

# The professional translator

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Translation is a much more complex process than simply rewriting words in a different language. You may know two languages, you may even know them well, but that is not enough to be a translator. A good analogy is that of a pianist: Simply because you have two hands does not make you a pianist. There are skills you need to acquire and practice that must go into it, before you can call yourself a pianist. Similarly, in order to be a translator, you need to learn certain skills and practice, before you can truly call yourself a translator.

The reason why translators exist, is because nobody can speak all languages on earth. There are several people, especially in South Africa, who claim to be able to speak more than 7 languages. However, the big question is: How well do you speak those languages? This is a very important question, because, if you are only able to say "Hi, how are you?" in a specific language, you cannot really claim to *speak* the language.

To be a professional translator can mean various things:

**Doing it for money** – Being a professional translator could simply mean that you are translating as a profession. I.e. you are being paid for it. Like any service where a provider is paid, business will only continue as long as the client is willing to pay for the service rendered. Therefore the translator must provide translations of good quality.

**Having studied** – Having studied translation could be what distinguishes one translator from the next. Having studied translation, shows that you have a theoretical and (hopefully) practical knowledge of translation at a specific level. However, knowing a lot about something does not always mean that you are able to do it practically. If you want to call yourself a professional translator, you must be able to translate documents perfectly.

**Belonging to a professional organisation** – Being professional could mean that as a translator, you belong to a guild, or association or organisation of translators. This normally means that you subscribe to the association's code of ethics and their standard of practice. Most professional translation and language practice organisations have exceptionally high standards – being an accredited translator with such organisations distinguishes you as a professional translator.

**Acting professionally** – This is probably the most vague description. A professional service provider provides the client with an experience that makes the client feel that his/her translation is in good hands. This means that not only is the translation of a high standard, but also the administration of the translation is handled in a professional matter. This includes aspects like consulting, word-processing, invoicing and payments

Regardless of why you wish to become a translator, it is of the utmost importance that you know your languages well. However, knowing your languages well is only the beginning – becoming a professional translator takes training and practice. At Wits Language School, we offer high quality training, including practical translation practice with language specialists to cover the fine details and nuances of your own language!

For more information, visit:

<https://www.wits.ac.za/witslanguageschool/courses/translation-and-interpreting/translation-methods/>

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