

Top Ten Traits of Good Translators*

How to Perform Nearly Perfectly in the Unlikely Event That You Are Not Already Doing So
(in the eyes of an agency coordinator)

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1. **Format your résumé such that pertinent points can be easily noticed.** Your native language, language pairs, and years of experience as a translator ought to be immediately visible to any reader flipping through a stack of résumés. List your subject matter specializations or representative types of projects.
2. **Have your fax on at all times.** Maybe not literally, although that certainly is appropriate. The point is to be accessible. If you are not immediately available by phone during business hours, then you should be checking your fax, e-mail, and/or voice messages frequently throughout the day. Many times it is not possible to wait even a couple of hours to hear from a translator about availability for a specific job.
3. **Keep up with the industry.** Be the expert on linguistics, resources in content areas, and the tools of the trade (software). Know where to look for answers. Let the industry change around you only if that is the result of your business decision to more narrowly define your niche in the market!
4. **Say “no” when necessary.** Decline a project if you are truly reluctant to do it. If you can’t handle a project for whatever reason, say so (and give the reason—that helps your client learn more about what you do best). There nearly always is another workable solution for the party trying to talk you into accepting a job.
5. **Say “yes” to a nuisance job every now and then.** On the other hand (referring back to number 4), go ahead and say “yes” every now and then when your reluctance to accept a project is because it’s one of those jobs that’s of the unpleasant-but-someone’s-got-to-do-it variety. The client to whom you occasionally say “yes” will not want to totally alienate you by sending you only nuisance jobs.
6. **Give advance notice of looming disaster.** Disasters nearly always seem to be related to delivery schedules. If you know that you will have to miss a due date for any reason, it’s better to warn your client sooner rather than later. It’s helpful if you can provide a reason for the disaster that will be useful in explaining the delay.
7. **Miss only one deadline per job.** Sometimes a project seems fated to suffer unavoidable setbacks from the moment it first crosses someone’s mind. There probably isn’t anything you can do to stop the cycle of madness on such a project. Even so, credibility (your client’s and your own) deteriorates rapidly if Plan B has to be followed by Plan C and worse. Do everything you can to prevent having to arrange more than one extension.
8. **Turn in jobs early!** If you happen to complete a project early, go ahead and deliver it. Your client learns more about how quickly you can work (and also knows that you might be available for more work).
9. **Express your preferences.** Help your client get to know what suits you best by offering information about your preferences—what you enjoy most; what dictionaries you have; how you

prefer to receive work, get messages, etc.; if you'd rather volunteer for a root canal than translate a certain subject; if you always or never work on weekends; if you routinely work through the night so please don't call before noon...anything! You'll have a better chance of getting more of what you want in a manner you prefer.

10. **Teach your client.** If you find yourself mentally listing all the things you wish your client knew, go ahead and offer some education. Translator coordinators particularly welcome your expertise on matters that will help them fine-tune their skills in providing accurate information about language, word count, and content. Also, your clients who are not the end users like to pass along helpful information to their own clients. The people that generate the demand for translations sometimes have no practical knowledge of what transpires between order and delivery. In many cases, it's the translators who can best initiate a flow of useful information to help remedy this situation.

Just one more tip...

11. **Bring up problems.** A mutually beneficial business relationship requires an ongoing investment of time and energy by both parties. One of the aspects with the most potential for reward in any good relationship is dealing with problems in a professional manner. If you value the business relationship, it's worth bringing up and resolving problems, and your client should do the same with you.

*This version has been amended to include eleven traits.

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