



## WHAT IS A TRANSLATION GLOSSARY? WHAT BENEFITS DOES IT PROVIDE?

**By helping to eliminate uncertainty in the translation process, a glossary will enforce consistency, shorten the time it takes to translate a document, and reduce the overall cost of translation over time.**

Every business has its own language. For example, consider the term “drive.” As a verb, it can describe several different actions, such as operating a motor vehicle. In many companies, however, it is used as a noun to describe a computer device that stores data.

In other cases, there are multiple words that can have similar meanings. “Screen” and “monitor” are two examples. Both describe a device that provides visual output from a computer. However, in the Life Sciences industry, “screen” means to check a patient for a particular symptom and “monitor” means to watch something over a period of time.

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Choosing the right word is a deliberate decision. Making sure everyone in your company uses the same term for the same concept requires discipline. All of this becomes even more complex as you attempt to provide this same information in multiple languages. If a word has multiple meanings, translating terminology from one language to another can be extremely complex, time consuming, and expensive. That’s why approximately 15 percent of all translation project costs arise from rework, and the primary cause of rework is inconsistent terminology.

### A Glossary is Your Reference for Proper Terminology

The glossary is a tool or document that helps you mitigate this consistency problem. You may also hear it referred to as a lexicon, term base, and terminology collection. For smaller companies or projects, it may be as simple as a spreadsheet (see sidebar, “Typical Glossary Format”); larger multinationals and broad product lines require more automated or sophisticated tools to manage all their terms and translations.

The glossary contains your key terminology in your source language (typically English) and approved translations for that terminology in all your target

languages. The glossary may also contain other metadata such as the definition, context, part of speech, and approval/review date. It is one of the key tools, along with a style guide (see sidebar, “Style Guide Sets Visual and Usage Rules”) and Translation Memory, to assure that all translated materials meet your quality requirements.

The glossary helps your translators make sure that each time a defined key term appears, in any language, it is used consistently and correctly. For example, the terms “laptop” and “notebook computer” are synonymous, but you should choose to use just one of these terms for all materials supporting your new product. If you enforce that standard on your technical authors, you should enforce it among the translators and their materials as well. Moreover, the glossary becomes even more important for maintaining consistency if you use more than one translation resource. This is especially true in the case of tight deadlines when many translators may be working on various elements of a project simultaneously.

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### How Your LSP Creates and Uses the Glossary

In the past, internal reviewers or a Language Service Provider (LSP) created glossaries manually. Today, most companies depend on an LSP’s automated tools, processes, and experience to create and manage glossaries.

To create your glossary, the LSP reviews your preexisting materials, style guides, or formal communication formats to identify potential terms.

**Glossaries should be as brief as possible. The larger the glossary, the more difficult it is to navigate.**

Some of this “term-mining” can be automated. Existing translations from previous versions of the product or from similar products can be leveraged using automated tools, helping the terminologists quickly find the correct translation for each term in the glossary. Then the translators provide the other metadata: usage, context, and definition.

Next, your company will need to validate the terminology for correct usage in each target

language. Your in-house expert for each language, ideally based in the country(s) where the translation will be used, needs to review the glossary to make sure each term is translated appropriately.

After formalizing the development, translation, and management of your glossary, your LSP uses it during the translation process. The glossary provides a needed level of precision for the most important terms in your source material. As the translator works through your material, the LSP's Translation Memory (TM) tool automatically suggests sentences and phrases for translations of the text. Some TM tools can also integrate and automate the lookup of glossary terms. Regardless, the translator refers to the glossary as the gold standard for consistent and correct use of your terminology.

### Style Guide Sets Visual and Usage Rules

A style guide is a set of rules for how a company will present its material textually and visually. It contains company and language-specific guidelines. Some common examples are the presentation of the company name, capitalization of product names and categories, and the use of English measures or metric measures for global products. There may also be language-specific rules, such as using a personal or impersonal mode of address to suit the practices within a particular country. Along with the glossary and TM, the style guide helps ensure consistency and quality of your translations.

The main goal of a style guide is therefore to provide future translators with the main and most important translation standards, normally including not only preferred grammatical and punctuation conventions, but also, and most importantly, common errors to avoid when translating from a specific language to another.

### Characteristics of an Effective Glossary

Think of a glossary as a tool for eliminating uncertainty for translators. The best tools are easy to use and simple to understand, as demonstrated in these characteristics:

**An effective glossary is an organized reference.** It is mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive. Mutually exclusive means that each term is included in the glossary only once. For example, a well-defined glossary will not include definitions for all of these terms: "car parts," "car," and "parts." Instead,

it simply provides a definition for "car" and "parts." Collectively exhaustive means that all of the terms that require specific definitions are contained within the glossary.

**Glossaries contain only terms that are specific to your product.** Glossaries do not need to contain terms found in other industry-standard glossaries or dictionaries. For example, the term "Integrated Online Terminology Management" describes Lionbridge's Logoport™ service that makes its customers' glossaries manageable and accessible over the Internet. That term is specific to Lionbridge and should be included in its glossaries. The term "Translation Memory," which describes a database of translated sentences and phrases, is used throughout the industry and should not be included.

**Glossaries should be as brief as possible.** The larger the glossary, the more difficult it is to navigate. A glossary with many thousands of terms will simply slow down the translation process.

**Glossaries should provide a context as well as a definition.** An effective glossary serves as a guide for the translator. It should not only contain the term, the definition of the term, and the translation of the term, but it should also provide context to help the translator comprehend proper usage.

**Glossaries may include a list of not to be translated terms (NTBT).** For example, product names are typically not translated. Noting these terms either within the glossary or in a separate list of NTBT terms helps translators identify these terms and leave them in the source language. Once again, context and definitions are important since there may be times when usage determines the need for translation.

## Five Best Practices for Developing a Translation Glossary

Based on many years of helping companies around the world develop and use glossaries, Lionbridge makes these suggestions for the best results.

1. **Create your glossaries from the terms appearing in your product's User Interface (UI) and User documentation.** For best results, focus on your user-facing materials.
2. **For a new project, base your glossaries on the source material specific to that project.** For projects that have already been translated, base your glossaries on the translated material, either segmented files or TMs.
3. **Focus on the core terminology of your product, processes, and company.** Zero in on the most common, important, and potentially complex terms, as opposed to being all-inclusive.
4. **Make sure local experts review every translated term.** When discrepancies arise among different reviewers, a good rule of thumb is that the most clear, self-evident translation should be retained.
5. **Make sure you are clear about any language variance before you translate and validate the terms in your glossary.** For example, specify which form of Spanish (e.g., Latin American or Puerto Rican Spanish) is needed.

### What you Should Know

Think of your glossary as a living, breathing document, growing and evolving with your business, products, services, and value propositions. You and your LSP will establish a process of entering and reviewing changes, as well as storing and accessing the terms. You may want to plan for a review every six to twelve months as your company creates and encounters new terminology. Working together, you can make sure your glossary remains a valuable tool for ensuring consistency and clarity in all your translated materials.

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### About Lionbridge

Lionbridge (Nasdaq: LIOX) is the leading provider of translation, localization, and testing services. Organizations in all industries rely on Lionbridge language and testing services to increase international market share, speed adoption of products and content, and ensure the integrity of their global brands. Based in Waltham, Mass., Lionbridge operates across 26 countries, and provides services under the Lionbridge and VeriTest® brands.

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