

Domain #5 Comprehensive Essay

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INTR 449: Senior Seminar

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July 11, 2025

Domain #5: Professionalism Comprehensive Essay

The fifth domain in the *34 Entry-to-Practice Competencies for Interpreters*, as outlined by Witter-Merithew and Johnson (2005), is Professionalism. In the broader context, interpreting remains a relatively young profession. Historically, interpreting services were often provided informally by friends and family members of Deaf individuals, long before interpreting was recognized as a legitimate professional field. As a result, remnants of those informal roots continue to influence public perceptions. This ongoing challenge highlights the critical importance of consistently demonstrating professionalism. By upholding high standards of conduct, interpreters not only help strengthen the field's credibility but also ensure the delivery of high-quality services to all consumers. Professional behavior is essential for gaining societal recognition, fostering trust, and advancing the profession as a whole.

Within this domain, several key competencies guide interpreters in maintaining professional standards. Interpreters must commit to lifelong learning and self-reflection, using these tools to enhance their skills and effectiveness (Competency 5.1) continuously. They must also demonstrate strong planning skills and the flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances during assignments (Competency 5.2). Equally important is the ability to exercise self-awareness and discretion, ensuring that personal issues do not interfere with professional responsibilities and that conflicts are managed professionally (Competency 5.3).

Furthermore, interpreters are required to adhere to established ethical codes, such as the NAD-RID Code of Professional Conduct, to ensure they operate within defined ethical and professional boundaries (Competency 5.4). A demonstrated commitment to the interpreting profession and the d/Deaf community is also essential, as shown through active membership and

participation in relevant organizations and initiatives (Competencies 5.5 and 5.6). Interpreters should maintain awareness of community resources that support Deaf individuals and be prepared to share this information appropriately (Competency 5.7). Given the variation in certification and licensure requirements across states, interpreters must be knowledgeable about both state and national standards and understand how these regulations impact employment opportunities and interpreting systems (Competency 5.8). Finally, a solid understanding of state and federal laws that affect Deaf individuals and interpreters is necessary to ensure legal compliance and informed practice (Competency 5.9).

Competencies 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3 cluster together to emphasize the importance of emotional regulation and ethical practice in the interpreting profession. These competencies highlight the need for interpreters to engage in ongoing self-reflection, not only to refine their skills but also to evaluate how specific assignments impact them emotionally and ethically. By understanding their personal responses and limitations, interpreters can make informed decisions about which assignments are appropriate to accept and how to manage themselves professionally in various situations. This reflective practice fosters adaptability, allowing interpreters to anticipate challenges and adjust their approach in real time. Ultimately, this cluster supports interpreters in becoming more responsive, resilient, and ethically grounded professionals, capable of navigating the complexities of their work with discretion and flexibility.

Competencies 5.5 and 5.6 emphasize the importance of interpreters being actively engaged not only within the interpreting profession but also within the Deaf community. When interpreters build relationships with their professional peers, they create opportunities for collaboration, the sharing of ideas, and the development of innovative approaches that help advance the field. Peer engagement also provides valuable spaces for discussing skill

development, ethical dilemmas, and receiving support. Equally vital is active participation within the Deaf community. Interpreters must remain connected to the very individuals who have invited them into their language and culture. This ongoing engagement fosters mutual trust and respect. It also allows interpreters to stay informed about how language is evolving, understand current issues impacting the community, and gain insights into how they can better serve Deaf consumers. Meaningful involvement in both communities strengthens professional practice and reinforces the interpreter's role as a bridge, not just between languages, but between cultures.

The final cluster includes Competencies 5.8 and 5.9, which emphasize the importance of staying informed about certification, licensure, and legal frameworks that impact both the interpreting profession and the d/Deaf community. Interpreters must remain current with their state's certification and licensure requirements and understand how state and federal laws affect their work and the lives of the people they serve. This knowledge is essential for maintaining professional eligibility and ethical practice. Moreover, when new policies or legislation are proposed—particularly those that could negatively impact the d/Deaf community or the interpreting field—interpreters have a responsibility to be informed and, when appropriate, engaged in advocacy efforts. By participating in these conversations, interpreters can help shape a more equitable and accessible future for all stakeholders. This cluster highlights that professionalism also includes civic awareness and a commitment to the long-term sustainability of the field and the rights of the communities it serves.

Competency 5.4 reminds interpreters that professional integrity must be a guiding principle when accepting assignments. Interpreters are expected to avoid conflicts of interest and ensure that personal issues do not influence their professional behavior. Ethical decision-making

requires interpreters to assess each situation objectively and to prioritize consumers' needs over personal convenience or preferences.

In addition, related to Competency 5.7, interpreters are encouraged to remain knowledgeable about resources that support the Deaf community and, when appropriate, share that information with consumers. This awareness is essential, as interpreters often have access to broader networks or information that Deaf individuals may not. By responsibly providing resource referrals, interpreters can improve access, advocacy, and empowerment for the communities they serve, further reinforcing their role as both service providers and allies.

References

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