

# ***CODE OF ETHICS & CODE OF CONDUCT***

**Australian Institute of  
Interpreters and Translators Inc**

**2012**



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# Introduction

The AUSIT Code of Ethics was first drafted as a by-law in the early 1990s. It was then endorsed in expanded form at the National Annual General Meeting in 1995, and for the next 15 years served AUSIT and the wider profession well. A number of overseas education institutions and professional bodies used it as a reference or as a model for their own codes.

But changes in the translation and interpreting industry mean the requirements of a code of ethics have also changed. In late 2010 AUSIT accepted a proposal from Monash University to set up a joint AUSIT/Monash working group to review the Code of Ethics, with funding for Dr Uldis Ozolins as its leader. After twelve months, when the funding was exhausted, Christian Schmidt took over the reins to bring the project to completion. At some point during the review process feedback was sought from all AUSIT members and from representatives of all areas of the T&I industry.

The members of the working group are, in alphabetical order:

Dr Meredith Bartlett, educator and deaf sign interpreter, former Chair of ASLIA Vic, currently Chair of AUSIT's VicTas Branch.

Vesna Boglev, AUSIT member, Manager of Sessional Interpreters, Research and Training at the Health Language Services, South Western Sydney Local Health District.

Adolfo Gentile, practitioner and foundation member of AUSIT, who was Australia's first home-grown full professor in T&I (Deakin University); former President of FIT and former Chair of the Board of NAATI.

Eva Hussain, former AUSIT Vice President and former Chair of AUSIT VicTas Branch; an interpreter and translator who runs her own language services company.

Dr Uldis Ozolins, a researcher who has written widely on T&I in Australia and internationally and taught in several Australian universities.

Christian Schmidt, a graduate of the University of Heidelberg who now runs a

translating and editing business in Adelaide.

Consultants: Dr Jim Hlavac and Prof Rita Wilson of Monash University,  
Barbara McGilvray, freelance translator and educator.

The AUSIT National Council wishes to express its heartfelt thanks to Christian  
and Uldis for their leadership of the review group, and to all the group  
members for their valuable contribution.

Barbara McGilvray  
AUSIT National Vice President  
November 2012

# Preamble

The AUSIT Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct are intended to regulate the professional conduct of members of AUSIT, the Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators.

AUSIT was founded in 1987, when the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) called practitioners, educators and government language service provider representatives from around Australia to a meeting in Canberra to establish a national professional association. AUSIT's establishment was part of the historical development of the architecture of interpreting and translating in Australia and New Zealand, which has also included national accreditation and qualifications standards, widespread language services, specialised education and a respected code of ethics.

AUSIT's original Code of Ethics was completed in 1995, when it was endorsed by NAATI and adopted by AUSIT at its National Annual General Meeting. In 1996 it was presented to the International Federation of Translators at the World Congress hosted by AUSIT in Melbourne. NAATI endorses the AUSIT Code of Ethics as the basis of professional conduct for those with a NAATI credential, that is to say anyone holding NAATI accreditation or recognition.

This updated version of the AUSIT Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct was written in 2012 in recognition of the significant development and diversification of the field in Australia, and the growing attention to ethical issues in interpreting and translation around the world. International recognition of the status of interpreters and translators becomes even more important as they achieve greater prominence through media, international affairs and local political issues, attracting increased scrutiny of their standards.

The revised Code was adopted by NZSTI, the national association of interpreting and translating professionals in New Zealand (established in 1985), at its Annual General Meeting in 2012.

The interpreting and translation profession in Australia is part of a global

profession increasingly concerned to address ethical issues that transcend national boundaries, such as protection of translators and translations (the Nairobi Declaration of UNESCO and the Translator’s Charter of the International Federation of Translators), protection of interpreters in conflict areas, or the right of individuals in criminal court proceedings to have access to interpreting and translating services.

Within Australia, a large number of agencies, institutions, language service providers and purchasers of interpreting and translating services now require practitioners who work with them – whether AUSIT members or not – to adhere to this Code of Ethics. It is recognised as setting a general standard for interpreting and translating.

In summary, the Code obliges members to:

- maintain professional detachment, impartiality, objectivity and confidentiality
- strive for excellence through continuous regular professional development
- decline work beyond their competence
- promote working conditions, relationships and an understanding of roles that facilitate collaboration and quality service delivery
- adhere to dispute resolution procedures

Clients or other parties who work with interpreting and translating practitioners should bring any breach of this Code to AUSIT’s attention. AUSIT has processes for investigating such complaints, as do many of the agencies or institutions that purchase interpreting and translating services and require their practitioners to adhere to the AUSIT Code.

AUSIT also encourages, and will assist, organisations with specific institutional or operational requirements of interpreters and translators to develop their own organisation-specific Good Practice Guides or protocols, which may usefully supplement this Code.

The AUSIT Code of Ethics defines the values and principles guiding the decisions interpreting and translating professionals make in practice. The related Code of Conduct and conduct issues specific to translators and interpreters provide a framework for interpreting and translating professionals to use when exercising judgment in their practice. They are not intended to be exhaustive lists of the situations and circumstances that may comprise compliance and non-compliance with the Code of Ethics. Ethical interpreting and translating practice requires judgment and balanced decision-making in context. Interpreters and translators who commit to practise in accordance with the Code of Ethics accept that they will be accountable for their conduct under AUSIT's processes for non-compliance.

The following values and principles will inform our interpreting and translating practice.



**CODE OF ETHICS**

**GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

## 1. PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Interpreters and translators act at all times in accordance with the standards of conduct and decorum appropriate to the aims of AUSIT, the national professional association of interpreting and translation practitioners.

### **Explanation**

Interpreters and translators take responsibility for their work and conduct; they are committed to providing quality service in a respectful and culturally sensitive manner, dealing honestly and fairly with other parties and colleagues, and dealing honestly in all business practices. They disclose any conflict of interest or any matter that may compromise their impartiality. They observe common professional ethics of diligence and responsiveness to the needs of other participants in their work.

## 2. CONFIDENTIALITY

Interpreters and translators maintain confidentiality and do not disclose information acquired in the course of their work.

### **Explanation**

Interpreters and translators are bound by strict rules of confidentiality, as are the persons they work with in professional or business fields.

### 3. COMPETENCE

Interpreters and translators only undertake work they are competent to perform in the languages for which they are professionally qualified through training and credentials.

#### **Explanation**

In order to practise, interpreters and translators need to have particular levels of expertise for particular types of work. Those who work with interpreters and translators are entitled to expect that they are working with appropriately qualified practitioners.

Practitioners always represent their credentials honestly. Where formal training or accreditation is not available (e.g. in less frequently used language combinations and new and emerging languages), practitioners have an obligation to increase and maintain skills through their own professional development (see Principle 8 below) or request employers, agencies or institutions to provide it.

### 4. IMPARTIALITY

Interpreters and translators observe impartiality in all professional contacts. Interpreters remain unbiased throughout the communication exchanged between the participants in any interpreted encounter. Translators do not show bias towards either the author of the source text or the intended readers of their translation.

#### **Explanation**

Interpreters and translators play an important role in facilitating parties who do not share a common language to communicate effectively with each other. They aim to ensure that the full intent of the communication is conveyed. Interpreters and translators are not responsible for what the parties communicate, only for complete and accurate transfer of the message. They do not allow bias to influence their performance; likewise they do not soften, strengthen or alter the messages being conveyed.

## 5. ACCURACY

Interpreters and translators use their best professional judgement in remaining faithful at all times to the meaning of texts and messages.

### Explanation

Accuracy for the purpose of this Code means optimal and complete message transfer into the target language preserving the content and intent of the source message or text without omission or distortion.

## 6. CLARITY OF ROLE BOUNDARIES

Interpreters and translators maintain clear boundaries between their task as facilitators of communication through message transfer and any tasks that may be undertaken by other parties involved in the assignment.

### Explanation

The focus of interpreters and translators is on message transfer. Practitioners do not, in the course of their interpreting or translation duties, engage in other tasks such as advocacy, guidance or advice. Even where such other tasks are mandated by particular employment arrangements, practitioners insist that a clear demarcation is agreed on between interpreting and translating and other tasks. For this purpose, interpreters and translators will, where the situation requires it, provide an explanation of their role in line with the principles of this Code.

## 7. MAINTAINING PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Interpreters and translators are responsible for the quality of their work, whether as employees, freelance practitioners or contractors with interpreting and translation agencies. They always endeavour to secure satisfactory working conditions for the performance of their duties, including physical facilities, appropriate briefing, a clear commission, and clear conduct protocols where needed in specific institutional settings. They ensure that they have allocated adequate time to complete their work; they foster a mutually respectful business relationship with the people with whom they work and encourage them to become familiar with the interpreter or translator role.

### Explanation

Interpreters and translators work in a variety of settings with specific institutional demands and a wide range of professional and business contexts. Some settings involve strict protocols where the interpreter or translator is a totally independent party, while others are marked by cooperation and shared responsibilities. Interpreters and translators must be familiar with these contexts, and endeavour to have the people they work with understand their role. For practitioners who work through agencies, the agency providing them with the work is one of their clients, and practitioners maintain the same professional standards when working with them as when working with individual clients. At the same time agencies must have appropriate and fair procedures in place that recognise and foster the professionalism of interpreting and translating practitioners.

## 8. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Interpreters and translators continue to develop their professional knowledge and skills.

### Explanation

Practitioners commit themselves to lifelong learning, recognising that individuals, services and practices evolve and change over time. They continually upgrade their language and transfer skills and their contextual and cultural understanding. They keep up to date with the technological advances pertinent to their practice in order to continue to provide quality service. Practitioners working in languages where there is no standard training or credential may need to assess, maintain and update their standards independently.

## 9. PROFESSIONAL SOLIDARITY

Interpreters and translators respect and support their fellow professionals, and they uphold the reputation and trustworthiness of the profession of interpreting and translating.

### Explanation

Practitioners have a loyalty to the profession that extends beyond their individual interest. They support and further the interests of the profession and their colleagues and offer each other assistance.

# **CODE OF CONDUCT**

**Obligations towards  
recipients of services**

## **ETHICAL PRINCIPLE**

Interpreters and translators act at all times in accordance with the standards of conduct and decorum appropriate to the aims of AUSIT, the national professional association of interpreting and translation practitioners.

## **1. Professional conduct**

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- 1.1 Interpreters and translators maintain their integrity and independence at all times.
- 1.2 Interpreters and translators undertake appropriate preparations for all assignments.
- 1.3 Interpreters and translators complete assignments they have accepted, unless they are unable to do so for ethical reasons (see 3.4 and 4.2 below).
- 1.4 Interpreters and translators adhere to appointment times and deadlines, or advise clients promptly of any hindrance.
- 1.5 Interpreters and translators do not exercise power or influence over their clients.
- 1.6 Interpreters and translators do not solicit or accept gratuities or other benefits. They may, however, accept typical small gifts in specific cultural contexts.



## 2. Confidentiality

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- 2.1 Interpreters and translators are bound by strict rules of confidentiality, as are the parties they work with in professional or business fields.
- 2.2 Where teamwork is required, the ethical obligation of confidentiality extends to all members of the team and/or agency.
- 2.3 Practitioners do not take advantage of information acquired during or as a result of their work.
- 2.4 Disclosure of information may be permissible with clients' agreement or when disclosure is mandated by law (see Int15).

### **ETHICAL PRINCIPLE**

Interpreters and translators maintain confidentiality and do not disclose information acquired in the course of their work.

## ETHICAL PRINCIPLE

Interpreters and translators only undertake work they are competent to perform, in the languages for which they are professionally qualified through training and credentials.

## 3. Competence

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- 3.1 The acceptance of an interpreting or translation assignment is an implicit declaration of an interpreter's or translator's competence to carry out that assignment.
- 3.2 Interpreters and translators are familiar with the varied contexts, institutional structures, terminology and genres of the areas in which they accept work.
- 3.3 Interpreters and translators clearly state their qualifications in particular languages or language directions if requested by the client.
- 3.4 If it becomes apparent in the course of an assignment that expertise beyond their competence is required, interpreters and translators inform the client(s) immediately and work to resolve the situation, either withdrawing from the assignment or following another acceptable strategy.
- 3.5 If a client wishes to change the language of the interpretation or translation to a different language, this can only be done if the interpreter or translator has relevant competence in the other language.

## 4. Impartiality

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- 4.1 Professional detachment is required for interpreting and translation assignments in all situations.
- 4.2 Where impartiality may be difficult to maintain because of personal beliefs or other circumstances, interpreters and translators do not accept assignments, or they offer to withdraw from the assignment.
- 4.3 Interpreters and translators are not responsible for what clients say or write.
- 4.4 Interpreters and translators do not voice or write an opinion, solicited or unsolicited, on any matter or person during an assignment.
- 4.5 Interpreters and translators frankly disclose all conflicts of interest, e.g. in assignments for relatives or friends and those affecting their employers.
- 4.6 Interpreters and translators do not recommend to clients any business, agency, process, substance or material matters in which they have a personal or financial interest, without fully disclosing this interest to the clients.

### **ETHICAL PRINCIPLE**

Interpreters and translators observe impartiality in all professional contacts. Interpreters remain unbiased throughout the communication exchanged between the participants in any interpreted encounter. Translators do not show bias towards either the author of the source text or the intended readers of their translation.

## 5. Accuracy

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### **ETHICAL PRINCIPLE**

Interpreters and translators use their best professional judgement in remaining faithful at all times to the meaning of texts and messages.

- 5.1 Interpreters and translators provide accurate renditions of the source utterance or text in the target language. Accurate is defined for this purpose as optimal and complete, without distortion or omission and preserving the content and intent of the source message or text. Interpreters and translators are able to provide an accurate and complete rendition of the source message using the skills and understanding they have acquired through their training and education.
- 5.2 Interpreters and translators do not alter, add to, or omit anything from the content and intent of the source message.
- 5.3 Interpreters and translators acknowledge and promptly rectify any interpreting or translation mistakes.
- 5.4 Where circumstances permit, interpreters and translators ask for repetition, rephrasing or explanation if anything is unclear.

## 6. Clarity of role boundaries

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- 6.1 Interpreters and translators do not, in the course of their interpreting or translation duties, assume other roles such as offering advocacy, guidance or advice. Even where such other tasks are mandated (e.g. by specific institutional requirements for employees), practitioners insist that a clear demarcation is agreed on by all parties between interpreting and translating and other tasks.
- 6.2 Interpreters and translators respect the professional boundaries of other participants involved in an assignment.
- 6.3 Interpreters and translators draw attention to any situation where other parties misunderstand the interpreter or translator role or have inappropriate expectations.
- 6.4 Interpreters and translators understand, and help their clients understand, the difference between professional and personal interactions. They assume responsibility for establishing and maintaining appropriate boundaries between themselves and the other participants in the communicative interaction.

### **ETHICAL PRINCIPLE**

Interpreters and translators maintain clear boundaries between their task as facilitators of communication through message transfer and any tasks that may be undertaken by other parties involved in the assignment.

## 7. Maintaining professional relationships

### ETHICAL PRINCIPLE

Interpreters and translators are responsible for the quality of their work, whether as employees, freelance practitioners or contractors with interpreting and translation agencies. They always endeavour to secure satisfactory working conditions for the performance of their duties, including physical facilities, appropriate briefing, a clear commission and clear conduct protocols where needed in specific institutional settings. They ensure that they have allocated adequate time to complete their work, they foster a mutually respectful business relationship with the people with whom they work and encourage them to become familiar with the interpreter or translator role.

- 7.1 Practitioners follow this Code whenever they are interpreting or translating – as employees, as freelancers, as agency contractors or as supervisors or employers of other interpreters and translators.
- 7.2 When working as freelancers, interpreters and translators deal with clients and agencies honestly and transparently.
- 7.3 When working through agencies, interpreters and translators maintain the same professional standards as when working with individual clients.
- 7.4 Interpreters and translators request briefing and access to reference material and background information before their work commences.
- 7.5 In interpreting assignments, interpreters endeavour to secure a physical environment that enables optimal message transfer in the given context. This includes the use of any devices and aids which participants typically require for hearing and speaking, such as appropriate standard booths for conference interpreting or appropriate physical arrangements for confidentiality, or security measures in cases of physical risk. It also includes provision of seating and reasonable breaks to avoid interpreter fatigue.
- 7.6 In acknowledging the shared responsibility to provide effective language services, interpreters and translators can expect that agencies, employers or clients who stipulate this Code as mandatory for interpreter or translator behaviour have appropriate procedures in place that recognise the professional obligations of the practitioners, and that they support interpreters and translators in securing the conditions outlined in 7.4 and 7.5 above.

## 8. Professional development

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- 8.1 Interpreters and translators enhance their skills and knowledge through continuing education and professional development throughout their professional career.
- 8.2 Interpreters and translators maintain proficiency in the languages and familiarity with the cultures for which they offer professional interpreting and translation services.
- 8.3 Interpreters and translators support and encourage professional development within the profession and among their colleagues.
- 8.4 Interpreters and translators endeavour to keep themselves informed about new trends and developments and the results of research in the field to improve their competence and practice.

### **ETHICAL PRINCIPLE**

Interpreters and translators continue to develop their professional knowledge and skills.

## 9. Professional solidarity

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### **ETHICAL PRINCIPLE**

Interpreters and translators respect and support their fellow professionals and they uphold the reputation and trustworthiness of the profession of interpreting and translating.

- 9.1 Interpreters and translators support and further the interests of the profession and their colleagues and offer each other assistance.
- 9.2 Interpreters and translators resolve any disputes with their interpreting and translating colleagues in a cooperative, constructive and professional manner.
- 9.3 AUSIT members refer any unresolved disputes with other AUSIT members to the National Council. The conclusive direction of the Council is binding on members, with the provision of appeal or review in the interests of natural justice.



# CONDUCT ISSUES SPECIFIC TO TRANSLATORS

- T1 Before commencing work, translators ascertain the intended purpose of the translation and the form of delivery required.
- T2 Translators obtain from the client as much information, terminology or reference material as possible and necessary for the proper and timely execution of the translation commission, and treat such material confidentially or as expressly agreed. If the client possesses but fails to provide reference texts crucial to the desired outcome, the translator is not responsible for inadequacies in the translation that are demonstrably due to such aids being withheld.
- T3 Translators deliver a translation that completely and impartially renders the meaning and intention of the source text within the parameters and requirements of the target language and culture and is in keeping with the purpose specified in the commission received from the client/initiator.
- T4 Translators work only from source languages and into target languages in which they are qualified.
- T5 Translators only perform work which they believe is within their translation competence and relevant specialist competence and for which they have the necessary resources, transfer abilities, level of understanding and fluency, or which will be revised by a person with the relevant knowledge or competence.
- T6 If the source text contains particular elements that need to be taken into account in carrying out the translation, translators use their best endeavours and apply professional judgement to bring

this to the attention of the client (except where the translated document is expected or required to be an exact reproduction of all source text content, meaning, style and language and needs to be thus certified). Such elements may include ambiguities, factual inaccuracies, linguistic errors, imprecise terminology, language that in the judgement of the translator is discriminatory, or wording or references that would jeopardise achieving the purpose of the text in the target language culture.

- T7 If a translator is contracted by an agency, he or she does not contact the client of the agency directly, except as provided for under the terms of the relevant agreement entered into with the agency. If contacted by the client of the agency directly, the translator follows the procedures agreed with the agency.
- T8 Translators may sub-contract work only to other practitioners who they have good reason to believe possess the necessary competence and resources and who adhere to this Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct, and always in compliance with any agreement entered into with the client. The responsibility for the translated text in any case rests with the translator who sub-contracted the work to the other practitioner, unless otherwise expressly agreed.
- T9 If a translation is subject to revision or checking by another translator, the revision is returned to the original translator for approval and finalisation. If changes are made to the translated text after delivery to the client without the translator's agreement and knowledge, the translator is no longer responsible for the translated text.
- T10 Professional translators working in areas involving copyright matters endeavour to follow the principles laid out in the Nairobi Recommendation of UNESCO on the Legal Protection of Translators and Translations, and the FIT Translator's Charter (see FIT website [www.fit-ift.org/](http://www.fit-ift.org/)).

# CONDUCT ISSUES SPECIFIC TO INTERPRETERS

Int1 Interpreters prepare themselves by obtaining from the initiator/client as much information and briefing as is necessary for the proper execution of their interpreting, and treat such material confidentially or as expressly agreed.

## Completeness in interpreting

Int2 In order to ensure the same access to all that is said or signed by all parties involved in a meeting, interpreters relay accurately and completely everything that is communicated.

Int3 Interpreters interpret in the first person.

Int4 Interpreters maintain the emotions of the speakers in their interpreting and do not soften or enhance the force of messages conveyed or language used. In specific contexts such as in court or psychometric assessments, incoherence, hesitations and unclear statements are maintained in the interpretation.

Int5 If obvious untruths are uttered, interpreters convey these accurately in the same manner as presented.

## Relations with other parties and the interpreting role in dialogue situations

Int6 In dialogue situations where some participants may be unaccustomed to working with interpreters, the interpreter encourages such participants to address each other directly.

Int7 In situations with a number of participants and where the interpreter is not interpreting aloud to all, the interpreter enables each participant to remain linguistically present where appropriate by whispered simultaneous interpreting or other suitable means, when other participants are communicating in the language not understood by the party or parties in question.

- Int8 If anything is unclear, the interpreter asks for repetition, rephrasing or explanation, informing all participants of what is happening.
- Int9 In emergency situations where interpreters may not have had the opportunity to be adequately briefed or given enough time to prepare, or if there are safety/security issues, they communicate this to the responsible person or initiator who is participating in the session.
- Int10 Interpreters keep the participants informed of any side comments made by any of the parties or of their attempts to engage the interpreter in a private or any other conversation. In business or intergovernmental contexts where one or more parties bring their own interpreter, it is appropriate for the interpreter to relay side comments of the other party to his or her own party.
- Int11 Various participants may place competing expectations on interpreters. These expectations may contravene the interpreters' ethics, therefore the onus is on interpreters to clarify the boundaries of their role and assist their clients in understanding how to achieve the best outcomes in an interpreted session. Interpreters take care that conversations that may arise during periods of waiting remain courteous but do not become personal, and that information divulged in the course of such conversations also remains confidential.
- Int12 Interpreters testify to their qualifications and the accuracy of their interpreting and, when requested, explain their linguistic choices, but do not testify to participants' understanding of messages; this remains an issue for participants.

### **Remote interpreting**

- Int13 Interpreters familiarise themselves with the increasing use of technology for interpreting, including telephone, video and

internet interpreting, and diverse recording/transmitting devices. Interpreters who engage in interpreting using these technologies prepare themselves by understanding the purposes of their use and the way in which communication is shaped by these technologies. Institutions, agencies and clients who use these technologies are encouraged to develop protocols and brief interpreters on their use and on any particular requirements they may have.

### **Specific institutional settings of interpreting work**

Int14 Where interpreters have roles in addition to that of interpreting due to specific employment arrangements, they clearly indicate when they are acting as interpreters and do not switch roles without notice.

Int15 In specific institutional settings where duty of care or security rules regulate the behaviour of all participants, such as in health care or high security settings, interpreters follow the relevant policies and procedures combining them with their interpreting code of ethics.

# NOTES

# NOTES



