

Code of Ethics and Conduct

Introduction

A Code of Ethics is an essential document that regulates relationships between professional interpreters and consumers of interpreting services. Codes of ethics and conduct are important in the training, evaluation and monitoring of professionals. They express agreed norms against which ethical decision-making and professional conduct can be benchmarked. By agreeing to follow the SLIANZ Code of Ethics, interpreters show that they are committed to behave in ways that preserve and promote the reputation of the profession and serve the interests of all consumers.

The Code of Ethics defines the principles that guide interpreter behaviour and informs consumers about the professional role and obligations they can expect from interpreters. Briefly, the Code states that interpreters are required to act with professionalism and integrity towards clients and employers. When interpreters behave professionally, they interpret accurately and impartially; maintain consumer confidentiality; represent their competence honestly in accepting work; maintain clear role boundaries; promote working conditions and professional relationships that enhance the quality of service delivery; and strive for excellence through professional development.

Core Values

The guiding principles in the Code of Ethics are based on key values that both interpreters and consumers agree are necessary to provide a quality service. These values are especially significant to the Deaf community, many of whom use interpreting services frequently in many domains of everyday life. These core values are:

- **Respect:** for consumers and other professionals, including being responsive to the diversity of language styles and preferences of Deaf consumers.
- **Integrity:** honesty, consistency and trustworthiness in professional and personal dealings with consumers.
- **Non-discrimination:** fair, equal treatment of all consumers and a non-judgmental attitude in providing service.

SLIANZ also acknowledges that its purpose of upholding ethical, high quality interpreting practice accords with the objective of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (2008) to promote Deaf people's equitable access in society.

Code of Conduct

Ethical practice and decision-making are not simply 'rule-based'. The Code of Conduct is a set of guidelines and expectations about practice that help guide interpreters to apply the intent of the Code of Ethics, to make decisions that have the least harmful impacts, and to ensure consistency of behaviour across the profession.

Background

After consultation with interpreters and consumers, revisions to the SLIANZ Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct (originally formulated in 1995) were adopted by members at the 2012 Annual General Meeting. The revised code reflects the expectations and values of SLIANZ members and interpreting consumers and remains consistent with the ethical tenets upheld in the wider interpreting sector (particularly as expressed in this region in the codes of AUSIT, NZSTI, ASLIA, and Interpreting New Zealand. To remain current with standards of professional practice and consumer expectations, SLIANZ may undertake further reviews of the Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct as needed.

Complaints and disciplinary proceedings

Consumers or other parties who experience a breach of this Code by a SLIANZ member can use the SLIANZ complaints procedure to resolve the matter. Members of SLIANZ agree to uphold this Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct, and to submit to disciplinary procedures of the Association in response to a finding that the Code has been breached.

Code of Ethics

General Principles

1. **Professional Conduct**
2. **Confidentiality**
3. **Competence**
4. **Accuracy**
5. **Impartiality**
6. **Clarity of Role Boundaries**
7. **Professional Development**

1. Professional Conduct

Interpreters uphold the standards of conduct, the aims and reputation of SLIANZ. They conduct themselves in a responsible and professional manner. They show respect towards all parties involved in an interpreting assignment. They respect and support their colleagues.

Aim: To maintain trust in interpreters as professionals and to maintain the reputation of SLIANZ; to support and further the interests of the profession and their colleagues, beyond their individual interest.

Explanation: Interpreters accept responsibility for their work and conduct; they are committed to providing quality service in a respectful and culturally sensitive manner. They are reliable. Interpreters deal honestly and fairly with other parties and colleagues, and are responsive to their needs and language preferences. They are transparent and honest in all business practices. They offer colleagues reasonable assistance as required.

2. Confidentiality

Interpreters maintain confidentiality and do not disclose information acquired during the course of their work, or details about specific assignments.

Aim: To protect the privacy of parties communicating through an interpreter, and to maintain the trust of consumers in the integrity of professional interpreters.

Explanation: Because interpreters hold a position of trust and deal with personal information, they are bound by strict rules of confidentiality.

3. Competence

Interpreters only undertake work they can reasonably expect to perform competently and for which they are professionally qualified through training and credentials.

Aim: to ensure that effective interpreting is provided and that professional standards are upheld.

Explanation: In order to practise, interpreters need to have adequate levels of expertise. Those who work with interpreters are entitled to expect that the interpreters are appropriately qualified. Interpreters always represent their credentials honestly.

4. Accuracy

Interpreters remain faithful to the meaning of the message at all times and, to the best of their ability, interpret the message in the manner in which it was intended.

Aim: Consumers communicating through an interpreter will be able to exchange information exactly as they intend, without distortion of meaning.

Explanation: Accuracy means complete and undistorted transfer of the message. The content and the intent of the original message are preserved in the interpretation.

5. Impartiality

Interpreters observe impartiality during any interpreted encounter and remain unbiased throughout the communication exchanged between the consumers.

Aim: To enable both parties to trust that the interpreter will be a neutral facilitator of their communication, staying within defined role boundaries.

Explanation: The purpose of interpreting is to allow parties who do not share a common language to communicate effectively with each other, retaining the full intent of the communication conveyed. Interpreters are not responsible for what the parties communicate, only for complete and accurate transfer of the message. Interpreters do not allow bias factors to influence their performance; likewise they do not soften, strengthen or alter the messages conveyed.

6. Clarity of Role Boundaries

Interpreters maintain clear boundaries between their own task (as facilitators of communication through message transfer) and the responsibilities of other parties in a situation.

Aim: To ensure that the interpreting task is not compromised by other tasks.

Explanation: The focus of interpreters is on message transfer. Interpreters do not, in the course of their interpreting duties, engage in other tasks such as advocacy, guidance or advice. Where interpreters are also employed to undertake other tasks, they will not engage in these tasks while interpreting. Interpreters employed to undertake multiple tasks will clearly indicate when they move between interpreting and their other role(s).

Interpreters should explain their role to consumers in line with this Code.

7. Professional Development

Interpreters continue to develop their professional knowledge and skills.

Aim: To maintain and improve standards of service..

Explanation: Interpreters commit themselves to lifelong professional learning, recognising that individuals, skills and practices change over time. Interpreters continually upgrade their language and interpreting skills and their understanding of interpreting contexts. Participating in professional development helps to develop and maintain a critical perspective on one's professional competence and practice.

Code of Conduct

Introduction

This Code of Conduct gives guidance to interpreters on how to apply the intent of the Code of Ethics. To ensure consistency across the profession, the points below set out the kind of conduct that is generally expected of interpreters.

In some contexts, practice norms for sign language interpreters may differ from these general guidelines in some contexts, where specific protocols, duty of care, or the overall goals of participants must be considered in the way that an interpreter functions and relates to others (e.g. educational, mental health, church, marae).

It also has to be acknowledged that the NZSL interpreting workforce is still small and cannot always meet demand in every locality. The points in this Code of Conduct describe an ideal model of practice that may not be achievable in every instance. For example, interpreters may at times be called on to interpret for family and friends, and they may have to undertake work that is potentially beyond their current competency level. It is nevertheless important to set out the ideal here.

Above all, interpreters should use their professional judgment to conduct themselves in ways that have the least harmful impacts, and that align with the aims of the Code of Ethics.

1. Professional Conduct

1.1 CONDUCT

1.1.1 Interpreters maintain their integrity at all times.

- Interpreters are honest and trustworthy in relationships with consumers and employers.
- Interpreters account and charge for their time accurately and honestly.
- Interpreters avoid behaviour at work or outside of work that may reflect poorly on the reputation and professionalism of interpreters or on a particular interpreting agency.

1.1.2 Interpreters are reliable and accountable for the quality of their work.

- When appropriate, interpreters inform consumers at the start of an assignment about key interpreting ethics, including confidentiality, accuracy, and impartiality. This information promotes consumer trust and interpreter accountability for ethical behaviour.
- Interpreters strive to perform their task to the best of their ability.
- Interpreters accept responsibility for errors or limitations in interpreting performance, without blaming others.
- Interpreters may advertise their services, providing the information is factual, relevant and neither misleading nor discreditable to the interpreting profession.

1.1.3 Interpreters show respect through their conduct, to maintain the dignity of clients and the interpreting profession.

- Interpreters are punctual.
- Interpreters dress and groom in a manner that is appropriate to the situation, and in an unobtrusive manner. For example, they avoid bright colours, revealing styles, distracting adornments, perfume or body odours that draw attention to the interpreter's physical presence.
- Interpreters are polite.
- Interpreters defer to their clients' communication choices as far as possible.
- Interpreters observe the norms and protocols in a given context (such as where to sit or stand, forms of address).

1.1.4 Interpreters do not exercise power or influence over their clients through their actions within or outside interpreting assignments.

1.1.5 Interpreters undertake appropriate preparations for all assignments.

- Interpreters prepare adequately prior to the assignment. Preparation may entail briefing with clients, reading available and relevant documents, consulting dictionaries and glossaries of technical terms in specialised fields, (for example, medical or legal), and/or seeking relevant background information from brochures, reference books, the internet, etc.
- Interpreters treat materials and information provided for preparation purposes as confidential. (See also under 2. Confidentiality).
- In situations where interpreters may not have had the opportunity to be adequately briefed or given enough time to prepare, or if there are safety/security issues, they communicate this to the responsible person or initiator who is participating in the session.

1.1.6 Interpreters complete assignments they have accepted, unless they are unable to do so for ethical reasons (for example, where they do not have the required competence or where there may be a conflict of interest).

- If interpreters cannot attend an assignment, they inform the person or agency who has booked the assignment.
- Except for urgent situations, interpreters do not delegate an assignment to another interpreter without the agreement of the parties concerned. Interpreters do not accept an assignment delegated by another interpreter when the parties involved have not been notified. In situations where an urgent replacement is required (for example, when an interpreter is sick), it may not be possible to seek the agreement of all parties, but the interpreter will endeavour to inform the parties as soon as practical.

1.1.7 In interpreting assignments, interpreters endeavour to secure a physical environment that enables as clear a communication as is achievable through reasonable effort in the given context.

- Interpreters use any technology required for interpreting in the given context, including microphones, telephone, and video interpreting.
- Interpreters make appropriate arrangements for maintaining confidentiality (for example, ensuring that briefing with the client takes place where they are not overlooked or overheard).
- Interpreters take appropriate security measures in cases of physical risk.
- Where possible, interpreters avoid lengthy stretches of interpreting without a break.

1.2 PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

1.2.1 Interpreters follow this Code – as employees, as freelancers, or as supervisors or employers of other interpreters.

1.2.2 Interpreters who work through agencies support the agencies to maintain a consistent service profile.

- Interpreters observe at all times the obligations arising from their contract with the agencies.
- Interpreters identify themselves at assignments by the agency brand name, as required by agency protocols.
- Direct requests for service arising during jobs booked through an interpreting agency are redirected back to the original booking agency.
- Interpreters do not assume an exclusive working relationship with a particular client—the matching of client to interpreter is the responsibility of the interpreting service, taking into account client preference.

1.2.3 Agencies, employers or clients who stipulate this Code as a mandatory standard have appropriate procedures in place to support interpreters to maintain the Code.

1.2.4 Interpreters should decline gifts or favours from consumers that would create a sense of obligation or perceived influence.

1.2.5 Interpreters maintain constructive and respectful working relations with colleagues that further excellent professional practice.

- Interpreters refrain from expressing opinions that bring the competence or integrity of colleagues into disrepute.
- Interpreters work cooperatively with colleagues (particularly in team situations) to maximise each other's professional skills and effectiveness.
- Interpreters resolve any disputes with interpreting colleagues in a cooperative, constructive and professional manner
- Interpreters participate in the activities and goals of the wider interpreting profession.
- Interpreters support fellow interpreters in their professional development.
- Where interpreters have a well-founded concern that an interpreting colleague has breached this Code and caused harm to the profession or to others, and where this cannot be resolved between the colleagues, they may report the matter for deliberation and possible disciplinary action to SLIANZ, the employing party, or another relevant body.

2. Confidentiality

2.1 Interpreters are bound by strict rules of confidentiality.

- When interpreters brief clients on their role, they will inform clients that everything interpreted will be kept confidential by the interpreter.
- Communication in each assignment (including casual conversations with clients) remains confidential to that situation.
- Interpreters ensure that any personal, identifying or sensitive materials related to the assignment are destroyed or left behind.
- Interpreters do not share identifying details of an assignment with others (including friends, family, or colleagues). Apart from exceptions covered in other parts of this Code, all details of an assignment, including time, place, names or content are considered as confidential and potentially identifying.
- For personal safety reasons, interpreters may inform someone where and when they are working (for example, if the assignment is after hours or at a distant location).

2.2 Where teamwork is required, the ethical obligation for confidentiality extends to all members of the team and/or agency.

- It will often be necessary for one interpreter to brief another interpreter for an assignment that is shared. Interpreters confine themselves to sharing only those details that are sufficient to prepare their colleague for the assignment.
- Interpreters do not pass on knowledge about a client between agencies or assignments relating to a client.

2.3 The duty of confidentiality does not apply where disclosure is required by law, or in specific circumstances of risk to life or security concerns .

- In specific institutional settings where duty of care or security rules regulate the behaviour of all participants (such as in health care, educational, or high security settings) interpreters follow the relevant policies and procedures in addition to their interpreting code of ethics.
- Should any potential conflict between the two codes arise, interpreters abide by the interpreting code in the first instance.
- In some cases (for example, life threatening situations) they may alert, and/or seek further guidance from, the relevant authority.

2.4 When interpreters discuss interpreting experiences within the context of training or professional supervision, they avoid revealing details about the identity of consumers.

3. Competence

3.1 Interpreters only accept interpreting assignments that they can reasonably expect to perform competently.

- Interpreters accept assignments using discretion with regard to the match between their skills and the likely demands of the situation, and decline those that they believe to be beyond their competence.
- Interpreters familiarise themselves with the varied contexts, institutional structures and terminology of the areas in which they accept work.

3.2 Interpreters represent their credentials honestly.

3.3 Interpreters maintain transparency about their ability perform the work required.

- Interpreters inform the parties of any impediment to a faithful interpretation, for example, when they are unable to understand a speaker, when an interpreting error has occurred, or when they encounter problems with competence that mean they are unable to continue with an assignment.
- Interpreters attest to their qualifications and the accuracy of their interpreting and, when requested, explain their linguistic choices, but do not attest to whether participants have understood messages; this remains an issue for participants.

4. Accuracy

4.1 Interpreters provide accurate renditions of the source utterance or text.

- The concept of accuracy is complex, and this code assumes that interpreters know the meaning of the concept and are able to provide accurate and complete renditions of the original message on the basis of the skills and understanding they have acquired through their training.

4.2 In order to ensure the same access to all that is said or signed by all parties involved in a meeting, interpreters relay everything that is communicated completely.

- Interpreters aim to interpret everything without omitting, adding or changing the content and intent of the original message.
- Interpreters aim to pass on everything, including side conversations, or information that might seem redundant, irrelevant, impolite or untrue. Discretion may need to be used in complex communication environments and multi-party conversations (for example in large meetings or classroom situations) in which it is not feasible to relay all incidental communication.
- When briefing clients about their role, interpreters discuss with clients how the communication process will work, reminding them that everything will be interpreted without editing.

4.3 Interpreters correct their own interpreting errors

- An interpreter who realises they have made a mistake corrects it promptly, informing parties that it is their own error. The interpreter does not fix perceived 'errors' of information spoken by other parties.

4.4 Interpreters manage the flow of communication where possible / appropriate, to enable accuracy

- Interpreters may ask a speaker to slow down or pause to enable accurate interpretation.
- Interpreters request a break if fatigue or stress is putting accuracy of interpreting at risk.

4.5 Interpreters ask for clarification if necessary to enable accurate and comprehensible interpretation.

- Interpreters intervene promptly if a speaker's meaning is unclear or missed by the interpreter, stating politely that, "I, the interpreter, need clarification".
- Interpreters use discretion regarding the situation and the consequences as to whether intervening for clarification is appropriate; for example, it would not usually be appropriate to request clarification during a formal speech or ceremony, or a judge's summing up for a jury.

4.6 Interpreters endeavour to maintain the emotions, tone, register and style of the speakers in their interpreting and do not soften or enhance the force of messages conveyed or language used.

- Interpreters convey the intent of parties in a way that matches the style and tone of language that speakers are using. If it is not possible to replicate a formal or technical register in the other language, one option is to ask the speaker if they can re-express the message more plainly.
- In specific contexts (such as in court or psychometric assessments) incoherence, hesitations and unclear statements are maintained in the interpretation.

5. Impartiality

5.1 Interpreters do not offer opinions or advice relating to the situation.

- Exceptions to this might be when it seems necessary, in the interpreter's professional judgment, to alert parties to a cultural issue that is impeding the current communication, or when the immediate wellbeing of a participant would be at risk by failing to offer advice or information.
- Interpreters keep the participants informed of any side comments made by any of the parties or of their attempts to engage the interpreter in a private or any other conversation
- Interpreters do not give opinions or share undisclosed details about a situation that they attended in the capacity of interpreter, even if the interpreter's presence is public knowledge (for example, at a media appearance, conference, public meeting). Knowledge about that event belongs to the main participants rather than to the interpreter.

5.2 Interpreters disclose any potential conflict of interest in relation to an interpreting assignment, and withdraw from an assignment if objectivity is compromised.

- Interpreters alert the agency or the other parties to any conflict of interest related to the assignment.
- Interpreters disclose any business or vested interest that they may have in an assignment, beforehand or as soon as practicable.
- Interpreters do not recommend to clients any business, agency, process, substance or material matters in which they have a vested, personal or financial interest, without fully disclosing this interest to the clients.
- Interpreters consider potential conflicts of interest before accepting interpreting assignments for family members or close friends, and in situations where the interpreter has another role, interest, or bias.
- Interpreters decline jobs where personal feelings or beliefs will make displaying and maintaining impartiality impossible.

5.3 Interpreters express the message faithfully and objectively.

- Interpreters do not express personal feelings or opinions about the content of communication through words, tone of voice, facial expression or body language – while interpreting, or afterwards.
- Interpreters are not responsible for the accuracy or acceptability of what clients say.

5.4 Interpreters establish physical and social neutrality

- Interpreters avoid physical contact with either party, beyond conventional greetings initiated by them. Physical contact may be required in Deafblind interpreting.
- Interpreters do not seek to elicit or share overly personal information in conversation with parties during an interpreting assignment.
- Interpreters demonstrate courtesy and tact towards all parties equally.

6. Clarity of Role Boundaries

6.1 When an interpreter has other roles potentially relevant to the participants or the situation, (for example, an interpreter who is also qualified as a legal or a medical professional), these roles are set aside in relation to the interpreting assignment.

- Where interpreters as a result of specific employment arrangements have roles in addition to that of interpreting, they clearly delineate between the two roles, and do not switch roles unannounced.

6.2 Interpreters encourage the people with whom they work or are engaged by to familiarise themselves with the role of the interpreter.

6.3 Interpreters respect the professional boundaries of other participants involved in an assignment.

6.4 Interpreters understand, and help their clients understand, the difference between professional and personal interactions.

- Interpreters assume responsibility for establishing and maintaining appropriate boundaries between themselves and the other participants in the communicative interaction.

6.5 If interpreters are approached by separate parties to the same legal assignment, the interpreter shall notify all parties and give the first party an opportunity to claim exclusive right to the requested interpreting service.

7. Professional Development

7.1 Interpreters enhance their skills and knowledge through continuing education and professional development throughout their professional careers.

- Interpreters show commitment to professional competence by holding formal qualification, by keeping their working languages highly proficient, by attending professional development and training opportunities, and by keeping abreast of current best practice and literature in the field.
- Interpreters adhere to the requirements for continued professional development set by SLIANZ.