



Office of the State Court Administrator

Colorado Court Interpreter Program

Division of Human Resources

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Certification Requirements, Testing, and Employment

I. I want to become a certified interpreter, what do I need to do?

Five things, in the following order:

First: Attend a 2-day court interpreter orientation that covers interpreter ethics, protocol and the three modes of interpretation used in the courtroom

Second: Pass a **written exam** covering vocabulary, criminal procedure and court interpreter ethics with a score of 80% or better.

Third: Pass all three portions of the Consortium for State Court Interpreter Certification **oral exam** with a score of 70% or better on each section.

Fourth: Undergo a background check investigation.

Fifth: Sign oaths promising to comply with the Colorado Judicial Department's *Code of Professional Responsibility for Court Interpreters*, and with the *Colorado Continuing Education Requirements*, when applicable. Several other documents will need to be completed and signed before an interpreter may work for the Colorado Judicial Department.

II. When will the next orientation/written exam/oral exam be offered?

You can find the 2007 training and testing schedule for interpreters working in Spanish as well as other languages by returning to the court interpreter program page.

Please remember that you must have attended an Orientation workshop and scored 80% or above in a written exam before registering to take the oral exam. If more than two years have elapsed since you attended a court interpreter orientation and you have not previously taken the oral certification exam, you must attend another orientation before registering to take the oral exam.

III. What is the written exam like?

The written test contains 135 multiple-choice questions, and measures candidates' knowledge of three areas central to the work of a court interpreter at the level of a minimally qualified court interpreter:

1. English Language. To function as a professional court interpreter, one indispensable component is a high degree of proficiency in the English language. Accordingly, the written examination assumes a high degree of literacy in the English language and familiarity with a range of language constructions. It tests comprehension of written English vocabulary and idioms.
2. Court-Related Terms and Usage. A second area of knowledge essential to successful professional performance is familiarity with the terminology and procedures of the court system. Accordingly, the written examination also measures recognition of common court-related situations and vocabulary.

3. **Ethics and Professional Conduct.** The last critical domain of knowledge required of professional court interpreters encompassed in the written test is general knowledge of standards guiding the performance of duties. Accordingly, the written exam includes questions aimed at measuring candidates' knowledge of ethical behavior and professional conduct.

IV. What is the oral certification exam like?

The oral certification exam tests proficiency in the three modes of interpretation used in the courts: Sight, Consecutive and Simultaneous. You must achieve a score of 70% in each portion of the test to pass. Tests are scored by two federally certified interpreters who are trained as raters.

V. How difficult is the Spanish oral certification exam? How should I prepare for taking the test?

The Spanish court interpreter oral certification exam has a global pass rate of around 12% in Colorado. However, first time test takers have a lower pass rate, so careful preparation is crucial. When you attend the orientation training, you will be provided with resources and suggestions to help you prepare for the exam, including information on further training opportunities. If you are interested in a textbook that includes practice CDs or tapes, we recommend "*The Interpreter's Edge*" by Holly Mikkelson, which can be found by visiting www.acebo.com.

VI. How difficult are the oral certification exams for other languages?

The level of difficulty is the same for all oral certification tests, regardless of language. Colorado only began testing in languages other than Spanish in 2004, however, so there is no reliable data regarding the pass rates for different languages yet.

VII. I am a Spanish language interpreter. Do I have to pass all three portions of the oral exam at once?

Yes, beginning August 1, 2005, you must pass all three parts of the oral certification exam in one sitting to be certified, whether you take the exam in Colorado or in another Consortium state.

VIII. I am a Spanish language interpreter. How many times can I take the oral certification exam?

Spanish language interpreters may take the oral test only as many times as there are different versions of the oral exam before having to sit out from testing for a period of two years. If you have taken the Consortium certification exam in another state, that exam sitting will be counted towards the maximum allowed in Colorado. Please note: You must take the certification exam within two years of attending the orientation or attempting the certification exam.

IX. I interpret a language that is not Spanish. Do you offer a certification exam in my language?

Colorado offers court interpreter certification for the following languages: Arabic, Cantonese, Haitian-Creole, Hmong, Korean, Laotian, Mandarin, Portuguese, Russian, Somali, and Vietnamese. It is expected that a test in Serbian will be available in the near future.

X. What other types of certification does the Colorado Judicial Department accept as a valid credential to work in the courts?

- Federal Court Certification (for more information visit www.ncsconline.org)
- NAJIT certification (for more information visit www.najit.org)
- Certification from Consortium member states with similar certification requirements (for more information visit www.ncsconline.org)

XI. Do I have to be certified to work as an interpreter in the Colorado State Courts?

In some judicial districts, only certified interpreters cover the Spanish language cases, while in others they are strongly preferred.

XII. Once I become certified, what must I do to maintain my certification in good standing?

You must comply with the continuing education and professional practice policy, which requires 24 hours of continuing education credit hours and 48 hours of professional practice to be completed every two years. This requirement applies to all interpreters desiring to remain listed on the active certified or professionally qualified interpreter rosters.

XIII. How can I get hired to work as a court interpreter and what would I get paid?

Please be aware that certification does not constitute a guarantee of employment. At this time, most of the interpreting done in the courts is provided by independent contractors. As such, the possible income for a court interpreter can vary greatly. Factors affecting the availability of work for independent contractors include the volume of cases requiring interpretation in a specific language, the employment policies of the applicable judicial district, and the availability of certified interpreters in each locality. Contact your local courthouse to find out how interpreters are hired in your locality and if there is a need for certified interpreters in your language and/or geographic area.

While there are variations, Spanish language interpreters are typically compensated as follows (FY2007 salary data):

Freelance Certified (Hourly)	\$30/hour
Freelance Uncertified (Hourly)	\$25/hour
Staff Uncertified (Salary)	\$2,979-\$3,995/month
Staff Certified (Salary)	\$3,815-\$5,113/month

Compensation for interpreters working in languages other than Spanish is set independently by each judicial district.

For interpreter (and other) employment opportunities, please visit our job announcements page at <http://www.courts.state.co.us/chs/hr/employment>.

You may also access the weekly job postings by visiting any district or county courthouse in Colorado, or by dialing the Judicial Branch's job hotline at (303) 837-3671.

XIV. How do I find out about program changes, test dates, and training opportunities?

Whenever you have questions about the court interpreter program, please visit this website. We endeavor to post any changes to the program promptly. If the answer to your question is not found here, you may contact Emy López, State Court Interpreter Program Administrator, at emy.lopez@judicial.state.co.us or at 303.837.2330.

❖ This information was updated in October 2006.