A Practical Guide for Translators
By Geoffrey Samuelsson-Brown

Book Summary

The CTP team created this summary to help our future certified professional translators with complimentary reading information about the book, A Guide for Translators, by Geoffrey Samuelsson-Brown.

Here, we present an easy way of reviewing the most important tips from the author of the book that will be critical to a successful career as a Professional Translator.

Chapter 1 - How to Become a Translator

Even though it does not require any formal academic qualifications to build up a career as a translator, most of the companies who are looking to hire professional translators ask their candidates if they have any experience in their field.

As a translator you should be able to translate all sorts of subjects. Most translators are not able to perform a perfect translation without consulting the original text.

Working as a translator can be very challenging. Having a home office can make your work easier but you will still have to plan your day and, yes, take a few breaks during your working day for your own personal health.

There are some qualities that a professional translator should have in order to produce excellent work: the translator must have an intimate knowledge of the source language, must be a skilled and creative writer, and most of all should provide a text that reads well.

When you do decide to begin your career as a translator, you probably will not have any experience or recognized professional qualifications. Do not worry, though; you will still be able to get a job in a translation company. The supervision that you will receive there from an experienced colleague will serve as a great guide for you as you develop your own translation methods and skills.
Before you consider working as a freelancer, you should really consider the advantages and risks. You will need discipline to schedule your working hours and you should treat your freelance job just like any other job. It all depends on your own capacity for work.

**Chapter 2 – Bilingualism - The Myths and the Truth**

There is a relatively small percentage of people who are truly bilingual (native speakers of the language of habitual use and the main language of a country); there are also people who have learned a foreign language and have taken an examination or submitted written evidence of their bilingualism.

When the author of the book talks about target language and source language, those are self-explanatory terms. Source language is usually the one you are working from and the target language is the language you are translating into - your language of habitual use.

Considering the location of your target language is very important when translating a document; make sure it is suitable for the intended market, use terminology that reflects what is being practiced, and use language of the right level.

Languages reflect culture and the translator must understand the cultural stereotypes that reproduce the meaning of the source text.

**Chapter 3 – The Client’s Viewpoint**

A translator should be accredited, pursue formal training as a translator, and be qualified as a member of a professional association. The translator should also be true to the translation field he has chosen to work in and have experience in order to produce an ethical piece of work.

A professional translator should always consult with his clients even if he has more experience in the client’s area. There will be times when clarifying and understanding the client’s needs could prevent an ambiguous text.

Good quality translation takes time and costs money. When clients look for translation services, they are considering a well-recognized professional with reasonable prices for their services. The price should also include as much information as possible about the work such as a reliable method of translating and time management.
Chapter 4 – Running a Translation Business

Before starting your own translation business you should make a few topics clear to yourself:

- Make sure you understand the implications and responsibilities of running the business.
- Make sure you have written terms and conditions for doing business that you can apply.

To make a financially successful translation career depends on your own goals and aspirations towards the execution of your work.

You should also get some support from enterprises that offer assistance to new businesses. You will be able to get more information and advice on how to get started in your own translation business as well as possible financial assistance through subsidized schemes.

Here is a simple checklist that will help you price your translation services:

- Counting words – charge per thousand words – usually source rather than target words.
- Quotations – ask the client for a sample of pages that will be translated; the legibility of the text also influences the speed that you are able to translate.
- Holidays – could be turned into work days.
- Advertising – if you don’t advertise your services, clients won’t know what your translation service has to offer.
- Financial considerations – you should have an estimate of the amount of money you will need to get the business started.
- Taxation – making provisions for these costs as necessary.

Chapter 5 – The Translator at Work and the Tools of the Trade

In this chapter, the author dedicates some time and attention focusing on the translator’s work environment. He presents the factors for a healthy translation routine and makes some good points about your office equipment.

It is important to have a comfortable workstation. This means that you should choose the type of desk, chair, and other supplies to work with carefully. Also, remember to take short breaks through your workday to keep your body and mind rested and working more efficiently.

The purchasing of equipment is something you should carefully consider when starting your translation business.

Here are a few items you will need:
• Computer – prices may vary according to the particular configuration that you desire.
• Printer – a good printer will provide a high quality sample of your translation work. You can evaluate a good printer by considering the amount of pages that are printed per minute and by the image resolution.
• Software – to produce your work and manage your business.
• Miscellaneous items – stationary, office supplies, photocopier, fax-machine, scanners, and speech recognition software.

You can also choose the best method of working that is right for you:

• Dictating translations – the use of a dictation machine through which you dictate words and record them. This also allows you to edit your work and make little changes while you are listening to the recording.
• Overtyping preformatted texts – a very consuming type of translation if you are not experienced. It usually uses a spreadsheet type of program.
• Using computer-aided translation - CAT – a type of software consisting of a number of tools that manipulates a database of language information to provide faster and better pieces of work.

Chapter 6 – Sources of Reference, Data Retrieval, and File Management

To develop good translation work you will need some good references that you can use and turn to as your main source of information when searching for detailed explanations.

• Dictionaries – a good source of confirmation for the term or phrase you are looking for. Talking to a much more experienced translator could also be a source of information.
• Standards – Most of them have terms in several languages.
• Research Institutes and Professional / Trade Association Libraries – You can find helpful information in the libraries of Research Information Associations.
• Past Translations – Saving all your previous translation work can provide great reference material.
• Detective work – Challenging; does not mean translation skills but usually life experience skills.
• Compiling glossaries – First check what is available to you then make your own list of words.
• Product literature – Stores your reference material by subject matter.
• Data retrieval and file management – make it simple to retrieve, using numerical characters for the sequential job and letters for the source language.

• Database applications – are indispensable but there are other ways to manage the information such as compiling glossaries and a term list, keeping a production record, maintaining an address list, keeping references, and past translations.

Chapter 7 – Quality Control and Accountability

A good translator is always recognized by the quality of her/his work, but subject knowledge is also extremely essential. Having your work checked by a colleague could be very helpful. It is always good to have a second opinion when you are translating so you have a more accurate and objective work.

The quality of your work can be affected by and require time, price, and urgency. So, before starting a translation assignment, make sure you know what the text will be used for.

Applications for Translation:

• Translation for information – Usually a summary of important information.
• Text scanning and abstracting – Requires translation editing skills.
• Translating a complete text for information – Completely accurate in terms of facts and figures and making sure all texts have been translated.
• Translation for publication – Consider the amount of people who will read it and make sure it is quality work before it is published.
• Translations used in advertising and marketing – Special attention to the client’s needs and wishes; always do whatever your client is asking for.
• Translations for legal purposes – Responsibility for the translation you are providing; high quality-control over the additional word checking.

It is important to make clear to the clients that providing a good piece of work always takes time. Also ensure that they know the time needed to elaborate a translation could affect the results and the quality of your work could be limited. Always be honest with your clients when it comes to time and be sure you can get excellent work done in specified time.

Always check for quality-control before handing your work to a client. That can include going over the following factors:

• Translation
• Glossary compilation
• Spell checking as you translate
• Spell checking after editing or making changes to the document
• Proof reading - your own work and work from your colleagues
• Updating / Revising
• Incorporating any client’s revisions
• Final spell check

Chapter 8 – Presentation and Delivery of Translations

Here, the author talks about the importance of a good presentation of the work and also gives you some advice on how to format your texts before delivering them to a client.

When formatting a text, it is important to have in mind that while most computer programs are similar, you must consider the font and size of the characters you are using. There may be different layouts between different programs. Always limit the use of the spacebar when creating columns; instead use tabs that are more compatible with other computer programs.

Consider introducing your clients to different text layouts. They might not be aware of the fact that you can create texts that reproduce the same original content and layout.

The best way to deliver your work to the client is by asking them what priority should be given to its delivery and ensuring that they agree with any extra payment or conditions that will be applied for the chosen option. You can either do delivery through the postal service, a fax, or through electronic mail, depending on the client’s urgency.

Chapter 9 – What To Do if Things Go Wrong

We all make mistakes, but when the subject is translating you should be very careful and dedicated to avoiding them. Being extremely cautious when working for the first time for a client is crucial. It can also be excellent for your reputation and make it more likely that you will get other work opportunities, either from a referral or from the same client in the future.

There are some preventive ways to avoid having things go wrong:

• Be aware of the deadline – talk to the client if you think your time is limited and before it is too late; you may get a deadline extension as well as the client’s forgiveness
• Be aware of your computer’s settings – sometime the files you have received to work with are not compatible with your program

Chapter 10 – Professional Organizations for Translators

Here, we have one international association that stands by more than 100,000 translators in the world – Federation Internationale des Traducteurs (FIT) – a non-political organization based in Paris, France and founded in 1953 with the main objectives of:

• promoting interaction between other translation associations  
• formation of other associations in countries where they are not yet established  
• promoting the interests of all translators and offering support  
• providing as much information and advice as needed to all members  
• promoting training and research

In addition to the Federation Internationale des Traducteurs, there are three other affiliated national organizations; the American Translators’ Association (ATA) based in the United States of America; the Institute of Translation and Interpreting (ITI) based in the United Kingdom; and the Translators Association of the Society of Authors (TA) also based in the United Kingdom.

Becoming a member of a translation association can help you increase the chances of enhancing your professional translating career as their associates are always looking for ways to provide links between other organizations and ways of promoting interlingual and intercultural communication between their members.

Chapter 11 – Glossary of Terms

A list of helpful words compiled by the author, which explains most of the terms and abbreviations that you will probably need to know when translating or using your computer.

Chapter 12 – Appendix

In this chapter, you will find a source of names of translation organizations, suggestions for further readings, and references that helped the author write the guidebook.