

How to Be a Good Translator?

Translation is a highly skilled, rewarding and satisfying job. But how can we become a good translator?

One of the most experienced translators in the world; Lanna CASTELLANO; has described the translator's career path as follows:

"Our profession is based on knowledge and experience. It has the longest apprenticeship of any profession. Not until thirty do you start to be useful as a translator, not until fifty do you start to be in your prime.


The first stage of the career pyramid -the apprenticeship stage- is the time we devote to investing in ourselves by acquiring knowledge and experience of life.

Tips for translators:

Here are some tips that might help in order to be a good translator:

1. Love language, especially your own. And keep studying it.
2. Learn to write well.
3. Learn about and study your passive language and the culture it comes from.
4. Only (Generally) translate into your own language.
5. Select a specialist area of expertise, and study and be prepared to learn more about your specialist subject. Constantly.
6. Read: books, newspapers, blogs, magazines, adverts, style guides, cereal packets...
7. Listen: to TV, the radio, friends and family, strangers in the street, on the bus, in bars, in shops...
8. Attend workshops, seminars and conferences in your subject area - listen to the experts, absorb their language. Even their jargon - but try not to use it.

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9. Keep up with current affairs.
10. Keep your I.T skills up-to-date.
11. Practise and hone your skills – keep up with your training.
12. Listen to the words that you write (some writers and translators read their texts out loud to themselves). Languages each have their own rhythm. If your writing doesn't "sound" right, try changing the word order, not just the words.
13. Use your spell-checker. Use it judiciously, but use it. Always.
14. Print out your translated text and read it on paper before delivering it to your client. Always. Especially if you use computer-assisted translation (C.A.T) software. Print it out.
15. Ask yourself if your translation makes sense. If it makes you stop, even for a second, and think "what does that really mean"?, then there's something wrong.
16. Write clearly and concisely, using the appropriate sentence -and paragraph- length for your target language. Use simple vocabulary. You can convey even complex ideas using clear, straightforward language.
17. Inform your client of any mistakes, typos or ambiguous wording you find in the source text.
18. Find ways to add value for your clients.
19. Always keep your reader in mind.

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As you've probably noticed, most of these tips also apply to writers, not just translators. After all, translation is a form of writing, and good translators should be good writers too. The important thing is to practise and hone your skills. And always use your brain. That's what makes a good translator a really good translator.