

Translator interview questions

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What to expect

Translator interviews mix practical assessment of language and editing ability with questions about how you manage clients, terminology and deadlines. Expect a short translation or editing exercise alongside conversation about past projects.

- **Technical/process:** Questions about how you handle terminology research, CAT tools and quality checks during an actual translation job.
- **Behavioural:** Questions about past projects, asking you to describe a specific situation and how you handled it.
- **Client-facing:** Questions probing how you clarify requirements, manage scope and handle disagreements over terminology or tone.
- **Scenario/judgement:** Hypothetical situations testing how you'd prioritise when deadlines or quality are under pressure.

Interviews typically open with background and qualifications (degree, NAATI certification, language pairs), move into a discussion of past projects and tools used, often include a short translation or proofreading test, and close with scenario questions about deadlines or client handling.

1. Walk me through your process when you receive a new document to translate.

Why they ask

This checks whether you have a structured approach to research, drafting and quality control rather than translating line by line without a plan.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a step-by-step walk-through: intake and scope clarification, terminology research, drafting, self-review, and final proofreading before delivery.

Example answer

"I start by reading the whole document to understand context and audience, then flag any terms that need client clarification. I build or update a glossary in my terminology database before drafting, so vocabulary stays consistent throughout. Once the draft is done, I run it through CAT software checks for consistency, then do a full read-through against the source text, and finish with a standalone proofread of the target language alone, since reading it in isolation catches awkward phrasing I might miss when comparing against the original."

2. Tell me about a time you had to manage several translation projects with overlapping deadlines.

Why they ask

Workload and time management are core to this role, and the interviewer wants evidence you can prioritise without dropping quality.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: situation, task, action, result.

Example answer

"I once had three client projects due within the same two-day window: a legal document, a marketing brochure and a technical manual. I used project management software to map out realistic time blocks based on document length and complexity, and flagged early to one client that their brochure would need an extra half-day given the legal document's non-negotiable deadline. I completed all

three on time by working through the technical manual in batches and cross-checking terminology as I went rather than leaving it to the end. The legal client met their filing deadline and the brochure client accepted the adjusted timeline without issue."

3. How do you handle a situation where you disagree with a client about how a term or phrase should be translated?

Why they ask

This tests client relationship skills and whether you can advocate for accuracy without being difficult to work with.

How to structure your answer

Frame as a specific past example with a clear resolution, or if hypothetical, explain your reasoning process and how you'd communicate it.

Example answer

"I had a client insist on a literal translation of a marketing tagline that didn't carry the same meaning in the target language. I explained the cultural context and offered two alternative phrasings that preserved the intended tone, along with a note on why the literal version could confuse or mislead their audience. I gave them the choice rather than overriding their preference, and they went with one of my suggestions once they understood the reasoning."

4. How do you research and manage specialised terminology for a subject area you're less familiar with?

Why they ask

Accuracy in technical or legal content depends on proper terminology research, not guesswork.

How to structure your answer

Describe your research method step by step, including tools and verification sources.

Example answer

"I start with the client's existing glossaries or style guides if they have them. Where terminology isn't covered, I cross-check industry-specific dictionaries, published standards, and material from professional bodies in that field, then verify usage against how native speakers in that industry actually write about the topic. I log new terms in a terminology management database as I go, so the glossary is ready for any follow-up work with that client."

5. A client sends you a document at the last minute and expects the same turnaround as a standard job. How do you respond?

Why they ask

This is a judgement-under-pressure scenario testing how you balance client expectations against realistic quality standards.

How to structure your answer

Explain the reasoning you'd apply and the trade-offs you'd weigh, rather than giving a single scripted answer.

Example answer

"I'd assess the document length and complexity first, then tell the client what's achievable in the time available and what the risk is if I rush it, such as reduced time for proofreading. If the deadline can't move, I'd suggest a reduced scope, for example prioritising the sections they need first, or ask whether a second translator could split the work under my review. I'd rather have that conversation upfront than deliver something under-checked."

6. What CAT tools and software have you used, and how do they fit into your workflow?

Why they ask

Tool proficiency affects consistency and speed, so interviewers want to know your practical experience with industry-standard software.

How to structure your answer

Give a direct, specific answer covering the tools you know and how each one supports a particular part of your workflow.

Example answer

"I've worked mainly with SDL Trados and MemoQ for translation memory and terminology consistency across large documents, alongside a separate terminology management database for client-specific glossaries. I use project management software like Asana to track deadlines across multiple jobs, and run a final pass through Grammarly or a similar tool to catch mechanical errors before the human proofread."