

# OVERVIEW OF THE WRITTEN EXAMINATION FOR PROSPECTIVE COURT INTERPRETERS

Tennessee Administrative Office of the Courts  
Nashville City Center, Ste. 600  
511 Union Street  
Nashville, TN 37219  
(615) 741-2687

This overview is adapted from an original text prepared by the Consortium for State Court Interpreter Certification. The written examination is a product of the Consortium, and Tennessee administers the written examination in a manner consistent with the Consortium's guidelines.

January 2005  
Revised July 2005  
Revised February 2007

## ***Introduction***

This document has been prepared to help persons aspiring to become credentialed court interpreters understand what the written examination (“exam”) measures, how it is administered, and how to prepare for taking it. Each examinee should study this overview thoroughly in order to be more fully prepared for the exam.

The written examination is only one part of the process for becoming a credentialed court interpreter. Passing this exam does not mean a person has become a credentialed court interpreter; rather, it means the examinee has met one of several credentialing requirements.

The exam measures candidates’ knowledge of three areas central to the work of a court interpreter at the level of a minimally qualified court interpreter:

1. English Language. To function as a professional court interpreter, one indispensable component is a high degree of proficiency in the English language. Accordingly, the written examination assumes a high degree of literacy in the English language and familiarity with a range of language constructions. It tests comprehension of written English vocabulary and idioms.

2. Court-Related Terms and Usage. A second area of knowledge essential to successful professional performance is familiarity with the terminology and procedures of the court system. Accordingly, the written examination also measures recognition of common court-related situations and vocabulary, *especially in the area of criminal courts.*

3. Ethics and Professional Conduct. The third area of knowledge required of professional court interpreters encompassed in the written examination is general knowledge of standards guiding the performance of duties. Accordingly, the exam includes questions aimed at measuring candidates’ knowledge of ethical behavior and professional conduct.

## ***What does the examination look like?***

The examination contains 135 multiple-choice questions. Each question has four choices, labeled A, B, C, and D. The candidate is instructed to select the **best** choice and mark that choice on the answer sheet.

The exam has two parts:

Part I: General Language Proficiency, and

Part II: Court-Related Terms & Usage, and Ethics & Professional Conduct.

Within each part there are several sections, each of which contains a particular category of questions. There are specific instructions for how to proceed at the beginning of each section. A complete list of the sections, including one or more sample questions for each, is provided in Appendix A.

***How will the exam be scheduled and what do I need to know about the exam in advance?***

The Administrative Office of the Courts ("AOC") administers the written examination several times each year. Persons who complete the two-day ethics and skill-building workshop are eligible to take the exam. The Tennessee Administrative Office of the Courts will post registration materials on its website approximately 1-2 months prior to the examination. For more information regarding Tennessee's credentialing process and examination dates, [www.tncourts.gov](http://www.tncourts.gov). After reaching the home page, select "Programs" and then "Court Interpreters" to reach the interpreter page of the website.

***Arrive early. No one will be admitted late. There are no exceptions and no one arriving late for any reason will be permitted to take the examination.***

***Only small purses or wallets are allowed in the examination room. Leave everything else at home or in your car. Do not try to bring briefcases, palm pilots, dictionaries, gym bags, cell phones, calculators, paper, or any other similar items into the exam room, as you will not be admitted with them.***

There will be a registration area where you will report and sign in. In the exam room, there will be an examination administration supervisor, and other proctors will be present to assist. ***You will be required to present your admission letter and positive photographic identification (either a United States government-issued driver's license or a passport) before entering the examination room. You must also bring an adequate number of No. 2 lead pencils with you to the examination.***

Use the restroom prior to entering the examination room. If you ask to leave the room after the exam has begun, you will be instructed to leave all of your examination materials with the administration supervisor prior to leaving the room. You may be escorted to the restroom to ensure that you do not use a telephone or converse with other individuals while you are outside of the exam room. No more than one candidate will be allowed to leave the exam room at the same time. No adjustments to the time allotted for completion of the exam will be made for any time you are outside of the exam room.

### ***What if I need special accommodation due to a disability?***

If you have a disability recognized by the Americans with Disabilities Act (“ADA”), you must request special accommodation *in advance*. The registration materials for the written examination will provide you with an opportunity to make such a request.

### ***How will the examination be administered?***

The examination will be administered in a classroom setting. An examination administration supervisor, who is responsible for oversight of the entire exam administration process, and multiple proctors will proctor the examination.

Seating will be assigned. Depending upon the seating arrangements, some candidates may be asked to move from one seat and occupy another. If this happens, it is for exam security measures and the candidates should not be troubled or concerned.

Security of the examination materials is obviously essential. Examinees may not take notes or copy any portion of the exam.

Proctors will monitor candidates throughout the examination to prevent inappropriate conduct and, if such conduct occurs, detect and deal with it. They may circulate throughout the room, but they will not disturb the examinees. If a proctor suspects that an examinee is behaving inappropriately, including giving or receiving assistance during the examination, communicating with others, retaining or copying examination questions, or using prohibited aids, the proctor will follow specific protocol for addressing the situation.

Once all examinees are seated for the exam, the administrator will hand out materials packets to each person. He or she will read scripted instructions to the examinees in order to ensure that all candidates receive the same instructions each time the examination is given. Then the examinees will be directed to read and execute an Agreement and Oath Form. Next, examinees will prepare their answer sheets by entering their names and social security numbers, the test date, and the test site. Examinees must listen to the instructions carefully and must not begin the examination until the administration supervisor says, “You may begin.”

Candidates are allowed two hours and fifteen minutes to complete the examination. A clock will be provided in each exam room to assist candidates who do not bring their own timepiece. Fifteen minutes before the end of the exam, the administrator will make the following announcement out loud: “You have fifteen minutes remaining.”

At the beginning of each section there are instructions on how to answer the questions in that section. As examinees work their way through the exam, they should carefully read the instructions for each section to be sure they understand how to answer that section's questions. The types of instructions you will find will be to select the answer that:

- Is closest in meaning;
- Most appropriately completes a sentence;
- Best answers a question or provides the best solution to a situation;
- Has the correct sequence of events; or
- Is opposite in meaning.

See Appendix A for sample questions from the various sections of the exam.

### ***What is the score required for passing and how will I be notified about the results?***

In order to pass the exam, 80 percent of the items must be answered correctly. That means the examinee must answer at least 108 of the 135 items correctly in order to pass. The state's examination administration supervisor will advise the examinee of the results of his or her test by mail. ***Reminder: Passing this exam does not mean you are now a credentialed court interpreter.***

### ***What can I do to prepare for the examination?***

A list of possible activities and resources has been compiled to help you identify actions you can take to help prepare for the exam. Some of the resources may help you decide whether you are ready to participate in an exam of this nature. The list is attached and marked as Appendix B.

### ***What if I do not pass the examination?***

This written examination is constructed to measure entry-level knowledge of

- English general vocabulary
- common words and phrases likely to be heard in court
- the typical progression of cases through the court system, and
- provisions of a code of ethics

that a minimally competent person entering the court interpreting field would need.

If you do not pass the exam, you must wait one calendar year to retake it. You are encouraged to review the section of this Overview entitled "What can I do to prepare for the test?" and Appendix B, and engage in some reading and preparatory study before retaking the examination.

## APPENDIX A

### SAMPLE QUESTIONS

#### Sections in Part I, General Language Proficiency

**Sentence Completion.** Items 1 through 9 consist of unfinished sentences. The candidate is instructed to select from a list of four words or phrases the one that best completes the sentence.

Example: A person who feels persecuted in his/her home country may apply for political

- A. appellation
- B. appraisal
- C. asylum
- D. ascendance

(C is the best answer)

**Synonyms in Context.** Items 10 through 17 consist of sentences that contain an underlined word or phrase. The candidate is instructed to choose from a list of four words or phrases the one that is closest in meaning to the underlined word or phrase.

Example: It was done pursuant to the proceedings of the court.

- A. in accordance with
- B. in addition to
- C. in conjunction with
- D. in spite of

(A is the answer that is closest in meaning)

**Synonyms.** Items 18 through 38 consist of words or phrases. The candidate is instructed to select from a list of four words or phrases the one that has the same meaning or closest to the same meaning as the word or phrase provided.

Example 1: Scaffold

- A. platform
- B. table
- C. prop
- D. curtain

(A is the answer that is closest in meaning)

Example 2: Hubris

- A. exaggerated pride
- B. steadfast loyalty
- C. extreme shyness
- D. committed fidelity

(A is the answer that is closest in meaning)

**Antonyms.** Items 39 through 50 consist of words or phrases. The candidate is instructed to select from a list of four words or phrases the one that is opposite in meaning to the word or phrase provided.

Example: Excessive

- A. stingy
- B. large
- C. robust
- D. restricted

(D is the correct answer, opposite in meaning)

**Idioms.** Items 51 through 75 consist of sentences that contain an underlined idiomatic expression. The candidate is instructed to select from the list of four words or phrases the one that is closest in meaning to the underlined idiom.

Example 1: Do you need to make a pit stop before we get there?

- A. get some money
- B. go to the bathroom
- C. empty the trash
- D. make a phone call

(B is the answer that is closest in meaning)

Example 2: His career as an attorney is all washed up.

- A. off to a late start
- B. off to a good start
- C. completely over
- D. very profitable

(C is the answer that is closest in meaning)

Sections in Part II, Court-Related Terms & Usage, and  
Ethics & Professional Conduct

(\*The legal terms found in items 76 through 125  
are taken largely from criminal court case types.)

***Sentence Completion.*** Items 76-111 consist of unfinished sentences that are likely to be heard in the court environment. The candidate is instructed to select from a list of four words or phrases the one that most appropriately completes the sentence.

Example 1: A case decided without prejudice means that

- A. there is no right to a new trial
  - B. there is an automatic appeal of the case
  - C. there is a right to a new trial
  - D. there are no racial overtones in the case
- (C is the answer that most appropriately completes the sentence)

Example 2: A defendant is required to give up certain constitutional rights

- A. after being found guilty at trial
  - B. before entering a plea of guilty
  - C. only if represented by a public defender
  - D. only after probation is granted
- (B is the answer that most appropriately completes the sentence)

***Court-Related Questions.*** Items 112 through 121 consist of questions on court-related topics. The candidate is instructed to select from a list of four choices the one that is the best answer.

Example: Which of the following would be a concurrent sentence?

- A. two years for burglary, two years for robbery: two years in jail
  - B. two years for theft, two years for assault: four years in jail
  - C. four years for rape, three years for a second rape: seven years in jail
  - D. four years for rape, two years for assault: two years in jail
- (A is the best answer)

***Sequence.*** Items 122 through 125 consist of questions about the proper sequence of events in court-related situations. The candidate is instructed to select from a list of four choices the one that correctly describes the order in which the events should occur.

Example: Which of the following is a correct sequence of event?

- A. Jury Charge, Jury Deliberation, Jury Instructions, Jury Verdict
  - B. Jury Sworn, Jury Verdict, Jury Charge, Jury Deliberation
  - C. Jury Deliberation, Jury Sworn, Jury Instructions, Jury Verdict
  - D. Jury Sworn, Jury Charge, Jury Deliberation, Jury Verdict
- (D is the correct sequence of events)

**Professional Conduct Questions.** Items 126 and 127 consist of questions about the appropriate course of professional conduct an interpreter should take. The candidate is instructed to select from a list of four choices the one that is the best answer.

Example: Which of the following is most important for you to do when you are interpreting at the witness stand?

- A. keep your eyes on the jury
  - B. keep your dictionary and note pad at hand
  - C. keep eye contact with the witness at all times
  - D. keep the judge informed of contradictory testimony
- (B is the best answer)

**Scenarios.** Items 128 through 135 consist of brief scenarios describing situations an interpreter might encounter while interpreting in the courts that would pose ethical or professional problems. The candidate is instructed to select from a list of four alternatives the best solution or course of action.

Example: An expert witness is giving testimony regarding blood alcohol content while you are interpreting for the defendant. The testimony is very complex, and even though you can interpret it at the same level, you sense that the defendant does not understand such technical language. What is the best thing for you to do in this situation?

- A. advise the judge that the defendant does not understand
  - B. interpret at the same level as the witness
  - C. ask the judge for permission to explain for the witness
  - D. summarize the testimony for the defendant in language he can understand
- (B is the best solution)

## ***Appendix B***

### PREPARING FOR THE TEST

If you are not familiar with taking written, multiple-choice tests, you may find it beneficial to:

1. Review instructions and suggestions on taking multiple-choice tests such as:
  - a. "Information about the Written Examination," Federal Court Interpreter Certification Examination ([http://www.ncsconline.org/d\\_research/Consort-interp/fcice\\_exam/FCICE-ExamineeHandbookOnline.pdf](http://www.ncsconline.org/d_research/Consort-interp/fcice_exam/FCICE-ExamineeHandbookOnline.pdf)) on page 12.
2. Study preparation material developed for similar exams, or even take the exams
  - a. TOEFL: TOEFL Sample Test, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition ([www.ets.org/stoefl.html](http://www.ets.org/stoefl.html)). There are many other publications available as well.

With respect to Part I, General Language Proficiency, one needs to have a very broad command of the English language. That is not something that is quickly or easily acquired. However, some of the following activities might be helpful in expanding one's knowledge of the English language and preparing for the test:

1. Take upper-level English courses at a college or university.
2. Read widely such items as books and professional journals in many fields, American literature, and editorials and articles in major newspapers.
3. Brush up on English vocabulary and lexical concepts (go back to the basics and review antonyms, synonyms, and idioms).
4. Review sample tests from other interpreter certification programs:
  - a. California: Request the "practice written examination." See <http://www.prometric.com/California/CACourtInt.htm>.
  - b. Administrative Office of the United States Courts: For a description of the written portion of the Federal Court Interpreter Certification Examination (FCICE), go to ([http://www.ncsconline.org/d\\_research/Consort-interp/fcice\\_exam/FCICE-ExamineeHandbookOnline.pdf](http://www.ncsconline.org/d_research/Consort-interp/fcice_exam/FCICE-ExamineeHandbookOnline.pdf)). A sample test can be found in the examinee handbook.
5. Consult other resources, such as:
  - a. The Idiom Connection, available online at: [www.geocities.com/Athens/Aegean/6720](http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Aegean/6720).
  - b. The ESL Idiom Page, (Dennis Oliver), available online at: [www.eslcafe.com/idioms](http://www.eslcafe.com/idioms).
  - c. The Synonyms Page, available online at: [www.manatee.k12.fl.us/sites/elementary/palmasola/synonyms.htm](http://www.manatee.k12.fl.us/sites/elementary/palmasola/synonyms.htm).
  - d. SAT and GRE workbooks.
  - e. Vocabulary-building books found in the reference section of libraries and bookstores.

With respect to Part II, Court-Related Terms & Usage, and Ethics & Professional Conduct, the following activities would be helpful in expanding or acquiring the substantive knowledge pertinent to these fields:

### Court-Related Terms & Usage

1. Read news items related to legal matters, law enforcement, and the courts in major newspapers, consulting a dictionary to look up unfamiliar words.
2. Visit courthouses and observe court proceedings in civil, criminal, and family matters.
3. Take college/university courses in criminal justice and court administration.
4. Read any standard introductory textbook on the criminal justice system.
5. Read publications about the administration of justice such as the following documents issued by the American Bar Association ([www.abanet.org/abastore](http://www.abanet.org/abastore)), which are available for \$2.50 each:
  - a. Law & the Courts, Volume I, *The Role of the Courts*, 2000.
  - b. Law & the Courts, Volume II, *Court Procedures*, 1998.
  - c. Law & the Courts, Volume III, *Juries*, 2001.
6. Study legal terms from the following sources:
  - a. Black's Law Dictionary
  - b. Glossary of Commonly Used Court & Justice System Terminology (a publication of the Consortium that is available at [http://www.ncsconline.org/wc/publications/Res\\_CtInte\\_EnglishLegalGlossaryPub.pdf](http://www.ncsconline.org/wc/publications/Res_CtInte_EnglishLegalGlossaryPub.pdf)).

### Ethics & Professional Conduct

1. Become familiar with Tennessee Supreme Court Rule 41 (Rules of Ethics for Spoken Foreign Language Interpreters in Tennessee Courts).
2. Study the model code of professional responsibility, which is available at [http://www.ncsconline.org/wc/publications/Res\\_CtInte\\_ModelGuideChapter9Pub.pdf](http://www.ncsconline.org/wc/publications/Res_CtInte_ModelGuideChapter9Pub.pdf).
3. Join and participate actively in a professional association such as the National Association of Judicial Interpreters and Translators ([www.najit.org](http://www.najit.org)) or the American Translators Association ([www.atanet.org](http://www.atanet.org)), studying their respective codes of ethics.
4. Read at least one of the classic texts in the field:
  - a. Berk-Seligson, Susan (1990). *The Bilingual Courtroom: Court Interpreters in the Judicial Process*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
  - b. De Jongh, E.M. (1992). *An Introduction to Court Interpreting: Theory and Practice*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
  - c. Edwards, Alicia B. (1995). *The Practice of Court Interpreting*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

- d. Gonzalez, R.D., Vasquez, V.F., and Mikkelson, H. (1991). *Fundamentals of Court Interpretation: Theory, Policy and Practice*. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press.
- e. Hewitt, William E. (1995). *Court Interpretation: Model Guides for Policy and Practice in the State Courts*. Williamsburg, VA: National Center for State Courts (available online [see #2 above for web address]).
- f. Mikkelson, H. (2000). *Introduction to Court Interpreting*. Manchester, UK: St. Jerome Publishing.