murder, introducing the photos as evidence that he had had an intimate relationship with the man and arguing that he killed his wife in part because she was enraged by the relationship.

The defendant tried to keep the photos out of his 1997 trial, contending that police needed a warrant before going through his belongings. The trial judge denied his objection, declaring an exception to the warrant requirement for homicide scenes.

1. How did the photographs found at the crime scene incriminate the man in the murder of his wife?
 - A. They were believed to show evidence of the man's violent nature.
 - B. They showed evidence of the man's intention to murder his wife.
 - C. They supported claims that the man had a recent life insurance policy on his wife.

- D. They were believed to be evidence of a relationship that angered his wife.

The correct answer to question 1 is option D. The information needed to respond correctly to this item is located primarily in the last sentence of the second paragraph.

2. On what basis did the trial judge allow the photographs to be included as evidence?
- A. The evidence was found at the location of a homicide.
 - B. The defendant's story was not supported by the evidence.
 - C. The defendant was accused of committing a homicide.
 - D. The briefcase where the photographs had been kept was not locked.

The correct answer to question 2 is option A. The information needed to respond correctly to this item is located primarily in the last sentence of the third paragraph.

The abbreviated text, Referéndum Venezolano, that appears below is typical of the general text type for Spanish. Note that this sample text, which has about 200 words, is shorter than the examination texts, which are 400-600 words in length.

Referéndum Venezolano

El resultado del referéndum verificado el domingo pasado en Venezuela revela que el poder de convocatoria del Presidente Hugo Chávez era menor que lo esperado. Chávez ha triunfado, por cierto, y el país se ha pronunciado a favor de una Asamblea Constituyente destinada a reformar la actual Carta Fundamental que rige al país. Más del 80 por ciento de los votantes, que sumaron unos tres millones de electores, respondieron afirmativamente a las dos consultas hechas por el gobierno. Estas, si bien incorporan elementos nuevos en el debate político, como la transformación del Estado, la creación de un nuevo ordenamiento jurídico y el funcionamiento de una democracia social y participativa, plantean futuros desencuentros en torno a sus reales alcances.

El éxito proclamado por Chávez, sin embargo, fue opacado por la abrumadora abstención, que alcanzó a más del 60 por ciento de la población inscrita. Los cinco millones y medio de personas que no participaron en la consulta representaron, según la oposición, una grave derrota para el mandatario. Pero, la escasa concurrencia de votantes a las urnas, que había sido anticipada por las encuestas, no pudo ser impedida por el Presidente, quien hizo varios intentos para evitar el abstencionismo.

1. ¿En qué se basa el autor para afirmar que el Presidente Hugo Chávez tuvo un “poder de convocatoria menor que lo esperado?”
- A. en que sólo el 80% de los votantes se pronunció a favor del plebiscito
 - B. en que tres millones de personas votaron por la creación de la Asamblea Constituyente
 - C. en que la mayoría absoluta de los votantes inscritos no votó en el referéndum
 - D. en que la Asamblea Constituyente no obtuvo la mayoría de los votos emitidos

The correct answer to question 1 is option C. The information needed to respond correctly to this item is located primarily in the first sentence of the second paragraph, although the quotation is from the opening sentence.

2. ¿Cuál es la función que llevará a cabo la Asamblea Constituyente venezolana?
- A. redactar una nueva constitución política

- B. velar por el funcionamiento de una democracia social
- C. incorporar nuevos elementos al debate político
- D. crear futuros desencuentros nacionales

The correct answer to question 2 is option A. The information needed to respond correctly to this item is located primarily in the second sentence of the first paragraph.

Part II: Usage

The usage items are intended to measure knowledge of standard grammar and common idioms.

Grammar usage items consist of a sentence with an underlined portion containing a grammatical form that may or may not include an error. Three alternatives for the underlined portion are presented in the options, with option D being “no change.” Only one of the options presented for the underlined portion is correct according to standard or normative grammar. The examinee must select the option that reflects this standard or normative use, or if the underlined portion represents the correct form, “no change” should be selected.

Here are four examples of grammar usage items, two in English and two in Spanish, for your review.

For each of the following sentences, either choose the alternative (A, B, or C) that best replaces the underlined portion, or, if the original sentence is best, mark option D (no change).

1. An effective defense counsel and an attentive jury were key in the acquittal.
 - A. counsel, besides attentive jurors, were key
 - B. counsel as well as attentive jurors was key
 - C. counsel and an attentive jury were key
 - D. no change

The correct answer to question 1 is option C. This item tests subject-verb agreement. Only choice C exhibits correct agreement. The underlined portion of the sentence and choices A and B all contain errors. Because a change is needed, D is not the right choice.

2. Government figures show that in 1995-2000 the economy grew at a much faster rate than in the previous ten years.
 - A. a more faster
 - B. a lot more faster
 - C. a further faster
 - D. no change

The correct answer to question 2 is option D. This item tests comparatives. The underlined portion of the sentence does not contain an error and, therefore, no change is necessary. Options A, B, and C all contain errors.

3. El delincuente apresado ayer resultó ser mucho más peligroso que la policía había imaginado.
 - A. peligroso de lo que la policía
 - B. peligroso que lo que la policía
 - C. peligroso lo que la policía
 - D. sin cambio

The correct answer to question 3 is option A. This item tests comparatives. Only choice A exhibits the correct use of a comparative form. The underlined portion of the sentence and choices B and C all contain errors. Because a change is needed, D is not the right choice.

4. Está lista la solicitud de libertad bajo fianza; el abogado va a entregársela mañana al actuario.
- A. se la va a entregársela
 - B. se va a entregarla
 - C. la va a entregársela
 - D. sin cambio

The correct answer to question 4 is option D. This item tests the placement of pronouns. The underlined portion of the sentence does not contain an error and, therefore, no change is necessary. Options A, B, and C all contain errors.

Following are two examples of idiom usage items, one in English and one in Spanish.

1. The robber was caught red-handed as he exited the bank.
- A. with his hands up
 - B. without a chase
 - C. without effort
 - D. with the evidence

The correct response to the English idiom example is option D. The best replacement for the expression “red-handed” is “with the evidence.”

2. Aquella tarde, el autobús iba de bote en bote.
- A. bamboleándose
 - B. avanzando a gran velocidad
 - C. lleno de gente
 - D. casi vacío

The correct response to the Spanish idiom example is option C. The best replacement for the expression “de bote en bote” is “lleno de gente.”

Part III: Error Detection

The Error Detection segment of the Written Examination is intended to measure knowledge of standard forms of grammatical expression, which is essential for the work of a Federally Certified Court Interpreter. Eight of the Error Detection items are based on a single, isolated sentence. The remaining twelve items are based on two six-sentence paragraphs. Each of those sentences is a discrete item. Three words or phrases are underlined in each item. One of the three underlined segments may contain an error. In that case, the examinee identifies which underlined word or phrase must be corrected for the sentence to be grammatically correct. The fourth option is No Error (D). The examinee marks No error (D) when the sentence is correct as stated.

Following are two examples, one in English and one in Spanish, of the single sentence Error Detection items.

In the following sentences, three segments are underlined and followed by a letter (A, B, C). One of these segments might contain an error. Choose the segment that contains the error and mark your choice on your answer sheet. If the sentence does not contain an error, mark D (No error). There may be grammatical, syntactic, or semantic errors. There is no more than one error in a sentence.

1. The victim's family reached a sense of closing (A) when the bomber was sentenced (B) to two life terms (C) without parole. No error (D)

The correct answer to the English example is option A because "closing" is an incorrect word form in this context. The correct form would be "closure."

2. Una de las medidas adoptadas (A) para hacer enfrente (B) al desempleo es premiar a (C) las empresas que contratan a empleados jóvenes. Sin error (D)

The correct answer to the Spanish example is option B because "enfrente" is an incorrect word form in this context. The correct form would be "frente."

Here is an example of the items contained in the six-sentence paragraph. An English set is provided to illustrate this segment of the exam; however, Spanish Error Detection items are presented in the same manner.

The six sentences that follow form a paragraph. In each sentence, three segments are underlined and followed by a letter (A, B, C). One of these segments might contain an error. Choose the segment that contains the error and mark your choice on your answer sheet. If the sentence does not contain an error, mark D (No error). There may be grammatical, syntactic, or semantic errors. There is no more than one error in a sentence.

1. At the Nice meeting, European Union (A) will have to embrace institutional reforms (B) as a prelude (C) to enlargement. No error (D)

The correct answer to question 1 in the set is option A because in option A the definite article "the" is missing.

2. The Union's decision-making processes, designed for (A) a trading bloc of six nations, are hardly (B) suited for today's common market of 15 nations, let alone (C) one of 27. No error (D)

The correct answer to question 2 in the set is option D because there is no error in the sentence.

3. The problem is that (A) individual member states champion reforms (B) that suit their often conflicting views of it's fundamental nature (C). No error (D)

The correct answer to question 3 in the set is option C because the pronoun "its," referring to the Union, should be used in this context.

4. France and Germany, for instance, both remain (A) strong proponents of expanding the Union, though one sees it (B) as a federation of nations, the other of peoples (C). No error (D)

The correct answer to question 4 in the set is option D because there is no error in the sentence.

5. France would like to reaffirm the supremacy (A) of the Council of Ministers, whose member (B) represent the national governments (C). No error (D)

The correct answer to question 5 in the set is option B because the singular form of the verb “member” is incorrect. The verb form “represent” requires a plural subject.

6. Germany would like (A) to strengthen the (B) supranational policymaking (C) European Commission. No error (D)

The correct answer to question 6 in the set is option B because the infinitive verb form “strengthen” is required in this context.

Part IV: Synonyms

Items in this part of the Written Examination measure the breadth and precision of vocabulary because a Federally Certified Court Interpreter must have a broad and precise vocabulary and be sensitive to slight differences in connotation among words of similar meaning. A Synonym item presents the vocabulary word – a noun, verb, adjective, or adverb – in a non-defining context. The vocabulary item to be tested is underlined, and four options are offered. One option is the best response; that is, the closest in meaning to the underlined word. The three incorrect options are at approximately the same level of difficulty (word frequency) as the underlined word but do not have the same meaning as the underlined word.

Following are one English and one Spanish example of Synonyms items. From among the four alternatives (A, B, C, D), choose the one closest in meaning to the underlined word in the sentence.

1. We were struck by his demeanor.
A. disquiet
B. behavior
C. weapon
D. attire

The correct answer to the English example is option B because the word “behavior” is closest in meaning to the underlined word in the sentence, “demeanor.”

2. Pese a la agresividad mostrada por el fiscal durante el contrainterrogatorio, el acusado se mantuvo impávido.
A. impertérrito
B. henchido
C. incólume
D. imborrable

The correct answer to the Spanish example is option A because the word “impertérrito” is closest in meaning to the underlined word in the sentence, “impávido.”

Part V: Best Translation of a Word or Phrase

Translating is similar to interpreting as it involves rendering a word or phrase from one language to another. An example of a Best Translation question is a sentence with an underlined word or phrase.

From the four alternatives, the examinee must choose the best rendering in the target language of the underlined portion. Items for which the sentences are in Spanish and the alternatives in English are included in the English section of the Written Examination; items for which the sentences are in English and the alternatives in Spanish are included in the Spanish section of the Written Examination. Eight of the items are based on isolated sentences. The remaining items are presented in three sets of four items each.

Following are two examples of the single sentence Best Translation part of the examination. For each of the underlined segments in the sentences that follow, choose the alternative (A, B, C, D) closest in meaning to the underlined word or phrase. In choosing your answer, consider the context of the underlined portion and what the translation of the entire sentence would be.

This example is from Spanish into English and would be included in the English section of the Written Examination.

1. El dinero recaudado apenas alcanzará para cubrir un quinto de los gastos.
 - A. a quintuplet
 - B. one item
 - C. one fifth
 - D. a fortnight

The correct answer to the Spanish into English example is option C because “one fifth” is the best rendering of “un quinto.”

This example is from English into Spanish and would be included in the Spanish portion of the Written Examination.

2. All subsequent allocations will be decided by the incoming Board.
 - A. posteriores
 - B. pendientes
 - C. subsecuentes
 - D. subsiguientes

The correct answer to the Spanish into English example is option A because “posteriores” is the best rendering of “subsequent.”

Following are examples similar to the four-item sets that are contained in the Best Translation segment of the examination.

This example is from Spanish into English and would be included in the English portion of the Written Examination.

De lo anterior (1) se concluye que analizados y valorados de manera conjunta los elementos probatorios (2) mencionados, de acuerdo con el numeral 175 del Código Federal de Procedimientos Penales, constituyen prueba plena de que alguien se apoderó de una cosa mueble (3) ajena, en este caso una unidad automotriz, sin derecho y sin consentimiento de la persona que puede disponer de ella con arreglo a la Ley (4), cuyos hechos ocurrieron en el vecino país del Norte; de ahí se justifique la existencia del cuerpo del delito de Robo, conforme a su definición.

1.
 - A. From the foregoing
 - B. Due to the preceding
 - C. In the former case
 - D. Given the foregone

The correct answer to question 1 is option A because the phrase “from the foregoing” is the best rendering of “de lo anterior” in this context.

2.
 - A. evidence
 - B. proof
 - C. probationary material
 - D. probative elements

The correct answer to question 2 is option A because the word “evidence” is the best rendering of “elementos probatorios” in this context.

3.
 - A. real property
 - B. personal property
 - C. durable goods
 - D. material goods

The correct answer to question 3 is option B because the phrase “personal property” is the best rendering of “cosa mueble” in this context.

4.
 - A. that is able to discard her according to the law
 - B. who may statutorily dispose of it
 - C. to whom the law gives access thereto
 - D. who can make lawful use thereof

The correct answer to question 4 is option D because the phrase “who can make lawful use thereof” is the best rendering of “que puede disponer de ella con arreglo a la Ley” in this context.

Finally, this example is from English into Spanish and would be included in the Spanish portion of the Written Examination.

WHEREAS: (5)

Pursuant to an agreement of even date herewith (6) between the aforementioned (7) parties (the “Principal Agreement”) the Assignor agreed to procure the sale and the Assignee agreed to purchase or procure the purchase of inter alia the commercial real estate and chattels, details of which are set out (8) in the schedule hereto, together with the goodwill associated therewith, (together, the “Property”); and

The Assignor has agreed to enter into this Assignment to assign to the Assignee all its rights, title and interest in and to the Property registered in its name.

5.

- A. por lo tanto
- B. en vista de
- C. considerando
- D. conviniendo

The correct answer to question 5 is option C because the word “considerando” is the best rendering of “whereas.”

6.

- A. de fecha pareja con aquí
- B. de la misma fecha que el presente Convenio
- C. con la fecha antedicha en este Convenio
- D. con la fecha igual que éste

The correct answer to question 6 is option B because the phrase “de la misma fecha que el presente Convenio” is the best rendering of “of even date herewith” in this context.

7.

- A. previamente dichos
- B. en su conjunto
- C. que suscriben
- D. antes mencionadas

The correct answer to question 7 is option D because the phrase “antes mencionadas” is the best rendering of “aforementioned” in this context.

8.

- A. cuyos detalles se listan
- B. detalles de los cuales se aparecen
- C. donde se establecen detalles de ellos
- D. detalles que son especificados

The correct answer to question 8 is option A because the phrase “cuyos detalles se listan” is the best rendering of “details of which are set out” in this context.

PART 4 THE ORAL EXAMINATION

4.1. Description of the Oral Examination

Only those individuals who have previously passed the Phase One Written Examination are eligible to take the Phase Two Oral Examination.

The purpose of the federal certification program is to determine whether a person seeking certification is minimally competent for immediate work in the federal courts. The FCICE oral phase is a performance exam that assesses functional proficiency during actual task performances required for court interpretation.

Functional proficiency means that the interpreter can accurately conserve the meaning of a source language when rendering it into a target language, without embellishments, without omissions, and with minimum impact on the style or register of the speaker. The interpreter must be able to do this while keeping up with the routine pace of court proceedings. The tasks required of interpreters in court include interpreting in the simultaneous and consecutive modes and sight translations of documents.

The Oral Examination consists of five parts that represent activities interpreters are required to do in court, namely: interpreting in the consecutive mode, interpreting in two contexts in the simultaneous mode, and sight translation of documents (English to Spanish and Spanish to English). The activity of simultaneous interpretation is performed in two contexts: the context of extended monologue speech and the context of witness examination, which involves relatively short exchanges between two speakers. All test parts are simulations of what interpreters do in court.

The five parts of the examination include:

- Sight translation: English to Spanish,
- Sight translation: Spanish to English,
- Simultaneous interpretation into Spanish – monologue speech,
- Consecutive interpretation: Spanish to English; English to Spanish, and
- Simultaneous interpretation into Spanish – witness testimony (question and answer).

4.2. Development of the Oral Examination

The Oral Examination specifications were written by expert interpreters with an extensive background in preparing and rating interpreter examinations for federal and state court systems. The test writers were advised and assisted by a team of language professionals serving as an examination development working group. Their areas of expertise included court interpreting, linguistics, language testing, and language teaching. The qualifications of test writers included the following, in approximate priority order:

- practicing interpreter with federal certification,

- prior test writing experience,
- advanced degree in language,
- experience as a test rater for FCICE or analogous state tests, and
- experience as an interpreter trainer.

Members of the original examination development working group reviewed and commented on examination design, considered and suggested policy regarding examination design and implementation, reviewed and commented on test content, and assisted in the collection of source texts for examination materials and the evaluation of source text appropriateness.

The first substantive activity in developing the exam was the selection of base documents for its construction. Base documents were chosen from a large corpus of federal court transcripts stored in digital form. Source documents were edited to bring the document to the length (number of words) required by the structural specifications. The second phase of editing took place when scoring units were selected and other fine-tuning was done to bring the text script into compliance with the structural specifications for the examination. For example, overall length, length of utterances in succession, and types and distribution of scoring units in each exam part.

After a complete draft was created for each section of the exam, test writers prepared examples of acceptable and unacceptable renderings of each scoring unit. Every unit has at least one initial example of an acceptable rendering. Most scoring units also had at least one example of an unacceptable rendering. During field testing of each examination form and pretest training of raters, additional examples of acceptable and unacceptable renderings have been noted and compiled. Field testing also revealed deficiencies in scoring units, and these units were replaced as a result. Deficiencies might have included an unclear meaning of a word in the source text material and too many or too few words included in the designated unit.

After the original test drafts were written, they were distributed for three types of review:

- a review by federal lawyers that focused on the substantive appropriateness of texts and scoring units (content validity),
- a linguistic review by professional interpreters and linguists familiar with varieties of Spanish usage and the specific linguistic challenges of Spanish-English interpreting, and
- a review focused on the cultural appropriateness of texts. The main purpose of the review process was (and continues to be) to ensure, based on consensus from native English and Spanish speakers from different regions of the United States and different native origins, that the examination did not include arcane words or phrases in either language or words used in a way that is so unique to a particular region or country that they would not be accessible to speakers from other regions. The underlying standard is: that if all the reviewers can retrieve the meaning of the word or phrase in the context as it appears in the test, then the unit is fairly and validly included in the examination.

4.3. Examination Validity, Reliability, and Field Testing

As is true for the Written Examination described in Part 3, examination specifications also guide the development of the Oral Examination. The specifications ensure that all versions of the examination are valid, reliable, and similar to each other in structure and content. Test validity and reliability have been previously explained in 3.3 Development of the Written Examination.

Validity of the Oral Examination is achieved by ensuring that the tasks candidates perform in the test match the tasks that interpreters must perform on the job, as described above in 4.1 Description of the Oral Examination. Validity also requires the test content to be appropriate. Appropriateness of texts used in the examination is achieved in two ways. First, the source material is based on actual court transcripts from federal courts or written documents presented in federal court. Second, the texts derived from these transcripts are reviewed by experienced professionals (federal judges, lawyers, and interpreters), who have consistently found them to be representative of the language typically encountered in federal court.

The reliability of the examination is ensured through a combination of qualitative and quantitative measures. Qualitative measures include standardized approaches to test writing and selection of the scoring units used for test rating, standardized guides for rating the scoring units, and intensive training of the raters who apply the guides. Especially important to reliability in scoring is the use of multiple raters. The opinions of two federally certified interpreters, who have received the same training as oral raters for the FCICE Oral Examination, must converge in determining when interpretations of scoring units are correct or incorrect. Quantitative measures include the collection and analysis of item-level rating data and the application of standard statistical techniques for exam evaluation, including multiple measures of examination reliability, overall internal validity, and the correlation of exam part scores to overall exam scores.

Field testing is used before finalizing a new examination to verify that the procedural techniques used to ensure validity and reliability worked as intended. There is more than one technique for field testing an Oral Examination. One technique includes administering the completed versions of the exam to a group of candidates who are as similar in composition as possible to the individuals who are expected to take the exam routinely. After the exams are administered, they are subjected to statistical and qualitative evaluations to determine that the exam content – especially the scoring units and scoring guides – are scored as intended. Any necessary adjustments may then be made before finalizing the exam for routine administration.

4.4. Administering and Scoring the Oral Examination

The Oral Examination is administered to candidates on an individual basis in testing rooms. Candidates' exam responses are recorded. This means that the candidate's performance is preserved for later scoring by a rating team. The administration of the Oral Examination lasts approximately 45 minutes.

A team of expert raters will later evaluate the candidate’s performance. Each rater is a Federally Certified Court Interpreter who has completed intensive training as an oral rater for the FCICE. All raters are trained immediately before serving as test raters.

The Oral Examination is scored objectively using pre-selected words and phrases—called “scoring units” or “keywords”—that appear in the text. The raters base their scoring on documented examples of correct and incorrect interpreted renderings in the guide for the raters. The test raters listen to the candidate’s recorded performance to verify what was said and can listen to it as many times as necessary if any question arises. The raters consider correct any word or expression that would be acceptable in any variety of Spanish or English where their usage is found in a standard, reputable resource, provided it conveys the original’s register accurately. Like the Written Examination, there are multiple forms of the Oral Examination and forms are statistically equated to ensure fairness to all candidates regardless of what form of the examination they took.

If a candidate stops an administration before completion of the examination for any reason, the examination will not be rated, and no score will be reported.

4.5. Discussion of the Individual Sections of the Oral Examination

Sight Translation: English to Spanish

The English to Spanish sight translation is the part of the exam that requires the candidate to interpret aloud into Spanish an English language document of approximately 230 words. This part represents 10 percent of the exam weight, and the candidate is allowed 5 minutes to complete the task, including the time used for an initial silent reading of the original script. Documents used for this part of the examination are typically based on police reports, presentence investigation reports, or affidavits of witnesses. These reports include a wide range of language and generally involve factual descriptions of events or personalities.

Sight translation: Spanish to English

The Spanish to English sight translation part of the exam is the same length and weight as the English to Spanish sight translation and requires the same procedure from the candidate. Documents used for this part of the examination are typically based on formal legal documents that are written in high register Spanish. Examples would include affidavits taken before a notary, letters written to judges by educated individuals, or excerpts from legal documents.

Simultaneous Interpretation Section – Monologue Speech

This section of the examination represents 30 percent of the exam weight. The recorded speech, either an opening or closing argument to a jury, is approximately 840 words in length, recorded at an average of 120 wpm, and takes about 7 minutes to complete. This first simultaneous section of the exam requires the candidate to listen to the recorded speech monologue by an English-speaking lawyer through a headphone set and to interpret it in Spanish simultaneously. The candidate wears a set of headphones to listen to the recording and speaks aloud so that her or his performance can be recorded

on the computer-based testing system. The speech is entirely in English, and the interpreter interprets it into Spanish as would be required to assist a Spanish speaking defendant during a trial. Texts in this section are typical of a discourse delivered to jurors who are average speakers of English. Language register will vary between higher and lower registers as the lawyer covers matters of law and fact in combinations of formal and casual persuasive speech patterns. Once this section of the exam begins, the candidate may not stop the recording.

Consecutive Interpretation Section

This section represents 35 percent of the exam weight. It is about 875-925 words in length, and the candidate is allowed 20 minutes to complete this. The consecutive section of the exam mimics the examination of a Spanish-speaking witness by an English-speaking lawyer in court. The system plays one segment at a time on the computer-based testing system, allowing the candidate to interpret from English into Spanish or from Spanish into English, as appropriate. The script is recorded at a normal, conversational pace that would be typical during a witness' testimony. The raters will evaluate the candidate's ability to interpret accurately all the details of the questions and the testimony, also preserving the register of the original. Source texts for this section of the examination are transcripts from direct or cross-examining a witness during actual trials where the testimony is given by a Spanish-speaking person. Texts in this portion of the examination always include examples of lower register speech, such as profanity and idiomatic usage. Candidates may initiate up to two repetitions during the consecutive section.

Simultaneous Interpretation Section – Witness Testimony (Q&A)

This section of the examination represents 15 percent of the test weight. It requires the candidate to simultaneously listen to recorded speech in English through a headphone set and translate it into Spanish. For this section of the exam, however, the source texts are in question-and-answer form, taken from transcripts of testimony by English-speaking witnesses. The text length is about 600 words at a varying speed of delivery that approximates normal courtroom speech, up to 160 wpm, and takes about 5 minutes to complete. Often these source texts will include evidence presented by law enforcement officers or technical experts. Vocabulary in these texts will include a greater amount of specialized terminology than in the consecutive interpreting task, but the texts only include technical vocabulary that would be familiar to educated native speakers of English. Once this section of the test begins, the recording may not be stopped.

4.6. [More on Scoring Units](#)

Scoring units are words and phrases that are selected because they represent various features of language that interpreters encounter in their work, which must be rendered accurately and completely without altering their meaning or the speaker's style of speech. The raters determine as a group whether each of the scoring units is interpreted correctly or incorrectly.

Scoring units are classified into three general categories and nine specific types, set out below:

Grammar and Usage (27% of scoring units)

Grammar/verbs

Features of grammar, especially verbs, that should be handled accurately by the user of the two languages.

False cognates/interference/literalism

Terms or phrases that should be interpreted correctly by a qualified interpreter despite interference by one language on the other (e.g., false cognates, awkward phrasing, or terms or phrases susceptible to literal renditions resulting in loss of precise meaning).

General Lexical Range (45% of scoring units)

General vocabulary

Vocabulary of general usage, including that of more and less academically educated speakers, and any general lexical item or set of items not easily classified elsewhere among the scoring units.

Legal terms and phrases

Any word or phrase of a legal or technical nature, or which is not common in everyday speech but is commonly used in legal settings.

Idioms/sayings and colloquialisms/slang

Idioms: Sets of words that, as a whole, have meaning that is different from that of the individual words (e.g., “hit the road,” “red-handed,” “make a pit stop”);

Sayings: Culturally bound expressions or famous quotes from literature or history (e.g., “when in Rome,” “the early bird catches the worm”);

Colloquialisms/slang: Informal, nonstandard words or phrases that are used in ordinary conversation but not in formal speech or writing.

Conservation (28% of scoring units)

Register

Words and phrases of unquestionably high or low register that can be preserved in that register in the target language by a qualified interpreter (e.g., curses, profanity, taboo words).

Numbers/names

Any number (e.g., street address, the weight of person or object, measurements such as distance) or name (e.g., person, court, street, town).

Modifiers/intensifiers/emphases/interjections

Adjectives and adverbs that increase or modify the intensity or provide emphasis or precision to a description (e.g., adverbs that increase the intensity of adjectives, such as “absolutely,” “completely,” or “very”). It may include interjections (e.g., wow, yuk, oops, etc.).

Embeddings/positions

Words or phrases that would not be omitted by a qualified interpreter due to position (e.g., at the beginning or middle of a long sentence; the second in a string of adjectives or adverbs) or function (e.g., tag questions).

4.7. Suggestions on How to Prepare for the Oral Examination

The FCICE Oral Examination requires candidates to demonstrate their interpreting skills. Because these skills need to be developed gradually and improved over time, it does not lend themselves to last-minute preparation. Reading widely and developing an extensive vocabulary in both English and Spanish are necessary to pass the prerequisite Written Examination. Preparing for the Oral Examination should include practicing interpreting skills frequently for an extended period. Candidates should continue or even intensify these practices in the weeks or months before taking the Oral Examination, including recording and listening to their delivery.

To make an initial assessment of readiness to take the Oral Examination, it is suggested that candidates refer to Part 5 of this handbook, entitled Self-Assessment of Readiness to Take the FCICE. A high score on both 5.2 and 5.3 means that a person may be ready to take the Practice Oral Examination Test found in Part 8 of this handbook. Otherwise, the candidate should work to improve skills before taking the Practice Test or the Oral Examination. It is recommended to practice sight translations (English to Spanish and Spanish to English) with a timer. Simultaneous interpretation should be practiced using headphones and interpreting aloud while self-recording to evaluate the accuracy of the performance.

4.8. Practical “To Do” List for the Oral Examination

- Before leaving for the exam, ensure you have official photo identification, your registration materials, and directions to the test site. Follow the suggestions in section 3.5 regarding becoming acquainted with the test location, directions, road conditions, and parking, beforehand.
- Leave any equipment or material that could be used to assist in taking the examination or that could be used to record or transmit any portion of an examination at home. Candidates with access to such material will be permanently disqualified from taking any exam in the Federal Court Interpreter Certification Examination Program.
- Dictionaries, reference materials, cell phones and other electronic devices will not be permitted in the testing room, and test staff will not be responsible for their security while you are taking the examination. Before the exam, you will be asked if you are carrying reference materials, a cell phone, or any other electronic devices, and if you do, they will be held by the proctors until

the exam has concluded. After the exam, the items will be returned to you. You may be disqualified from taking a federal examination in the future if you are found to have any electronic devices on your person while taking a test.

- Bring only identification documents, keys, and wallet or small purse to the testing site. Remember that official photo identification will be required at check-in time, and that only the following will be accepted:
 - Current Driver's license or State I.D. card
 - Current U.S. passport or passport issued by a foreign government, or
 - Current U.S. Military I.D. card. The name on the identification must match the name under which you registered for the examination.
 - Water bottles will not be allowed into the testing room.

4.9. Procedures for the Day of the Oral Examination

On the day of the examination:

Before the Exam

You will not be allowed to bring food or drink into the test center.

Please plan to arrive at the test waiting area at least twenty minutes early. Allow time to find the facility. Also, allow time to find the room where the testing will take place and for you to go through the security check.

- If you drive to the site, check the parking facilities beforehand, especially if you require accessible parking. All testing locations are required to provide accessible parking and facilities, but some facilities provide more parking spaces than others. If it appears that there are few available parking spaces, check with the facility to see if a parking permit can be provided or if a space can be reserved for you.
- If you arrive late for your scheduled examination, proctors will not be able to administer your examination. They will move on to the next scheduled candidate and you will lose your scheduled time slot. If you are the last examinee for the day, proctors will wait no more than 15 minutes for you.
- Remember that you will be admitted to the testing room only if you have an acceptable form of government-issued picture identification and the name on the identification matches the name under which you registered for the exam.
- Follow instructions from the proctor, who will register you, check your official identification, and conduct a security check.
- Use the restroom before the exam begins. If you go to the restroom during the examination, you will not be allowed extra time to complete the exam.

During the Exam

- You should expect to be at the test center for a minimum of one hour to complete pre- and post-exam tasks. Please allow up to two hours, and

- Visitors are not permitted in the testing room, except for official AO observers.

4.10. The Examination Itself – What You Can Expect

The Oral Examination lasts about 45 minutes. All portions of the examination are timed to ensure fairness. Proctors will strive to start your examination at the scheduled time. However, keep in mind that because the exams are administered to one person at a time, proctors may be slightly behind or ahead of schedule. The proctor will introduce him/herself and show you to your room. Instructions will be provided within the computer-based test delivery system before each section. General instructions will be provided in a tutorial section before the exam begins, and then section-specific instructions will appear before each section of the exam. These instructions are provided below so that you can familiarize yourself with them.

4.11. Tutorial Instructions

Please read these directions carefully before you start the examination. You will be provided 15 minutes to review this tutorial. Selecting “Start the Test” will end this tutorial and begin the examination. **You will not be able to return to this tutorial once the exam begins, so it is strongly suggested that you view each page fully before the exam begins.**

This examination consists of the following sections that require you to record an oral response:

Section	Section Type	Content Time
1	Sight Translation – English to Spanish	5 Minutes
2	Sight Translation – Spanish to English	5 Minutes
3	Simultaneous Monologue Interpreting	9 Minutes
4	Consecutive Interpreting	20 Minutes
5	Simultaneous Q&A Interpreting	6 Minutes

Continue with this tutorial to learn more about each section type.

You should have received a Sound Recording Test message before entering the tutorial. If this message does not appear, inform the proctor.

The proctor has provided you with paper and a pen/pencil for note-taking during the examination. If you need extra, ensure you know how to get the proctor’s attention. You must leave your notes at the test center when you are finished. If you do not leave them, your exam may be voided.

Click the “Next” button to continue the tutorial.

General Exam Instructions

Notice the timer at the top of the screen. A similar display will appear during the actual exam. This timer will reflect the time remaining to complete the current section.

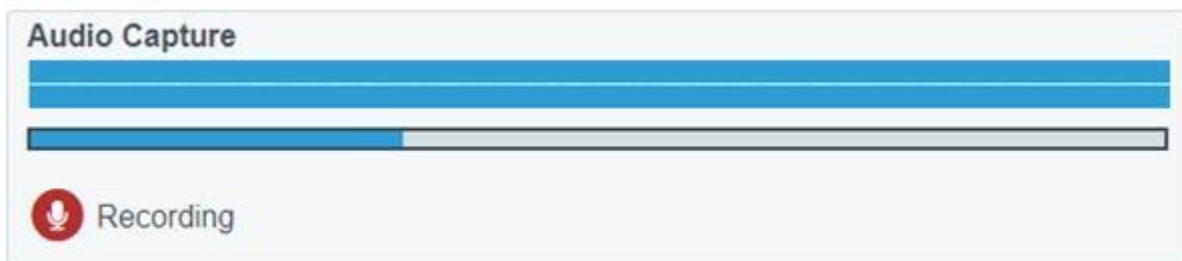
When you are ready to begin a section or submit your recording, click the **“Next”** button. The exam sections will not have a **“Back”** button, so you will not be able to return to a question once **“Next”** has been selected. If you run out of time on any section, including this tutorial, you will automatically be moved to the next section.

Click the **“Next”** button to continue

Audio Capture Questions – Sight Translation

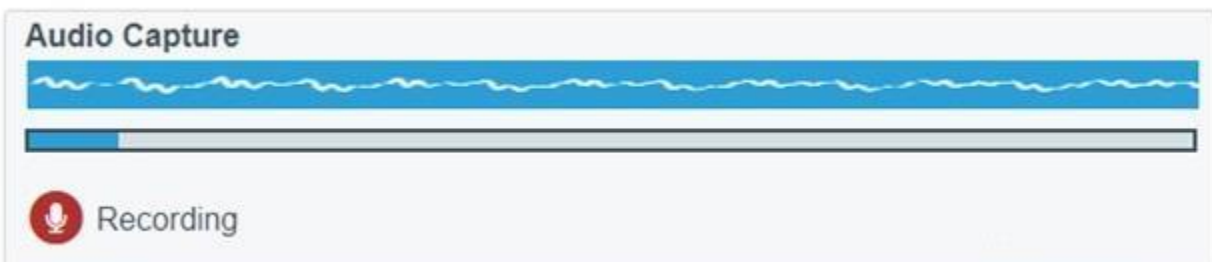
Text will be provided on the left side of the screen in either English or Spanish. Recording will begin immediately upon entering the sight translation sections and cannot be paused. Simply begin speaking when you are ready to start interpreting. You will not be able to playback/review your recording, and you may only record your interpretation once. Do not re-interpret text that has already been interpreted.

When you enter the sight translation section, the following audio capture bar will be visible:



The timer in the bottom right of the image indicates how much time is left to record your response. This time should match the section time remaining. The exam will move on automatically if either of the timers (audio capture or section time remaining) runs out.

When you speak, the line in the blue bar will move to indicate that the microphone is picking up sound:



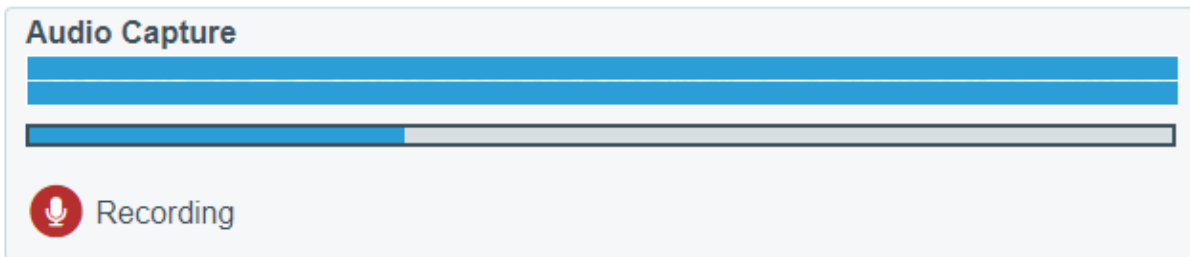
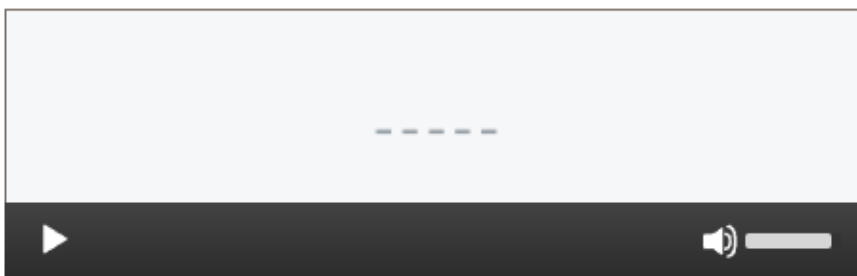
Click the **“Next”** button to continue

Audio Capture Questions – Simultaneous Interpreting

Select the play button to begin the audio playback. **Select the Play button as soon as you can to ensure you have time to listen to and interpret the entire audio file.** There is no navigation bar available on the media, so you will not be able to advance forward, rewind, or pause once playback has begun. If you wait too long to select play and the timer runs out while the media is still running, playback and recording will end, and your responses will be saved.

A short set of instructions will be provided at the beginning of the recording to allow you time to adjust the headphone volume. This can be adjusted using the volume bar on the bottom right of the media box.

Audio capture does not begin until the play button is selected. Once selected, the audio file will begin playing, and the recording indicator will display a red recording icon.



Click the **"Next"** button to continue

Audio Capture Questions – Consecutive Interpreting

This section will contain multiple questions. You will only be able to navigate forward through the series of questions. Each question contains an audio file, referred to as an "utterance," that will be interpreted into either English or Spanish, depending on the original language of the utterance. **You have 20 minutes to complete the section, so you need to move quickly through the utterances.**

When the utterance is first presented, only the media box will be visible. **The utterance will play immediately when beginning the section and then when navigating to each utterance.**



After the playback has completed, the audio capture box will appear, and the recording will begin automatically. **Do not interpret before the audio capture box appears.** You may provide your interpretation whenever you would like after the audio capture begins recording.

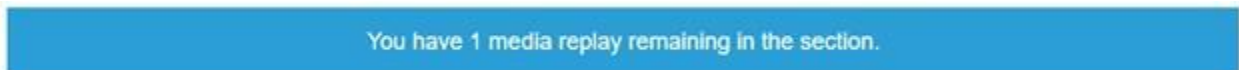


You have two repetitions that may be used on two utterances of your choice (or both within the same utterance). That's two repetitions for the entire consecutive interpreting section, not two repetitions for each utterance. After each use, the repetition counter will decrease by one. Once both repetitions are used, the replay button will not be available for the remainder of the section.

If you want to replay the utterance, click the replay button (↺) to hear the media again.



The number of replays you have left in the section will be tracked at the top of the page.



When you are finished with your interpretation, select the **"Next"** button immediately to avoid running out of time on the section.

When you select **"Next"** to submit your recording, the following pop-up will appear:



Select **"Continue and Save"** to submit your response and move to the next question.

Click the "Next" button to continue

Tutorial: Conclusion

This concludes the tutorial. You can review the tutorial by clicking on the **"Back"** button to back up one screen at a time or by using the numbered buttons displayed on the left side of the screen. These navigation options are only available in the tutorial.

When ready, click the **"Start the Test"** button to exit the tutorial and begin the examination. Each exam section will be preceded by a short instructional page, which re-states the instructions for the section type.

Sight Translation

The examination begins with the sight translations. The first section is from English to Spanish. You can look at the text as you interpret it, and you may make notes on the scratch paper provided if you wish.

You will have five minutes to both review and sight translate the entire page. You will need at least three minutes to interpret, so you should begin interpreting after reviewing for no more than two

minutes. **You will NOT receive a two-minute warning.** Watch the timer at the top of the screen to manage your time.

When ready, click the "Next" button to begin the sight translation. The exam section will begin automatically when the timer for this introduction page expires. Once started, the section and audio capture timer will begin immediately. You will have until the section duration ends to record your response. **Note that you only have one attempt to record your response.** You may use the scratch paper provided to take notes as needed. Once you are ready to begin recording your response, simply begin speaking.

Click the "**Next**" button to begin.

Simultaneous Interpretation – Monologue

Next is the simultaneous monologue interpretation portion of the exam. In simultaneous interpreting, you will interpret only from English into Spanish. The English audio has been pre-recorded for you to listen to while interpreting. There are about 45 seconds of introduction and instruction at the beginning of the recording to allow you time to adjust the headphones and volume. The audio will prompt you when it is time to begin interpreting.

Audio playback and recording will not begin automatically for this section of the exam. Once the section has begun, select the Play button to begin the audio playback. The audio capture will start at the same time and cannot be paused or restarted once the recording has begun. **Select the Play button as soon as you can to ensure you have time to listen to and interpret the entire audio file.** Once the media has begun playing, it cannot be stopped. Your response will be automatically saved once the time allocated has expired or you choose to end the section.

Click the "**Next**" button to begin.

Consecutive Interpretation

Be prepared to interpret immediately after the end of the instructions.

The next section is the consecutive interpreting portion of the exam. The consecutive interpreting portion contains multiple questions, each presenting pre-recorded "utterances" one at a time.

The audio tracks will play immediately when beginning the section and then when navigating to each question. Once the audio playback has finished, the recording of your interpretation will automatically begin. Many of the utterances consist of multiple sentences, so it is important that you do not begin speaking until the audio capture box appears.

When you have finished interpreting, click the "**Next**" button at the bottom of the screen to move to the next segment, which may be in Spanish or English. A prompt will appear to confirm saving if there is still time remaining for the audio capture. Click "**Continue and Save**" to save the recording and move to the next segment or click "**Cancel**" to resume recording. If the time allotted for the audio capture runs out, the response will save, but the exam will not move on automatically.

You have two repetitions that may be used on two utterances of your choice (or both within the same

utterance). **That's two repetitions for the entire consecutive interpreting section, not two repetitions for each utterance.** After each use, the repetition counter will decrease by one. Once both repetitions are used, the replay button will not be available for the remainder of the section. Repetitions do not increase the audio capture duration, so make sure you have enough time to respond before using a repetition.

You have 20 minutes to complete this portion of the exam, so it is in your best interest to maintain a good pace. **Watch the timer at the top of the screen to manage your time.** You may not return to previous utterances, so do not skip any utterances. You have scratch paper and pencils to take notes if you like. Please feel free to use them.

There is no play button for this section. The utterance will begin immediately upon entering the consecutive interpreting section.

Click the "**Next**" button to begin.

Simultaneous Interpretation of Witness Testimony (Simultaneous Q&A)

The final section of the exam is the simultaneous Q&A interpretation portion. In simultaneous interpreting, you will interpret only from English into Spanish. The English audio has been pre-recorded for you to listen to while interpreting. There are about 45 seconds of introduction and instruction at the beginning of the recording to allow you time to adjust the headphones and volume. The audio will prompt you when it is time to begin interpreting.

Audio playback and recording will not begin automatically for this section of the exam. Once the section has begun, select the Play button to begin the audio playback. The audio capture will start at the same time and cannot be paused or restarted once the recording has begun. **Select the Play button as soon as you can to ensure you have time to listen to and interpret the entire audio file.** Once the media has begun playing, it is unable to be stopped. Your response will be automatically saved once the time allocated has expired or you choose to end the section.

Click the "**Next**" button to begin.

Conclusion of the Examination

The oral examination is over when you finish the simultaneous witness testimony section. You will be asked to leave the waiting area and refrain from any discussions with other examinees.

4.12. Sources for Practice Materials

Preparing for the Oral Examination involves intensive practice. An Oral Examination Practice Test (practice test) is provided in this Handbook (Part 8). The practice test was developed in parallel with the actual tests and is very similar to them, although some parts are not as long as the actual exams. The practice test material also includes recorded examples of passing performances. Candidates who

faithfully follow the practice test procedure will be in a good position to gauge how they might perform on an actual exam, although the practice test is not intended to be diagnostic.

Self-study materials may be very helpful, but the AO does not endorse any particular independently marketed sources. Interested candidates may consider the materials produced by the two sources indicated below, which can be researched or purchased by emailing or calling the sites or ordering directly online.

ACEBO

Post Office Box 710113

San Diego, California 02171, USA

Phone: (858) 866-8799

FAX: (858) 866-8799

Email: info@aceboproducts.com

Website: <https://acebo.myshopify.com/>

National Center for Interpretation

The University of Arizona

PO Box 210151

Tucson AZ 85721-0151

Phone: (520) 621-3615

Email: ncitr@email.arizona.edu

Website: <https://nci.arizona.edu/self-study-products/>

PART 5 SELF-ASSESSMENT OF READINESS TO TAKE THE FCICE

5.1. Introduction

Following are two sets of questions to help you assess your readiness to take the Federal Court Interpreter Certification Examination: Language Proficiency questions and “Can Do” questions.

Language proficiency

Section 5.2 concentrates on language proficiency, the first prerequisite to success as an interpreter. Three subsets of questions relating to speaking, listening, and reading in English and Spanish are provided to help you assess your level of language proficiency.

“Can Do” Interpreter Self-Assessment

If you are satisfied with the results of the Language Proficiency assessment, or if you simply want to know more about what is required for court interpreting, proceed to Section 5.3 for the list of 29 “can do” statements.

5.2. Language Proficiency Self-Rating in English and Spanish

Following is a three-part self-rating exercise, based on the US Government language proficiency skill level descriptions, for individuals considering registration for the Federal Court Interpreter Certification Examination (FCICE). The three parts are:

- A. speaking proficiency
- B. listening proficiency
- C. reading proficiency

A key to helping you apply your self-ratings of language proficiency readiness to take the FCICE is found at the end of the exercises.

- A. Self-rating of speaking proficiency in English and Spanish

Read and consider the following four descriptions of speaking proficiency. Afterward, decide which description most accurately represents your overall speaking proficiency in English and Spanish. If your language proficiency is substantially better than one level but not consistently as good as the next higher level, select the appropriate "plus" level.

Fill in the box below the appropriate number.

1.1 English – Speaking				1.2 Spanish – Speaking			
2	3	4	5	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	2+	3+	4+		2+	3+	4+
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. Limited working proficiency. I can handle informal conversations successfully. I can begin, continue, and bring to completion a variety of communicative tasks. I can handle most everyday social conversations with some confidence, but not with the facility, including casual conversations about current events, work, family, and autobiographical information. I can narrate and describe events occurring in the past, present, and future. I have control of everyday vocabulary sufficient to discuss general topics of a concrete nature.

2+

3. General professional proficiency. I can participate effectively and with ease in both formal and informal conversations on abstract and professional topics as well as practical and social topics. I can discuss my particular interests and fields of competence with ease. In conversation, I can answer objections, clarify points, justify decisions, state and defend the policy, or give a briefing. I show some breadth of vocabulary. I make occasional errors with low frequency and complex language, but these almost never impede communication.

3+

4. Advanced professional proficiency. I can speak the language fluently and accurately and with a high degree of effectiveness, reliability, and precision for all representational purposes within the range of my personal and professional experience and scope of responsibilities, even when communicating in sophisticated and demanding conversations. I can communicate effectively with varied audiences, purposes, tasks, and settings. If a non-native speaker, I may exhibit a slight foreign accent, although this never disturbs the native listener.

4+

5. Educated native proficiency. I speak the language as well as a highly articulate, well-educated native speaker. I can use the language with complete flexibility and intuition so that my speech on all levels is fully accepted by, and equivalent to, a well-educated native speaker in all of its features, including breadth of vocabulary, colloquialisms, and pertinent cultural references. My pronunciation is consistent with that of an educated native speaker of a standard dialect of the language.

B. Self-rating of listening proficiency in English and Spanish

Read and consider the following four descriptions of listening proficiency. Afterward, decide which description most accurately represents your overall listening proficiency in English and Spanish. If your language proficiency is substantially better than one level but not consistently as good as the next higher level, select the appropriate "plus" level.

2.1 English – Listening				2.2 Spanish – Listening			
2	3	4	5	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	2+	3+	4+		2+	3+	4+
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. Limited working proficiency. I can understand face-to-face speech in standard pronunciation spoken at a normal pace, with some repetition and rewording, even when spoken by a native speaker who is not used to speaking to people with limited proficiency in this language. I understand speech dealing with everyday topics, common personal and family news, well-known current events, and routine work matters. I can understand descriptions of different places and narrations about past, current, and future events. I can follow the essential points of the average discussion on work-related topics in my field. I can understand the facts, such as those reported in news broadcasts, but I do not grasp inferred meanings or implications expressed through more complex language.

2+

3. General professional proficiency. I can understand the essentials of all speech in standard pronunciation, including discussions within my field of interest or specialization. I can follow accurately the essentials of conversations between educated native speakers of the language, reasonably clear telephone calls, radio broadcasts, news stories, oral reports, some oral technical reports, and public presentations on non-technical subjects. I can infer meanings that are not directly stated. I have trouble understanding native speakers if they speak very quickly or use dialect or slang.

3+

4. Advanced professional proficiency. I can understand all forms and styles of speech pertinent to my social and professional needs. This includes speech involving extensive and precise vocabulary, subtleties and nuances in standard dialects of the language, and technical discussion on professional topics within the range of my knowledge. I understand language tailored to different audiences and purposes, including persuasion, representation, counseling, and negotiating. I can readily infer meanings and implications. I can easily understand social conversations, radio broadcasts, and phone calls. I may experience some difficulty understanding speech heard under unfavorable conditions, such as through a poor-quality loudspeaker or radio or in a noisy room.

4+

5. Educated native proficiency. I fully understand educated and academic speech, abstract and professional discussions, regional dialects, highly colloquial speech, jokes and puns, and speech in noisy places or under unfavorable acoustic conditions. My comprehension of the language is fully equivalent to that of a well-educated native speaker.

C. Self-rating of reading proficiency in English and Spanish

Read and consider the following four descriptions of language proficiency. Afterward, decide which description most accurately represents your overall reading proficiency in English and Spanish. If your language proficiency is substantially better than one level but not consistently as good as the next higher level, select the appropriate "plus" level.

3.1 English – Reading				3.2 Spanish – Reading			
2	3	4	5	2	3	4	5
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	2+	3+	4+		2+	3+	4+
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. Limited working proficiency. I can read simple written material in print on subjects I am familiar with. I can read straightforward, familiar, and factual material with only some misunderstandings. I can locate the main ideas and details in material written for the general public. I can read uncomplicated prose on familiar subjects. I can generally comprehend most news articles involving descriptions or narration of current events, travel, food, and music. I can also comprehend simple biographies, social notices, personal correspondence, routine business letters, and simple technical material written for the general public.

2+

3. General professional proficiency. I can read a variety of materials on unfamiliar subjects with normal speed and almost complete comprehension. I fully understand news stories or international news items in magazines, routine correspondence, editorials, and general reports. I can understand technical reports and other materials in my field of specialization, even when they include hypotheses, argumentation, and supported opinions. I can read and comprehend literature, including short stories, novels, and plays. I can usually read between the lines, if necessary. I rarely have to reread general vocabulary; however, I may have some difficulty with unusually complex structures or low-frequency idioms.

3+

4. Advanced professional proficiency. I can read nearly all styles and forms of the language pertinent to academic and professional needs fluently and accurately. I can readily follow unpredictable turns of thought and author intent in such materials as sophisticated editorials, specialized journal articles, professional documents, and complex literary texts, as well as any subject directed to the non-specialized reader. I can also read legal documents and legal texts written for the general reader and documents from earlier periods containing archaic forms of language.

4+

5. Educated native proficiency. I can fully understand extremely difficult and abstract prose, including general legal and technical material, as well as contemporary and classical literature. I can read classical or archaic forms of writing as well as a well-educated native. I can read a wide variety of handwritten documents. My speed and comprehension are equal to that of a well-educated native reader.

Interpreting your self-ratings

Speaking. Federal court interpreters must have a broad and precise vocabulary, excellent grammar, always easily intelligible pronunciation, fluency, and natural expression in both languages. Language experts generally agree that FCCIs are usually a 4+ in one language and a 5 in the other. Many are a 5 in both. Some federal court interpreters may only be 4 in one language if they have excellent interpreting skills and are always intelligible. If your speaking skills are not at least a 4 in both languages, you may wish to improve your speaking skills before taking the FCICE.

Listening. The listening skills of a typical FCCI are at the same high level as the speaking skills. That is, one must be at least a 4 in both languages, preferably higher. In addition, one must be able to retain what one hears, decode it, and then encode it rapidly in the other language.

Reading. FCCIs are highly literate in both languages, although they may be somewhat more literate in one than the other. Language experts generally agree that the typical profile is probably a 4 in one language and a 5 in the other. One needs to be at least a 3+ in both languages to comprehend the kinds of documents that the court interpreter may have to translate orally to a defendant or the court.

5.3. “Can Do” Interpreter Self-Assessment

An extensive list of “Can Do” statements will follow. Read each statement and circle the answer that most accurately describes your current ability or skill. Although the FCICE examination is specific to court interpreting, the questions related to interpreting skills are intended to be general in nature. You should answer those questions about interpreting skills based on your own interpreting experience. If you have no experience or other basis on which to make a self-assessment of the activity or skill described in the question, do not circle any answer and go on to the next question.

A key to helping you apply your self-ratings of the “Can Do” assessment of readiness to take the FCICE is found at the end of the exercises.

1. When speaking a standard variety of Spanish, I can use correct pronunciation and intonation without any significant effort.
 - A. always
 - B. most of the time
 - C. frequently
 - D. rarely or never
2. I understand standard varieties of Spanish usage from any country in the Spanish-speaking world.
 - A. always
 - B. most of the time
 - C. frequently
 - D. rarely or never
3. When listening to nonstandard varieties of Spanish, I can comprehend speakers without significant extra effort, especially when the context is provided.
 - A. always
 - B. most of the time
 - C. frequently
 - D. rarely or never
4. When engaged in conversations with native speakers, I can speak Spanish fluently and can incorporate regional colloquialisms and slang expressions.
 - A. always
 - B. most of the time
 - C. frequently
 - D. rarely or never
5. I can render precise, accurate interpretations from Spanish into English without omissions or additions.
 - A. always
 - B. most of the time
 - C. frequently
 - D. rarely or never
6. When interpreting Spanish into English, I can maintain the speaker's level of the register (formal versus informal language) and the complexity of the original speech.
 - A. always
 - B. most of the time
 - C. frequently
 - D. rarely or never
7. I can render interpretations from Spanish into English promptly without hesitation.
 - A. always
 - B. most of the time
 - C. frequently
 - D. rarely or never

8. I can read and understand articles of general interest written in standard Spanish.
 - A. always
 - B. most of the time
 - C. frequently
 - D. rarely or never
9. I can read and understand technical material written in Spanish such as legal documents, probation or social services reports, medical reports, etc.
 - A. always
 - B. most of the time
 - C. frequently
 - D. rarely or never
10. I can read and understand correspondence in Spanish that may be written in an archaic or semi-literate manner.
 - A. always
 - B. most of the time
 - C. frequently
 - D. rarely or never
11. I can read any Spanish document out loud in English promptly, precisely, and accurately without hesitation, omissions or additions.
 - A. always
 - B. most of the time
 - C. frequently
 - D. rarely or never
12. When listening to varieties of spoken English other than standard American English, I can comprehend speakers without any significant extra effort.
 - A. always
 - B. most of the time
 - C. frequently
 - D. rarely or never
13. When watching the nightly news on English language television, I can simultaneously render the newscaster's speech into Spanish without falling behind.
 - A. always
 - B. most of the time
 - C. frequently
 - D. rarely or never
14. I can render precise, accurate interpretations from English into Spanish without omissions or additions.
 - A. always
 - B. most of the time
 - C. frequently
 - D. rarely or never

15. When interpreting from English into Spanish, I can maintain the speaker's register (formal vs. informal language) in terms of level and complexity of vocabulary and sentence construction.
 - A. always
 - B. most of the time
 - C. frequently
 - D. rarely or never
16. I can render interpretations from English into Spanish promptly without hesitation.
 - A. always
 - B. most of the time
 - C. frequently
 - D. rarely or never
17. When engaged in conversation, I can speak standard American English with correct pronunciation and intonation.
 - A. always
 - B. most of the time
 - C. frequently
 - D. rarely or never
18. When engaged in conversation, I can speak English fluently and incorporate regional colloquialisms, slang terms, and slang expressions.
 - A. always
 - B. most of the time
 - C. frequently
 - D. rarely or never
19. I can read and understand technical material written in English such as legal documents, probation or social services reports, medical reports, etc.
 - A. always
 - B. most of the time
 - C. frequently
 - D. rarely or never
20. I can read any English document out loud in Spanish promptly, precisely, and accurately without hesitations, omissions, or additions.
 - A. always
 - B. most of the time
 - C. frequently
 - D. rarely or never
21. I can interpret consecutively in both directions what the speaker is saying.
 - A. always
 - B. most of the time
 - C. frequently
 - D. rarely or never

22. I can interpret every oral utterance, even those embarrassing to other court participants or me, in either direction.
- A. always
 - B. most of the time
 - C. frequently
 - D. rarely or never
23. When going in either direction and when interpreting consecutively or simultaneously, I can monitor my own interpretations and correct my own mistakes.
- A. always
 - B. most of the time
 - C. frequently
 - D. rarely or never
24. I can research the meaning of specific words and terms efficiently and effectively.
- A. always
 - B. most of the time
 - C. frequently
 - D. rarely or never
25. When going in either direction and when interpreting consecutively or simultaneously, I can interpret effectively under pressure of time constraints, adversarial settings, and emotionally charged circumstances.
- A. always
 - B. most of the time
 - C. frequently
 - D. rarely or never
26. When interpreting consecutively in either direction, I can comprehend and retain conversation or testimony as long as necessary to render an accurate interpretation.
- A. always
 - B. most of the time
 - C. frequently
 - D. rarely or never
27. If someone reads a passage to me that is descriptive (what something looks like or something that happened), I can remember and repeat back what I heard even if the passage is as many as 30-40 words long.
- A. always
 - B. most of the time
 - C. frequently
 - D. rarely or never
28. I speak clearly and can adjust the loudness of my speech so that I am audible to the intended audience in both intimate and public interpreting settings.
- A. always
 - B. most of the time
 - C. frequently
 - D. rarely or never

29. I can efficiently take notes when interpreting consecutively while preserving the natural flow of question and answer.
- A. always
 - B. most of the time
 - C. frequently
 - D. rarely or never

KEY

If you can answer “A” or “B” to questions 1 to 29, you may be ready to take the FCICE Examination. If you skipped or answered “C” or “D” on more than a few questions, then you may want to gain additional experience as a court interpreter before taking the examination, or you may want to pursue additional formal study or immersion training in English or Spanish.