

## The English language consultant

MET is a not-for-profit professional association of language and communication experts who provide English language expertise to a wide range of cross-cultural projects, particularly in science and academia, but also in financial, cultural, political and non-governmental organizational settings. We concentrate on needs in Mediterranean cultures, facilitating communication in the English language and between English and Mediterranean languages.

The association MET offers these guidelines to users of communication support services — we wish to help potential clients make sense of available service suppliers and choose consultants wisely and efficiently. The document is organized in the following sections:

- Types of language services
- Characteristics of a professional language consultant
- FAQs about English language consultants

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### Disclaimer

All negotiations between clients and MET members are personal and extraneous to MET. MET, as a professional association that provides training opportunities for its members, is not responsible for the outcome of such negotiations and will not mediate in the event of disagreement, nor can it be held accountable for the quality of the work produced by its members. Advice given in this document is meant to guide clients in choosing consultants wisely.

### Types of language services

English language consultants come from many different disciplines and backgrounds, and offer a variety of professional services, broadly classified as editing, translating, writing, interpreting, training, coaching and project managing. Language consultants may combine several roles in a unique blend, and they often specialize in a subject in which they have prior academic and work experience or professional interest. Some also do research on aspects of their work, publishing their insights in professional or academic journals.

#### Editing

Editing refers to the modification of a document or audiovisual prior to its publication (or use), to improve its presentation, style, accuracy, usefulness, etc. There are many levels of editing, depending on the type of document, its purpose and the client's needs. **Simple copy editing** entails the improvement of spelling and grammar and the application of a standardized format, and is often requested by publishers for documents already scheduled for print. In **substantive editing**, the editor performs a comprehensive check regarding internal consistency, information flow, legibility, numerical and statistical sense, terminology, content organization, etc. Substantive changes are then made, as necessary, by adding, removing or modifying the content; this type of editing requires linguistic knowledge that is sensitive to meaning in specialist documents. **Author's editing** involves a mix of linguistic and content expertise as well as publication strategies, often through close collaboration during the writing process.

#### Translating

Translation is more than simply changing a text from the source language to the target language. A skilled translator ensures the new text is faithful to the original and equally effective. Translations can range from **critical** (for external communication or publication in highly specialized areas) to **simple** (for few readers, usually for internal communication). Some high quality processes may include the concept of **revised translation** (checking of content and style by a second expert translator). Some translation jobs require cultural

adaptation, such as localization projects, advertising, or research instruments that must be validated.

## **Writing**

While a translator renders text into a new language and an editor improves a text prior to use, there are times when the best communication strategy is to directly employ a writer. A writer gathers and selects key information and synthesizes it into an effective original text. Writers may specialize in grant or funding applications, drug authorization requests, production of content for the Web or for magazines and brochures, preparation of company literature or advertisements, etc. A skilled writer is also familiar with the structure and form of the document to be produced.

## **Interpreting**

Interpreters mediate spoken communication. **Simultaneous interpretation** involves conveying the idea in another language at the same time as it is being spoken, with the audience listening principally to the interpreted speech through headphones. **Consecutive interpreting** takes place in face-to-face meetings (press conferences, business negotiation, court settings, medical visits, etc.); it is sometimes called **dialog (or community) interpreting** if the linguist translates into both languages.

## **Training and coaching**

This broad category usually refers to language consultants who help clients produce well-delivered oral presentations but who may also help with print or audiovisual texts. This is typically a mid- to long-term approach in which the client's goal is to develop autonomy. Trainers may be instructors of written and oral communication, publishing consultants (who provide strategies rather than editing services) and public speaking coaches.

## **Project managing**

Recognizing that many communication projects require the intervention of more than one type of specialist, some language consultants operate as project managers by selecting and coordinating a team of other consultants. For example, project managers may handle multilingual translations of a source document for international use, they may coordinate the communication aspects (scientific, administrative, public) of large or international research projects, or they may handle quality control on large translation projects.

## **Characteristics of a professional English language consultant**

Professional language consultants distinguish themselves by the quality of their product, by a strong sense of business ethics, and a high level of professional organization. From the client's point of view, the outcome of professional consulting should be a high quality product and a transparent, reliable process. Look for the following features in a professional and his or her output:

### **A consistently satisfactory product**

In text-based activities such as editing, translating and writing a professional strives to give you an effective product — in other words target readers should find the writing clear, attractive and appropriate. A professional is consistent — providing the same high quality again and again. Professionals may provide a satisfaction guarantee to their work and remain available to make any requested revisions once the client has received and reviewed the work. Consultants demonstrate quality and professionalism by respecting schedules, providing comprehensive support material, and exhibiting good interpersonal skills.

### **Ethical conduct**

Professional language consultants are familiar with the ethical issues surrounding the production of communication materials. In particular, they know and seek to avoid unethical behavior such as plagiarism, ghost writing, biased and fraudulent reporting, and redundant publication. They also assist and educate their clients in avoiding these problems, by being familiar with the latest international standards. For example, they may help a client clarify a conflict of interest and they may notice the unauthorized copying of texts simply from lack of language expertise and thus save the client from being accused of plagiarism. And, to ensure

greater transparency regarding authorship, they are also likely to request that their contributions to documents be acknowledged.

## **Engagement with the profession**

Professionals engage in continuing professional development activities. Look for mention of association membership, attendance at conferences and other ongoing training events.

## **Professional business practices**

Independently employed language consultants, whether freelancers or entrepreneurs coordinating the activities of several operators, demonstrate their professional attitude to business by adhering to the laws of the land. These may include registration as a business with the Chamber of Commerce, collection and payment of VAT, managing the receipt of payments through banks, and proper invoicing.

## **FAQs about English language consultants**

### **1. What criteria can I use to choose a language consultant?**

The choice of the language consultant depends on the importance of the job (document, presentation or audiovisual material to be produced), the type of text, how many readers are being targeted and how difficult they'll be to convince, the end-user's expectations and needs, and your time frame and budget. If the success of your product, service or career depends on the quality of the communication, then you should choose a skilled language consultant carefully.

To choose a language consultant appropriate for a particular job, you should match your needs with the language consultant's background, training, work experience, ethics, and professional business attitude. A professional language consultant will be an active member of associations like MET, and recognizes the need for continuing professional development (e.g. attending workshops, conferences and training events put on by professional organizations or academic institutions). Language consultants may document this information in their promotional materials or on websites, and the prospective client may inquire about these issues in an informal telephone interview.

### **2. How long should a job take and how much should it cost?**

Talk your specific job over frankly with a candidate language consultant. Professionals are able to assess how much time is necessary for a particular job. However, since at any one point in time they are probably working on multiple projects, professional language consultants provide clients with an estimate of both costs and time to delivery. In fact, a single job is not necessarily carried out in a continuous time period but may be worked on at different times spread out over several days. This interrupted way of working is actually advantageous in that it gives language consultants time to think over the job and find better solutions than if the job were to be rushed to completion within a shorter continuous period of time.

An accurate assessment of costs is also something you can expect from a professional language consultant. Units of cost and criteria vary. Length (e.g. number of pages, words or characters of text or hours of work) will be relevant. The complexity of the material to be worked on will also be considered. Costs also vary with the type of service, the specific field or industry, or language combination for translators. However, one point about pricing is clear: our work can be cheap and fast, or fast and good, or even cheap and good, but it cannot be cheap, fast *and* good.

We can't tell you how much your job will cost but a professional consultant can. Expect to answer questions about timing. For urgent assignments, it is not sufficient simply to pay more for extra effort: urgency may mean sharing a job with another consultant, with added costs for quality control and revision for consistency.

### **3. Do I need a native speaker of English?**

The selected language consultant should be fluent in English and should know how to write (or speak) the type of text needed. Remember that a native English speaking editor or translator may work more confidently and faster, but the result will be satisfactory if and only if the right field expertise is also present. In some Mediterranean cities, highly proficient, English-educated nonnative speakers with field-specific knowledge are

available and may be wiser consultants than native English speakers with no relevant specialist expertise or experience. On the other hand, a client wishing to produce a promotional text that will work internationally might be better off hiring an English native speaker with current, thorough knowledge of the target Anglophone culture. These are issues one must deal with frankly and openly when contracting a service because the skill of providers available will vary greatly from country to country and sector to sector.

#### **4. Do I need a language consultant specialized in my particular field?**

Language consultants usually specialize in a type of service offered (e.g. editing, translating, writing) and they are also likely to specialize in certain subjects (e.g. biomedical sciences, law, engineering, sociology) or products (e.g. research papers, web content, international business meetings, company promotional literature). However, if a subject specialist is not readily available, a professional language consultant has the skill to work closely in collaboration with the client to facilitate the expression of complex ideas in the appropriate style.

#### **5. What if I can't find a skilled English language consultant in my city?**

Editors, translators and writers typically interact with clients by email and phone rather than in person, and they almost always receive and send their work electronically. Therefore, for these activities, clients can search for a skilled language professional in a geographical area beyond their own city (within their own country or abroad). If an on-site consultant is needed (interpreters, trainers and coaches, highly engaged author's editors) but the ideal language consultant is not available, one approach is to choose a candidate who meets some of your requirements and to work in close collaboration to make up for deficits.

Choose a professional with whom you can interact in person or by email, internet telephony (VOIP) or videoconferencing. Our experience is that you are more likely to be satisfied with that approach than by handing your work to large or very remote service providers that don't encourage personal interactions between client and operator.

#### **6. What references or evidence of good work can I ask for?**

You can ask if consultants can provide published samples of completed work — many are acknowledged by their clients on their documents. Some persons at the beginning of their career may be willing to do short tests. However, we recommend that you commission a small or relatively simple job to assess quality and your ability to work together. Assess quality of product and professional business practice before proposing more complex tasks.

#### **7. Can MET help me find an English language consultant?**

MET is developing an online membership database that may help you find an appropriate consultant. Furthermore, although MET is not an agency or a company, MET will consider posting announcements for long-term language consultant positions on its internal mailing lists. Publishers and communications companies who share some of our interests are encouraged to attend our meetings and workshops, where they'll meet many consultants engaged in their own continuing professional development. Watch the MET website for meeting announcements.

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