

# BECOMING AN ARABIC COURT INTERPRETER

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This document was prepared to enable persons who wish to become Arabic court interpreters to understand what the profession of court interpretation entails. It identifies the knowledge, skills and abilities that are required and outlines how Arabic court interpreter certification exams are designed, administered and graded. Finally, specific suggestions for preparing for these exams and hints to keep in mind when taking the exam are provided, including references to resources for improving one's knowledge, skills and abilities.

Candidates are strongly encouraged to study this document thoroughly and invest appropriate effort to prepare before attempting to take the exam. **Study this document carefully in order to increase your odds of passing the certification exams required of Arabic court interpreters.**

The authors wish to acknowledge the contributions made early in their work on developing this document by **Muhannad F. Haimour**, a practicing Arabic court interpreter in Dearborn, Michigan, who is also a rater of the Arabic court interpreting exam. Unfortunately other commitments prevented him from being able to participate in this project to the degree we all had hoped.

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## ***Introduction***

The court systems of the United States are experiencing an increasing need for the services of professional interpreters in many languages, including Arabic. This document has been prepared to help prospective Arabic interpreters understand what the profession of court interpreter entails and how to prepare for certification exams. In this document, you will learn the following:

- The knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that all court interpreters need;
- The special skills that Arabic court interpreters must have;
- Some ways you can develop the KSAs you will need as an Arabic court interpreter;
- How the court interpreter tests are administered and what you should keep in mind when you take the tests; and
- How the court interpreter oral performance tests are graded.

## ***What are the Knowledge, Skills and Abilities (KSAs) that ALL Court Interpreters Need?***

Most of the knowledge, skills and abilities that are essential for success in the profession of court interpreting are the same for all court interpreters, regardless of the languages in which they work. Court interpretation requires much more than knowing two languages. If you are thinking about becoming an Arabic court interpreter, consider the knowledge, skills and abilities you must have by asking yourself the following questions:

### Linguistic/communicative sophistication:

- **Have I mastered the written and spoken forms of English and Arabic at the level of a highly educated native speaker of both languages?**
- **Do I have a very sophisticated knowledge and mastery of English and Arabic at all levels?**
- **Can I understand and use formal varieties of English and Arabic as well as more informal domains such as slang, colloquialisms, profanity, etc.?**

### Legal sophistication:

- **Do I have extensive knowledge of legal systems and court procedures in my state?**
- **Can I understand and use the range of technical terminology that occurs in courts and other legal contexts (e.g., legal terminology, but also specialized domains such as drugs, weapons, etc.)?**
- **Do I know the Arabic equivalents of English legal terms and the English equivalents of Arabic legal terms?**

### Skill sophistication:

- **Can I perform all three modes of court interpretation: sight, consecutive and simultaneous?**
- **Can I perform all three modes accurately and faithfully, no matter what the circumstances might be?**

### Professional sophistication:

- **Do I know established codes of professional conduct and ethics, and best practices for court interpreters?**
- **Do I follow those codes of professional conduct and ethics, and best practices, so that I always perform my duties in a professional manner?**

Most people who answer these questions honestly must say “maybe” or even “no” to one or more of these questions. Now please ask yourself one more question:

- **What am I willing and able to do in order to obtain the KSAs of a court interpreter?**

The likelihood that you will successfully become an Arabic court interpreter depends on how accurately you make these assessments and the degree to which you are willing to invest the time, resources and effort into developing the KSAs of this profession. See Appendix A for a more detailed list of court interpreter KSAs.

## ***What Special Skills Does the Arabic Court Interpreter Need?***

The Arabic language presents a unique challenge to Arabic court interpreters. The primary feature of that challenge is that Arabic usage is “diglossic”. This means that Arabic speakers use two major different varieties of the language. They may stay in one variety, go back and forth between the two varieties, or use both varieties in a single sentence, depending on circumstances. You are familiar with this situation from your daily life.

One variety is a highly formal variety that we have come to call Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and is also known as “Classical Arabic,” “الفصحى, *al-fus-ha*, or “literary Arabic.” It is the type of Arabic used in official or formal circumstances such as schools, courts, and media. This is also the variety of Arabic used in written communications. As such it is fairly standardized throughout the Arabic-speaking world. To the degree that speakers of Arabic from various parts of the world can communicate with each other, it is often (but not always) through the use of this variety of Arabic.

The other variety is known as “colloquial Arabic,” “العامية, *al-‘aamiyya*, or “الدارجة, *al-daarija*, “dialectal Arabic,” “Arabic dialect,” “vernacular Arabic,” “conversational Arabic,” or “the slang,” and has many local variants. This variety of Arabic is spoken in everyday social situations. Linguists of Arabic recognize four major dialect groups: Arabian Peninsula Colloquial, Egyptian Colloquial, Levantine Colloquial (Mashriqi), and North African Colloquial (Maghribi). Arabic speakers from different parts of the world who attempt to

communicate verbally with each other will have many obstacles to overcome if they rely solely on one of the four primary varieties because of wide variations in pronunciation and vocabulary. These varieties of Arabic are essentially verbal and are not usually written.

Because of the diglossic nature of Arabic, Arabic court interpreters must possess the following KSAs above and beyond those of court interpreters of other languages. In order to further assess your readiness to take an Arabic court interpreter certification exam, please ask yourself the following additional questions:

- **Can I interpret effectively back and forth between English and Modern Standard Arabic (MSA)?**

MSA is as close as there is to a universal means of communicating among Arabic speakers. If a court interpreter cannot handle MSA, there will be a problem communicating with many Arabic speakers who appear in courts as parties or witnesses.

- **Can I effectively and accurately interpret between English and MSA -- rather than a colloquial dialect -- when I face written materials?**

As noted above, written Arabic will almost always be in MSA and rarely in a colloquial dialect.

- **Can I effectively and accurately interpret between English and MSA -- rather than a colloquial dialect -- when I face simultaneous interpretation from English into Arabic?**

Simultaneous interpretation in court is always from English into Arabic and is largely the interpretation of the speech of judges and attorneys and, to a lesser degree, English-speaking witnesses. The type of discourse that is ordinarily interpreted simultaneously is the formal discourse of highly educated speakers who use language in a very formal, restricted and trade-specific way unique to the legal environment of the courtroom. Accordingly, the vehicle for that interpretation into Arabic should be MSA for the most part. However, when an English speaker begins to use a more informal, colloquial or slangy style of speech, then the interpreter could use either MSA or the colloquial variety spoken by the person for whom the interpreter has been contracted.

- **Can I effectively and accurately interpret between English and a colloquial variety of Arabic in question-and-answer situations with the Arabic-speaking party or witness? Can I perform consecutive interpretation when it is the appropriate mode of interpretation?**

When parties or witnesses are answering questions during a court proceeding (e.g., when the court asks questions of an Arabic-speaking defendant during a first appearance in a criminal matter, or when an attorney is conducting an examination of an Arabic-speaking witness), the Arabic court interpreter will have to understand what that speaker of Arabic is saying, whether in MSA, a colloquial variety depending on the speaker's background, or a combination of both. In addition, it will sometimes be

appropriate, in the professional judgment of the court interpreter, to use MSA or to use the colloquial variety of Arabic used by that party or witness. Furthermore, the interpreter may use a variety of strategies that include a combination of both MSA **and** that colloquial variety.

- **Can I demonstrate my abilities as an Arabic court interpreter in MSA and one of the following Arabic dialect groups: Arabian Peninsula Colloquial, Egyptian Colloquial, Levantine Colloquial (Mashriqi), and North African Colloquial (Maghribi)?**

The New Jersey Judiciary has invested considerable effort since April 1995 to understand the special needs of Arabic speakers and the linguistic diversity of the Arabic-speaking world so it can develop appropriate approaches for providing equal access to Arabic speakers who have limited English proficiency. These efforts are based on the expert advice of scholarly linguists and practicing interpreters. The fact that *Ethnologue*, the preeminent authority on the world’s languages, identifies some 40 major varieties of Arabic illustrates the nature of the problem. It is simply not possible to develop court interpreter certification exams in 40 varieties of Arabic or to attempt to match every person needing Arabic interpreting services with an Arabic interpreter from the exact same dialect group.

In order to manage certification of Arabic interpreters as well as the delivery of appropriate Arabic court interpreting services, the following scheme for classifying dialect groups has been adopted:

DIALECT GROUP	COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN
Arabian Peninsula Colloquial	Bahrain Iraq Kuwait Oman Qatar Saudi Arabia United Arab Emirates Yemen
Egyptian Colloquial	Egypt Northern Sudan
Levantine Colloquial (Mashriqi)	Israel Jordan Lebanon Palestine (Palestinians) Syria
North African Colloquial (Maghribi)	Algeria Libya Mauritania Morocco Tunisia

- **Can I strike the right balance between MSA and a colloquial variety of Arabic that is faithful to the source language, the nature of the discourse being interpreted, and the variety of Arabic which can carry the interpretation most faithfully?**

There is a presumption that in certain circumstances MSA or the appropriate colloquial variety will be used for sustained periods of time. It is equally true that a speaker may move back and forth between MSA and a colloquial variety for extended periods of time. Arabic interpreters must be competent in both MSA and one or more dialects, and know when and how to move back and forth between the two appropriately and accurately.

### ***What Are Some Recommended Ways to Develop the Knowledge, Skills and Abilities to Become an Arabic Court Interpreter?***

#### Develop Broad Knowledge of Both Languages

The first and perhaps most important step of all is to ensure that you have an extensive knowledge of English and Arabic. It is simply not possible to develop interpreting skills without having a sophisticated mastery of both languages. Do the following in Arabic and English:

- **Read a lot and read a wide range of materials, especially in each of the following areas:**
  - literature
  - biography
  - the hard sciences (biology, chemistry, geology, etc.)
  - the social sciences (history, sociology, anthropology, etc.)
  - religion and philosophy (Muslim, Christian, secular, etc.)
  - scholarly journals, books, and other academic sources
  - popular periodicals such as magazines and newspapers, and Internet sources
- **Expose yourself to a wide range of regional and stylistic varieties of Arabic and English through the media.**
- **Make a conscious effort as you read and listen to learn new vocabulary and update your vocabulary in Arabic and English. Even the most experienced interpreters keep vocabulary lists and glossaries.**
- **Listen to all of the following:**
  - the news
  - talk shows and discussions that deal with a variety of topics
  - call-in programs (useful for regional variation in Arabic and English)
  - dramas and serials (useful for regional variation in Arabic)

- **Whenever possible, take advanced college or university courses in Arabic and English. Possible areas of study are:**
  - literature
  - advanced grammar and linguistics of Arabic or English
- **Use Arabic and English regularly in a variety of informal and formal situations, personal as well as professional.**

A list of specific resources that may be useful is provided in Appendix B.

### Develop Knowledge of Legal Terminology and Court Procedure

You must learn the terminology you will be hearing from judges, attorneys, and the parties. You also need to understand court procedure. To a lesser degree, you need to understand the legal cultures of the Arabic-speaking world so you know how to select and use terms appropriately when interpreting into Arabic, as well as understand and interpret into English the legal concepts used by Arabic speakers in our courts.

- **Learn the most common legal terms and types of court procedures in English.**
  - Download *The English Legal Glossary* issued by the Consortium ([http://www.ncsconline.org/D\\_Research/CIResources.html](http://www.ncsconline.org/D_Research/CIResources.html); click on “Legal Glossary-English”) and learn the commonly used terms listed
  - Whenever possible, take courses in law or court procedure at a college or university. You do not have to go to law school. There are many courses in paralegal studies, criminal justice, administration of justice, and related majors and minors that will help you learn what you need.
  - Observe a wide variety of court proceedings and related events in courthouses such as mediation and hearings presided over by arbitrators and hearing officers.
  - Watch “Court TV,” taking notes on terminology and procedure.
  - Buy or borrow from a friend, colleague, or library as many as possible of the bilingual, English-Arabic references listed in Appendix B.
  - Begin compiling your own list of key terms and making sure you learn what they mean.
- **Learn how each of those terms should be rendered in Arabic**
  - Buy or borrow from a friend, colleague or library as many as possible of the Arabic-language references listed in Appendix B.
  - Develop equivalents (translations) for each of the terms in *The English Legal Glossary*. If possible, do this collaboratively as a team effort with peers.
  - Use translation (Arabic to English and English to Arabic) of legal documents for practice. If possible, ask someone with legal and/or interpreting experience to review your translations and mentor you on appropriate usage.

## Develop Interpreting Skills in the Three Modes of Interpretation

Once you have a solid base in the two languages, then you can start developing the basic skills in sight, consecutive, and simultaneous interpretation. Here are some of the ways you can do this:

- **Take courses in translation.**

Interpretation, which involves oral or signed communication, and translation, which involves only written documents, are related but separate professions. Still, studying translation provides an excellent foundation for developing skills in interpretation. Some experts even claim that training in translation should precede taking courses in interpretation. Theories and techniques for finding equivalents and understanding the challenges of producing equivalency across languages provide an excellent foundation for interpreters. Following are the courses known to the authors:

- Marygrove College in Detroit, Michigan. For details, call 313-927-1448 or go to <http://www.marygrove.edu/academics/Arabic/index.asp>.
- New York University in New York City. For details go to [www.http://scps.nyu.edu/areas-of-study/foreign-languages/professional-certificates/translation.html](http://www.http://scps.nyu.edu/areas-of-study/foreign-languages/professional-certificates/translation.html), or call 212-998-7200; 888-998-7204.

- **Take a language-specific course in Arabic-English, English-Arabic interpretation.**

Following are the courses known to the authors:

- Interpreting School for Prospective Arabic Court Certified Interpreters, LA Institute of Translation and Interpretation, Los Angeles, California. <http://Chinese-school.netfirms.com/Arabic-translation-interpretation-school.html>.
- “Learn How to Become a Certified Interpreter in the Arabic Language: A Two-Day Skill-Building Workshop” offered by the Arab American Language Institute in Dearborn, Michigan (313-457-1700).

- **Buy or borrow Arabic-English interpretation materials and practice all of the exercises provided.**

One of the best ways to develop skills is to practice with a small group of prospective Arabic interpreters or a mentor so you can receive honest, objective feedback. The only available material known to the authors at this time is the following:

- Arabic: Two-Tone Tapes, English-Arabic Tape (available from Acebo, Inc., <http://www.acebo.com>). This stereo tape contains source material for the interpreter to practice as well a model interpretation of that same material by

an expert interpreter. The source material is on the left track of the tape, and the interpretation is on the right track. The source material consists primarily of jury instructions.

- **Buy or borrow language-neutral practice materials and practice all of their exercises.**

This also is most useful when done with peers or mentors. Following are some available materials:

- *The Interpreter's Edge*, Generic Edition, (available from Acebo, Inc., <http://www.acebo.com>). This consists of a paperback book and a set of five one-hour audio cassettes to develop interpreting skills from English into any other language. The products provide English-language source materials designed to provide interpreters and interpreting students with training in all the requisite techniques of court interpreting.
- Consortium for State Court Interpreter Certification, *Practice Examination Kit—All Languages*. Available from [http://www.ncsconline.org/d\\_research/CourtInterp/CICourtConsort.html](http://www.ncsconline.org/d_research/CourtInterp/CICourtConsort.html)
- Administrative Office of the [New Jersey] Courts, *Simultaneous Interpreting Practice Kit*. This may be obtained through Interlibrary Loan through any participating library. Look for the document under either of two titles: “Manual for the Simultaneous Interpreting Practice Tape” or “AOC Simultaneous Practice Tape.”
- The National Court Reporters Association has issued numerous tapes at differing speeds to help court reporters build transcription skills. Some are also helpful tools for simultaneous interpreting practice into any language. We recommend the following for beginners: Special Student Series A, 3 tapes; Speed Development Series, SD 120 Jury Charge and SD 120 Testimony. For the more advanced student, we recommend Special Student Series B. Get a current catalog directly from the association. NCRA Store, 8224 Old Courthouse Road, Vienna, VA 22182-3808; <http://www.ncraonline.org>; 800-272-6272; FAX 703-556-6291.
- Practice simultaneous interpretation while listening to English broadcasts on radio and television (e.g., National Public Radio, news, and documentaries).

## **How Are the Arabic Court Interpreting Performance Tests Administered? What Should Candidates Keep in Mind When Taking the Test?**

There are three components to the test, one for each of the modes of interpretation: sight, consecutive and simultaneous. Some jurisdictions give all three components at the same time. Others give sight and simultaneous together first, and the consecutive is given separately only to candidates who qualify on the sight and simultaneous. In spite

of these differences, the actual administration of each component is the same, wherever you take the exam. The exams are administered by a trained proctor who is ordinarily neither an interpreter nor a speaker of Arabic.

### Sight

The sight component of the exam has two parts. There are two documents, one written in English and the other in Arabic. Each one is less than one page long, double-spaced, and contains 200-225 words.

Each document is a type of document that a court interpreter could encounter in her/his work. The English document, for example, may be from a police report, a presentence report, or any other report written for a judge. The MSA document could be a formal letter written to a judge (such as a character reference letter or victim impact statement submitted for consideration at sentencing) or legal documents originating from an Arabic-speaking country.

The English-to-MSA part is administered first. Once the English-to-MSA exam is finished, the candidate may take a brief break. Then the proctor will proceed to administer the MSA-to-English part.

Both parts are timed. The candidate has six minutes to interpret each document.<sup>1</sup> The proctor uses a stopwatch to monitor the time. If you have not finished by the end of the time allotted, the proctor will stop you.

You should interpret the majority of the text into MSA. Where the English text is informal or colloquial, interpret into the colloquial variety of Arabic with which you are most familiar, i.e., the type of Arabic spoken by ordinary people in their everyday lives.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>New Jersey's administration of sight exams is slightly different from the Consortium model in that New Jersey gives candidates two minutes to read the document after which the candidate must begin to interpret, and then allows four minutes for the interpretation. Candidates in New Jersey will hear the following instructions: "We will now begin the exam with the two sight interpretations. The first document is in English and you will interpret it into Modern Standard Arabic. The second one is in Modern Standard Arabic and you will interpret that one into English. In each case, we recommend that you read through and study the entire document before beginning your interpretation. You will have up to two minutes for that review. I will tell you when one-half of your review time has passed to help you budget your allotted time. While you do have up to two minutes to familiarize yourself with each document, you may begin interpreting at any time. If you have not begun to interpret by the end of two minutes, however, I will tell you to begin. You will then have up to four minutes in which to complete your interpretation of each document. Please do not fold or write on either document, but you may take notes on the pad if you wish. Do you have any questions?"

<sup>2</sup>Dr. Bergman provides the following examples: "Formal English differs from informal English in the same ways the MSA differs from the varieties. That is, the varieties differ in diction, grammar, and vocabulary. The diction of formal English is slower and more precise than that of informal English. Word boundaries are clearer, so that words are not slurred together. The grammar of formal English differs from that of informal English. The most noticeable difference is in contractions (I'd, shouldn't, etc.). They are common in informal English, where the uncontracted forms (I would, should not) are more common in formal English. The other most noticeable difference is in vocabulary. Formal English has 'person' or 'individual' where informal English has 'guy,' for example." July 5, 2005 e-mail to Robert Joe Lee.

Here are the actual instructions the proctor will read to you when you take the English-to-MSA portion of the sight exam<sup>3</sup>:

Here's the first document. When you've completed your review period, interpret everything you see on the page into Modern Standard Arabic. "Modern Standard Arabic" is the Arabic you use for formal reading and writing, as well as for formal situations like a courtroom trial, a news broadcast, or a lecture. This is also known as "Classical Arabic" or "al-fus'ha." However, when the style of English is informal or colloquial, you may interpret into any dialect of Arabic using the kind of Arabic spoken by ordinary people in their everyday lives instead of Modern Standard Arabic.

Here are the actual instructions the proctor will read to you when you take the MSA-to-English portion of the sight exam:

This time you will go the other way, from Modern Standard Arabic into English. Interpret everything you see on the page into English..<sup>4</sup>

*Suggestions to Remember When Taking the Sight Part*

- Read through each document BEFORE beginning your interpretation.
- Make notes of solutions while reading and refer to them when interpreting.
- Interpret everything you see on the page; do not leave out anything.
- Deliver the interpretation in a smooth, even pace. A choppy delivery is not professional.
- Do not fill pauses in your interpretation with "um" or "ah". When you need a moment to think, silence is much more professional.
- Do not speed through your rendition. The time allotted is ample for a competent interpreter. There is no reward for speed. At the same time, avoid long pauses.
- If you need reading glasses, bring them with you to the exam and put them on before you start the sight exam.
- If you cannot find the right word or phrase in MSA, it is acceptable to use an appropriate word or phrase in an Arabic dialect and such renderings will not be counted wrong.
- Do not write on or fold the written test document.

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<sup>3</sup>Candidates in New Jersey will hear both the instructions indicated in footnote 1 as well as the instructions indicated here.

<sup>4</sup>Candidates in New Jersey will hear the following instruction from the proctor instead: "This time you will go the other way, from Modern Standard Arabic into English. Again, I'll advise you when half of your review time has passed and tell you to start to interpret after two minutes, if you haven't already begun. Here's the second document. When you've completed your review period, interpret everything you see on the page into English."

## Simultaneous

Let's start two important points. First candidates, regardless of language, find that simultaneous interpretation is the most difficult mode of interpretation. The following table taken from the court interpreter testing databases maintained by the New Jersey Judiciary, which has been testing court interpreters since 1987, illustrates this<sup>5</sup>:

LANGUAGE <sup>6</sup>	AVERAGE SCORE AND % OF CANDIDATES SCORING 70 OR HIGHER ON EACH TEST PART					
	Sight		Consecutive		Simultaneous	
	Average Score	% at 70%+	Average Score	% at 70%+	Average Score	% at 70%+
Arabic, Modern Standard	58	23	Not applicable		33	2
French	74	60	67	31	35	5
Haitian Creole	68	50	61	28	43	7
Italian	85	95	75	71	51	12
Korean	62	28	70	54	41	6
Mandarin	71	71	65	44	41	9
Polish	80	90	73	77	38	29
Portuguese	82	84	69	55	46	18
Russian	76	76	72	59	47	10
Spanish	60	28	58	28	41	11
Vietnamese	55	11	59	33	30	4

***The most obvious implication for candidates is that you really need to practice your simultaneous interpreting skills to prepare for this portion of the exam. Most people can perform sight and consecutive interpretation with some practice. For most candidates, learning simultaneous interpreting takes much more time and effort than mastering the other modes of interpretation.***

Second, simultaneous interpretation is indeed possible between from English into MSA. Interpreters of many languages, including some Arabic-English interpreters, believe that the differences in syntax and lexicon make simultaneous interpretation into MSA impossible. The following statistics, again from New Jersey and for the same time period, show that it is indeed possible to perform simultaneous interpretation from English into very dissimilar languages, although it is also true that there is some evidence that it is easier to perform simultaneous interpretation into some languages than others.

<sup>5</sup>This is also born out in other states as well as the Federal court interpreter certification programs. See Wanda Romberger, *Skills Training for Foreign-Language Court Interpreters: Does It Increase the Number of Qualified Interpreters?* at 23.

<sup>6</sup>New Jersey tests in other languages besides these, but statistics for languages for which there have been less than 25 examinees are not reported here.

***The most obvious implication for candidates is that simultaneous interpretation is indeed possible from English into MSA. It requires a considerable amount of sophistication in knowledge of the two languages as well as skill in the performance of this mode of interpretation. Knowledge and skill at this level can ordinarily be attained only through extensive training and practice. Do not allow yourself to believe in or be held back by the suspicion or belief that simultaneous interpretation from English into MSA is impossible -- it is possible.***

LANGUAGE	HIGHEST SCORE EVER REACHED ON THE SIMULTANEOUS
Arabic, Modern Standard	78
French	77
Haitian Creole	86
Italian	87
Korean	81
Mandarin	89
Polish	92
Portuguese	90
Russian	91
Spanish	96
Vietnamese	79

The material in the simultaneous exam is an average, general type of legal proceeding a court interpreter typically encounters. It does not include highly technical material, such as testimony by expert witnesses. It could consist of an opening or closing argument in a civil or criminal matter; witness testimony, with both questions and answers (where the witness is a speaker of English), or both.

The exam administered via a prerecorded CD.<sup>7</sup> The proctor will give you a set of headphones that are plugged into the CD player. After the proctor has read all the instructions, including telling you what the first words or sentence will be when the test begins, and you indicate that you are ready to begin, the proctor starts the CD player.

The first thing you will hear on that recording is an introduction. It last about one minute and is not a part of the test. That introduction reminds you of most of the instructions you have already heard from the proctor, including the first words or sentence of the test. It also gives you a chance to adjust the volume. You can also make sure there are no problems with the headphones before the test begins.

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<sup>7</sup>The simultaneous exam was originally administered from a prerecorded, standard cassette tape. It is possible that some candidates will take the test from a tape recording instead of a recording on a CD.

After a five-second pause, you will hear one or more persons speaking in English for approximately seven minutes. There are no pauses or breaks; English speakers continue without hesitation. While the English material continues, you must interpret out loud into MSA everything you hear to the best of your ability.

The simultaneous recording cannot be stopped while you are taking the exam. You have to keep up with the English material. If you stop interpreting and ask to stop, the proctor will confirm that you want to end the exam. If you do stop, the test will end at that point and everything that you have not attempted to interpret for the rest of the exam will be counted wrong.

The simultaneous component has between 800 and 850 words and is recorded at a constant speed of 120 words per minute (WPM). This is not fast, although it may seem fast when you are taking the exam given the role nerves and anxiety can play. In fact, it is fairly slow when compared to the average speed with which English is spoken either in ordinary discourse or in the courtroom.

Most of the English material you will hear is formal English, which is characteristic of what you would hear from judges and attorneys in an American courtroom. When the material is that kind of English, you will interpret simultaneously into MSA.

Some of the English may be in an informal or colloquial style. When you hear such informal or colloquial English, interpret simultaneously into the colloquial variety of Arabic with which you are most familiar, i.e., the type of Arabic spoken by ordinary people in their everyday lives.

Here are the actual instructions the proctor will read to you when you take the simultaneous part of the exam:

Interpret everything you hear into what we call Modern Standard Arabic and is also known as “Classical Arabic” or “al-fus’ha,” as we described it in the sight portion of the test. However, when the style of English is informal or colloquial, interpret into any dialect of Arabic using the kind of Arabic spoken by ordinary people in their everyday lives instead of Modern Standard Arabic.

*Suggestions to Remember When Taking the Simultaneous Part*

- Keep up with the source material as best you can. Maintain the pace.
- Don’t let one word throw you off. If you don’t know it or don’t know how to interpret it, leave it out and keep going.
- If you get lost or fall behind, take a deep breath and resume interpreting as soon as you can. Missing a few words here and there will not cause you to fail the entire exam.
- If notes are useful and appropriate, take notes to help you interpret.
- If you cannot find the right word or phrase in MSA, it is acceptable to use an appropriate word or phrase in colloquial Arabic.

## Consecutive

The consecutive component of the exam simulates taking evidence from one or more witnesses who are testifying in one of the colloquial varieties of Arabic. As with the simultaneous, the material in the simultaneous exam is a typical court proceeding involving taking testimony from a witness that court interpreters typically encounter. It does not include highly technical material such as testimony by expert witnesses. It could be from either a civil or a criminal case.

The consecutive component has also been recorded on a CD. When the CD is produced, native speakers of English play the role of the judge or attorney who is asking the questions. Likewise, native speakers of the pertinent colloquial variety of Arabic play the role of the witness or defendant who is testifying. The test material has been recorded at an even, consistent pace and is neither particularly slow nor particularly fast.

It has 850-950 words total. Over half of the material is in colloquial Arabic; under half is in English.

The utterances differ in length, from very short to relatively long--they may be as short as one word and as long as 50 words long. The scoring units (see below for how the test is graded) are distributed throughout the consecutive exam according to the length of utterances. The reason for this is to ensure that candidates demonstrate their ability to handle varying lengths of utterances. Here is the distribution of scoring units per length of utterance that the tests generally reflect:

1-10 words	10% in each source language
11-20 words	25% in each source language
21-30 words	30% in each source language
31-40 words	25% in each source language
41-50 words	10% in each source language

The proctor first reads instructions about how the consecutive will be administered. Once the instructions have been read, the proctor will confirm that you are ready and begin the consecutive exam. Here is the basic structure of how this works:

1. The proctor will play the first track on the CD. It is a question or statement in English.
2. The proctor pauses the CD player.
3. You interpret that utterance into the variety of colloquial Arabic in which the exam has been prepared (see below for more specific guidance).
4. The proctor plays the next track, which is usually the witness answering the question in the appropriate variety of Colloquial Arabic.
5. The proctor pauses the CD player.
6. You interpret that utterance into English.

While that is the sequence throughout most of the exam, there may be some instances when you will hear two consecutive utterances in English or two consecutive utterances by the witness or party.

Finally, keep in mind that **you will be able to ask for two utterances to be repeated**. When you are taking the exam, remember that you may ask for two repeats. You will be reminded about this right before the proctor plays the first utterance on the CD player.

### *Specific Guidance for the Egyptian Colloquial Exam*

The Arabic-speaking witness you will hear is from Egypt and will be speaking Egyptian Colloquial Arabic. By that we mean the Arabic variety spoken in Egypt and parts of Sudan.

Most of the questions are asked in a relatively informal register of English. You should interpret those questions into Egyptian Colloquial Arabic.

Some of the questions are spoken in a more formal register of English. You may interpret those into either MSA or Egyptian Colloquial Arabic. The choice of Arabic is up to you; any accurate and faithful interpretation in **either** will be accepted and you will not be penalized for your choice.

When interpreting the witness's answers into English, interpret testimony given in MSA into formal English. When the witness speaks in an informal, colloquial, or slangy style of Egyptian Colloquial Arabic, use an informal style of English or slang.

Here are the actual instructions the proctor will read to you when you take the consecutive part of the exam:

Interpret questions asked in English into Arabic and interpret the witness's Arabic responses into English after each speaker finishes speaking. The Arabic-speaking witness you are about to hear is from Egypt and speaks Egyptian Colloquial Arabic. Egyptian Colloquial Arabic is the Arabic dialect spoken in Egypt and northern Sudan.

Most of the questions are asked in a relatively informal register of English. Interpret those questions into Egyptian Colloquial Arabic. Some of the questions are spoken in a more formal register of English. You may interpret those into either Modern Standard Arabic or Egyptian Colloquial Arabic. The choice of Arabic is up to you.

When interpreting the witness's answers into English, interpret testimony given in "Modern Standard Arabic" (also called "Classical Arabic" or *al-fus-ha*) into formal English. When the witness speaks in an informal, colloquial, or slangy style of Arabic, use an informal style of English or slang.

### *Specific Guidance for the Levantine Colloquial Exam*

The Arabic-speaking witness you will hear is from Lebanon and will be speaking Levantine Colloquial Arabic. This is the Arabic variety spoken in the "Mashriq," which is spoken in Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria, as well as by Arabs in Israel.

Most of the questions are asked in a relatively informal register of English. You should interpret those questions into Levantine Colloquial/Mashriqi Arabic.

Some of the questions are phrased in a more formal style of English. You may interpret those into either MSA or Levantine Colloquial/Mashriqi Arabic. The choice of Arabic is up to you; in this part of the exam, you will not be penalized for your choice.

When interpreting the witness's answers into English, interpret testimony given in MSA into formal English. When the witness speaks in an informal, colloquial, or slangy style of Levantine Colloquial Arabic, use an informal style of English or slang.

Here are the actual instructions the proctor will read to you when you take the consecutive part of the exam:

Interpret questions asked in English into Arabic and interpret the witness's Arabic responses into English after each speaker finishes speaking. The Arabic-speaking witness you are about to hear is from Lebanon and speaks Levantine Colloquial Arabic. That is the Arabic dialect spoken in the "Mashriq," spoken in Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria, as well as by Arabs in Israel.

Most of the questions are asked in a relatively informal register of English. Interpret those questions into Levantine Colloquial Arabic or Mashriqi Arabic. Some of the questions are phrased in a more formal style of English. You may interpret those into either Modern Standard Arabic or Levantine Colloquial or Mashriqi Arabic. The choice of Arabic is up to you.

When interpreting the witness's answers into English, interpret testimony given in "Modern Standard Arabic" (also called "Classical Arabic" or *al-fus-ha*) into formal English. When the witness speaks in an informal, colloquial, or slangy style of Arabic, use an informal style of English or slang.

*Suggestions to Remember When Taking the Consecutive Part*

- Read and study this section completely. Make sure that you fully understand when to use formal English or Arabic (MSA) and when to use informal English or Arabic (colloquial Arabic or slang).
- Develop a note-taking system before you take the exam. Use your system to take notes during the exam to supplement your short-term memory. Note-taking is an essential skill for performing the consecutive mode professionally and competently.
- Use your repeats, but use them wisely. If you use them early in the exam on short utterances, they won't be available to you if you struggle with longer utterances.

## Special Note re Interpreting English Legal Terms into Arabic

When interpreting legal terminology from English, you will ordinarily be using equivalents in MSA. You need to exercise caution, however, to make sure that the MSA word or phrase really means the same thing as the English source term. The legal systems are different in many key ways. Sometimes there is no real equivalent in MSA. When there is no equivalent term or phrase in MSA, you may use a simple descriptive phrase instead that conveys the basic meaning (e.g., “jury” could be “the 12 people who decide the case”). However, it is recommended that you try to find equivalent terminology in Arabic for common legal terms used in American courts.

### **How Are the Arabic Court Interpreting Performance Tests Graded?**

#### What Is Graded?

All Consortium exams, regardless of language or component of the exam, are structured and graded the same way. A very complex process that adheres to the Consortium’s *Oral Examination Construction Manual* ensures that all exams are constructed the same way and are valid, reliable, and of similar levels of difficulty.

The consecutive and simultaneous exams are based on actual courtroom transcripts. When possible, the base texts for the sight materials are authentic documents from each source language used in court cases.

Teams of trained experts “write” the tests, which involves editing the materials selected according to the specifications set forth in the test construction policy document mentioned above. Within the text, specific words and phrases are selected as *scoring units*. These are linguistic phenomena whose interpretation will be graded. Scoring units are distributed throughout the test material and are not bunched together. Candidates taking the test never know what specific words or phrases have been selected as scoring units. A list of the categories of scoring units is provided in Appendix C.

To illustrate the concept of scoring units, take the following simple sentence: “I saw a tall, red-headed man sitting in the driver’s seat of the Toyota Echo.” In theory, any of the words and phrases in that text could be a scoring unit, but here are some examples (scoring units are designated in italics and bold):

1. ***I saw*** could be a measure of Grammar/Verbs in at least two ways:
  - a. Subject/verb agreement
  - b. Use of past tense (instead of any other tense)
2. ***tall, red-headed*** could be a measure of:
  - a. General Vocabulary (is the lexical content preserved?)
  - b. Markers/Emphases (are the descriptors which provide specific information about the man accurately interpreted?)
  - c. Grammar/Verbs to determine, for some languages, whether the adjectives agree with the noun being modified in number and/or gender.

- d. **tall** or **red-headed** could be selected as a scoring unit likely to be left out as they constitute a string of modifiers since interpreters sometimes leave one or the other one out (this is referred to as Embeddings/Position)
3. **sitting in** could be a measure again of Grammar/Verbs, or it could be, depending on the language being interpreted into, an awkward phrasing that requires some other form in the target language for which one would want to measure Language Interference.
4. **driver's seat** could be General Vocabulary
5. **Toyota Echo** could be a proper name to be tested under the category of Names/Numbers to ensure that it is handled properly (note: proper names are not interpreted into the other language).

When the persons who grade the tests receive the recording of an exam, they listen to the candidate with a copy of the test text in front of them on which all the scoring units have been clearly indicated. Each scoring unit is assessed as being correct or incorrect. A scoring unit can be incorrect for many different reasons, but the most common causes of marking a scoring unit wrong are that they are (1) left out in part or altogether or (2) incorrectly interpreted (e.g., \$2,500 is interpreted as \$250).

Scores are calculated by dividing the number of scoring units correctly interpreted by the number of scoring units in that portion of the exam. For example, if a candidate has accurately interpreted 65 of the 75 scoring units in the simultaneous, the score is calculated as follows:  $65 \div 75 = .867$ , or a score of 87%.

The persons who grade the exams are selected because of their linguistic expertise, professional experience, and ability to follow the Consortium's rating standards. Before they grade any exams, they undergo training.

For further details about how raters are selected, trained and perform their duties, see the Consortium's *Oral Examination Construction Manual* as well as the Consortium's manual for test raters (which establishes policies for recruitment, training, and supervision of the experts who grade the exams) and the manual for program managers (which establishes the policies for how tests are actually administered by members of the Consortium).

### How the Raters Grade the Exams

When rating exams, the raters listen to the sound recording of the exam and mark the scoring units as correct or incorrect. They compare their scoring with each other and must agree any time a scoring unit is deemed to be incorrect. If the raters disagree on whether a particular scoring unit is incorrect and cannot resolve the disagreement through research or consultation with other raters, the benefit of the doubt goes to the examinee and the scoring unit is marked correct.

Please note that raters do not mark scoring units as incorrect when an examinee uses an inappropriate variety of Arabic. For example, the source text may say "he wishes to". The examinee may interpret "he wishes to" into MSA as *yuriidu 'an* or into Egyptian Colloquial Arabic as *'aawiz* or *'aayiz*. Both the MSA and the Egyptian Colloquial Arabic

interpretation are marked correct. If you consistently interpret formal English into a colloquial variety of Arabic instead of into Modern Standard Arabic, you should be aware, as the raters will be, that your language skills and professionalism need improvement.

**The authors hope that you find this document helpful in guiding you to success in the field of court interpretation. We also welcome any feedback on this document, suggestions on how to improve it, or references to other resources that may help future candidates.**

**We extend to every candidate all encouragement and our best wishes for success. Good luck!**

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## APPENDIX A KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND ABILITIES (KSAS) FOR THE PROFESSION OF COURT INTERPRETATION

Another way to consider the KSAs of court interpreters is the comprehensive itemization issued in 2007 by a research report commissioned by the Judicial Council of California.<sup>8</sup> The KSAs they determined to be “essential for the performance of court interpretation” appear below.<sup>9</sup> Again, please ask yourself two questions about **each** KSA: (1) Do I currently have this KSA? (2) If not, what am I willing and able to do to obtain each of these KSAs?

### **Linguistic Skills**

- Native-like proficiency in all working languages;
- Ability to think and react communicatively in all working languages;
- Knowledge and use of a broad range of vocabulary, including legal terminology, subject-specific terminology, and slang; and
- Knowledge and use of cultural nuances, regional variations, idiomatic expressions, and colloquialisms in all working languages.

### **Speaking Skills**

- Ability to speak with proper pronunciation, diction, and intonation in all working languages;
- Ability to speak with a neutralized accent in all working languages; and
- Ability to project and/or speak softly.

### **Listening Comprehension Skills**

- Ability to listen to and comprehend different rates of speech in all working languages;
- Ability to listen to and comprehend various regional accents and/or dialect differences in all working languages; and
- Ability to ignore auditory distractions and focus on source speaker.

### **Reading Comprehension Skills**

- Ability to read and comprehend overall meaning and specific details of written text in all working languages.
- Ability to read and recognize various written contexts, including formal and informal text, subject-specific vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and colloquialisms; and
- Ability to read quickly and with little preparation.

### **Interpreting Skills**

- Ability to concentrate and focus;
- Ability to process linguistic information quickly;
- Ability to make quick linguistic decisions regarding word choice or terminology selection;
- Ability to apply short-term memory skills in retaining small units of information;
- Ability to think analytically;
- Ability to utilize predictive thinking skills to anticipate incoming

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<sup>8</sup> *Study of California's Court Interpreter Certification and Registration Testing*, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

- messages;
- Ability to convey meaning;
- Ability to provide transference from one language to another;
- Ability to preserve accuracy;
- Ability to select appropriate equivalents for vocabulary or phrases;
- Ability to accommodate for lack of equivalents in vocabulary or phrases;
- Ability to conserve intent, tone, style, and utterances of all messages;
- Ability to reflect register; and
- Ability to self-monitor and self-correct.

### **Behavioral Skills**

- Ability to practice and follow ethical standards;
- Ability to conduct business in a professional manner;
- Knowledge and awareness of cultural aspects that affect language;
- Ability to work in various settings, situations, or conditions;
- Ability to project self-confidence and self-awareness when interpreting; and
- Knowledge and continued learning of social, technological, and legal changes that affect language.

In his comments on that report to the Judicial Council of California, Robert Joe Lee<sup>10</sup> identified several additional KSAs that you should also consider as vital to the day-to-day work of an Arabic court interpreter:

- Ability to exercise situational control appropriately (e.g., knowing how to handle impediments to performing court interpreting duties and having the fortitude to do so);
- Ability to switch back and forth among the various modes of interpretation appropriately;
- Ability to use note-taking techniques effectively to supplement short-term memory;
- Ability to work effectively and productively on a team of interpreters (teams of two or more interpreters are important if not essential in proceedings that last two hours or longer);
- Ability to prepare for assignments, including knowing when and how to request appropriate information;
- Ability to use equipment appropriately, especially simultaneous and telephone interpreting devices; and
- Ability to use professional judgment flowing from professional codes of conduct and conform one's practice to the interpreter's role and functions.

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<sup>10</sup> "Comments on the Study of California's Court Interpreter Certification and Registration Testing," December 14, 2007.

## APPENDIX B: DICTIONARIES AND OTHER SOURCES FOR TERMINOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

### General Bibliography of Dictionaries

*Bibliography of Arabic Dictionaries*, compiled by John. E. Hinton. Available at <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/data/indiv/Mideast/cuvlm/AraBib>

### Comprehensive Monolingual Arabic Dictionary

*Al-Mu'jam Al-Wasiit (Arabic-Arabic Lexicon)*. Cairo: Majma' al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah, 1980.

Also useful:

*The Hans-Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*.

Editor: J.M. Cowan.

Publisher: Spoken Language Services, Inc., Ithaca, NY

### Comprehensive General Bilingual Dictionary

*Al-Mawrid (English-Arabic/ Arabic-English dictionary)*

ASIN: 1894412974

Publisher: Dar El Ilm Lilmalayin.

Date: March 1998 (or most recent edition)

*Al-Mawrid 2002: A Modern English-Arabic Dictionary*

ISBN: 9953900426

Publisher: Librairie Du Moyen-Orient

Pub. Date: 2001 (or most recent edition)

### Monolingual Legal Dictionaries in Arabic

General legal:

*Mawsuu'at al-qadaa' wa-al-fiqh lil-duwal al-'Arabiyya*. 3 vols. Cairo: al-Daar al-'Arabiyya lil-Mawsuu'at al-Qaanuuniyya, 1975-1976.

Criminal law:

Abuu Zayd, Ma'muud. *al-Mu'jam fii 'ilm al-ijraam wa-al-ijtimatee' al-qaanuunii wa-al-'iqaab*. Cairo: Daar Ghariib, 2003.

Shalaalaa, Naziih Na'iim. *al-Qaamuus al-jazaa'ii al-tahlilii = Dictionnaire pénale analytique*. Beirut: Manshuuraat al-Halabii al-huquuqiyya, 2004.

## Information in Arabic about Legal Systems

1. United Nations Development Programme, <http://www.undp-pogar.org>
2. Reference books for Arabic available at [www.aramedia.com](http://www.aramedia.com)
3. Websites of interest:
  - a. [www.arab.de/arab/Government\\_Politics/Law\\_Issues/](http://www.arab.de/arab/Government_Politics/Law_Issues/)
  - b. [www.arablaw.org/English.htm](http://www.arablaw.org/English.htm)
  - c. [www.findlaw.com/12international/countries/index.html](http://www.findlaw.com/12international/countries/index.html)
  - d. [www.findlaw.com/12international/regions/mideast.html](http://www.findlaw.com/12international/regions/mideast.html)
  - e. [www.law.depaul.edu/centers\\_Institutes/ihrli/publications/](http://www.law.depaul.edu/centers_Institutes/ihrli/publications/)
  - f. [www.law-book.net/](http://www.law-book.net/)
  - g. [www.nyulawglobal.org/globalex/Egypt.htm](http://www.nyulawglobal.org/globalex/Egypt.htm)
4. Do your own Google search in English or Arabic for websites that publish rules of procedure from Arabic-speaking countries
5. Locate websites of Ministries of Justice and other government entities related to law and courts in Arabic-speaking countries

## Bilingual Dictionary of Legal Terms

*Arabic-English Faruqi's Law Dictionary, 3rd ed.*

ISBN: 0884310728

Publisher: I B D Ltd

Pub. Date: December 1986

(This dictionary is also available in English-Arabic)

*Dictionnaire des Termes Juridiques, Français-Anglais-Arabe.*

Author: Dr. A. Zaki Badaoui

Publisher: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Masri, Cairo, Egypt and Dar Al-Kitab Al-Lubnani, Beirut, Lebanon

*English-Arabic Dictionary for Legal Terms Used in US Courts*

Author: Walid Farhoud

Publisher: Middle East International Services, West University Center, 4500 Ninth Avenue NE, Suite 300, Seattle, WA 98105; 425-672-0439; <http://www.arabicspecialists.com/dictionary.asp>

Pub. Date: April 2008

*English/Arabic Legal Glossary*

Author: Samia Zumout

Publisher: Superior Court of California, County of Sacramento, 720 9<sup>th</sup> Street, Sacramento, CA 95814; 916-874-6867

Pub. Date: 2005

Available free on-line at:

[http://www.saccourt.com/geninfo/legal\\_glossaries/glossaries/Arabic\\_English\\_Legal\\_Glssary.pdf](http://www.saccourt.com/geninfo/legal_glossaries/glossaries/Arabic_English_Legal_Glssary.pdf)

*Law Dictionary, English-Arabic, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.*

Author: Dr. Ibrahim I. Al-Wahab

Publisher: Libraire du Liban, Riad Sol Square, Beirut, Lebanon

Pub. Date: 1988

See also [www.proz.com/glossary-translations/english-to-arabic-translations/75](http://www.proz.com/glossary-translations/english-to-arabic-translations/75)

## APPENDIX C: SCORING UNITS<sup>11</sup>

<b>Grammar and Usage</b>	
<b>A</b>	<b>Grammar / Verbs</b> Features of grammar, especially verbs, that may not be handled appropriately by the unsophisticated user of the two languages.
<b>B</b>	<b>Language Interference (including False Cognates and Literalism)</b> Terms or phrases that are likely to invite misinterpretation due to interference by one language on the other, e.g., false cognates, awkward phrasing; terms or phrases susceptible to literal renditions resulting in loss of precise meaning.
<b>General Lexical Range</b>	
<b>C</b>	<b>General Vocabulary</b> Any general lexical item or set of items not easily classified elsewhere among the scoring units.
<b>D</b>	<b>Legal Terms and Phrases</b> Any legal word or phrase of a legal or technical nature, or which is not common in everyday speech but is commonly used in legal settings.
<b>E</b>	<b>Idioms / Sayings</b> Idioms are sets of words whose meaning as a whole is different from the meaning of the individual words. "Sayings" includes famous sayings from literature, history, etc.
<b>Conservation of More Technical Forms</b>	
<b>F</b>	<b>Register</b> Words and phrases of unquestionably high or low register that can be preserved in the target language, but might be lowered or raised (e.g., curses, profanity, taboo words).
<b>G</b>	<b>Numbers / Names</b> Any number (e.g., street address, weight of person or object, measurements such as distance) or name (e.g., person, court, street, town).
<b>H</b>	<b>Markers / Intensifiers / Emphases / Precision</b> Any word or phrase giving emphasis or precision to a description (e.g., adverbs, adjectives) or statement (e.g., can be grammatical in form).
<b>I</b>	<b>Embeddings / Position</b> Word or phrases likely to be omitted due to position (e.g., at the beginning or in the middle of a long sentence; the second in a string of adjectives or adverbs) or function (e.g., tag questions).
<b>J</b>	<b>Slang / Colloquialisms</b> Words/phrases that seem to be slang or colloquial language.

<sup>11</sup> Consortium for State Court Interpreter Certification, *Oral Examination Construction Manual*.

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