



THE ETHICS OF TRANSLATING AND INTERPRETING

A guide to obtaining NAATI credentials

WHO WE ARE

NAATI is a company that is jointly owned by the nine governments of Australia. We are governed by a Board of Directors, who are appointed by the owners.

Our mission, as outlined in the NAATI Constitution, is to set and maintain high national standards in translating and interpreting to enable the existence of a pool of accredited translators and interpreters responsive to the changing needs and demography of the Australian community.

NAATI services are available through any of our offices located across Australia.

WHAT WE DO

Some people get confused about what NAATI is and what we do. Essentially, NAATI is a standards organisation responsible for setting, maintaining and promoting high professional standards.

Our core focus is issuing accreditations for practitioners who wish to work as translators and interpreters in Australia.

Our aim is to be a respected and recognised global leader in the provision of certification services for translators and interpreters, providing quality services and being responsive to the individuals and organisations which benefit from NAATI's services.

NAATI's work enhances the translation and interpreting industry's competitiveness and contributes to a community demand for everyone to be able to communicate and interact with each other.

ETHICAL CONDUCT WITHIN THE TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETING PROFESSION

This guide provides a source of information for acceptable professional practice and outlines the knowledge that is required by applicants for NAATI accreditation and recognition.

Interpreters and translators encounter a variety of ethical issues and questions in the course of their work. Ethical behaviour and the maintenance of high ethical standards are essential to good practice, in developing the profession and in maintaining positive opinions and perceptions.

While working as an interpreter or translator, ethical responsibilities overlap with your duty of care. Duty of care is the requirement to exercise the skill, care and diligence of a reasonable person performing similar work.

Knowledge and understanding of ethical standards is an integral part of the NAATI accreditation and recognition system. If at any time NAATI considers that a practitioner has breached the applicable code of ethics, NAATI reserves the right to counsel and in certain circumstances suspend or remove a practitioner's NAATI accreditation or recognition.

The ethical standards for Australian interpreting and translating practitioners are set out by the national professional bodies for translating and interpreting: the Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT) and, for Auslan interpreters, the Australian Sign Language Interpreters' Association (ASLIA).

This guide provides background information on these two primary codes of ethics:

1. *AUSIT's Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct (AUSIT Code)*
2. *ASLIA's Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Professional Conduct (ASLIA Code)*

It is also important to be aware that the AUSIT code has been adopted by the New Zealand Society for Translators and Interpreters (NZSTI). Different bodies in different countries will determine their own codes of ethics. When working with specific international organisations, practitioners are expected to adhere to the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) *Code of Ethics*.

While NAATI does not prescribe a code of ethics for the profession, NAATI has adopted both the AUSIT code and the ASLIA code as important elements in the accreditation and revalidation processes. A number of government and private language service providers have implemented these codes as an integral part of the contract that practitioners must sign before joining their service.

GENERAL ETHICS PRINCIPLES

Although the codes of ethics mentioned above may differ in some parts, they are generally concerned with similar underlying ethical principles.

The general principles contained in the different codes of ethics require translators and interpreters to:

- Respect their clients' right to privacy and confidentiality
- Disclose any real or perceived conflicts of interest
- Decline to undertake work beyond their competence or accreditation levels
- Relay information accurately and impartially between parties
- Maintain professional detachment and refrain from inappropriate self-promotion
- Guard against misuse of inside information for personal gain

NAATI ACCREDITATION

NAATI accreditation is an acknowledgement that an individual has demonstrated the ability to meet the professional standards required by the translation and interpreting industry.

NAATI assesses translation and interpreting professionals against these standards so that English-speaking and non-English speaking Australians can interact effectively with each other, particularly when accessing medical, legal, government and other services.

NAATI accreditation permits translators and interpreters to quickly and easily demonstrate to clients and agencies their level of skill and ability. Many employers will expect practitioners to have accreditation – it is difficult to get translating and interpreting work without it.

NAATI RECOGNITION

NAATI recognition is granted in emerging languages or languages with very low community demand where NAATI does not offer accreditation testing. The granting of NAATI recognition is an acknowledgement that an individual has recent and regular experience as a translator and/or interpreter with no defined skill level.

Agencies and clients who engage practitioners who hold the NAATI recognition will know that they meet the minimum experience and ability to interact as translator or interpreter with the Australian community. Recognition does not, however, have equal status with accreditation, nor does it stipulate a specific skill level, because NAATI has not had the opportunity to test your skills by formal assessment against a particular standard of performance.

SETTING THE ETHICAL STANDARDS FOR THE PROFESSION

AUSIT provides the translation and interpreting community with a professional organisation to promote the profession, improve the profile of translators and interpreters in the community and raise standards through professional development and the enforcement of the AUSIT code.

This code was initially developed by AUSIT in 1995 in consultation with NAATI and other stakeholders and is revised and updated on a regular basis. It is a compilation of rules and directives that interpreters and translators in Australia must follow while performing their duties. The core values provide a framework of expectations for the profession and industry.

For a printable version of the current AUSIT code see:
http://ausit.org/AUSIT/Documents/Code_of_Ethics_Full.pdf

The ASLIA code articulates ethical principles, values, and standards of conduct to specifically guide Australian Sign Language (Auslan) practitioners in their pursuit of professional practice. It is intended to provide direction to interpreters for ethical and professional decision-making in their day-to-day work. The ASLIA code is the mechanism by which the public is protected in the delivery of service. It should not be considered as a prescriptive set of rules, but rather as a set of principles and values which should be inherent in professional practice.

For a printable version of the ASLIA code please see:
<https://aslia.com.au/code-of-ethics/>

As ethical behaviour is important in maintaining standards in the interpreting and translating professions, NAATI examines knowledge and awareness of the ethics of the profession in its accreditation tests. This involves answering the questions about translating issues in writing and for interpreting tests questions relating to interpreting issues orally.

During a test, applicants are presented with a scenario as it could be encountered by an interpreter or translator in the field and are then required to respond to these situations, based on the relevant code of ethics. In their answers applicants need to:

- **Identify** the relevant ethical principle by name. There is no need to provide a pinpoint or numbered reference to the principle you are referring to. For example, 'this question is related to the principle of *accuracy* ...'
- **State** what the requirements of the principle are, e.g. '... according to which, a translator should ...'
- **Explain** how the situation places the principle at risk and how this problem should be resolved.

When an applicant's answers are marked, the mark awarded will depend on whether the applicant has covered all of these points. The marking process penalises an applicant who raises irrelevant issues as part of their answer. It is important that answers are clear, concise and only address the ethical principle(s) directly related to the question asked.

NAATI does not prescribe maximum or minimum numbers of words for a response. As a point of reference, it is recommended that answers to each question are approximately 100 to 150 words in length for translation tests or one to two minutes long for interpreting tests.

SAMPLE ETHICS QUESTIONS IN NAATI ACCREDITATION TESTS

The following are examples of ethics of the profession questions and possible answers.

FOR PARAPROFESSIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL TRANSLATOR TESTS

Sample question 1

You have translated a business document for a company managed by a LOTE speaking person. You complete the translation, but the client sends it back with numerous changes requested. The changes reflect the manager's house style preferences, change the semantic nature of the English original and affect the accuracy of the translation. What would you do and why?

Sample question 1 answer

The principle involved is accuracy, which indicates that translators use their best judgement in remaining faithful at all times to the meaning of the text. This means optimal and complete message transfer into the target language that preserves the content and intent of the source text without omission or distortion.

Accuracy is crucial and translations should reflect the original document's content accurately and faithfully. Any changes that result in a different meaning, when compared to the English original, are unacceptable. I would contact the client and advise him/her that I cannot make the requested changes. If the client insists, I would ask the client to re-write the English original in that house style and I could then do the translation from the revised original document. A translator should not be involved in producing a document that does not accurately reflect the meaning of the original document.

Sample question 2

Your uncle has had his will drafted, signed and witnessed in English. The will refers to property that exists in another country where English is not an official language. Your uncle requests that you, an accredited translator, translate the will into the official language so it will be available when the time comes to deal with the authorities. What should you do and why?

Sample question answer

The principles involved are impartiality and professional conduct. Translators must frankly disclose all conflicts of interest, e.g. in assignments for relatives or friends and those affecting their employers, and translators maintain their integrity and independence at all times

I would have to decline the request as there might be a real or perceived conflict of interest, given the document is for a relative. As the request relates to a legal document, I would not want to risk having my translation not accepted when presented. I would explain my reasoning to my uncle. If I did translate the document, I would ensure that as part of certifying the document I declared my relationship with the document owner.

FOR PARAPROFESSIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL INTERPRETER TESTS

[Sample question 1](#)

While you are interpreting in an interview between a police officer and a witness, the officer asks you for your comment on the client's background and whether he is telling the truth. How would you reply? Please give reasons for your answer.

[Sample question 1 answer](#)

The first principle involved is Impartiality. This states that interpreters do not voice or write an opinion, solicited or unsolicited, on any matter. The second principle is clarity of role boundaries, which states that interpreters draw attention to any situation where other parties misunderstand the interpreter role or have inappropriate expectations.

I would explain to the police officer that as an interpreter my only role is to enable communication between two parties who do not speak a common language. As part of this process it is important that I do not express an opinion in relation to his question as this would mean that I do not maintain my independence in relation to the communication.

[Sample question 2](#)

You are interpreting for a patient and a psychiatrist. The patient seems rather uncomfortable and does not respond with complete sentences. Their answers to the psychiatrist's questions do not make much sense. What would you do and why?

[Sample question 2 answer](#)

This issue relates to impartiality and accuracy. Impartiality states that interpreters remain unbiased throughout the communication exchanged between the participants in any interpreted encounter. Accuracy states that interpreters use their best professional judgement in remaining faithful at all times to the meaning of messages.

Because of these principles, the interpreter must not improve on the coherence of the patient's replies by making them seem more articulate than they are. Whatever the client says must be interpreted for the psychiatrist, even if such a client's response bears no relation to the question or makes no sense. It is the psychiatrist who will take appropriate action, if necessary.