

Speaking Through an Interpreter

If you are not fluent in Spanish it may be necessary to use an interpreter to give your presentations. The following suggestions are offered to help you work with your interpreter to communicate more accurately.

1. If you are planning to hand out outlines or other materials, send them to your host well in advance so they can be translated and duplicated.
2. Tell your interpreter the gist of your talk and what kind of response you expect from the audience. Are you trying to inform, or do you want them to act or make a decision?
3. Go over your talk beforehand, discussing difficult words or concepts, to enable your interpreter to find accurate equivalents or paraphrases in his or her own language.
4. If you plan to quote other sources, give your interpreter written quotations in advance.
5. Because humor is so deeply rooted in culture, use it sparingly. If you plan to tell jokes or anecdotes, make sure your interpreter understands the point. He or she may suggest alternate illustrations that would communicate better.
6. Avoid irony or plays on words because they seldom carry over into another language. The native speaker may translate your words literally, not knowing the point intended.
7. Don't talk down to your audience or patronize them. They may be better educated than you and some may be fluent in English. Avoid jargon or slang or vacuousness. If you are not sure what you are saying, there is no way your interpreter will be able to make sense of it.
8. Make sure your pronunciation is distinct. Avoid dialect. Don't talk too fast or too slow. Just speak clearly at a normal rate of conversation.
9. Speak in complete units of thought, normally of sentence length. Your interpreter needs to know where you are going. Avoid compound or convoluted sentences.
10. Pause long enough between sentences to allow your interpreter time to reformat them in his or her own language. The word order may not be the same as English. And it may take longer to say the same thing, because there may not be a one-word equivalent, or the style may be more flowery.

11. Speak directly to the audience, maintaining eye-contact with them rather than with your interpreter. Speak in the first person and be animated. A good interpreter will imitate your style and body language. He or she must communicate the same conviction you feel about the subject.
12. Do not allow someone in the audience to continually make unsolicited suggestions to the interpreter. If it becomes obvious that your interpreter is not doing an adequate job, consider replacing him or her during a scheduled break.
13. It is best to use the same interpreter for a series of talks because you get used to each other's style and can develop a natural rhythm and flow of words.
14. If possible, use an interpreter of the same sex as the speaker. We naturally associate a masculine voice with a male speaker and a feminine voice with a female speaker.
15. Keep it short. It will take at least 40 minutes to give a 20 minute speech using an interpreter.