

BEST PRACTICE: TEAM INTERPRETING

The recommended practice for simultaneous and consecutive interpreting calls for two or more interpreters for court proceedings lasting longer than two hours. The length of time an interpreter is able to maintain accuracy varies to some degree depending on the gravity, complexity, and intensity of the proceeding, but generally the court should not expect an interpreter to work alone for any hearing expected to last longer than two hours. If the court decides to proceed without a second interpreter, an interpreter working alone will need frequent ten-minute breaks. Studies show that accurate interpreting decreases dramatically after approximately 30 minutes of continuous interpreting.

The best practice is for team interpreters to trade off every 20-30 minutes at the microphone, thus rotating their respective roles throughout the proceeding. Therefore, a two-member team of interpreters provides interpreting to the defendant and to all witnesses and parties needing interpreting services, irrespective of whether they are prosecution or defense witnesses.

Team interpreting works particularly well during trials. Team interpreting not only provides periodic relief to prevent fatigue, one potential cause of interpreter error, but it also allows for the presence of a second language expert in the event of challenges to interpretation at the witness stand.

Because interpreters cannot realistically know in advance every word or phrase that will arise, research of reference sources during a trial is handled by the second interpreter, who will also take care of any problems that may arise with electronic equipment, if it is used.

Because of the limited number of certified interpreters in all areas of the state, it is understandable that team interpreting cannot be used in all circumstances. The court must keep in mind the factor of interpreter fatigue and make adaptations to protect the rights of non-English-speaking persons before the court.