

TRANSLATION-FRIENDLY SOURCE TEXTS

Several factors have an impact on the quality of translations. One factor, which tends to be overlooked, is the source document. Below I would like to draw your attention to some issues that time and again represent stumbling stones for translators.

These issues may be subdivided into three categories:

- File format
- Background information
- Source text

File Format

Today, most translators use translation software programs, so-called translation memory systems or computer-aided translation (CAT) tools, which primarily help to ensure the consistent use of terminology within a translation and between two or more translations.

Formats that are easy to use and can be processed by most translation memory systems (TMS) include Word, Excel and RTF (rich text format). Even without CAT tools such formats are to process by simply overwriting the source texts, and these formats are also the most common formats for drafting the source text. However, translators often get to work on other file formats that are considerably more difficult to process. The most common of these file formats are discussed below.

- ***Portable Document Format (PDF)***

The simplest case is a PDF file that can be copied and converted into a Word file. Depending on the file structure (newsletter-style columns are usually more difficult to convert than single column text) text conversion is more or less time consuming; copying and subsequent processing to delete line breaks may open the door for mistakes, when letters, words or larger parts of the text are missing in the Word file.

PDF files that cannot be copied are even more difficult to work on. In some cases it is possible to convert them into Word files using OCR software. However, this creates even more important sources for errors, because many letters (particularly technical units of measure or Greek letters) are not properly converted. Meticulous word by word comparison with the PDF file is necessary in these cases, and sometimes this can only be done on the screen by opening two windows—one for the PDF file, and another one for the Word file—because the font size in the PDF was reduced to an extent that renders the printed PDF file illegible.

- ***PowerPoint (PPT)***

The major issue with PPT files is space or rather insufficient space for the translation, because the author of the source text did not take into account that different languages require a different amount of space. Some slides are already overloaded with text and graphics and difficult, if not impossible to read for the audience, because the font size was reduced to an almost illegible size. In these cases the translator who translates into a language that requires more space has very few options. Sometimes, the translator will find a creative solution to shorten

the text, but in most cases the standard approach will be to further reduce the font size. The outcome is unacceptable for the audience.

Suggestions for improvement

- Provide a Word file instead of a PDF file, whenever possible
- If only PDF files are available, please consider the extra time and the extra cost for translation
- Do not overload PPT slides and consider the requirement for more space in other languages

Background Information

The general rule is: The better the information about your company, your products, your services and customers, the better and faster the translation. Scanty information may increase the time required for research and inquiries considerably, while the availability of comprehensive background data will enhance the quality of the final product. Each project is unique and therefore the requirements for background information differ. Some general requirements for background information, which apply to many projects, are discussed below.

- *Target audience*
The more precise the specification, the easier it will be for the translator to adapt the style and terminology appropriately.
- *Regional language requirements*
In many languages regional differences exist, such as US English vs. British English or Canadian French vs. the language spoken in France. Please inform your translator about specific requirements.
- *Localisation*
Many documents are based on conditions and regulations in the local market (e.g., in regards to regulatory requirements) which do not exist in the target market(s). Please inform your translator whether an adaption to the situation in the target market is required.
- *Company-specific abbreviations and designations*
Please provide a definition or explanation of unknown abbreviations and acronyms, which cannot be found in dictionaries or other reference documents to avoid time consuming research and inquiries. Ideally, your company has developed a Style Guide, which should be made available to the translator.
- *Conversion of units of measure*
In general, data in scientific/technical documents should be indicated in SI-units. If other units of measure are used in the source texts, detailed instructions should be provided to the translator, whether units of measure are to be converted and which units are to be used.
- *English (technical) terms*
In many cases English terms are used in other languages, even if a translation exists or is possible. Different conventions exist in different companies, and it is helpful to advise the translator upfront on the company-specific conventions. Here too, the above mentioned Style Guide may contain valuable information for the translator.

- *Background information on product(s)/procedure(s)/service(s)*
By providing additional information such as graphics, photos, drawings, previous translations, information about the company, products, clients, and any other relevant data you can support your translator and ensure consistent use of terminology.

Suggestions for improvement

Please use our [Checklist for Translations](#)

Source Text

The quality of the source text has a decisive impact on the quality of the translation. Well written source texts are easier to translate and translation is faster. Over and above all, mistakes may be avoided that result from misleading wording and errors in the source text.

Some important suggestions for drafting source texts for translation are listed below. Special consideration is given to the fact that most translators use translation memory programs.

Suggestions for improvement

- Review the text for linguistic and scientific accuracy before sending it to the translator.
- Use technical/scientific terms consistently; i.e., always use the same term and avoid using synonyms, unless the use of synonyms is also required in the translation.
- Always use the same punctuation for identical phrases.
- Always use the same spelling for the same word (particularly in regards to hyphenation)
- Spell out the date, since it may not be entirely clear which type of date format was chosen (07-01-07 may be interpreted as January 7, 2007 or July 1, 2007)
- Ensure the consistent use of decimal markers; e.g. consistently use either German decimal markers (1.000,00) or English markers (1,000.00)
- Check all figures, in order to avoid time consuming inquiries

I wish to thank all clients who have invested their precious time into reading these lines. The best translations are the result of good teamwork. Thank you very much for your support!