



Australian Institute of  
Interpreters and Translators Inc

## BEST PRACTICES

### FOR THE TRANSLATION OF OFFICIAL AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

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## 1. Scope

The following are AUSIT's recommendations for the translation of official and legal documents into English and other languages for use in Australia. They have been based on the NZSTI (the national association of interpreting and translating professionals in New Zealand) "Guidelines for the Translation of Official and Legal Documents" (© Copyright NZSTI 2005).

Disclaimer:

Some recipients of such translations (government departments, authorities, courts et al.) may have additional or varying requirements.

## 2. Heading

- 2.1 The translation should be headed "Translation from [source language]".
- 2.2 The translation may also be headed "Extract translation from [source language]" in the case of an extract translation, or "Certified (extract) translation from [source language]" if the translator adds a certification formula at the end (see 20.2).
- 2.3 In the case of translations into a foreign language, the corresponding heading should be written in that language.

## 3. Original/Copies (also see 20.)

The document to be translated is to be considered as:

- Electronic copy, if the document has been received via email or other electronic means.
- Original, if the latest stamp of issue or certification by the issuing authority of the country of origin or a related entity bears an original signature
- Certified Copy/Certified Photocopy, if the latest stamp of certification in the document has been put in place by a party other than the issuing authority, i.e. a person authorised to authenticate copies by laws in force at the place of issue or in the country of use of the document. The person so certifying should be identified in the translation (e.g. J.P., notary)
- Uncertified Copy/Photocopy, if the latest stamp of issue or certification in the document is already included in the copy
- Fax, if the document has been received by facsimile

## 4. Completeness and Correctness (also see 20.)

- 4.1 The source texts should be translated **completely and accurately**. Notes relating to publishing or printing matters do not normally require translation.
- 4.2 If the client requires only extracts to be translated, the sections that have been omitted should be indicated in the translation or a template for extract translations of standard documents be used that allows for all relevant translated information to be entered. Templates are available for download in the Members Area of the AUSIT website, [www.ausit.org](http://www.ausit.org).

## 5. Format/Layout

- 5.1 A full translation should approximately follow the format and layout of the source text.
- 5.2 If this is not possible, appropriate notes should be inserted within square brackets (e.g. [above right:], [left margin:], [vertical:], etc.). In the case of documents in which the text is not continuous (e.g. academic reports, family books, etc.), the page number of the source text should be inserted within square brackets before the text in question.
- 5.3 When translating forms, empty columns may be omitted or should bear the words "No entry/No entries/Left blank" within square brackets.
- 5.4 Such typographical conventions as a dotted line used to prevent unauthorised insertions in the source text may either be reproduced or their meaning indicated by a Translator's note.
- 5.5 Signatures should be represented by the insertion of [signature] or [signed] only, and should not be copied and pasted into the translation as images. There is no need to indicate whether or not the signature is legible.
- 5.6 Logos, taglines or slogans should be identified as such within square brackets and not be copied and pasted into the translation as images. Relevant text within a logo or tagline may be translated within the brackets (e.g. [company logo; tagline underneath: 'Accredited provider']).

## 6. Special features

- 6.1 Mention should be made in the translation, by way of translator's notes, of special features in the document (e.g. erasures, hand-written corrections, deletions, etc.) which could be of significance in establishing the authenticity or otherwise of the source text.
- 6.2 Crossed out but still legible sections should be translated and a note inserted stating that they were crossed out in the source document. Alternatively, they may be translated and crossed out as in the source document. If such sections are not translated, a note should be inserted to this effect. A note is also required for sections which have been crossed out and are consequently no longer legible and parts of the document which are illegible.

## 7. Translation hardcopy (also see 20.)

- 7.1 The materials (paper, pen, ink, etc.) used for the translation hardcopy must be acceptable for official purposes, able to resist erasure and indelible. For the translator's signature, the use of blue or black ink / a blue or black pen is recommended.
- 7.2 If the translation consists of several pages, these should be numbered sequentially and the total number of pages indicated (e.g. "Page 1 of 5").
- 7.3 A printout or photocopy of the source document may be attached to the translation.
- 7.4 The sheets should be joined together in such a way that any separation would cause externally visible damage (e.g. with staples, not paper clips).
- 7.5 The left hand corner of the sheets may be folded, stapled and sealed with the imprint of the translator's seal.

## 8. Electronic version of the translation (also see 20.)

- 8.1 If the translation consists of several pages, these should be numbered sequentially, with the total number of pages indicated, and all pages should be contained within one file.
- 8.2 The translator's stamp and/or signature may be inserted as an image. The translation should then be saved and provided to the client in PDF format (or an alternative file format that typically hampers document manipulation).

Alternatively, the translator may scan the hardcopy and provide the scan to the client.

- 8.3 Using an appropriate software program, the electronic version of the translation may be protected against copying and/or editing of document contents. Some Australian Government departments (e.g. Department of Home Affairs) may not accept a translation if it is in the form of an encrypted PDF file. The translator may suggest that the client check with the end user of the translation about acceptable electronic formats.

## 9. Insertion of notes in the translation

- 9.1 Translator's notes (i.e. notes of an explanatory, detailing or commenting nature) should be inserted in a suitable place in the text in the form of footnotes and should include the words "Translator's note". In translations into a foreign language, an equivalent translation of "Translator's note" should be employed.
- 9.2 All notes inserted in the translation including translator's notes, footnotes and other notes should be written within square brackets so they can easily be identified as such.

## 10. Names of official bodies and courts

In cases where it is important for official purposes that the name of an official body, court or educational institution be left in the original language or transliterated, a translation of the name should be inserted in square brackets after the name or as a footnote. Alternately, a translation of the term may be followed by the original language version or a transliteration either in square brackets or in the form of a footnote.

## 11. Fee stamps, official seals and stamps

Fee stamps, official seals and stamps in the source text should be mentioned in the translation within square brackets (e.g. [seal] or [stamp]) and should not be copied and pasted into the translation as images. Relevant text contained within official seals and stamps may be translated within square brackets, or explained in a note (e.g. [stamp; within: Mayor's Office, received 14 August 2014]).

## 12. Notes of Certification, Attestation and Authentication

Notes of Certification, Attestation and Authentication should be translated or described in square brackets, indicating the issuing authority or person, place, date and reference number.

Apostilles issued by competent authorities as part of the Hague Convention should be translated in full (except for their titles) with their layout approximately reflected. The title "Apostille (Convention de La Haye du 5 octobre 1961)" should remain in the French

language, or be translated into the French language if it has been translated to some other language in the original.

### 13. Address details

Address details should not be translated. They should be transliterated or transcribed if necessary.

### 14. Numbers and dates

- 14.1 Reference numbers (as opposed to dates) should be copied without change (e.g. as Roman or Arabic numerals).
- 14.2 To avoid ambiguity, on official documents intended for use in Australia, dates should appear in a format such as 01 January 2004 or 01-Jan-2004, with the month written in words.
- 14.3 Numbers written in words in the source text should also be written in words in the translation.
- 14.4 If the stated date is based on a different calendar, the conversion should be mentioned in a translator's note, i.e. [date converted].

### 15. Abbreviations

Abbreviations should be deciphered and translated in full. If this is not possible, a note should be inserted to this effect.

Very common and known abbreviations may be translated using equally known abbreviations in the target language (for example "e. g.", "et al." etc.).

### 16. Spelling/typing errors/discrepancies

If the original document contains words with spelling/typing errors/discrepancies, they should not be corrected. However, a note should be inserted to this effect immediately following the error i.e. [sic].

### 17. Certificates and diplomas

- 17.1 In the translation of certificates and diplomas, the type of school, the marks, the profession or the academic degree should be translated as accurately as possible. It is recommended that their original designation in the source language be inserted underneath in square brackets; if necessary, they should be explained in a translator's note. Academic titles that typically either precede or are appended to the name of their holder should not be translated, but may also be explained in a note within brackets.
- 17.2 The assessment of the Australian equivalent is the responsibility of the relevant authorities as applicable. It is not the responsibility of the translator to attempt to indicate or explain exact equivalency with the Australian education system in marks or qualifications. The translator may include an appropriate footnote to that regard.

Example wording: “[By law, the value of overseas qualifications in Australia is assessed by the competent authorities. This translation should not be seen as an assessment or validation of any qualifications.]”

## 18. Names of people

- 18.1 As a general rule, names of people and marks of nobility and titles that are part of the name (e.g. van, von) should never be translated, but copied in the original spelling, including diacritic marks. (Some titles, e.g. “Prince”, “King” in Arabic, may be an exception to this rule and may be translated if they have an equivalent in the target language, depending on context.) Alternative spellings without diacritic marks can be added and/or explained in form of a translator’s note, if the person concerned can produce a person’s birth, marriage or death certificate, passport or driver’s licence issued by Australian regulatory authorities containing such an alternative spelling. If other official Australian documents are submitted, the alternative name as given in these documents may also be added, but a note should be inserted to this effect. In some languages, (e.g. in Slavonic languages) it may be necessary to indicate the masculine nominative form of a surname.
- 18.2 If it is difficult to distinguish between the first name and the surname of a foreign-language name, the surname may be written in block letters, or a footnote inserted indicating the surname.
- 18.3 If the language in question uses lettering other than Latin, the following applies:
- 18.3.1 If the person concerned can produce a person’s birth, marriage or death certificate, passport or driver’s licence issued by Australian regulatory authorities containing an existing transliteration or transcription of his/her name, this should be used in the translation. If other official Australian documents are submitted, the name as given in these documents may be used but a note should be inserted to this effect.
- 18.3.2 If the person concerned cannot produce any such document, his/her name should be transliterated. Transliteration should follow as closely as possible the transliteration standards recommended by the International Standardisation Organisation (ISO). A copy of the ISO standards for transliteration can be downloaded from the ISO website ([www.iso.org](http://www.iso.org)).
- 18.3.3 If transliteration of the original is not possible (e.g. Arabic script), the name should be transcribed according to their pronunciation and English phonetics.
- 18.3.4 When transcribing Chinese names, as a general rule, the translator should check the origin country of the client and his preferred/official translation, requesting proof if necessary. If this is not possible, the Hanyu-Pinyin system (without accents) should be employed and a note added that it was used to transcribe the name. Former common spellings may be added in brackets for clarification, if such spellings have been established for common use (e.g. Beijing [Pekin]). Note: Equivalent rules apply to Japanese.

## 19. Names of places and countries

- 19.1 When translating into English, names of countries, places or other geographical designations should be written with the foreign spelling. If an English designation is commonly in use, then this should be employed instead. We recommend that all translators of official and legal documents use the designations contained in either: the countries, economies and regions webpages on the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website; the United Nations list of geographical names; the Australian Bureau of Statistics Standard Australian classification of countries; or designations verified with a credible online resource. The [Australian Government Style Manual](#) also provides links and recommendations as to what constitutes a credible online resource for use in Australia. The foreign spelling - as a transliteration or transcription if necessary - may be indicated in a note. Note: No. 18.3.2 and 18.3.3 also apply here.
- 19.2 If the translator is aware of changes to names of places or other geographical designations, he/she may state this in a note by adding [formerly ...] or [now ...].
- 19.3 In the case of translations into a foreign language, the same applies. Translation rules of the target language remain unchanged.
- 19.4 The official term used in the original document should not be changed when translating into another language (e.g. "Bundesrepublik Deutschland" should be translated "Federal Republic of Germany" in English, not German Federal Republic or FRG.)

## 20. Additional notes and translator's certification

- 20.1 An additional note should be inserted at the end of the translation, describing the type of document submitted for translation.

Example:

**[Translated from an electronic copy] or [Translated from a hard copy].**

If applicable, "Original sighted" may be added.

The translation should be stamped with the translator's stamp (see below), dated and signed.

If the translator does not have a stamp, he/she should add their name and certification details to the note. Example:

**[Translated from an electronic copy by John Doe, Certified Translator from French to English, NAATI No. CPN1XX11X].**

**[Date, Signature]**

Stamp:

If a stamp is used, this is recommended to be a rectangular stamp measuring 50 x 38mm containing the name, translation date, certification details and language pair. The official stamp provided by NAATI should be used where possible. Note: The translation must be signed and dated in the space provided on the stamp.

The use of a NAATI translator stamp of this kind is not compulsory but it is at any rate highly recommended. It is also recommended that each page of the translation bear the translator's stamp and signature or initials of the translator. For the electronic copy, insertion of the signed stamp at the end of the translation suffices.

- 20.2 If the client has requested a "certified translation", the translator should add a certification

formula. It can replace the simpler note described in 20.1 above and may be worded along the following lines:

“I, (include full name and certification details if no stamp is used), certify that this is a true and accurate translation, to the best of my knowledge, of ... (state the nature and title of the document and specify whether source was original or copy).”

Example:

**I, John Doe, Certified Translator from French to English, NAATI No. CPN1XX11X, certify that this is a true and accurate translation, to the best of my knowledge, of a French birth certificate for ... (source document: electronic copy).**

The following sentence may be added, to facilitate the electronic use and submission of the translation, but leave its acceptance in only electronic form up to the recipient of the translation:

**A photocopy/a printout of the source document has been attached to the certified translation hardcopy.**

(The sentence informs that by checking the hardcopy, the recipient may verify whether the electronic copy of the translation has been presented together with the correct source document.)

- 20.3 The translator may choose to add a disclaimer underneath the certification (e.g. in smaller font) as to the authenticity of the source document. Example:

**The translator, in providing this certification, gives no warrant as to the authenticity of the source document. Any unauthorised change to the translation renders this certification invalid.**

In the case of translations into a foreign language, an equivalent additional note or certification should be inserted in that language. If the translator makes exclusive use of a NAATI translator stamp, he/she should at least insert a note in the language in question referring to certification status.

- 20.4 Documents to be presented to a court may require an affidavit instead of a simple certification. An affidavit sets out the translator’s qualifications, lists and certifies each source document and lists the associated translations and certifies them as true and correct. Affidavits are usually prepared by the lawyers requesting the translation and need to be sworn or affirmed before a Justice of the Peace or other person authorised to take an oath or affirmation, who will stamp and sign the affidavit. They may also stamp and sign source documents (copies) and translations.

## 21. [Document revisions](#)

21.1 The original version of this document was released in 2014.

21.2 This updated version 1.1 was released in 2022 (including terminology changes and updates due to the passage of time).