

WRITING FOR TRANSLATION: AN EDITOR'S CHECKLIST.

When you set out to create a new piece of content for a global audience, check these important elements of globally neutral content before you publish or send a piece for translation. Otherwise, your message risks being misunderstood or mistranslated.



1

ARE SENTENCES BRIEF AND CONCISE?

For easier comprehension and simpler translations, sentences should contain a maximum of 15 to 20 words.

2

DID YOU USE STANDARD ENGLISH WORD ORDER WHENEVER POSSIBLE?

This means a subject, verb, and object with associated modifiers. Always remember to proofread for general grammar and punctuation — typos undermine credibility and can bleed into translations.

3

CAN YOU BREAK UP LONG NOUN STRINGS?

They can cause confusion, which leads to misinterpretations or translations that sound too literal. For example, don't use "The computer monitor sun glare." Instead use, "The sun glare on the computer monitor."

4

DID YOU USE ONE TERM TO IDENTIFY A SINGLE CONCEPT?

Synonyms get in the way of clarity. By using them, you also prevent the use of translation memory, leading to increased translation costs and turnaround time.

5

DID YOU AVOID HUMOR?

It rarely translates with equivalency. Something funny in one culture could be offensive in another.

6

ARE DATES, TIMES & MEASUREMENTS CLEAR?

Should you include conversions, or not? Is 7/9/2025 a day in July, or September? Style guides should document the handling of large numerals, measurements, time, phone numbers, currency, etc. Stay consistent.

7

DID YOU ADD RELATIVE PRONOUNS LIKE "THAT" AND "WHICH"?

Even if you don't need them, they may improve understanding. "The software that he licensed expires tomorrow." is clearer than "The software he licensed expires tomorrow."

8

DOES YOUR WRITING STAY IN ACTIVE VOICE?

It's more direct, better understood, and easier to translate. Search for words like "was" and "by" in your document. They may show the use of passive verb.

9

DID YOU REPLACE PHRASAL VERBS WITH A ONE-WORD SUBSTITUTE?

What's a phrasal verb? It's a verb that includes one or more articles, like "put down" or "put off." They have distinctly different meanings in English, but they can complicate translations. Instead, use "place" for "put down," or "procrastinate" for "put off."

10

DID YOU DELETE ANY IDIOMS?

Most idioms don't translate directly. For example, the French expression "les carottes sont cuites" literally translates to "the carrots are cooked" in English. An appropriate substitute could be "what's done is done," or "no use crying over spilled milk." But idioms might have slightly different meanings depending on context. So avoid confusion and remove them from your writing.



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