



Getting into freelance translation?

Translate: vb to express in another language, using the written word

The first step

Freelance translation offers a fascinating and rewarding career to anyone with the right combination of language skills, professional commitment and business acumen.

Starting up can be tough. The competition is fierce and only the really skilled, professional and businesslike will succeed. You will need to give serious thought to whether or not you are fully qualified and sufficiently motivated. Your earning potential will depend on your language combinations, subject knowledge and translation skills. The Institute can also help you – see the section entitled **Help is at hand**

As a very minimum, you must:

- have a very high standard of education; with very few exceptions, a degree is essential, though not necessarily in languages - it is a positive advantage to have qualifications or experience in another subject. Postgraduate training in translation is useful. You must be able to write your own mother tongue impeccably in a style and register appropriate to the subject and have a flair for research on technical subjects;
- be a master of one or more foreign languages: language knowledge, however, is not enough on its own - you must have a thorough knowledge of the institutions, culture, attitudes and practices in the countries where that language is spoken, normally acquired through residence there;
- have specialised knowledge of a business, technical or scientific field;
- have excellent keyboard skills (alternatively, use voice-recognition software or a dictating machine and a competent typist);
- have invested in a minimum of equipment and software - a computer and appropriate word-processing software; fax machine and internet connection; suitable dictionaries; a telephone; answering machine (and, optionally, a dictating machine); increasingly, today's translators are also using translation memory software and other translation tools.

If you feel you satisfy these requirements, the next step is to:

- produce a well-typed, well-presented **curriculum vitae**, briefly describing your education, qualifications, the professional associations of which you are a member, the languages from which you translate (source language/s) and the amount of translation work you can handle (normally quoted as x thousand words per week in the UK). You should translate only into your mother tongue (target language). Give evidence of your specialist subject knowledge. Stress any first-hand experience in fields other than languages. Say whether you have any interpreting ability or other language-related skills such as abstracting, editing or proofreading. Say how you produce your work (word-processing software) and whether you can communicate by email or fax;
- ask someone working in business or in the language world to take a critical look at how you are presenting yourself before you send out your CV;
- send your CV and a short covering letter to potential work providers: translation agencies listed in Yellow Pages; local exporting/importing firms in the fields in which you have special subject knowledge (consult your library, your local Chamber of Commerce, exhibition catalogues); secretarial agencies; banks; international organisations (NGOs); anyone else who might have language work to offer;
- check the ITI bulletin, translation journals, quality newspapers and periodicals, professional and trade journals for job advertisements for translators or for any companies or organisations which might have a need for translators;
- pull strings - enlist the help of friends and acquaintances in business and industry.

Help is at hand

Anyone seriously intending to become a translator should join the Institute of Translation & Interpreting. As a newcomer to the profession, you will have the opportunity to measure yourself against realistic standards through contact with established translators at workshops and seminars run by ITI and by its Networks and Regional Groups. These cover both practical and linguistic matters. Full details of all qualified (MITI, FITI) and corporate members are in the Institute's Directory, available on the Internet (www.iti.org.uk). However, a lot of work is passed on by the recommendation of colleagues, so it is an advantage to make yourself known to others in the profession. You should, therefore, try to join one of ITI's language or subject Networks and also your local ITI Regional Group. The Networks and Regional Groups offer professional support and guidance as well as an important opportunity to break out of the isolation of freelance life. ITI also operates a Peer Support scheme to give advice and support to new members and those seeking extra guidance.

If you are determined to be successful as a translator, ITI is here to help you help yourself.

Further reading

ITI Reference 007: Presenting yourself to work providers

ITI Reference 008: How to make money working freelance for translation companies

ITI Reference 009: Network and Regional Groups

The translator's handbook, ed Owens, Rachel, 3rd edition, London:Aslib, 1996, ISBN 0 85142 352 3.

A practical guide for translators, Samuelsson-Brown, G, 3rd ed, Clevedon:Multilingual Matters, 1998, (hb), ISBN 1-85359-304-4; (Pb), ISBN 1-85359-303-6.

Careers using languages, Ostarhild, Edda, 7th ed, London:Kogan Page, 1997, ISBN 0-7494-1821-4.

Dictionary of Translation Studies, Mark Shuttleworth/Moira Cowie, St Jerome Publishing, 1997, ISBN 1-00650-03-7.

For further information on ITI, please visit its website at: www.iti.org.uk

© ITI