

Interpreter interview questions

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What to expect

Interpreter interviews mix technical questions about method and equipment with ethics-focused scenarios, since impartiality and confidentiality are central to the role. Panels often include someone from the language services team and, for specialist roles, a client-facing manager from health, legal or government services.

- **Process:** How you prepare for and structure an interpreting assignment, including research and terminology work.
- **Technical:** Understanding of interpreting modes, equipment and when to apply each.
- **Scenario:** Judgement calls when something goes wrong mid-assignment, such as dialect gaps or unclear speech.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of handling ethical dilemmas or confidentiality risks, assessed using STAR.
- **Client-facing:** Managing boundaries when clients misunderstand the interpreter's role or ask for advocacy.

Expect an opening discussion of your language pairs and accreditation, then a run of scenario and ethics questions to test judgement, followed by a technical section on interpreting modes and equipment, and a closing discussion of availability and settings you're comfortable working in (health, legal, community).

1. Walk me through how you prepare for a specialised assignment, such as a medical consultation or court hearing.

Why they ask

Tests whether you treat preparation as a professional discipline rather than relying purely on fluency.

How to structure your answer

Step-by-step walkthrough: what you do before, during and after the booking, from requesting background material to building a glossary and debriefing afterwards.

Example answer

"Once I get the booking details, I ask for any documents or background on the subject matter I'm allowed to see beforehand. For a medical consultation, that might mean reviewing terminology for the specific condition so I'm not searching for words mid-session. I build a short glossary in both languages, note any culturally sensitive terms that need careful handling, and arrive early to confirm the setup with the clinician and patient. Afterwards I note any terms that were tricky, so I'm better prepared next time."

2. What's the difference between consecutive and simultaneous interpreting, and how do you decide which to use?

Why they ask

Confirms genuine technical grounding rather than general language fluency.

How to structure your answer

Technical explanation followed by a concrete example of applying the distinction on the job.

Example answer

"Consecutive interpreting means the speaker pauses and I interpret what was said, which suits one-on-one settings like medical or legal consultations where accuracy and the ability to ask for

clarification matter more than speed. Simultaneous interpreting happens in real time, usually with headsets or a booth, and suits conferences where pausing every sentence would be impractical. I've used consecutive interpreting for most legal consultations and simultaneous interpreting for multi-day conferences using booth equipment."

3. A speaker suddenly uses a strong regional dialect or slang you don't fully understand, in the middle of a session. What do you do?

Why they ask

Tests judgement under pressure and honesty about limitations, which matters more than appearing infallible.

How to structure your answer

Judgement-under-pressure structure: immediate response, how you signal the issue without breaking trust, and how you resolve it.

Example answer

"I'd ask for a brief clarification directly, phrased neutrally so it doesn't put the speaker on the spot, rather than guessing and risking a wrong interpretation. If it's a recurring issue with a specific dialect, I'd flag it to the coordinating party afterwards so future bookings can consider a better-matched interpreter. Accuracy matters more than sounding polished, so I'd rather pause briefly than pass on something I'm not confident about."

4. Tell me about a time you faced an ethical dilemma or confidentiality risk during an assignment.

Why they ask

Behavioural question checking real-world adherence to the AUSIT code of ethics under pressure.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result.

Example answer

"During a family law consultation, one party asked me privately afterwards to explain what I 'really thought' about the other party's case. I explained clearly that my role is strictly to interpret, not to offer opinions or take sides, and declined to discuss it further. I reported the interaction to the booking agency as a precaution. The result was that both parties continued to trust my impartiality for the remainder of the proceedings, and the agency had no concerns about how I'd handled it."

5. How do you handle a client who asks you to advocate for them or add your own opinion during a session?

Why they ask

Client-facing question testing whether you can maintain professional boundaries without damaging the working relationship.

How to structure your answer

Boundary-setting explanation: how you decline while keeping the relationship functional.

Example answer

"I explain, briefly and without judgement, that my role is to interpret exactly what's said so both parties can trust the record of the conversation, and that adding my own view would undermine that trust for everyone involved. I've found most people accept this once it's framed as protecting them, not just as a rule I'm following."

6. Interpreting in trauma-related settings, like family violence matters or refugee assessments, can be emotionally demanding. How do you manage

that?

Why they ask

Checks self-awareness and sustainable practice, relevant given the high-stakes, emotionally charged settings interpreters regularly work in.

How to structure your answer

Reflective structure: acknowledge the demand, describe concrete coping strategies, note professional supports used.

Example answer

"I keep a clear line between the professional role during the session and processing afterwards. I debrief with a colleague or supervisor when a session has been particularly heavy, and I make sure I'm not scheduling back-to-back sensitive assignments without a break. I've also used AUSIT's resources on vicarious trauma to recognise when I need to step back for a session and hand it to another accredited interpreter."