When I began training interpreters more than a decade ago, I started collecting teaching materials and different training exercises like a pack rat. I relished every chance I had to “talk shop” with other trainers in order to pick their brains and share my experiences, and still do. Why? Because I soon learned that there was precious little available in the form of formally published training manuals with specific exercises—let alone actual language-specific material—to reinforce my efforts to teach key concepts and skills.

Sure, back then I had the classic works by Jean-François Rozan, Danica Seleskovich, Marianne Lederer, and Daniel Gile, my personal copies of which are duly marked up, highlighted, and dog eared. Then, in the mid-2000s, there was an uptick in the number of scholarly books and manuals published on interpreting—some of them excellent. But it was up to the interpreter trainers to build courses based on personal experiences (good and bad) and to cull through available resources to fashion what they thought best for a given cohort of students. That is how it should be.

My office is now replete with books published in English, Spanish, Russian, and Portuguese on everything from consecutive note-taking techniques, beginning simultaneous interpreting exercises, and language enhancement, to interpreting theory and practice, teaching models, and the history of interpreting, not to mention all of my file folders with handouts from training-of-trainer seminars and journal articles.

Today, there is no dearth of literature about interpreter training. However, what has been missing from my library is a book that would bring together the collective wisdom and numerous exercises spread out across a broad swath of publications on interpreter training in a format that is easy to consult based on the skill that needs to be taught or improved.

Well, not any more. Conference Interpreting: A Student’s Practice Book (Routledge, 2013), by Andrew Gillies, now fills that once gaping void. It is the kind of book any interpreter trainer would do well to have close at hand.

Why do I say that? In short, because the book puts many options at a trainer’s fingertips when planning classes or when helping students faced with specific challenges in their own progression through an interpreter training program. Gillies has written a practical reference work for trainers and students alike that is divided into four broad parts: practice, language, consecutive interpreting, and simultaneous interpreting. Each part is divided into well organized subsections, each with an introduction to the specific topic (e.g., feedback, active listening, split attention, etc.) that explains why each is an important part of interpreting. For example, Part A offers the best collection of general guidelines on how to practice effectively that I have come across in interpreter training literature. It is going to be required reading for my introduction to interpreting students.

Parts B, C, and D are comprised of mainly specific exercises. For example, “Part D: Simultaneous Interpreting” includes subsections on delivery, split attention, time lag/décalage, anticipation, reformulation, self-monitoring, and stress management, each with the aforementioned explanatory introduction followed by a treasure trove of exercises for working on the specific skill. (The section on reformulation has 40 separate exercises!)

As Gillies himself notes, this is not a course book, nor should the goal be to do all of the exercises in it. It is best used by an experienced interpreter trainer to complement and enrich an interpreting course and to help students work on specific skills as they progress through a training program.

I have a plethora of great titles on interpreter training in my library. But if someone were to ask me what book I would want with me if stranded on a desert island, and if I had to train interpreters, the answer would be easy: Conference Interpreting: A Student’s Practice Book by Andrew Gillies.

—Barry Slaughter Olsen