

The Truth About Spoken Language Interpreting

I've been lucky. I went from being a Spanish teacher, to coordinating language services in a hospital, to being the Executive Director of a non-profit language provider agency that I founded 6 years ago. I have rarely needed to rely on strictly interpreting to make a living. Although I understand the desire to as it is one of the most rewarding uses of one's time. At least that has been my experience now for over two decades.

When a person expresses the desire to become a qualified or certified spoken language interpreter, whether that be in the community, in medical settings, in legal settings and in court, or as a conference interpreter, I am secretly thrilled because it tells me they are one of us. One who loves making a difference by facilitating communication and expressing what needs to be said. Whether it be the service provider or receiver, life is better for all when messages are relayed in a language and culture that is understood. I'm pretty sure it's not because one wants to get rich since that is probably not going to happen. For me, interpreting has been largely mission-driven and the best interpreters I know feel similarly.

But what if one does want to give a go to making a living as an interpreter? This is not impossible, depending on the language(s) spoken, the kind of interpreting and your willingness to hustle. Regardless, if you want to include interpreting in your future it is imperative to start your interpreter education which, in the case of spoken language, by pursuing an entry-level certificate. Most of these concentrate on medical and/or community interpreting. They start at 40 hours, the minimum requirement for a qualified medical/community interpreter. Some are online, some are a hybrid, some are still in person. I say 'still' because the pandemic changed interpreting in some profound ways, one of which is an increase in remote services as interpreter training also pivoted to meet the challenge.

Your second most important step is to be sure to have in hand proof of language proficiency in English and all the languages in which you want to interpret. This can be via diplomas and/or formal third-party language testing. The best language testing is based on ACTFL or ILR. You will want to score a minimum of Advanced Mid on the ACTFL scale and a 2+ or better on ILR. These diplomas/reports plus your entry-level training certificate deems you a qualified medical/community interpreter. **Not certified.** That is a whole other process.

Most interpreters will be 1099 contractors. This means you will work as needed with no set schedule or guarantee of work. You can work for various agencies including some of the bigger, national companies. Such contractors do not have benefits, vacation time or built in retirement accounts.

Some interpreters may find part- or full-time work. The larger hospitals usually have dedicated departments to Language Access and employ nationally certified medical interpreters. Regardless, earning an entry-level interpreter certificate is a fantastic addition to your resume should you want to be employed in any bilingual capacity.

You can further your interpreter education by becoming court or conference interpreters. Below you'll find links to help you on your journey.

For Court Interpreting in Kentucky: <https://kycourts.gov/Court-Programs/Language-Access/Pages/Interpreter%20Resources.aspx>

Kentucky Interpreter & Translator Association: <https://kitanonprofit.org>
The KITA website includes information on our licensed medical interpreter program Core Medical Interpreter Training

The Community Interpreter (a 40-hour online self-paced medical/community interpreter certificate course): <https://www.thecommunityinterpreter.com/the-community-interpreter-online>

Third-party ACTFL/ILR-based \$37 language testing for Spanish, Mandarin, and English: <https://languagetest.com>

Additional languages are available at a higher cost through the same company, Parrot. Contact Lynn@AccessLanguageSolutions.org for more information

Additional ACTFL/ILR-based language testing: <https://www.altalang.com>

**ALTA only schedules exams through corporate accounts. Email Lynn@AccessLanguageSolutions.org if you'd like to take one of their tests. **

National Medical Interpreter Certification: <https://cchicertification.org>

National Medical Interpreter Certification: <https://www.certifiedmedicalinterpreters.org>

Some national interpreter companies to explore: AMN, Boostlingo, CyraCom, Globo, Language Line