

ISO 18841: Shaping the Future of Interpreting Services

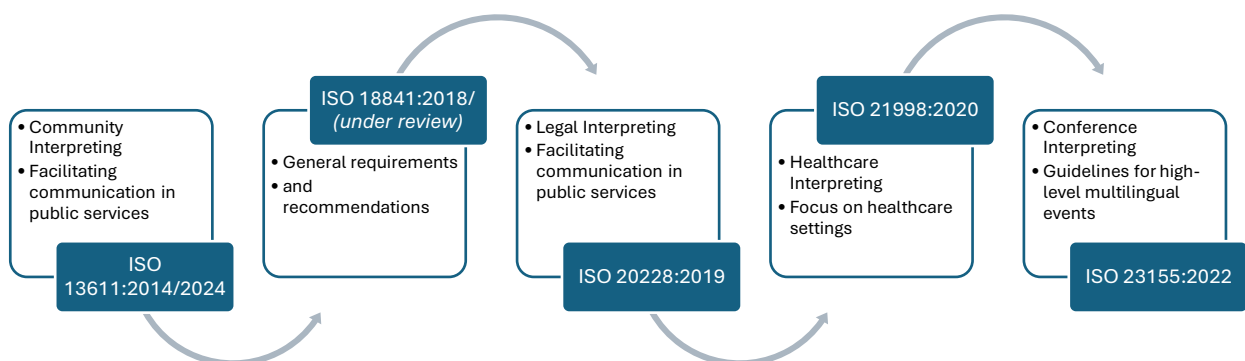
By Carina Balbo, ATC ISO Committee

The interpreting profession has seen tremendous growth and evolution in recent years, spurred on by advances in technology and increasing demand for multilingual communication. At the forefront of ensuring quality and professionalism in this field is ISO 18841, an international standard that sets out requirements and recommendations for interpreting services. Developed by ISO Technical Committee 37, Subcommittee 5, ([ISO/TC 37/SC 5](#)) and led by experts like Verónica Pérez Guarnieri, ISO 18841 provides a comprehensive framework for delivering consistent and high-quality interpreting services across various settings.

A Brief History of Interpreting Standards

The journey toward regulating interpreting services began in 2010 with ISO 13611, the first international guideline for community interpreting. This milestone recognised the vital role of interpreting in healthcare, education, and social services, sectors that lacked formal international guidelines at the time. Following ISO 13611, ISO 18841 was published in 2018 as a broader "umbrella" standard covering interpreting services across all domains. Additional standards followed, such as:

- **ISO 20228:** Legal interpreting in courtrooms and police stations.
- **ISO 21998:** Healthcare interpreting, introduced in 2020.
- **ISO 23155:** Guidelines for conference interpreters at high-level multilingual events.





Evolution of ISO 18841: What's New in the 2024 Revision?

In response to the evolving interpreting profession, ISO 18841 is currently undergoing a significant revision. The 2024 draft reflects advances in technology, the increased use of remote interpreting platforms, and a growing focus on ethical considerations. Below are some key updates:

1. Technological Advancements

The 2018 version introduced the concept of remote or distance interpreting, but the new draft delves deeper into this area. It provides detailed requirements for:

- setting up professional remote hubs and home offices,
- using high-quality equipment, such as microphones and headsets, to ensure clear communication,
- adhering to relevant technical standards for interpreting setups

2. Expanded Competencies

While the 2018 standard focused on linguistic, interpersonal, intercultural, and technical skills, the 2024 draft sharpens its focus on professional competencies and strategies for effective communication in both remote and in-person settings. New provisions include:

- ethical protocols regarding the recording of interpreted events, including requirements for disclosure and consent,
- expanded technical competencies for using remote interpreting platforms

3. Professional Development and Self-Care

Continuous professional development (CPD) has always been encouraged, but the revised draft now emphasises keeping up with technological advancements and obtaining feedback from stakeholders. Additionally, self-care responsibilities for interpreters are elaborated upon, including recommendations for wellness plans and seeking support for vicarious trauma.

4. Human-Centric Approach

For the first time, and due to the increasing use of AI within the languages sector, the 2024 draft explicitly states that interpreting services are performed by **human beings**. The scope reads:

“This document specifies requirements for the provision of interpreting services. It provides recommendations of good practice, and in this document, interpreting refers to the activity performed by human beings to convey spoken or signed messages from one language to another. AI-driven interpreting is outside the scope of this document.”

This addition underscores the importance of **human expertise** in interpreting, setting clear boundaries against automated solutions within the context of this standard.

Why ISO 18841 Matters

ISO 18841 is more than just a guideline; it is a testament to the professionalism and adaptability of the interpreting industry. By incorporating updates that address technological trends, ethical



considerations, and professional growth, the revised standard ensures that interpreting services continue to meet the evolving needs of global communication.

Take the Next Step

Whether you are a language service provider, interpreter, or organisation that relies on interpreting services, understanding and adopting ISO 18841 can elevate the quality and reliability of your work, leading to an improved experience for the service user.

Let's build a stronger, more standardised industry together!

Read more about ISO standards development for language services at

<https://atccertification.com/about-iso-standards/>