Institute of Translation & Interpreting

Presenting yourself to work providers and to translation companies

Translation companies receive hundreds of applications from would be translators and interpreters. How can you do yourself justice when applying for work and make sure that you stand out from the crowd?

Letterhead

It is extremely important to have a well-designed letterhead that conveys the essential information about you without being cluttered. If you are just starting your career,
it may be too early to have it professionally printed as you will undoubtedly want to change it during the first few months. So make sure that your own printer can produce a fairly professional job.
Ensure that all vital information is clearly stated: your name, your company name (if different), address, email address and telephone/fax numbers (with their international codes). Remember to include a brief description of your specialist subject and whether you are working as a translator and/or an interpreter.

Curriculum vitae

A copy of your **curriculum vitae** must present you at your best whilst not exaggerating your capabilities. Produce it yourself on good quality paper and do not fold it when posting. Feature your name prominently at the top and repeat this in a simpler format on all following pages. Do not offer to translate into languages other than your mother tongue or a proven language of habitual use, as this will mark you as an amateur. If you are an interpreter, describe the type of interpreting you can do and any other skills you offer such as court interpreting, copy editing, abstracting. Claim a skill only if you genuinely have it. Your profile should show your educational qualifications and the level you achieved. Your tertiary education and job training will be what work providers are most interested in and so there is no need to list every examination taken or every school attended.

Describe your work pattern to date and any relevant work experience. Work providers will be particularly interested in a person who has trained and worked in a field other than languages: for example engineering, law, abstracting, copy writing.

State any further special interests or non-linguistic skills as these may prove relevant to work which you may be asked to do. Mention any affiliation to a professional association, such as ITI, in a prominent place. Try to offer references from employers and work providers, rather than from former tutors. List your equipment and the computer packages with which you are familiar. Give an idea of what you can offer: the number of words you could translate per week, how you can deliver your work (electronic delivery or posted disk), whether you have your own car (if you are an interpreter) and whether you are prepared to travel and/or stay overnight.

Covering letter

Type an individual covering letter to each addressee and do not forget to sign it! Make sure that you are sending it to the correct person in the organisation you are trying to target. Use the translator/interpreter grapevine to glean as much information about the company as possible. This may make your application more relevant. Ask someone to double-check your letter and application, especially if you are not writing in your native language. If they contain careless mistakes and omissions, you will not get a second chance. Ensure that you enclose an example of your work if this has been requested. It is also a good idea to have a couple of scripts already prepared in case you are asked for these at a later date.

Applications log

Keep a log of the applications you have sent and follow up after a week to check that your details have been received. You should also advise companies of any new circumstances, such as another computer package or further qualifications. If you do not hear anything, be polite but ruthless, ring and ask for some feedback. However, you must be prepared to accept constructive criticism as such.

Promoting yourself

Seek help from colleagues in assessing your strengths, and how to market these, and your weaknesses, and how to remedy these. If you have joined one of the ITI Networks or ITI Regional Groups, talk to other members – if you are a member of ITI, contact the office about the ITI Peer Support Scheme.

Good luck!

Best of luck in your job hunting. The effort you put into networking and research will pay off, and there are professional bodies - such as ITI - on hand to offer advice and support.

Further reading:

ITI Reference 019: Recommended Model General Terms of Business for commissioned Translation Work (1999)
ITI Reference 020: Code of professional conduct

See also ITI Resources, Reference 011, for further suggested reading.

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