

HOW DO YOU DETERMINE WHO NEEDS AN INTERPRETER?¹

A person who is not fluent in English learns to linguistically survive in most circumstances. The person will often guess when answering questions because they do not want to appear dumb by admitting they don't understand or want to avoid causing a disruption in court.

What questions should you ask that would help determine someone's ability to speak English? Who should you avoid?

DO...

Ask open-ended questions, which require complete or near complete sentences to be answered.

Ask opinion questions, or questions where the answer would be unique to the person answering. Ask questions with no "right" answer.

Examples:

What has your work experience been prior to coming to Washington?

What do you like or dislike about your present employment?

How did your mother celebrate her last birthday?

DON'T...

Ask questions with "yes" or "no" answers.

Ask questions that can be answered with one or two words, particularly based on only understanding one or two words in the questions. For example, "What is your name?" would lead someone to answer with his/her name even if the only word the person understood was "name."

Ask questions that someone would already be exposed to over and over again by virtue of being in this country (Where do you work? What is your name? What is your address?) Exposure to the pattern of the words in the question may be what is prompting the "right" answer, not understanding the question itself.

¹ Provided by: Washington Administrative Office of the Courts