ARKANSAS SUPREME COURT
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS
COURT INTERPRETER SERVICES

OVERVIEW OF THE CANDIDATE ASSESSMENT EXAMINATION

Introduction

This document has been prepared to help persons interested in becoming certified court interpreters understand what the Candidate Assessment Exam measures, how it is administered, and how to prepare for taking the exam. Each examinee should study this overview thoroughly in order to be fully prepared for the exam.

The examination is only one part of the process for becoming a certified or approved court interpreter. Passing this test does not mean a person has become a "certified court interpreter;" rather, it means the examinee has officially met the requirements to be a Candidate for Certification.

The test measures examinees' knowledge of four areas central to the work of a court interpreter at the level of a minimally qualified court interpreter:

1. English Language. To function as a professional court interpreter, one indispensable component is a high degree of proficiency in the English language. Accordingly, the written examination assumes a high degree of literacy in the English language and familiarity with a range of language constructions. It tests comprehension of written English vocabulary and idioms.

2. Ethics and Professional Conduct. The second area of knowledge required of professional court interpreters encompassed in the written test is general knowledge of standards guiding the performance of duties. Accordingly, the written exam includes questions aimed at measuring candidates' knowledge of ethical behavior and professional conduct as established by the Arkansas Supreme Court in Administrative Order 11.

3. Foreign Language. Prospective interpreters must also be highly proficient in the language they intend to interpret. While written knowledge is important, the primary function of an interpreter is oral. The ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) is a standardized procedure for the global assessment of functional speaking ability. It measures how well a person speaks a language by comparing their performance of specific language tasks, as set forth in the criteria for each of ten proficiency levels established by the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL).

4. Court-Related Terms and Usage. The fourth area of knowledge essential to successful professional performance is familiarity with the terminology and procedures of the court system. Accordingly, the examination also measures recognition of common court-related situations and vocabulary, *especially in the area of criminal courts*.

What does the test look like?

The Candidate Assessment Exam has been developed in cooperation with the Language Access Division of the National Center for State Courts. The test has four parts:

Part I: General Language Proficiency (written)
Part II: Ethics & Professional Conduct (written)
Part III: Oral Proficiency Interview (oral)
Part IV: Court-Related Terms & Usage (written)

Arkansas Court Interpreter Services offers the Candidate Assessment Exam in two stages. In the first stage, Parts I, II, and III are administered. The examinees who achieve a combined passing score of 80% on Parts I and II and a score of Advanced High on Part III will be eligible to attend the two day Orientation to continue with the certification process, at which time Part IV of the Exam will be administered.

The written sections of the examination (Parts I, II, and IV) contain a total of 135 multiple-choice questions. Each question has four choices, labeled A, B, C, and D. The examinee is instructed to select the ***best*** choice and mark that choice on the answer sheet (the specific form of the answer sheet will vary by state). Part III, the OPI, is administered remotely by a private testing provider contracted by the AOC. A complete list of the sections, including one or more sample questions for each, is provided starting on Page 5 of this overview.

How will the exam be scheduled and what do I need to know in advance?

Court Interpreter Services will notify you in writing by mail or e-mail once your registration for the exam has been received. The notice will include a reminder of when and where to report for the test and may include directions to the test site.

Arrive early. No one will be admitted late. There are no exceptions and no one arriving late for any reason will be able to take the test at that test session.

You must present valid photo identification before entering the testing room. There may be a registration area where you will report and sign in. In the testing room, there will be a test administration supervisor, and there may be another test proctor present to assist. You will not be permitted to keep anything at your desk aside from your photo ID and pencils. All other belonging must be placed in the back of the testing room.

What if I need special accommodation due to a disability?

If you have a disability recognized by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), you must request special accommodation *in advance.* In order to do that, you should complete the attached Request for Special Accommodation and submit it to the director of the court interpreting program in your state as far ahead of the test date as possible. You must describe your disability and describe the type or kind of accommodation you are requesting. In addition, you must submit a statement from an appropriate professional documenting the diagnosis or evaluation of your disability.

How will the test be administered?

Examinees are allotted two hours to complete Parts I & II of the examination. The Oral Proficiency Interview will last 20-30 minutes for each examinee.

Parts I and II of the exam will be given in classroom style to a number of examinees at the same time in the same room. Upon completing the written sections, the examinee should notify the exam proctor, who will direct the examinee to a private room for the computer administration of the Oral Proficiency Interview. Examinees will take the Oral Proficiency Interview in the order that they complete the written sections.

Security of the exam materials is obviously essential. Examinees may not take notes or copy any portion of the exam. If an examinee is disruptive, engages in clear or flagrant

cheating, or attempts to copy questions or retain or record exam materials, the examinee may be expelled from the testing room and advised that his or her examination will not be scored. Documentation of the expulsion and the reasons for it will be maintained by the state.

What is the score required for passing and how will I be notified about the results?

In order to pass the exam, examinees must achieve a combined score of 80% on Parts I and II, answering at least 68 of the 85 items on these two sections correctly. A score of Advanced High is required to pass the Oral Proficiency Exam. On Part IV, the examinee must again answer 80% (40 of 50) of the questions correctly.

Court Interpreter Services will advise the examinee of the results of his or her exam by mail or e-mail. Reminder: Passing the Candidate Assessment Exam makes the examinee a Candidate for Certification, NOT a Certified Foreign Language Interpreter.

What can I do to prepare for the exam?

A list of possible activities and resources has been compiled to help you identify actions you can take to help prepare for the exam. Some of the resources may help you decide whether you are ready to participate in a test of this nature. The list is located on page 11 of this overview.

What if I do not pass the examination?

Applicants are permitted to test only once in a 12 month period. If you do not pass the exam, it is suggested that you review the preparation materials provided in this overview before registering to take the test for the following year.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Part I: General Language Proficiency

Sentence Completion. Items 1 through 9 consist of unfinished sentences. The examinee is instructed to select from a list of four words or phrases the one that best completes the sentence.

Example: A person who feels persecuted in his/her home country may apply for political

A. appellation
B. appraisal
C. asylum
D. ascendance

(C is the best answer)

Synonyms in Context. Items 10 through 17 consist of sentences that contain an underlined word or phrase. The examinee is instructed to choose from a list of four words or phrases the one that is closest in meaning to the underlined word or phrase.

Example: It was done pursuant to the proceedings of the court.

A. in accordance with
B. in addition to
C. in conjunction with
D. in spite of

(A is the answer that is closest in meaning)

Synonyms. Items 18 through 38 consist of words or phrases. The examinee is instructed to select from a list of four words or phrases the one that has the same meaning or closest to the same meaning as the word or phrase provided.

Example 1: Scaffold

A. platform
B. table
C. prop
D. curtain

(A is the answer that is closest in meaning)

Example 2: Hubris

A. exaggerated pride
B. steadfast loyalty
C. extreme shyness
D. committed fidelity

(A is the answer that is closest in meaning)

Antonyms. Items 39 through 50 consist of words or phrases. The examinee is instructed to select from a list of four words or phrases the one that is opposite in meaning to the word or phrase provided.

Example: Excessive

A. stingy
B. large
C. robust
D. restricted

(D is the correct answer, opposite in meaning)

Idioms. Items 51 through 75 consist of sentences that contain an underlined idiomatic expression. The examinee is instructed to select from the list of four words or phrases the one that is closest in meaning to the underlined idiom.

Example 1: Do you need to make a pit stop before we get there?

A. get some money
B. go to the bathroom
C. empty the trash
D. make a phone call

(B is the answer that is closest in meaning)

Example 2: His career as an attorney is all washed up.

A. off to a late start
B. off to a good start
C. completely over
D. very profitable

(C is the answer that is closest in meaning)

Part II: Ethics

Professional Conduct Questions. Items 76 and 77 consist of questions about the appropriate course of professional conduct an interpreter should take. The examinee is instructed to select from a list of four choices the one that is the best answer.

> Example: Which of the following is most important for you to do when you are interpreting at the witness stand?
>
> A. keep your eyes on the jury
> **B.** keep your dictionary and note pad at hand
> **C.** keep eye contact with the witness at all times
> **D.** keep the judge informed of contradictory testimony
>
> (B is the best answer)

Scenarios. Items 78 through 85 consist of brief scenarios describing situations an interpreter might encounter while interpreting in the courts that would pose ethical or professional problems. The examinee is instructed to select from a list of four alternatives the best solution or course of action.

> Example: An expert witness is giving testimony regarding blood alcohol content while you are interpreting for the defendant. The testimony is very complex, and even though you can interpret it at the same level, you sense that the defendant does not understand such technical language. What is the best thing for you to do in this situation?
>
> A. advise the judge that the defendant does not understand
> B. interpret at the same level as the witness
> C. ask the judge for permission to explain for the witness
> D. summarize the testimony for the defendant in language he can understand
>
> (B is the best solution)

Part III: Oral Proficiency Interview

The OPI consists of **four phases**:

- **warm-up** (greetings, small-talk to help the learner to feel comfortable and to provide a first indication of a possible level)
- **level-check** (questions to see where the learner is able to handle talk comfortably and to find out what topics the learner is interested in; the tester hypothesizes the proficiency level of learner)
- **probes** (questions to elicit samples at one level higher than the hypothesized one; the probe and level-check phases alternate as necessary)
- **role-play** (for learners at the Intermediate or Advanced level, can serve as a level-check or probe)
- **wind-down** (closing of the interview at the learner's proficiency level; similar to a closing of a natural conversation; provides a final verification of the learner's level)

In the conversation, the tester elicits the use of different **language functions** that are representative of the various levels of oral proficiency:

- **Novice level (Low, Mid, High)**: naming, listing, recalling memorized material
  Sample probe: *What are some ways people travel?*
- **Intermediate level (Low, Mid, High)**: describing daily tasks, acquaintances, asking and answering questions, and getting through a basic survival situation
  Sample probe: *You say you like to travel. Tell me about your travel habits.*
- **Advanced level (Low, Mid, High)**: describing and narrating in the past and future, comparing, explaining in detail, and negotiating more complex situations in a cultural context
  Sample probe: *Tell me about something interesting that happened on a recent trip you took.*
  Sample role play: *You are a good friend. I confide in you that I am feeling stressed at work. You know me very well, so give me some advice on what might help me through this situation.*
- **Superior level**: supporting opinion, hypothesizing, using specialized language or explaining specialized notions; talking in abstract terms about concepts or issues
  Sample probe: *Gas prices are rising dramatically. How do you think this will affect people's travel plans?*
  Sample role play: *You are not satisfied with this year's performance appraisal at your place of employment because your supervisor overlooked several of your major accomplishments. Be tactful, yet assertive, in outlining these elements for inclusion in your appraisal.*

Court Interpreter Services will only accept scores of Advanced High or Superior for the Oral Proficiency Interview. The ACTFL description of the minimum required score of Advanced High is provided below.

> *"Speakers at the Advanced-High level perform all Advanced-level tasks with linguistic ease, confidence and competence. They are able to consistently explain in detail and narrate fully and accurately in all time frames. In addition, Advanced- High speakers handle the tasks pertaining to the Superior level but cannot sustain performance at that level across a variety of topics. They can provide a structured argument to support their opinions, and they may construct hypotheses, but patterns of error appear. They can discuss some topics abstractly, especially those relating to their particular interests and special fields of expertise, but in general, they are more comfortable discussing a variety of topics concretely.*
>
> *Advanced-High speakers may demonstrate a well-developed ability to compensate for an imperfect grasp of some forms or for limitations in, vocabulary by the confident use of communicative strategies, such as paraphrasing, circumlocution, and illustration. They use precise vocabulary and intonation to express meaning and often show great fluency and ease of speech. However when they are called on to perform the complex tasks associated with the Superior level over a variety of topics, their language, at times, breaks down or proves inadequate, or they may avoid the task altogether, for example, by resorting to simplification through the use of description or narration in place of argument or hypothesis."*

Sections in Part IV, Court-Related Terms & Usage

(*The legal terms found in items 1 through 50 are taken largely from criminal court cases.)

Sentence Completion. Items 1-36 consist of unfinished sentences that are likely to be heard in the court environment. The examinee is instructed to select from a list of four words or phrases the one that most appropriately completes the sentence.

Example 1: A case decided without prejudice means that

A. there is no right to a new trial
B. there is an automatic appeal of the case
C. there is a right to a new trial
D. there are no racial overtones in the case

(C is the answer that most appropriately completes the sentence)

Example 2: A defendant is required to give up certain constitutional rights

A. after being found guilty at trial
B. before entering a plea of guilty
C. only if represented by a public defender
D. only after probation is granted

(B is the answer that most appropriately completes the sentence)

Court-Related Questions. Items 37 through 46 consist of questions on court-related topics. The examinee is instructed to select from a list of four choices the one that is the best answer.

Example: Which of the following would be a concurrent sentence?

A. two years for burglary, two years for robbery: two years in jail
B. two years for theft, two years for assault: four years in jail
C. four years for rape, three years for a second rape: seven years in jail
D. four years for rape, two years for assault: two years in jail

(A is the best answer)

Sequence. Items 47 through 50 consist of questions about the proper sequence of events in court-related situations. The examinee is instructed to select from a list of four choices the one that correctly describes the order in which the events should occur.

Example: Which of the following is a correct sequence of event?

A. Jury Charge, Jury Deliberation, Jury Instructions, Jury Verdict
B. Jury Sworn, Jury Verdict, Jury Charge, Jury Deliberation
C. Jury Deliberation, Jury Sworn, Jury Instructions, Jury Verdict
D. Jury Sworn, Jury Charge, Jury Deliberation, Jury Verdict

(D is the correct sequence of events)

Suggested Study Resources

English Proficiency

For Part I, General Language Proficiency, one needs to have a very broad command of the English language. That is not something that is quickly or easily acquired. However, some of the following activities might be helpful in expanding one's knowledge of the English language and preparing for the test:

1. Take upper-level English courses at a college or university.
2. Study preparation material developed for similar exams, or even take the exams:
    a. TOEFL
    b. Cambridge ESOL
3. Read widely such items as books and professional journals in many fields, American literature, and editorials and articles in major newspapers.
4. Brush up on English vocabulary and lexical concepts (go back to the basics and review antonyms, synonyms, and idioms).
5. Consult other resources, such as:
    a. The ESL Idiom Page, (Dennis Oliver), available online at: www.eslcafe.com/idioms.
    b. SAT and GRE workbooks.
    c. Vocabulary-building books found in the reference section of libraries and bookstores.

Ethics & Professional Conduct

1. Become familiar Administrative Order 11, Code of Professional Responsibility for Interpreters in the Judiciary in Arkansas.
2. Join and participate actively in a professional association such as the National Association of Judicial Interpreters and Translators (www.najit.org) or the American Translators Association (www.atanet.org), studying their respective codes of ethics.
3. Read at least one of the classic texts in the field:
    a. Berk-Seligson, Susan (1990). *The Bilingual Courtroom: Court Interpreters in the Judicial Process.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
    b. De Jongh, E.M. (1992). *An Introduction to Court Interpreting: Theory and Practice.* Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
    c. Edwards, Alicia B. (1995). *The Practice of Court Interpreting*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
    d. Gonzalez, R.D., Vasquez, V.F., and Mikkelson, H. (1991). *Fundamentals of Court Interpretation: Theory, Policy and Practice.* Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press.
    e. Mikkelson, H. (2000). *Introduction to Court Interpreting*. Manchester, UK: St. Jerome Publishing.

Court-Related Terms & Usage

With respect to Part IV, Court-Related Terms & Usage, the following activities would be helpful in expanding or acquiring the substantive knowledge pertinent to these fields:

1. Read news items related to legal matters, law enforcement, and the courts in major newspapers, consulting a dictionary to look up unfamiliar words.
2. Visit courthouses and observe court proceedings in civil, criminal, and family matters.
3. Take college/university courses in criminal justice and court administration.
4. Read any standard introductory textbook on the criminal justice system.
5. Read publications about the administration of justice such as the following documents issued by the American Bar Association (www.abanet.org/abastore), which are available for $2.50 each:
    a. Law & the Courts, Volume I, *The Role of the Courts,* 2000.
    b. Law & the Courts, Volume II, *Court Procedures,* 1998.
    c. Law & the Courts, Volume III, *Juries*, 2001.
6. Study legal terms from the following sources:
    a. Black's Law Dictionary
    b. Glossary of Commonly Used Court & Justice System Terminology (available on the National Center for State Courts website http://www.ncsc.org)

ARKANSAS SUPREME COURT
Administrative Office of the Courts
Court Interpreter Services

REQUEST FOR ADA ACCOMMODATION

Complete this form only if you are requesting individual testing arrangements because you have a disability recognized by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

APPLICANT NAME:

Have you been diagnosed with a disability that is recognized by the ADA: Yes___ No___

Describe the type of disability:
_____
_____
_____

I request an accommodation, which is described on the *Documentation of Accommodation*, attached hereto.

Signature	Date

Attach the Documentation of Accommodation form and submit to:

ARKANSAS SUPREME COURT
Administrative Office of the Courts
Court Interpreter Services

DOCUMENTATION OF ACCOMMODATION

This section must be completed by an appropriate professional (doctor, psychologist, psychiatrist, or education professional) to certify that your disabling condition requires the requested exam accommodation.

If you have existing documentation of having the same or similar accommodation provided to you in another test situation, you may submit such documentation instead of having this portion of the form completed.

I HAVE KNOWN _____ SINCE _____
(APPLICANT NAME) (DATE)
AS A _____. I HAVE DIAGNOSED OR EVALUATED
(PATIENT, OR OTHER PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP)
THE APPLICANT MYSELF AND I AM NOT RELYING UPON FACTS RELATED TO ME

BY THE APPLICANT. MY DIAGNOSIS IS _____

_____
(DESCRIBE THE MEDICAL OR OTHER CONDITION)

THE APPLICANT HAS DISCUSSED WITH ME THE NATURE OF THE TEST TO BE ADMINISTERED. IT IS MY PROFESSIONAL OPINION THAT BECAUSE OF THIS APPLICANT'S DISABILITY, HE/SHE SHOULD BE ACCOMMODATED BY PROVIDING THE FOLLOWING: (CHECK ONLY THOSE THAT APPLY)

	Large print type		Extra time (how much?)
	Separate testing area		An examination reader
	Other oral administration (describe)		Other accommodation (describe)

Signature and title of professional _____

Printed name and title_____

Date_____ Telephone Number_____