

**TRANSLATING DIVISION
OFFICE OF LANGUAGE SERVICES (LS)
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE**

**GUIDANCE ON: CHOOSING THE RIGHT TIME IN YOUR CAREER
AS A PROFESSIONAL TRANSLATOR TO TAKE
THE LS TRANSLATION TEST**

You are a professional translator if one or more of the following are true:

- You occupy a staff/in-house translator position;
- You are regularly employed on the freelance translation market;
- You earned an academic certificate or degree in translation from a university; or
- You were certified as a translator by a professional association or other body with accrediting authority (LS does not have such authority).

Interpreting and language instruction experience certainly enrich one's language skills, but are not a substitute for actual *translation* experience. As you consider applying to sit for the LS translation test, and becoming an LS contract translator, please keep the following questions in mind:

- Have you gained sufficient experience as a translator? As a general rule, LS considers five years to be the minimum necessary for a successful test and successful long-term performance as its contractor, *even for those with academic training in translation*.
- Has your work been mentored or reviewed by experienced professionals? If you have been working too independently, bad habits may have become ingrained.
- Has your experience included translating laws, court records, treaties, high-level correspondence, and bureaucratic prose of the type found in government announcements, bulletins, and fact sheets? If your translation work is solely in S&T, life sciences, literature, or computers, you may find the documents LS handles to be too unfamiliar and daunting.
- Have you determined what combination of languages, and in what direction, you work best as a translator? LS prefers that you test in your strongest language combination first, which will generally mean translating into your native language,
- Have you mastered online research techniques and translation technology? Are you able to work with formatting issues that may arise with text in your language combination(s)? Thorough proficiency in the entire *MS Office* suite and Computer Assisted Translation (CAT) tools is vital for today's translators.
- Are you able to produce top-quality work under pressure? LS deadlines are often very tight.
- Do you keep abreast of foreign affairs vocabulary in your source and target languages?
- Do you have a methodical approach to translating—one that you can articulate and defend?

An LS translation contract is not a certification, credential, or résumé adornment—it is a serious commitment to assist in the diplomatic translation of the United States Government. LS demands top-notch work—the documents it translates may be used by senior decision makers, released to the general public, or form the written record of U.S. foreign policy. Consequently, its translation test is designed to be a fair representation of the challenging work LS contractors must confront. The bottom line: take a long-term view of your translation career and choose carefully the moment when you apply to sit for an LS translation test. If you answer “no” to any of the questions above, it may be wise to invest some time in further preparation. LS wants you to succeed as a test taker, and as a contract translator. Good luck!