



Writing text for translation

Paul Mason, MD of Cicero Translations, suggests the following tips for success when writing text which is to be translated.

Advance planning

1. Deadlines

Be realistic in your deadlines - make sure you leave enough time in your schedule for the preparation of all the translations. If you need advice, phone us on +44 (0)1892 676655 and we can advise you.

2. Write first, then translate

Draft your text and get it right (see 3-6 below) before commissioning translations. Preparing translations from half-completed text can cause errors and add to time and costs.

Good writing

3. Review the readership

Think about all the possible types of reader of your piece. They may not read English very fluently, but are they all familiar with the subject matter? Are any of the words or expressions 'jargon' which should not only be translated but explained? What are the ages, sex, nationality, expectations of your readers? You need answers to these questions when writing any piece for publication, and all the more so if the text is to be translated.

Example: A European tour operator is writing a piece about winter holiday breaks in Jan-March. Clients come from all over Europe and North America. The company also has occasional groups from Brazil. For them, Jan-March is the summer holidays. The Portuguese text needs adapting accordingly.

4. Translation vs 'localisation'

Do you want to say the same to all readers (translation) or vary your message for different nationalities ('localisation')?

Example: An airline discovers from passenger surveys that its appeal to Asian clients stems mainly from the frequency of flights and wide range of European destinations, while the European passengers tend to be attracted by the excellence of the service and the competitive prices. Its publicity material for the two areas may be quite different.



It is certainly worth checking with your agents, distributors and customers first rather than hoping for the best and having to make later, perhaps costly, revisions.

Also, this time for linguistic reasons, the French translations for Belgium, Canada and France should not necessarily be the same, nor the German translations for readers in Austria, Germany and Switzerland. If you tell us all the countries in which the translation may be used we can advise on how to deal with the differences of vocabulary and expression.

In other cases, it may be that one translation is required where it might be thought that two different versions are required.

Example: One of our clients asked us to translate brochures into Dutch and Flemish (the form of Dutch spoken in Belgium). After reviewing the text and consulting our translators we were able to advise our client that in this instance one single translation would be fine. Our advice saved our client about £4,000.

Cicero Translations staff are used to dealing with such variations, and helping you ensure the right message reaches the right people.

5. Straight talk

Plays on words, idiomatic expressions and jargon may have no equivalent in other languages and should be avoided.

Here are two examples of English text which may not work in other languages:

Hotel brochure strap line	"Get the full English!"
Manual for instrument providing rapid measurement of the flow-rate of liquids	"0-60 in 9 seconds!"

As a general rule, text for translation should be free from ambiguity. If in doubt, phone us on +44 (0)1892 676655 for advice before starting to write. Cicero employs project managers and translators whose whole professional life is concerned with cultural and linguistic niceties. We have a wealth of experience and expertise to offer – please do not hesitate to make use of it.

6. Final checks

You have prepared your text, or texts, and are ready to send them to Cicero for translation, perhaps into several languages. Please take the time to run some final checks before you press the 'send' button, especially

- titles;
- names (Steven/Stephen, Jon/John, Gill/Jill, Lesley/Leslie);
- contact details.

It will be less expensive to correct them once, before the text is translated and typeset, than to make revisions later perhaps in several language versions.



Help us to help you

We want to do our best for you. We can only do this with your assistance. Here is how you can help us to produce the best translations for you:

7. Target readership

Tell us what the translation is for and who the target readers are (see points 3 and 4 above). This will enable our translators to use the right style and vocabulary.

8. Names, measurements etc.

If it is not obvious, please advise us about

- names: Alex, Kim and Sam can be male or female names, and this will produce different results in languages with 'genders';
- measurements: should references to inches, miles and gallons be converted into metric values, or should both be shown (with one in brackets)?
- size restrictions: is the translated text subject to a length limit – for example does it need to fit onto a label or packaging? (Bear in mind that English texts are usually shorter than their translations into European languages).
- layout: should the pagination and cross-references be kept consistent between the language versions, and are you happy for us to adjust the font size if necessary to achieve this?
- product names: should they be translated or left in the original language, perhaps followed by an explanatory note?
- symbols: should symbols such as ©, ® and ™ be included?

9. Previous translations

Is the text to be combined with some previously translated text? If so, does it need to be consistent in style and vocabulary? Please make this clear, and send us the previous translations so that we can ensure the whole piece reads naturally and consistently.

10. Seeing the job through

Please do not give us half a job. Many inaccurate translations come about because a perfectly good translation is typeset or desktop published by non-linguists who break words in the wrong places or even leave out whole paragraphs.

Example: For one of our clients we translated a document into Italian and Portuguese and the client then sent our translations to the typesetters. The typesetters got them the wrong way round, putting the Italian text inside the Portuguese brochure cover and vice-versa.

If your text is for publication, please allow us to handle the whole project right through to the final stage. We can handle the typesetting or desktop publishing ourselves, or work with your existing suppliers – we don't mind – but one way or another please allow us to be in a position to give your translation a final check before publication.