

Accreditation tests for freelance interpreters

Tips for candidates

These tips are intended to help you prepare and give you an idea of what to expect.

Before the test:

Golden rule number 1: Carefully read all the information you are sent so that you know exactly what you will be required to do at the test.

Golden rule number 2: Prepare thoroughly. Read newspapers or your favourite news websites. Look at the websites of the three institutions to see how they are structured and how they work. Do not forget the websites of the interpreting services. The more background information you have, the less likely it is that you will be caught out by the subject matter of the speeches. And do practice! You can familiarise yourself with the level and format of the test by using the practice tools of the EU institutions (see FAQ).

Golden rule number 3: Treat the test seriously.

This is not a mock exam. It is a freelance accreditation test and, as such, could be the first step in a long and illustrious career.

At the test:

When you go into the room, you will be facing 8 to 10 people. This is because designated member(s) of each of the three institutions will be present. The speakers will also be in the room (see below). The panel members' role is to make sure your work is assessed fully and fairly based on the performance of the day; and they will do their utmost to make the experience as positive as possible. But do not mistake their friendliness for familiarity. Please remember that an accreditation test is a professional situation.

You may well be asked to introduce yourself before the test starts. Think about what you are going to say beforehand. You may even be asked why you are interested in a career as an interpreter. Have your answers ready.

The interpreting tests:

Usually, the speakers are not panel members and do not participate in the assessment process. Their job is to deliver an impartial speech. It will not contain any deliberate traps or peculiar phrases. Unusual terms or names will be given to you in advance. The speakers have all been trained to prepare and give speeches for tests of this kind and they will not choose a subject that is too obscure. The subjects will be a mix of EU-related issues and general topics. These considerations apply to consecutive and simultaneous tests alike.

For consecutive tests, you will be given a 'live' speech. The speakers will not read out the text. If they go too fast, they will be slowed down.

For simultaneous tests, you will usually be given a pre-recorded video speech, which will be played on the screen in the room and, where possible, on the small screen provided in the booth.

In case you encounter any technical problems (sound, image, etc.), either during the consecutive or simultaneous tests, signal them immediately to the panel.

In addition, for consecutive tests, at least one of the panel members will be taking notes to help judge the degree of difficulty of the speech. Remember that, after the speech has been delivered, you can ask questions to the speaker to clarify certain points. This usually means that you ask one or two factual questions in the language of the speaker. Do not allow too big a pause between the speaker finishing and your starting your interpretation.

After the test:

You will be told your result as soon as the test is over. If you pass, you will be asked to indicate your professional domicile, which is the place from which you may be recruited. You need not reply immediately, so give the matter some thought beforehand.

Whether you pass or fail, you will be provided with feedback on your performance.

In general, candidates can have up to three attempts to succeed in their test.

Good to know:

The panel members (not to mention the administrative staff behind the scenes) have put a lot of time and effort into preparing your test. They will not hold it against you if you are somewhat nervous, but will also expect you to treat the occasion seriously.

Please remember, since this is formal occasion, to dress accordingly. In any case, once you start working as an interpreter, you will have to abide by a certain dress code.

We hope that you now have a clear understanding on how to approach the accreditation test.

Good luck!

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