



**MAINE JUDICIAL BRANCH – COURT SERVICES:  
WHAT TO EXPECT AND WHAT NOT TO EXPECT  
FROM A COURT INTERPRETER**



EXPECT THE INTERPRETER TO...	DON'T EXPECT THE INTERPRETER TO...
<b>SPEAK</b> to enable the non-English speaker to hear all that an English-speaker would hear, even the non-confidential conversations that are part of a legal proceeding and <i>don't go on the record</i> . You may need to pause to allow for interpretation.	<b>STOP</b> interpreting when a judge indicates that statements are off the record. An interpreter has an ethical duty to interpret everything an English speaker would hear, unless specifically ordered not to do so by the Court.
<b>BE</b> the ear and the mouth of the non-English speaker, a vehicle of communication. Nothing more, nothing less.	<b>GIVE</b> advice or take the role of paralegal or attorney (i.e. the interpreter should read or sight-translate but not explain a form).
<b>INTERPRET</b> all elements of communication, including pauses, hedges, and self-corrections.	<b>SUMMARIZE</b> or sanitize speech. Unlike what is customary in other interpretation settings, such as in international conferences, in court, interpreters must not cover for speakers' flaws or word choices.
<b>INTERPRET</b> legal and other specialized terms and concepts correctly, even if there is no equivalent in the non-English language. For example, for the three-word concept: "baby-bonding therapy", the Spanish interpreter has to use ten words to render an interpretation: "terapia para fortalecer el apego entre el bebé y la madre".	<b>STEP</b> out of the interpreter's role to help the non-English speaker understand or adapt the level of the language to suit the perceived or known educational background of the non-English speaker.
<b>SIGHT TRANSLATE</b> a short document. It is always preferable to have longer, or complex documents translated in writing, rather than pressure the interpreter to translate on the spot.	<b>INTERPRET</b> as fast as a speaker can read. Pre-memorized speeches of judges or attorneys delivered at reading speed, and with many legal concepts can compromise the accuracy of the interpretation.
<b>FOLLOW</b> the train of thought of the speaker precisely and accurately concept for concept, not necessarily word for word.	<b>MAKE</b> assumptions about what the speaker intended to say but didn't say or make sense out of something nonsensical.
<b>BE</b> an impartial party, <b>MAINTAIN</b> confidentiality and <b>FOLLOW</b> courtroom protocols.	<b>INTERPRET</b> speech that is too fast or inaudible. The proper use of <b>microphones</b> in the courtroom by all the speakers is necessary for the rendering of accurate and complete interpretations and audio recordings.
<b>HAVE</b> a general understanding of legal processes and procedures, and an ample vocabulary of legal terms at the ready.	<b>KNOW</b> specifics of the penal code, idiosyncratic uses of terms, or legal acronyms, etc.