

Domain #1 Comprehensive Essay

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Domain #1: Theory & Knowledge Comprehensive Essay

The first domain in the 34 Entry-to-Practice Competencies for Interpreters, as published by Witter-Merithew and Johnson in 2005, is Theory and Knowledge. This domain highlights the importance of interpreters having an expansive knowledge base across many areas, in addition to the language skills and cultural awareness required for interpreting. Domain #1 reminds us of the importance of staying up to date with current events, learning about historical events, and expanding our knowledge beyond our own backyards. It highlights the importance of examining the systems around us and encourages us to consider national and international circumstances to demonstrate world knowledge (Competency 1.1). It also asks us to explore the power and privilege dynamics in play, not only in interpreting but also all around us (Competency 1.7). Domain #1 emphasizes that our work is rooted in Deaf culture and Deaf history, and effective interpreting can only be achieved when those implications are understood (Competency 1.8). Lastly, as a profession that is constantly changing and evolving, practitioners must stay abreast of new research and evaluate it through a critical lens. New research must be generated and evaluated to support the growth and development of our young profession (Competency 1.9). The Theory and Knowledge Domain encompasses many aspects of interpreters' work, and having a solid mastery of each competency in this domain supports an interpreter's ability to navigate diverse topics, understand cultural nuances, and apply critical thinking skills to their work.

It is far easier for interpreters to interpret when they are working with information that they are familiar with or have a strong foundation in. Concerning Competency 1.1, this ties into the importance of interpreters having a background and world knowledge to draw from. Interpreters are trained to prepare for assignments as much as possible; however, at any given

moment, any topic could come up in discourse. Having awareness of the world around us will make us more competent and effective interpreters, better able to support the unpredictable flow of natural communication.

Interpreters encounter people from many different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This requires them to be aware not only of American Deaf culture but also of the other beautiful cultures they may come into contact with throughout the day. When people communicate, the meaning they construct through their language use is influenced by their background experiences, including their cultural identities, intersectional identities, and interactions with other cultures. All of this must be taken into consideration by an interpreter when analyzing discourse to ensure an effective transfer of meaning across linguistic and cultural barriers. Interpreters must be competent in Competency 1.7 so they can bring cultural awareness to their work at all times and accurately represent the intent of the consumers they are working with.

Additionally, it is imperative that interpreters have a deep understanding of Deaf culture and history to work effectively within the community. Without awareness of where the Deaf community has been, how that impacts how they view the hearing majority culture, and how the values of their culture and language have developed, interpreters wouldn't be effective cultural mediators. It would also be harder for the Deaf community to trust an interpreter who doesn't understand or respect Deaf culture and history. Without trust, an effective interpreting process is nearly impossible. Competency 1.7, having a strong foundation in knowledge of Deaf culture and history, is imperative for any interpreter who wants to work within the community, as language is tied to culture and vice versa. An interpreter who learns the language but doesn't learn the community's culture and history will be unable to render the messages of the Deaf consumers they encounter faithfully.

Lastly, in relation to Competency 1.8, as practitioners in a field that is still relatively new in the grand scheme of things, interpreters must keep up with current research and use critical analysis skills to participate in research and conversations that advance the field. This improves the quality of the field not only for the practitioners who will enter it after we leave, but also for all consumers who will receive services from interpreters. The more that the field finds to publish about best practices in specific environments, or how to train the newest interpreters, the better the entire field can be. As practitioners, keeping up with new research is the responsible thing to do so that we can provide the best possible services.

The competencies in Domain #1 show the need for interpreters to be knowledgeable in many aspects beyond simply using another language and applying skills that support the mental process of interpreting. Having a strong, diverse knowledge base supports an interpreter in their quest to provide effective interpreting services. Cultural awareness allows interpreters to consider people and their intersectionality and how that impacts their communication and language. Specifically, interpreters must have a deep understanding of the cultural and historical events the Deaf community has experienced to represent Deaf consumers effectively. When looking at our field as a whole, it is essential for interpreters to contribute to research to propel the field forward and to analyze other research critically for its validity and relevance. This will make our work stronger for all consumers. Knowledge is power, and Domain #1 emphasizes how interpreters can leverage knowledge to deliver the best possible services and support our growing field.

References

- Witter-Merithew, A., & Johnson, L. J. (2005). *Toward competent practice: Conversations with stakeholders*. Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc.