

Query Sheet Management for Project Managers and Translators

Everyone will probably agree that one of the most important aspects of a successful translation project is communication—with the client, project manager, and linguistic team. To facilitate organized and effective communication between everyone involved in a project, a query sheet will sometimes be provided. These sheets are especially important in large, complex projects where there needs to be a central location for all questions and comments. The most important benefit of having a query sheet is that translators are provided with an organized system for asking questions and receiving answers from the client, thus promoting collaboration and communication.

The query sheet is usually an online form or spreadsheet that can include columns with heading such as:

- Project Number
- File Name
- Segment Number
- Language
- Source Text
- Proposed Translation
- Questions
- Client Feedback
- Status

Because multiple people can collaborate on a query sheet, there are some important aspects to consider to design a sheet that's well organized and useful. The following are some tips for designing effective query sheets for both project managers and translators.

FOR PROJECT MANAGERS

Use the Cloud: The first aspect that should be considered is to make the query sheet available as a collaborative document in the cloud using a tool such as Google Sheets. With a web-based spreadsheet, you can collaborate with



anyone you grant access to and see their changes automatically in real time. This is particularly important when there are more than two parties involved in the project. You'll want to avoid sending and receiving the same files over and over again. Not only is this time consuming but sending files back and forth multiple times increases the chances of information getting lost.

Create a Single Collaborative Sheet for All Languages: If you're managing or participating in a project involving several linguists and multiple languages, I highly recommend creating a sheet in which translators can see everyone's questions. Depending on the scope of the project, I would discourage creating a separate sheet for each language involved. It's useful for translators to be able to see all the questions in one place so they don't ask something that's already been addressed. If there's something especially obvious, like an error in the source text or lack of context, it's likely that every linguist, regardless of their language combination,

will want to ask about that. Sometimes you'll see an answer to a question that you either forgot or didn't think to ask. By creating a collaborative sheet for all languages, everyone can learn and apply what others are asking. You'll also avoid having to answer the same type of question more than once.

If the query sheet gets too long and difficult to sort, I recommend adding filters so you can easily show or hide information. The filters can be added in an online sheet or in Excel: select the row you want to filter and chose a filter per value, color, icon, etc. Some of the fields to consider filtering would be the language and the status of the query (e.g., open or closed).

This is a good way to keep everyone in the loop regarding different aspects of the project and for translators to learn how their colleagues are approaching the translation. A query sheet also makes it easy to see which changes have been made and by whom and allows for a more organized system.

FOR TRANSLATORS

Catch (the Correct) Phrase: As translators, we first and foremost must keep in mind what the query sheet is used for: asking questions. It's important to always structure your query as a clear and concise question. I've seen numerous times that these sheets are used by translators for making comments such as "This is untranslatable," or "This would make no sense in the target language." As language specialists, we should phrase our concern in a way that's helpful to the client, perhaps even providing some guidance and advice. For example, if we encounter something that's "untranslatable" we could say, "This sentence would not make sense in the target language for X reason. Would it be okay to transcreate it entirely so that

QUERY SHEET ETIQUETTE DOS
Create a sheet using the cloud.
Encourage its use.
Add filters.
Ask closed-ended questions.
Phrase questions in a way that's helpful to the client.
Be polite and respectful.
QUERY SHEET ETIQUETTE DON'TS
Don't hide questions from any participants on the project.
Don't repeat a question.
Don't write vague comments that will result in a lot of back and forth.
Don't ask something that you can find out for yourself.

it fits the target audience? For example, we could use ___ instead.” Phrasing the query this way offers a possible solution and positions us as experts. Clients will appreciate this helpful attitude and it will save everyone time in the long run.

When possible, I highly recommend asking closed-ended questions that can be answered by a simple “yes” or “no.” Clients generally don't have time to answer something that's not clear and doesn't allow for a simple answer. By asking questions clients can answer easily and quickly, we might obtain the answer we're looking for faster.

There's No Such Thing as a Stupid Question, but: This might sound obvious, but it's important to make sure we do our due research before jumping in to ask a question. The first place to look for an answer would be the style guide, if the client has provided one. If the style guide is comprehensive, it will usually contain the answer to many of your questions. Make sure you read it carefully before using the query sheet. The second place to look for answers would be the project instructions. These instructions could have been provided in the initial

email with the project assignment or inside the translation package. I would say not reading and following the instructions is one of the most common mistakes I see linguists make.

The last thing to do before inserting your question on a query sheet is to do some online research. Put your investigative spirit into practice (or as I like to say, take out the Sherlock Holmes magnifying glass) and research your query online, as the answer might be a click away on a search engine.

By asking questions that were already checked against the style guide, the project instructions, and thorough online searches, you show the client that you're responsible and trustworthy. You show that you're a true professional who cares about quality and is respectful of their time. On the other hand, don't avoid asking questions because you don't want to “bother” the client. Translation projects usually require linguists to ask plenty of questions. If translators ask smart and well thought out questions, it's a clear indicator that the project is in the right hands.

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FOR EVERYONE

Mind Your Manners: This item cannot be stressed enough. Even if you're working on the most complicated project and your patience is being tested, you should always be polite in your communication with your peers and the client. Believe me, I understand frustration can sometimes run very high, especially when dealing with disorganized project management. However, we must always maintain our

best professional self. When asking a question, make sure you use “please” and “thank you.” I often see query sheets with entries such as “What is this?” There's probably a much better way to phrase this question, such as “Could you please provide more context here?” or “Could you please clarify what this refers to?” This will make a significant difference in the way the client perceives the services you're providing and how serious you are about the quality of the work, which will lead to a great working relationship!

Be Flexible: If done right, query sheets can be immensely helpful to the success of a project. However, sometimes they can fall short, in which case the team might need to communicate in some other way. Communication is not a one-size-fits-all approach. As a team, it's important to have flexible ways to communicate between project managers and linguists, from email to chat to face-to-face video conferencing when necessary. Make sure you provide, and are provided, a space to consult outside the query sheet. The success of the project will be highly dependent on the team's ability to communicate well and work together to accomplish the best possible quality.

For more information about collaborative worksheets, I recommend checking out Google Sheets (www.google.com/sheets/about), OneDrive (<https://bit.ly/OneDrive-sheets>), and www.Monday.com. ◉



Marina Ilari, CT is an ATA-certified English>Spanish translator with over 15 years of experience in the translation industry. She is an expert in translation tools and managing projects in English and Spanish. She has worked as a translator, editor, and quality assurance specialist for many companies around the world with a special focus on creative translations and video game localization. She is the chief executive officer of Terra Translations and co-host of the podcast about translation, *En Pantuflas*. Contact: marina@terratranslations.com.