

Best Practices for Handling IEP Translations in Pairaphrase

Purpose of this guide

Individualized Education Program (IEP) documents often require a more careful translation workflow than standard school forms or general communications. IEPs may include legal language, tables, checkboxes, signatures, service minutes, student-specific details, and long narrative sections. Because of this, the best workflow depends on what matters most for the final deliverable: layout, editability, content quality, or speed.

Use this guide to choose the right translation path, avoid common formatting issues, and prepare parent-ready IEP translations with greater confidence.

1. Start with the best source file

Before choosing a language pair or translation engine, first identify the source file type. The quality of the source file has a major impact on the quality of the translated file.

Best option: Original Word document

Use the original editable Word file whenever it is available. This usually produces the cleanest structure, better formatting retention, and easier post-editing.

Good option: Digital PDF

A digital PDF can work well when the text is selectable and the file was created from an editable source, such as Word or Google Docs.

Use extra caution: Scanned or form-like PDF

OCR can help translate scanned PDFs, but these files require closer review. Pay special attention to names, dates, numbers, service minutes, eligibility terms, and field-entered text.

Best practice: Always start with the most editable, highest-quality file available.

2. Choose the right PDF conversion setting

When translating PDFs, Pairaphrase offers different conversion options. You can select them in your User Profile. The right setting depends on the structure of the IEP.

Use Retain Flowing Text when you need easier editing

This option is often best for text-based PDFs created from Word or Google Docs.

Use it when you want:

- Cleaner text flow
- Easier editing in Word
- More natural reformatting after translation
- A working document that is easier to revise

Use Retain Page Layout when you need stronger visual fidelity

This option is often best for form-heavy, system-generated, or highly structured IEP PDFs.

Use it when you want:

- Closer visual similarity to the source document
- Better preservation of tables and form-like sections
- Stronger handling of fixed-position content blocks
- A translated file that looks more like the original

Key tradeoff

Flowing Text is usually better for editing. Page Layout is usually better for preserving the original visual structure.

Best practice: For complex IEP PDFs, run both settings and compare the outputs before committing to final edits.

3. Test complex PDFs before finalizing the workflow

A short test can save time later, especially with system-generated IEPs.

Recommended test process

1. Translate the PDF using Retain Flowing Text and download the DOCX.
2. Translate the same PDF using Retain Page Layout and download the DOCX.
3. Open both files side by side.
4. Compare layout, readability, table structure, and ease of editing.
5. Continue with the version that gives you the safest and cleanest final document.

What to check during comparison

- Are all tables intact?
- Are headings in the correct place?
- Is any text missing, duplicated, or split oddly?
- Does the document open properly in Word?
- Which file will be easier to edit and review?
- Which version would you feel comfortable sharing after final cleanup?

Best practice: Choose the version that protects both content accuracy and final usability.

4. Understand why SEIS-exported IEPs need extra attention

IEPs exported from systems such as SEIS can behave differently from ordinary Word documents or simple PDFs. Even when the PDF looks normal, the file may contain complex structures underneath.

These files may include:

- Nested tables
- Fixed-position sections
- Repeated headings and labels
- Headers, footers, and page-level artifacts
- Blocks that do not follow a natural reading order
- Form-generated structures that convert inconsistently

This means the translation process is not only translating text. It may also involve reconstructing a complex layout into an editable translated file.

Best practice: Expect a short cleanup pass after translation, especially when working from exported PDFs.

5. Troubleshoot common IEP translation issues

Issue: Word shows an error when opening the translated file

Try the alternate PDF conversion setting first. When possible, return to the original editable file and translate from that version instead. You can also try opening the DOCX in Word repair mode or another compatible editor.

Issue: Right-to-left languages display awkwardly

The translation may be accurate even if the formatting needs cleanup. Check paragraph direction, table alignment, punctuation, dates, and numeric strings.

Issue: Text is missing, repeated, or oddly split

Review headers, footers, table row breaks, checkbox labels, and OCR results. For complex PDFs, compare the source and target files page by page.

Issue: Layout is crowded after translation

Translated text can expand compared to the source language. Reduce font size slightly, adjust column widths, resize table rows, and remove unnecessary line breaks.

Best practice: If one workflow produces poor results, rerun the same file using a different conversion setting or translation engine before spending time on manual repairs.

6. Clean up the final Word document

The translated DOCX should be treated as a working file, not necessarily the final parent-ready document.

Before exporting or sharing, complete a focused visual review.

Final cleanup checklist

- Reduce font size where translated text creates crowding

- Adjust table row heights and column widths
- Remove extra hard returns or awkward line breaks
- Reapply paragraph direction for right-to-left languages
- Check table alignment and page breaks
- Confirm names, dates, numbers, service minutes, and eligibility terms
- Review legal references and acronyms carefully
- Export to PDF only after the final visual review

Best practice: Keep cleanup practical and focused. Most formatting issues can be solved with small Word edits.

7. Use the AI Sandbox when content quality comes first

The AI Sandbox is a strong option when meaning, tone, and readability matter more than preserving the exact layout of the original file.

This workflow is useful for:

- Narrative-heavy IEP sections
- Parent-facing explanations
- District-specific terminology
- Content that requires clear, natural phrasing
- Sections where educational context matters

Recommended AI Sandbox process

1. Open the AI Sandbox.
2. Select ChatGPT 4.5 for IEP and text translation workflows.
3. Use the pre-made Translate IEP prompt or start with a custom translation prompt.
4. Specify the source language and target language.
5. State whether you want translation only or translation plus light formatting cleanup.
6. Review the output carefully before final use.
7. Handle final layout cleanup separately.

Helpful reference materials to upload or provide

- District glossaries
- Approved bilingual terminology

- Special education term lists
- Plain-language guidance
- Previously approved translated IEP content

Best practice: Use the AI Sandbox when you want the translation to prioritize meaning, educational terminology, and parent-friendly readability.

8. Prompt clearly for better IEP translation results

A strong prompt should protect student-specific facts and compliance-critical language.

Include these instructions

- Translate accurately and faithfully
- Use clear parent-facing language
- Preserve names, dates, numbers, service minutes, acronyms, eligibility terms, and legal references
- Maintain section headings where possible
- Do not add, omit, or freely rewrite content
- Use district terminology when provided

Sample prompt

Translate this IEP content into [target language]. Prioritize accurate meaning, educational terminology, and clear parent-facing language. Preserve student names, dates, numbers, service minutes, eligibility terms, acronyms, section headings, and legal references exactly. Do not add or omit content. Focus on faithful content transfer rather than recreating the exact original layout.

Useful follow-up prompts

- Make this easier for parents to understand.
- Keep the meaning, but make the language clearer.
- Make the tone more formal.
- Keep acronyms in English.
- Use the district terminology from the uploaded reference file.
- Do not change names, dates, numbers, or service minutes.

Best practice: Start with a simple, direct prompt. Then ask for one focused improvement at a time.

9. Choose the best workflow for the goal

Workflow A: File Translation

Use this path when layout matters most.

1. Start with the original editable file when available.
2. If working from a PDF, test both PDF conversion settings.
3. Translate the file in Pairaphrase.
4. Review the translation in the Editor.
5. Clean up formatting in Word.
6. Export the final reviewed version to PDF.

Workflow B: AI Sandbox

Use this path when content quality, readability, or educational context matters most.

1. Open the AI Sandbox.
2. Select ChatGPT 4.5.
3. Upload or paste the IEP content.
4. Use the Translate IEP prompt or a content-first custom prompt.
5. Review the translation carefully.
6. Apply layout cleanup separately before final delivery.

Best practice: Use a structure-first workflow for layout-heavy files and an AI-first workflow for meaning, readability, and parent-facing clarity.

Quick Reference: Which workflow should I use?

Situation	Recommended Workflow
You have the original Word file	Translate the Word file in Pairaphrase
You have a selectable PDF	Test both PDF conversion settings
The PDF is form-heavy or system-generated	Start with Retain Page Layout, then compare with Flowing Text
The translated file is hard to edit	Try Retain Flowing Text or locate the original editable file
The file layout matters most	Use Pairaphrase file translation
The content needs to be parent-friendly and clear	Use the AI Sandbox with ChatGPT 4.5
The file includes scanned text	Review OCR output carefully
The target language is right-to-left	Review paragraph direction, table alignment, punctuation, and numbers

Key Takeaway

A successful IEP translation depends on choosing the right workflow for the file. Start with the best source document, test PDF settings when needed, protect student-specific details, and use the AI Sandbox when meaning and readability matter most. With a practical review and cleanup process, teams can create accurate, secure, and parent-ready IEP translations more efficiently.

This document is a companion to the webinar *Translating IEPs with Accuracy & Efficiency*.

[Watch on YouTube](#)

Have questions? [Contact the Pairaphrase team](#).