

SoA GUIDE

# Translation readers' reports

Best practice guidelines



# Best practice in translation readers' reports

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## 1. What is a reader's report

**A reader's report** is a short (1-3 pages) written report on a non-English language book commissioned by a publisher from a translator. It is usually commissioned to help them decide whether to buy the English language rights for their list.

It may also be commissioned as part of a grant application process to assess the strength and eligibility of an application. In this instance case-specific criteria about format and content may apply.

### It will usually include

- (a) A short synopsis
- (b) An overview of the narrative style and structure
- (c) The reporter's personal opinion of the book, e.g. does it succeed in its aims, is it enjoyable, does it make a stand-out contribution?
- (d) Comparison with other titles in the Anglophone market
- (e) Where the book might sit in the publisher/agent's list
- (f) Any potential issues or challenges in English translation
- (g) Cultural and/or sensitivity issues

## 2. Good practice for publishers

### Why are you commissioning a reader's report?

Think through what you want from a reader's report and why. Is it a justification for a choice you have made or an assessment that will help you reach a decision? If it is a high-profile acquisition, would you like the person writing the report to let you know if the book turns out to be over-hyped or goes downhill after a couple of chapters? If this is the case, would you like them to let you know as soon as possible, rather than reading the whole book and writing a full report?

### Who are you commissioning?

Be mindful of the human behind the commission. The translator you commission is a freelancer without a salary to support them and with other ongoing projects. Don't exploit their eagerness to take up an opportunity by giving them an unrealistic timeline and a token fee.

### What information do you really need?

Do you already have a synopsis? If so, don't duplicate and ask the translator to spend time on this. Do you really need a written report? Would a phone conversation be adequate to give you the information you need? Be as specific as possible in your guidance for the report – let the reporter know if you are seeking answers to specific questions about the book.

### Fair contract terms and payment

If you want a quality opinion then be prepared to pay for it and give the time for it to be written. 2-3 weeks is a reasonable turnaround time. If it is a long book – 500 pages or more – then the fee and deadline should reflect this. Paying a translator £400 for a report with a three-week deadline will give you a different result from giving the same translator a weekend to read the same 500 page book and paying them £50. It is also mutually beneficial to you and the translator; helping to nurture a balanced and productive working relationship.

### Put it in writing

Ensure that you confirm everything in writing, including the fee, deadline, length of the work, any specific issues that you want the translator to focus on.

## Manage expectations

A translator may hope to be given the contract for the book or another further down the line. Make clear that a reader's report is part of the commissioning process and that it doesn't in anyway commit you to asking the translator to do the book if you buy the rights. If a translator is already assigned to the project, make this clear.

## Access

Are you sending an ebook, print volume, or a PDF file? Ensure it is in a readable format. Check whether the translator has any access requirements

# 3. Guidance for translators negotiating and writing readers' reports.

## Do you want to accept this commission?

It can be tempting, particularly if you are just starting out in the profession, to accept any commission from a publisher just to 'get your foot in the door'. But take a moment to think seriously about what is in it for you and your work. Do you really want to take 2-3 days to read, research and write a report that pays less than £100? If you are interested in the book then you might want to say yes for its own sake. Or you might want to write a report for your own professional development. Remember that in most instances writing a report for the publisher doesn't mean you will get a commission for the translation if the book is acquired.

## What does the publisher want?

As a professional translator you have skills and knowledge. Don't be afraid to share/highlight your own experience to the publisher. Would the editor be happy with a phone call rather than a written report? Do they really need a report in 24 hours when a two-week deadline would provide greater quality and insight? Establish the context of the commission. How will the report be used? If it is a high-profile acquisition, would the publisher prefer you to let them know at an early stage if the book is over-hyped or goes downhill after Chapter 3?

## Fair terms and payment

In the recent experience of the SoA, fees for readers' reports typically range from as little as £50 up to £400 or more. Deadlines can range from 24 hours to 3 weeks. Fees and deadlines often reflect the standard commissioning practice of the publisher rather than the urgency of the deadline or the length of the book. A fee of £200-£400 with a turn-around period of three weeks is not unreasonable, depending on the length and complexity of the book.

## Get it in writing

Ensure the publisher confirms the details in writing, including the fee, deadline, length of the work, and any specific issues that they want you to focus on.

## Copyright

Make it clear the report should only be used by the person commissioning it. Keep a copy of your report and include a copyright notice in the format: *Title © Your Name, Year*

## Access

Will the publisher send you an ebook, print volume, or a PDF file? Ensure it is in a format for you to read easily. You should feel confident in raising any access requirements needed for your work.

## Respect confidentiality

Refrain from posting on social media or other public channels about a book you are working on unless the publisher has confirmed they are happy for you to do so.

## 4. A final reminder...

In accordance with the [Book and Publishing Industry's Professional Values](#) we aim to hold ourselves and our colleagues in the industry to high standards of professional behaviour, based on mutual respect, compassion, humanity, an openness to difference and an unwavering commitment to the free exchange of ideas. At no point will abusive language or behaviour, or discrimination of any type, be tolerated or accepted.

We believe that an industry commitment of this kind can support an industry-wide culture we can be proud of.

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### Further resources

Negotiating Payments for Translations

[The Wrong Way In](#) by Clare Richards and Nichola Smalley, *The Author*, Summer 2023

[Access Requirements: A Little Communication](#) by Claire Wade, *The Author*, Autumn 2025



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