

"Preparing Text for Translation: One Translator's Perspective"
by Barbara Jungwirth
at the 56th STC Annual Conference, May 3-6, 2009 in Atlanta, Ga.

Glossary

"Source language" means a document's original language -- in your case, English.

"Target language" means the language into which the document is translated -- in your case, the foreign language.

"For information" means a rough -- albeit technically accurate -- translation so the reader understands the content of the original.

"For publication" is an edited final translation which should flow as if it had been written in the target language.

Helpful Items for the Translator

- Provide a glossary of terms specific to your product and/or industry
- Consider other languages' space requirements and writing conventions (e.g., right-to-left)
- Provide context, especially for translating interfaces only
- Provide original (Word, Excel, ...) documents rather than PDFs

Writing "Rules"

- Use terminology extremely consistently
- Eliminate non-essential information -- or group information relevant only to programmers or other experts in a separate section
- Write concisely, but don't omit multiple articles or syntactic cues
- Do not use words in non-standard ways, such as using nouns as verbs and vice versa
- Insert notes (as invisible comments) for the translator
- Use the literal meaning of words -- and avoid wordplay and metaphors
- Avoid references to popular culture, sports, etc.
- Avoid acronyms and abbreviations as much as possible
- Minimize the use of homographs (words with the same spelling, but different meaning)
- Write in a formal tone
- Keep in mind that time zones, units of measure and national holidays differ among countries

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Further Reading

- Rachel A. Davis. "Nine Things Your Translators Wish You Knew". *Intercom*, September/October 2006, pp. 8-9
- Laurie Kamerer. "Avoiding a U.S.-Centric Writing Style". In "Writing for Translation," Supplement #59 to *Multilingual Computing*, October/November 2003, pp. 22-23
- Hans E. Fenstermacher. "Closing the Content Gap: Converging Authoring and Translation". *Intercom*, May 2007, pp. 6-9.
- Nicole St. Germaine-Madison. Instructions, Visuals and the English-Speaking Bias of Technical Communication. *Technical Communication*, Vol. 53, No. 2, May 2006, pp. 184-194
- A. Aparido and C. Durban. *Translation: Getting it Right -- A Guide to Buying Translations*. American Translators Association, 2003.
- Global Translation Systems, Inc. *A User's Guide to Translation: What You Should Know About the Translation Process*. www.globaltranslation.com/services/guide/, accessed October 30, 2008.
- John R. Kohl. *The Global English Style Guide: Writing Clear, Translatable Documentation for a Global Market*. SAS Publishing, 2008.
- George Rimalower. Tips for Writing a Document Destined for Translation. *Intercom*, April 2008, pp. 21-22.