



# LANGUAGE ACCESS PROGRAM

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA OFFICE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

## Reference Guide: Types of Interpretation

There are several methods of oral interpretation. Know what method works best in which setting.



**Simultaneous.** Simultaneous interpretation works best for events in which attendees do not usually speak, such as lectures or panel discussions. In this type of interpretation, a speaker talks continuously as the interpreter repeats the speaker's message in another language. The interpreter uses special equipment, including a microphone that transmits to headsets or earphones worn by attendees. Simultaneous interpretation can accommodate multiple languages at once, though it is limited by the availability of interpreters and equipment.



**Consecutive.** In consecutive interpretation, the speaker and the interpreter take turns talking. The speaker delivers a message in short segments, pausing between each one to allow the interpreter to relay the segment in another language. This method takes about twice as much time as simultaneous interpretation, but does not require any specialized equipment. It is appropriate for small-scale interactions, such as client meetings.



**Whispered.** Whispered interpretation is like simultaneous interpretation without specialized equipment. The interpreter sits or stands next to the person who needs language assistance and conveys what a speaker is saying in real time. The interpreter does not actually whisper, which can cause hoarseness, but rather uses normal speech at a low volume. So as not to disturb other attendees, the interpreter's mouth must be in close proximity to the listener's ear, limiting the number of people that a single interpreter can assist.



**Telephonic.** Telephonic interpretation consists of a three-way call between two people who do not share a language, and an interpreter. The individuals who do not share a language may be in the same place (e.g., a walk-in customer and a help desk representative) or in different locations (e.g., a customer and a call center representative). The interpreter uses consecutive interpretation to relay messages between the two parties.



**Sight Translation.** Sight translation combines interpretation and translation (translation refers to converting written text from one language to another, while interpretation refers to converting speech). For sight translation, an interpreter reads text out loud, converting the text from one language to another in the process. Sight translation does not usually occur on its own, but rather is part of a consecutive or simultaneous interpretation session. For instance, an interpreter may provide sight translation for text on presentation slides.