

Testing Interpreters:



**Developing, Administering, and
Scoring Court Interpreter Exams**

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Overview of Court Interpreter Tests in the US

- **The Federal Test**
- **The Consortium Test**
- **The NAJIT Test**
- **The NY State Test**

**In some ways very
similar...**



but in others very
different....



Some Communalities...

- Include a written test
- Test the 3 modes of interpreting
- Administered by recording
- Confidentiality agreement
- Grading usually by a combination of scoring units and a global score
- Off-site graders
- Grader training required



Some Differences...

- Is the test administered by audio or by video?
- At what point in the process is the written test administered?
- Is the written test part of the exam or is it merely a language screen?
- What does the written test test?



More Differences...

- Are all parts of the exam administered at the same time?
- If a candidate fails a section must s/he re-take all sections?
- How soon can one re-test?
- How often can one re-test?
- How long are test scores valid



Still More Differences...

- How many raters are used?
- Are they sitting together or are they in different locations consulting by telephone or e-mail?
- Are any of the tests re-rated blind to check for interrater reliability?
- Does the test include simultaneous in both directions?



A Quick Overview



The Federal Exam (FCICE)

- Established under Court Interpreters Act of 1978; 1st administration in 1980
- Currently available only in Spanish
- Previously offered in Haitian Creole and Navajo
- 2-year cycle (written exam in even-numbered years; oral exam in odd-numbered years)



Federal Written

- Multiple choice language proficiency in English & Spanish
- 100 items in each language
- 2½ hours time limit
- No dictionaries or other aids
- Passing score 75% on each
- Practice test provided in test handbook



Federal Written Content

- Reading comprehension
- Usage, grammar and idioms
- Error detection
- Synonyms
- Best translation of a word or phrase



Federal Oral

- Simulates normal interpreter assignments
- Based on real court transcripts edited to meet psychometric requirements (length, structure, scoring units)
- Test scripts reviewed by judges, attorneys, interpreters, linguists, cultural experts
- Dictionary of acceptable/unacceptable renderings
- Passing score 80%



Federal Oral Structure

- Sight Translation into English (230 words)
- Sight Translation into Spanish (same)
- Simultaneous monologue into Spanish (ca. 840 words; 120 words per min.)
- Consecutive into Spanish & English (850-900 words; time limit; notes, 2 repetitions)
- Simultaneous dialogue (up to 160 words per min., average 150)



Scoring Unit Categories

- Grammar/Verbs
- False
Cognates/Interference/Literalism
- General Vocabulary
- Legal Terms and Phrases
- Idioms/Sayings



Scoring Unit Categories

(cont't)

- Register/Slang/Colloquialisms
- Numbers/Names
- Modifiers/intensifiers/emphases/
interjections
- Embeddings/positions



The Consortium Exam

- Consortium founded 1995
- New Jersey, Oregon, Washington and Minnesota
- Now 40 member states
- Tests in 16 languages (plus abbreviated)
- Plus state-donated exams
- More tests under development
- Test schedules determined by individual member states



Consortium Variations

- One size does not fit all
- Written exam
- Ethics exam
- Grading protocols
- Pass entire test or piecemeal
- Reciprocity rules vary



The NAJIT Exam

- Developed by professional organization rather than government
- Decision in 1998
- Piloted in 2001
- Worked with a test development company
- Spanish only
- 3 versions
- Accepted by 9 states



The NAJIT Written Exam

- Reading comprehension
- Grammar & syntax
- Antonyms
- Synonyms
- Analogies
- Idioms
- Proverbs
- Ethics
- Translation (E<>Sp)



The NAJIT Oral Exam

- Sight translation (E>Sp)
- Sight translation (Sp>E)
- Consecutive (Sp<>E)
- Simultaneous (E>Sp)
- Simultaneous (Sp>E)



New York Interpreter Testing

- Large system
- 300+ staff interpreters in 2007 (231 Spanish, 74 in 20 other languages; 90% full time)
- Registry of ca. 900 freelancers
- Two examination tracks)



NY Civil Service Competitive Examination – General Info

- Spanish
- Since 1980
- Every 4 years
- Written Test
- Oral Test
- Ranked eligible list
- On registry until hired as staff



NY Civil Service Written

- 120 multiple choice
- 3 hours
- Translation
- English/Spanish Grammar & Usage
- Vocabulary (synonyms & antonyms)
- Reading comprehension (E & Sp)
- Cloze exercises (E & Sp)



NY Civil Service Oral

- Administered by video tape (except sight translations)
- Recorded on audio-tape
- Ca. 1 hour
- Federally certified graders
- Scoring units
- Plus qualitative assessment



NY Civil Service Oral

- Sight Translation (e.g. affidavits, court orders; Sp>E and E>Sp)
- Consecutive (witness by lawyer)
- Simultaneous (monologue, E>Sp)
- Simultaneous (monologue, Sp>E)
- Simultaneous (two voices, E>Sp, attorney & judge, specialized vocab)



NY Civil Service Exam

1998

- Written: 4200 registered
- Written: 3253 completed written
- Written: 692 passed
- Oral: 192 passed

2006

- Written: 1238 registered
- Written: 40% passed
- Oral: 455 completed
- Oral: 116 passed
- 9.4% passed



NY Registry

- Established 1994
- Pass written before admitted to oral
- Written: English Proficiency & Legal Terminology (90 min., 75 items)
- Oral Test (22 languages)
- Most same test parameters
- Pass/Fail
- Criminal history check
- Ethics seminar



NY Tested Languages

- Albanian
- Arabic
- Bengali
- Cantonese
- French
- Greek
- Haitian Creole
- Italian
- Korean
- Mandarin
- Polish
- Portuguese
- Russian
- Spanish
- Vietnamese



NY Abbreviated Exams

- Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian
- Hebrew
- Hindi
- Japanese (full version in progress)
- Panjabi
- Urdu (full version in progress)
- Wolof



Other NY Information

- Civil Service exam: combination of scoring units & qualitative global assessment (+10/-10)
- Final score 50% written, 50% oral
- Civil Service exam: Supervisor input on cutting score
- High inter-rater reliability statistics

Thank you



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