



# MultiLingual

**WRITING FOR TRANSLATION**

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GETTING STARTED: **Guide**



**PLANNING AND WRITING  
FOR TRANSLATION**  
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**OPTIMIZING THE SOURCE  
USING TRANSLATION MEMORY**

**ELEMENTS OF STYLE  
FOR MACHINE TRANSLATION**

**OPTIMIZED MT FOR  
HIGHER TRANSLATION QUALITY**

**CONTROLLED AUTHORIZING  
TO IMPROVE LOCALIZATION**

# PLANNING AND WRITING FOR TRANSLATION

BARB SICHEL

**D**ocuments and online communications are translated to achieve specific objectives. Your goal may be to execute a global communication plan, meet regulatory requirements, avoid liability or drive revenue by addressing target audiences in their native language. Whatever the outcome, you will need clear communication of a single message across all of the languages involved to get there.

Lately, cost considerations have become just as important as the accuracy of the translation. Consequently, writing for successful translation today involves planning your project so that you can convey your message within a reasonable budget.

## Message and scope

First, and most obviously, decide what you need to communicate, and communicate it as simply and directly as possible. Determine what is most relevant to your target audience and what you must translate to achieve your particular objectives.

Take the time to think your project through from the perspective of the recipient, and do some research if you don't know the recipient's perspective. Translating everything you publish in English may not maximize the return on your translation investment. You might not have the luxury of translating every one of your product data sheets, for example, so focusing on product line summary brochures instead may be less costly. If it is beyond your budget to translate your entire 200-page employee manual, perhaps you can focus on only those critical policies most needed to protect your firm's interests.

Some projects, such as catalog or website translations, may warrant the creation of abbreviated or revised versions for target audiences. Sections dealing with customer support or how to locate a sales representative, for instance, may need modification so that they are relevant in the geographic locale in which they will be used. Other types of projects require translation of ancillary materials that may not immediately come to mind. Technical documentation for large-scale industrial equipment may also involve

translating warning labels and software user interfaces. Again, to save money, perhaps you can omit a section such as the corresponding parts list. If your customers can't order parts in Japanese by calling your customer service line, why provide a Japanese parts list?

Understanding the intent and full scope of your project will enable you to plan your budget and work with your translator to determine the correct order in which to proceed. A phased implementation may be easiest to manage while allowing you to complete the highest priority requirements first.

## Layout

For printed materials, properly planning your layout even before you start writing copy can greatly influence the ease and cost

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of managing your project. Quite literally, it pays to understand which factors affect the cost and quality of your translation. Then you can craft your presentation to achieve the desired outcome within your allotted budget.

A few things to consider are the choice of desktop publishing application and layout. If this is going to be a printed document with color plates, you might look at whether enough room is left for text expansion to accommodate any graphics. Text will expand in some languages and may contract in others. This has implications for the font sizes and page margins you select, as well as graphics. Chinese characters that need to be reduced to a 6-point font in order to fit on a page will be illegible. Also, check the graphics accessibility. Don't plan to embed

words into layer upon layer of graphics. Your translator may not be able to access them for translation at all or may be able to do so only at great expense to you. Plan to place your text labels beneath graphics rather than inside of them. Text must be "live," that is, accessible independently of the graphics in order to be translated and reinserted in the same position.

The same concept applies to screen shots. Unless you translate your software first and provide new screen shots, the English copy locked within your graphics cannot be accessed for translation. If you must use preexisting graphics, your translator may be able to recommend solutions such as a reference table so that the reader can still understand your message.

Too often, project costs are unnecessarily high or the quality of the finished translation is compromised because translation was never considered when a document was originally created.

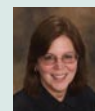
## Your copy

Simple, straightforward text is easiest to translate. Say what you mean as concisely as possible. Word count is a key factor in the cost of your translation, so, if possible, keep sentences short and limited to a single idea. If English copy already exists for your pending translations, review and revise the content. Formal copy style with correct grammar, spelling and punctuation will be most easily understood by your translator. Consider also your audience's education level and communication style and then select the appropriate tone. Instructions to a physician prescribing medication should be written differently than instructions to the patient taking the medication.

Avoid words with double meanings and references or metaphors that may not make sense in other cultures. Don't rely on buzzwords, abbreviations, industry jargon,

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colloquial expression or humor. Create standardized text whenever possible. If you can reuse blocks of copy from one document to the next, you will save time and money on your translations and ensure consistency across all of your written and online communications.

If your content is highly technical in nature or your industry-specific terms are prone to multiple meanings, supply your translator with reference material or glossaries for key terms. Links to websites or product catalogs can minimize the need for research during the translation process.

Some copy may not translate well or may translate into some languages but not others. Be particularly aware of this if you are creating ad copy or marketing materials. It is worthwhile to check with your translator early, before you have invested heavily in developing graphics or a tagline to accompany your corporate logo. Choosing the right words and the right images or colors for your presentation may make the difference between a seamless translation and one that falls completely flat with your target audience.

Acronyms should be avoided. The problem in trying to translate an acronym is that once you translate the theme word, the letters change and they no longer cross-reference to the supporting ideas you want to convey in your target languages. A native-speaking translator is a good resource for spotting things that won't play well with your target audience. Basic localization — gearing your translated document to a particular country, region or target audience — is usually part of any well-executed translation project. Extensive localization, to the point of creative strategizing, however, is a specialized skill beyond the scope of typical translation projects. If you suspect your project requires an unusual amount of attention, check with your translator.

Provide only fully proofread, final copy for translation. Drafts are fine for budgetary quotes, but works-in-progress are unsuitable for translation and will leave yours prone to errors, inconsistencies and higher costs. If you intend to update documents later with new product models or next year's catalog, the level of attention you devote to tracking changes and version control now will be well worth your effort.

### Formatting

Locate your source files for older documents. This includes all of the desktop publishing and accompanying graphics files. Are they with your graphics design firm or archived somewhere within your organization?

Your translator may not be able to replicate your formatting and graphics without them. Provide files to your translator in the same format you would like to receive back.

PDFs are fine for reference, but depending on the size of your document and the application used, having the source files available may significantly impact the time to quote your project, the cost of your project and the appearance of the final output. If you are working from hard copies or scanned documents, manual processes will have to be employed that will similarly affect your project.

Given the source files, most translation firms can replicate standard file formats, even for software code. How you present content for translation impacts cost, timeline and the ease of implementing your project. If you do any cutting and pasting at your end, have your translator provide a "post-format review." This ensures proper text flow and the overall quality of your presentation before you print or post it on the internet. Costs for this service are usually nominal and can prevent potential embarrassment.

Formatting foreign character sets on your own can be a challenge, even for an experienced graphics person, and you may not have the right tool set. Languages such as Arabic that read right to left require special software versions and the ability to reorient everything on a page. It is best not to attempt this on your own.

If you are translating software for user interfaces, handheld LCD screens or similar uses, be prepared to answer questions about your ability to handle foreign character sets, space limitations and other factors that specifically affect these types of projects. If you need to resize short translations to fit an ad or label, ask for an Adobe Illustrator EPS file that has been "outlined." This provides the best of both worlds. It is locked down like a graphic to eliminate the possibility of introducing errors during formatting, but leaves flexibility for resizing. You can format the text to meet your needs, even for a character set that you may not have installed.

Lastly, use the right application for your project. Some applications play well with the automated tools employed by translation firms while others require a lot of manual manipulation.

Microsoft Word works fine for short documents, but FrameMaker may be a better choice for large manuals. If you use charts, live embedded links or manually inserted multiple carriage returns, the level of difficulty in working with your files for translation will increase, and this will impact your cost.

### Timelines

Translation is a meticulous, skilled process similar in nature to technical writing. Though you provide the concept and the source files, your translator must take time to fully comprehend your meaning and find the best way to replicate the tone and content in his or her native tongue. Often there is research involved or requests for you to provide clarification.

Your project involves much more than merely translation. Numerous details are involved in preparing your files for translation, gaining commitment from the best qualified translators, proofreading, formatting and ensuring proper quality control. For multiple language translations, managing your project becomes even more complex. If you make a single change, it needs to be disseminated across teams of translators and proofreaders for each language.

Allow realistic timelines for your projects to be completed. A simple brochure may take several days, while a 300-page manual may take several weeks. Advise your project manager in advance if you must meet a specific deadline so that your project can be managed accordingly.

### Partnering with a vendor

Since the quality of the translations you publish reflects on you and your organization, establishing a comfortable working relationship with your vendor is essential.

Carefully crafted branding strategies can be derailed in an instant by sloppy or inaccurate work. Even a single poorly chosen word can alter your intended meaning. And just imagine your customer purchasing a piece of equipment only to find that the documentation doesn't make sense or that the table of contents doesn't match the order of the text. You will rely on your translation vendor to provide you with accurate translations that are audience appropriate and delivered, print ready, within the specified timeframe. You should also educate yourself as to their quality processes and experience level with projects similar to yours so that you can move forward with full confidence.

While there is no single industry certification for translations, there are third parties such as TÜV or the American Translators Association that provide quality testing and auditing. It is perfectly acceptable to ask for credentials. In many cases, your own in-house quality policies or regulatory requirements demand that you do. **G**