



## Best Practices for Pro Bono Attorneys Working with Volunteer Interpreters

When you take a pro bono case for RMIAN, you may be paired with a volunteer interpreter to help you communicate with your client.

Please read these tips to ensure that you understand the role and responsibility of an interpreter in this setting.

Rules of thumb for working with an interpreter...

- **Speak clearly and pause often!**
- **Ask regularly if your client understands**
- **Speak directly to your client and encourage your client to speak directly to you!**



**Consecutive Interpretation** – In most cases, during client meetings, the interpreter will be doing *consecutive interpreting*, which means you will speak to your client and pause while the interpreter conveys your message in the client’s language.

**Simultaneous Interpretation** – This is used more frequently in conferences, during live testimony, or in television (think of the News!). The interpreter conveys the message at the same time as the speaker (with a few seconds of lag time).

### DID YOU KNOW?

**Interpretation refers to the spoken word and translation refers only to the written word. Testimony is interpreted, while documents are translated.**

If you have questions or concerns about working with an interpreter, please contact [lklafehn@rmian.org](mailto:lklafehn@rmian.org).

## Helpful Tips

Encourage your client to speak directly to you and not to the interpreter. Maintaining eye contact with your client even when the interpreter is speaking can be helpful.

Make sure you are sitting so you can see your client clearly. The interpreter should not be in between you, but ideally off to the side to minimize distraction and ensure you and your client are speaking directly to each other.

Try to keep your thoughts clear and concise – pause often to give the interpreter time to convey your message accurately.

Even if you are proficient in or if you understand some of the language of your client, allow the interpreter to convey your words from English into the second language. If you feel the interpreter misspoke, you can address this directly.

Interpreters are taught to interpret everything they hear, accurately and without omissions. If you don’t want your client to hear something – don’t say it! Interpreters convey *exactly* the words you speak: meaning, if you tell your client “I will be there at 10am,” the interpreter will say exactly this. So, if you tell the interpreter “Tell her I will be there at 10am,” the interpreter will say this sentence verbatim. It is better to speak directly to your client in the first person. Treat the interpreter as a conduit for information but not as a separate party.

If the interpreter needs clarification, she should say “Interpreter speaking.. please repeat (or clarify) the last thing you said,” so that it is clear to both parties what is going on.

It is not the interpreter’s job to tell you when your client is not understanding. If you feel that your client is misunderstanding you or something you have said, ask the client directly and clarify accordingly.

The interpreter should only speak to your client when you are present.