



OCCUPATIONAL OUTLOOK HANDBOOK

Go

nterpreters and Translators

PRINTED VERSION

- Summary
- What They Do
- Work Environment
- How to Become One
- Pay
- Job Outlook
- State & Area Data
- Similar Occupations
- More Info

Summary

Summary

Quick Facts: Interpreters and Translators	
2021 Median Pay	\$46,110 per year \$22.62 per hour
Typical Entry-Level Education	Bachelor's degree
Work Experience in a Related Occupation	None
On-the-Job Training	None
Number of Jobs, 2021	69,600
Job Outlook, 2021-31	20% (Much faster than average)
Employment Change, 2021-31	14,000



What Interpreters and Translators Do

Interpreters and translators convert information from one language into another language.

Work Environment

Interpreters and translators work in settings such as schools, hospitals, courtrooms, meeting rooms, and conference centers. Part-time work is common, and work schedules may vary.

How to Become an Interpreter or Translator

Interpreters and translators typically need at least a bachelor's degree to enter the occupation. They also must be proficient in English and at least one other language, as well as in the interpretation or translation service they intend to provide.

Pay

The median annual wage for interpreters and translators was \$46,110 in May 2021.

Job Outlook

Employment of interpreters and translators is projected to grow 20 percent from 2021 to 2031, much faster than the average for all occupations.

About 9,200 openings for interpreters and translators are projected each year, on average, over the decade. Many of those openings are expected to result from the need to replace workers who transfer to different occupations or exit the labor force, such as to retire.

State & Area Data

Explore resources for employment and wages by state and area for interpreters and translators.

Similar Occupations

Compare the job duties, education, job growth, and pay of interpreters and translators with similar occupations.

More Information, Including Links to O*NET

Learn more about interpreters and translators by visiting additional resources, including O*NET, a source on key characteristics of workers and occupations.

What They Do >

What They Do

What Interpreters and Translators Do

About this section

.....



OCCUPATIONAL OUTLOOK HANDBOOK

Go

Interpreters and Translators

PRINTER-FRIENDLY

Summary	What They Do	Work Environment	How to Become One	Pay	Job Outlook	State & Area Data	Similar Occupations	More Info
---------	--------------	------------------	-------------------	-----	-------------	-------------------	---------------------	-----------

Summary

Summary

Quick Facts: Interpreters and Translators	
2021 Median Pay	\$49,110 per year \$23.61 per hour
Typical Entry-Level Education	Bachelor's degree
Work Experience in a Related Occupation	None
On-the-job Training	None
Number of Jobs, 2021	69,400
Job Outlook, 2021-31	20% (Much faster than average)
Employment Change, 2021-31	14,000



What Interpreters and Translators Do

Interpreters and translators convert information from one language into another language.

Work Environment

Interpreters and translators work in settings such as schools, hospitals, courtrooms, meeting rooms, and conference centers. Part-time work is common, and work schedules may vary.

How to Become an Interpreter or Translator

Interpreters and translators typically need at least a bachelor’s degree to enter the occupation. They also must be proficient in English and at least one other language, as well as in the interpretation or translation service they intend to provide.

Pay

The median annual wage for interpreters and translators was \$49,110 in May 2021.

Job Outlook

Employment of interpreters and translators is projected to grow 20 percent from 2021 to 2031, much faster than the average for all occupations.

About 9,200 openings for interpreters and translators are projected each year, on average, over the decade. Many of those openings are expected to result from the need to replace workers who transfer to different occupations or exit the labor force, such as to retire.

State & Area Data

Explore resources for employment and wages by state and area for interpreters and translators.

Similar Occupations

Compare the job duties, education, job growth, and pay of interpreters and translators with similar occupations.

More Information, Including Links to O*NET

Learn more about interpreters and translators by visiting additional resources, including O*NET, a source on key characteristics of workers and occupations.

What They Do ->

What They Do

What Interpreters and Translators Do

About this section

Interpreters and translators convert information from one language into another language. Interpreters work in spoken or sign language; translators work in written language.

Duties

Interpreters and translators typically do the following:

- Convert concepts, style, and tone in the source language to equivalent concepts, style, and tone of the target language
- Compile information and technical terms into glossaries and terminology databases for use in their oral renditions and translations
- Speak, read, and write fluently in at least two languages, one of which is usually English
- Render spoken messages accurately, quickly, and clearly

Interpreters and translators aid communication by converting messages or text from one language (typically called the source language) into another language (the target language). Although some people do both, interpreting and translating are different skills: interpreters work with spoken communication, and translators work with written communication.

Interpreters convert information from one spoken language into another—or, in the case of sign language interpreters, between spoken language and sign language. The interpreter’s goal is for people to experience the target language as seamlessly as if it were the source language. Interpreters typically must be fluent speakers or signers of both languages, because they communicate between people who do not share a common language. Interpreters may provide their services remotely as well as in person.

The three common modes of interpreting are:

- **Simultaneous interpreters** convey a spoken or signed message into another language at the same time someone is speaking or signing. Simultaneous interpreters must be familiar with the subject matter and maintain a high level of concentration to convey the message accurately and completely. Due to the mental fatigue involved, simultaneous interpreters may work in pairs or small teams if they are interpreting for long periods of time, such as in a court or conference setting.
- **Consecutive interpreters** convey the speaker’s or signer’s message in another language after the person has stopped to allow for interpretation. Note taking is generally an essential part of consecutive interpreting.
- **Sight translation interpreters** provide translation of a written document directly into a spoken language for immediate understanding, not for the purposes of producing a translated document in writing.



Interpreters and translators speak, read, and write in at least two languages fluently.

Translators convert written materials from one language into another language. The translator’s goal is for people to read the target language as if it were the source language of the written material. To do that, the translator must be able to maintain or duplicate the written structure and style of the source text while also keeping the ideas and facts accurate. Translators must properly transmit cultural references, including slang, and other expressions that do not translate literally.

Translators must read the source language fluently. The target language into which they translate is usually their native language. They adapt a range of products, including websites, marketing materials, and user documentation.

Nearly all translators use software in their work. Computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools, which use a computer database of previously translated sentences or segments (called a “translation memory”) to translate new text, allow translators to be efficient and consistent. Machine translation software automatically generates text from the source language into the target language, which translators then review in a process called post-editing. Translations often go through several revisions before becoming final.

Although most interpreters and translators specialize in a particular field or industry, many have more than one area of specialization.

The following are examples of types of interpreters and translators:

Community interpreters work in a variety of public settings to provide language interpretation one-on-one or for groups. Community interpreters often are needed at parent-teacher conferences, community events, business and public meetings, social and government agencies, new-home purchases, and in many other work and community settings.

Conference interpreters work at events that have non-English-speaking attendees. The work is often in the field of international business or diplomacy, although conference interpreters may provide services for any organization that works with speakers of foreign languages. Employers generally prefer experienced interpreters who can convert two languages into one native language—for example, the ability to interpret from Spanish and French into English. For some positions, such as those with the [United Nations](#) , this qualification is required.

Conference interpreters often do simultaneous interpreting. Attendees at a conference or meeting who do not understand the language of the speaker wear earphones tuned to the interpreter who speaks the language they want to hear.

Healthcare or medical interpreters and translators typically work in healthcare settings and help patients communicate with doctors, nurses, technicians, and other medical staff. Interpreters and translators must have knowledge of medical terminology in both languages. They may translate patient consent documents, patients’ records, pharmaceutical and informational brochures, regulatory information, and research material from one language into another.

Healthcare or medical interpreters must be sensitive to patients’ personal circumstances and must maintain confidentiality and ethical standards.

Liaison or escort interpreters accompany either U.S. visitors abroad or foreign visitors in the United States who have limited English proficiency. Interpreting in both formal and informal settings, these specialists ensure that the visitors are able to communicate during their stay.

Legal or judicial interpreters and translators typically work in courts and other judicial settings. At arraignments, depositions, hearings, and trials, they help people who have limited English proficiency. Accordingly, they must understand legal terminology. Court interpreters must sometimes read source documents aloud in a target language, a task known as sight translation.

Literary translators convert books, poetry, and other published works from the source language into a target language. Whenever possible, literary translators work closely with authors to capture the intended meaning, as well as the literary and cultural references, of the original publication.

Localizers engage in a comprehensive process of adapting text and graphics from a source language into the target language. The goal of localizers’ translation is to make a product or service appear to have originated in the country where it will be sold. They must not only know both languages, but also understand the technical information they are working with and the culture of the people who will be using the product or service. Localizers generally work in teams.

Sign language interpreters facilitate communication between people who are deaf or hard of hearing and people who can hear. Sign language interpreters must be fluent in English and in American Sign Language (ASL), which combines signing, finger spelling, and specific body language. ASL is a separate language from English and has its own grammar.

Some interpreters specialize in other forms of interpreting for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Some people who are deaf or hard of hearing lip-read English instead of, or in addition to, signing in ASL. Interpreters who work with these people do “oral interpretation,” mouthing speech silently and carefully. They also may use facial expressions and gestures to help the lip-reader understand.

Other modes of interpreting include cued speech, which uses hand shapes placed near the mouth to give lip-readers more information; signing exact English; and tactile signing, which is interpreting for people who are blind as well as deaf by making hand signs into the person’s hand.

Trilingual interpreters facilitate communication among an English speaker, a speaker of another language, and an ASL user. They must have the versatility and cultural understanding necessary to interpret in all three languages without changing the fundamental meaning of the message.

[<- Summary](#)

[Work Environment ->](#)

Work Environment

Work Environment

About this section

Interpreters and translators held about 69,400 jobs in 2021. The largest employers of interpreters and translators were as follows:

Professional, scientific, and technical services	32%
Self-employed workers	20
Educational services; state, local, and private	19
Hospitals; state, local, and private	8
Government	6



Legal interpreters must sometimes read documents aloud in a language other than that in which they were written.

Interpreters work in a variety of settings, including schools, hospitals, courtrooms, detention facilities, and conference centers; they also may work remotely. Some interpreters, such as liaison or escort interpreters, travel frequently. Depending on the setting and type of assignment, interpreting may be stressful.

Translators usually work in offices, which may include remote settings. They usually receive and submit their work electronically and must sometimes deal with the pressure of deadlines and tight schedules.

Work Schedules

Part-time work is common for interpreters and translators, and work schedules may vary. Interpreters and translators may have periods of limited work and periods of long, irregular hours.

Self-employed interpreters and translators are able to set their own schedules.

[<- What They Do](#)

[How to Become One ->](#)

How to Become One

How to Become an Interpreter or Translator

About this section

Interpreters and translators typically need at least a bachelor’s degree to enter the occupation. They also must be proficient in at least two languages (English and one other language), as well as in the interpretation or translation service they intend to provide.

Education

Interpreters and translators typically need a bachelor’s degree; common [fields of degree](#) include [foreign language](#), [business](#), and [communications](#). Students who study technical subjects, such as engineering or medicine, may be able to provide a higher level of interpreting and translation.

Interpreters and translators also need to be proficient in at least two languages, one of which is usually English, and in the translation or interpretation skill they plan to provide.

High school students interested in becoming an interpreter or translator should take a broad range of classes, including in foreign languages and English.

Through community organizations, students interested in sign language interpreting may take introductory classes in American Sign Language (ASL) and seek out volunteer opportunities to work with people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Internships offer prospective interpreters and translators an opportunity to learn about the work. For example, interns may shadow an experienced interpreter or begin working in industries with particularly high demand for language services, such as court or medical interpreting.

Licenses, Certifications, and Registrations

General certification typically is not required for interpreters and translators. However, workers may show proficiency by passing a variety of optional certification tests. For example, the [American Translators Association](#) (ATA) provides certification in many language combinations.



Some interpreters and translators attain a bachelors degree in a specific language or American Sign Language.

Employers may require or prefer certification for some types of interpreters and translators. For example, most states require certification for court interpreters. Federal courts offer court interpreter certification in several languages, including Spanish, Navajo, and Haitian Creole. At the state level, courts offer certification in multiple languages.

The [Certification Commission for Healthcare Interpreters](#) (CCHI) offers two types of certification for healthcare interpreters: Core Certification Healthcare Interpreter (CoreCHI), for interpreters of any language providing services in the United States; and Certified Healthcare Interpreter (CHI), for interpreters of Spanish, Arabic, and Mandarin.

The [National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters](#) (NBCMI) offers two types of certification for medical interpreters: the Hub-CMI credential, a nonlanguage-specific certification available to all interpreters regardless of target language; and the CMI credential for interpreters of Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Russian, Korean, and Vietnamese.

Continuing education is required for most state court and medical interpreter certifications. It is offered by professional interpreter and translator associations, such as the ATA and the [National Association of Judiciary Interpreters](#) (NAJIT).

The [National Association of the Deaf](#) (NAD) and the [Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf](#) (RID) jointly offer certification for general sign language interpreters. In addition, the registry offers specialty tests in legal interpreting, speech reading, and deaf-to-deaf interpreting—which includes interpreting among deaf speakers of different native languages and from ASL to tactile signing.

The [U.S. Department of State](#) offers aptitude tests for interpreters and translators at various levels, from basic to advanced. Although these tests are not considered a credential, they are a required step for candidates to be added to a roster for freelance assignments. Other federal agencies may offer similar proficiency tests.

Other Experience

Experience is not typically required to enter the occupation, but it may be especially helpful for interpreters and freelancers pursuing self-employment. Prospective interpreters and translators may benefit from activities such as spending time in a foreign country, interacting directly with foreign cultures, and studying a variety of subjects in English and at least one other language.

Working in-house for a translation company or taking on freelance or volunteer assignments may help people gain firsthand knowledge of the skills that interpreters or translators need. Volunteer opportunities for interpreters may be available through community organizations, hospitals, and sporting events, such as soccer, that involve international competitors.

By developing relationships with experienced workers in the field, interpreters and translators build their skills and confidence and establish a network of contacts. Mentoring may be formal, such as through a professional association; for example, both the [American Translators Association](#) (ATA) and the [Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf](#) (RID) offer formal mentoring programs. Mentoring also may be informal, such as with a coworker or an acquaintance who has experience interpreting or translating.

Advancement

Experienced interpreters and translators advance by taking on increasingly difficult assignments, gaining certification, and obtaining editorial responsibility.

Some interpreters and translators advance by becoming self-employed. They may submit resumes and samples to different translation and interpreting companies who match their skills to assignments. They may get work based on their reputation or through referrals from clients or colleagues. Those who start their own businesses also may hire translators and interpreters to work for them.

Important Qualities

Business skills. Self-employed interpreters and translators must be able to manage their finances. They need to set prices for their work, bill customers, keep records, and market their services to build their client base.

Communication skills. Interpreters and translators must be able to read, speak clearly, and write effectively in all of the languages in which they are working.

Concentration. Interpreters and translators must be able to focus while others are speaking or moving around them.

Cultural sensitivity. Interpreters and translators must be aware of expectations among the people for whom they are helping to facilitate communication. They must understand not only the language but the culture.

Dexterity. Sign language interpreters must be able to make quick and coordinated hand, finger, and arm movements when interpreting.

Interpersonal skills. Interpreters and translators must be able to put clients and others at ease. Interpreters may work on teams and must get along with colleagues to ensure success.

Listening skills. Interpreters must pay attention when interpreting for audiences to ensure that they hear and interpret correctly.

<- Work Environment

Pay

Pay ->

Pay

About this section

Interpreters and Translators

Median annual wages, May 2021

The median annual wage for interpreters and translators was \$49,110 in May 2021. The median wage is the wage at which half the workers in an occupation earned more than that amount and half earned less. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$29,360, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$97,760.

In May 2021, the median annual wages for interpreters and translators in the top

industries in which they worked were as follows:

Government	\$62,390
Hospitals; state, local, and private	54,940
Educational services; state, local, and private	49,200
Professional, scientific, and technical services	48,900

These wage data exclude self-employed workers. Pay for interpreters and translators may depend on a number of variables, including the language, specialty, experience, education, and certification of the interpreter or translator.

Part-time work is common for interpreters and translators, and work schedules may vary. Interpreters and translators may have periods of limited work and periods of long, irregular hours.

<- How to Become One

Job Outlook

Job Outlook

Employment of interpreters and translators is projected to grow 20 percent from 2021 to 2031, much faster than the average for all occupations.

About 9,200 openings for interpreters and translators are projected each year, on average, over the decade. Many of those openings are expected to result from the need to replace workers who transfer to different occupations or exit the labor force, such as to retire.

Employment

Employment growth reflects increasing globalization and a more diverse U.S. population, which is expected to require more interpreters and translators.

Demand will likely remain strong for translators of frequently translated languages, such as French, German, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. Demand also should be strong for translators of Arabic and other Middle Eastern languages; for the principal Asian languages including Chinese, Japanese, Hindi, and Korean; and for the indigenous languages from Mexico and Central America such as Mixtec, Zapotec, and Mayan languages.

Demand for American Sign Language interpreters is expected to grow due to the increasing use of video relay services, which allow people to conduct online video calls and use a sign language interpreter.

In addition, growing international trade and broadening global ties should require more interpreters and translators, especially in emerging markets such as Asia and Africa. The ongoing need for military and national security interpreters and translators should result in more jobs as well.

Computers have made the work of translators and localization specialists more efficient. However, many of these jobs cannot be entirely automated, because computers cannot yet produce work comparable to the work that human translators do in most cases.

Employment projections data for interpreters and translators, 2021-31

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2021	Projected Employment, 2031	Change, 2021-31		Employment by Industry
				Percent	Numeric	
Interpreters and translators	27-3091	69,400	83,400	20	14,000	Get data

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections program

<- Pay

State & Area Data

State & Area Data

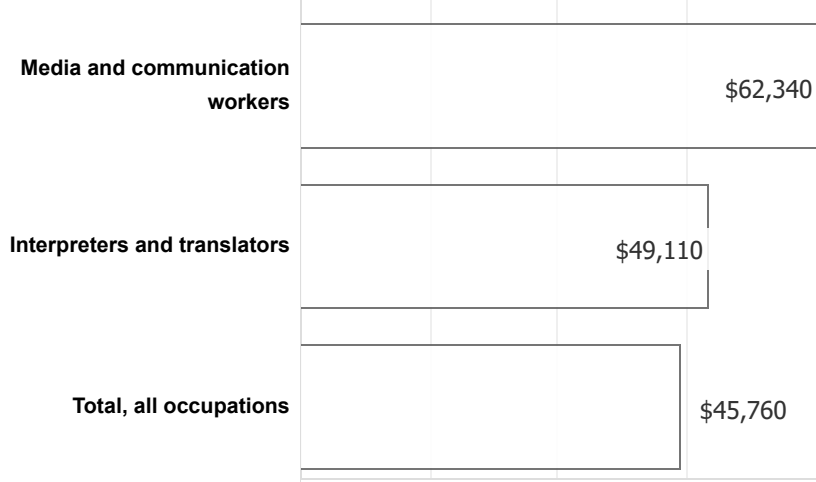
Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS)

The [Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics](#) (OEWS) program produces employment and wage estimates annually for over 800 occupations. These estimates are available for the nation as a whole, for individual states, and for metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas. The link(s) below go to OEWS data maps for employment and wages by state and area.

- [Interpreters and translators](#)

Projections Central

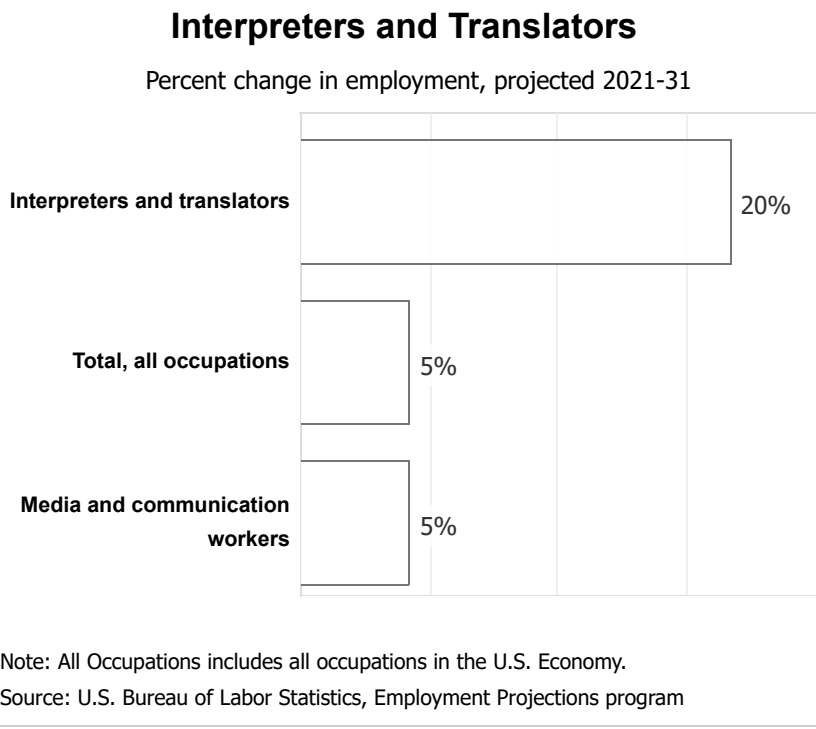
Occupational employment projections are developed for all states by Labor Market Information (LMI) or individual state Employment Projections offices. All state projections data are available at www.projectionscentral.org . Information on this site allows projected employment growth for an occupation to be compared among states or to be compared within one state. In addition, states may produce projections for areas; there are links to each state’s websites where these data may be retrieved.



Note: All Occupations includes all occupations in the U.S. Economy.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics

Job Outlook ->

About this section



Note: All Occupations includes all occupations in the U.S. Economy.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections program

CareerOneStop

CareerOneStop includes hundreds of [occupational profiles](#) with data available by state and metro area. There are links in the left-hand side menu to compare occupational employment by state and occupational wages by local area or metro area. There is also a [salary info tool](#) to search for wages by zip code.

[<- Job Outlook](#)

[Similar Occupations ->](#)

Similar Occupations

Similar Occupations

About this section

This table shows a list of occupations with job duties that are similar to those of interpreters and translators.

	OCCUPATION	JOB DUTIES	ENTRY-LEVEL EDUCATION 	2021 MEDIAN PAY 
	Adult Basic and Secondary Education and ESL Teachers	Adult basic and secondary education and ESL (English as a Second Language) teachers instruct adults in fundamental skills, such as reading and speaking English. They also help students earn their high school equivalency credential.	Bachelor's degree	\$59,720
	Career and Technical Education Teachers	Career and technical education teachers instruct students in various technical and vocational subjects, such as auto repair, healthcare, and culinary arts.	Bachelor's degree	\$61,160
	Court Reporters and Simultaneous Captioners	Court reporters create word-for-word transcriptions at trials, depositions, and other legal proceedings. Simultaneous captioners provide similar transcriptions for television or for presentations in other settings, such as press conferences and business meetings, for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.	Postsecondary nondegree award	\$60,380
	High School Teachers	High school teachers teach academic lessons and various skills that students will need to attend college and to enter the job market.	Bachelor's degree	\$61,820
	Kindergarten and Elementary School Teachers	Kindergarten and elementary school teachers instruct young students in basic subjects in order to prepare them for future schooling.	Bachelor's degree	\$61,350
	Medical Transcriptionists	Medical transcriptionists use electronic devices to convert voice recordings from physicians and other healthcare workers into formal reports.	Postsecondary nondegree award	\$30,100
	Middle School Teachers	Middle school teachers educate students, typically in sixth through eighth grades.	Bachelor's degree	\$61,320
	Postsecondary Teachers	Postsecondary teachers instruct students in a variety of academic subjects beyond the high school level.	See How to Become One	\$79,640
	Special Education Teachers	Special education teachers work with students who have a wide range of learning, mental, emotional, and physical disabilities.	Bachelor's degree	\$61,820
	Technical Writers	Technical writers prepare instruction manuals, how-to guides, journal articles, and other supporting documents to communicate complex and technical information more easily.	Bachelor's degree	\$78,060
	Writers and Authors	Writers and authors develop written content for various types of media.	Bachelor's degree	\$69,510

[<- State & Area Data](#)

[More Info ->](#)

More Info

Contacts for More Information

About this section

For more information about interpreters, visit

[Discover Interpreting](#)

For more information about interpreter and literary translator specialties, including professional certification, visit

- [American Translators Association](#) (ATA)
- [Certification Commission for Healthcare Interpreters](#) (CCHI)
- [International Association of Conference Interpreters](#)
- [National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators](#) (NAJIT)
- [National Association of the Deaf](#) (NAD)
- [National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters](#)
- [National Council on Interpreting in Health Care](#) (NCIHC)
- [Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf](#) (RID)

For more information about becoming a federal contract interpreter or translator, visit

[U.S. State Department](#)

O*NET

[Interpreters and Translators](#)

[<- Similar Occupations](#)

SUGGESTED CITATION:
Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, Interpreters and Translators, at <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/media-and-communication/interpreters-and-translators.htm> (visited *June 06, 2023*).

Last Modified Date: Thursday, September 8, 2022

U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS Office of Occupational Statistics and Employment Projections PSB Suite 2135 2 Massachusetts Avenue NE Washington, DC 20212-0001
Telephone:1-202-691-5700_ www.bls.gov/ooh [Contact OOH](#)