Buying translation: a guide for clients

This guide helps businesses, charities and members of the public get the translation they need, on time and at a fair price.

Plan ahead

A professional translator typically translates 2,000 to 3,000 words a day. As a rule of thumb, allow one working day for every 2,500 words, plus one extra day for checking.

Urgent work usually costs more. Many translators add 25% to 50% for jobs needed within 24 hours or at weekends.

Know what you need

For information only: a translation so you can understand a document. For publication: a polished translation for your website, brochure or packaging, which should be checked by a second linguist. For official use: a certified translation for courts, visas or registrars.

What makes a good brief

Say who will read the translation and in which country, send the final version of the text in an editable format, and list any terms your organisation always uses. Name one person who can answer questions quickly.

Getting quotes

Ask two or three translators for quotes. A quote should state the price, the delivery date and what is included, such as checking by a second linguist. Be wary of very low prices for publication work.

Machine translation

Machine translation can help you understand the gist of a text. Do not rely on it for contracts, medical information, safety instructions or anything you will publish.

Working with an interpreter

Book at least a week ahead for common languages and two weeks ahead for rarer ones. For meetings over two hours, ask whether a second interpreter is needed.

If something goes wrong

Raise any concerns with the translator first. If you cannot resolve them and the translator is an SFTI member, you can complain to the Society within 12 months.

Find a qualified translator

Search the SFTI Find a translator directory, free of charge, to find Members and Fellows by language pair, specialism and location.