

ATA Certification Program

Certification Exam

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Does the examination come with instructions?

A: Yes. Each examination passage includes Translation Instructions that provide information such as the source of the presented text and the purpose, audience, and medium of the target text. You are instructed to produce your translation for the specified purpose. The Translation Instructions may also specify that certain terms should be left untranslated or that term "X" is to be translated as "Y." Graders will penalize any failure to comply with the Translation Instructions.

Q: What is the most common avoidable mistake?

A: Careless omissions. When you finish translating a passage, take some time to check whether you have omitted a title, a heading, an item in a bulleted list, a sentence, or an entire paragraph.

Q: Can I take more than one test at a sitting?

A: You may take only one test at an exam sitting.

Q: Can I break a long, complicated sentence into two or more shorter ones?

A: Yes, provided nothing is added or omitted which results in changes in meaning. Be cautious about this in a legal passage especially.

Q: What should I do if I find an error in the source text?

A: If you find a typographical error, please tell us in a note at the end of your translation of that passage. (Don't just write it on the exam passage itself—it might not be noticed.)

If it's clear from the context what the correct spelling or wording should be, adjust your translation accordingly.

Example: *Brot un Butter* instead of *Brot und Butter* (don't translate as *bread an butter*).

If the error is debatable, do the best you can with what's there. Example: If you think *odd style* should really be *old style*, translate *odd style* and add a note suggesting that there's a typo. If you translate *old style* and you're wrong about the typo, an error will be marked.

Q: When will I find out whether I passed or failed?

A: Allow at least fifteen weeks. There are periods of the year with a high concentration of exam sittings, and the waiting period may increase.

Q: Why does it take so long?

A: The exams are sent to ATA Headquarters and photocopied, then mailed to two graders (working translators in the United States and abroad who receive an honorarium for their

services to this ATA program). If these graders disagree on the pass/fail outcome of an exam, they consult each other to seek agreement. If they cannot reach agreement, the exam is sent to a third grader, who in turn may consult with the initial graders or other graders in the workgroup. These steps can add substantial time to the grading process. After the graded exams are returned to Headquarters, the results are recorded, and you are notified by mail.

Q: Do the graders know who I am?

A: No.

Q: When will I get my exam back to see my errors?

A: The exam is a no-comment, no-return exam. You will be notified only whether you pass or fail, and for fail you will be informed of the score range (18–25 points, 26–35 points, 36–45 points, or 46+ points).

Q: Is there any way to see my exam and the marked errors?

A: If you pass, you will not see your exam. If you fail, the Certification Review process allows you to see your exam and the marked errors.

Q: How do I apply for a review?

A: The review process, like all other components of the Certification Program, is open only to current members of ATA. You must remain a member of ATA in order to apply for an examination review. You have six months from the date of your notification letter to pay the fee and apply for a review. Reviews are conducted after the close of the examination year, which runs from January to December. The first batch of reviews goes to reviewers in January, with subsequent batches going out as needed. The policy and request forms are available on the ATA website and from our office.

Q: How does the review procedure work?

A: Your record is scrutinized at Headquarters for possible processing errors and to make sure you are a current member of ATA. Photocopies of the graded passages are then sent to a reviewer, who evaluates the errors to determine whether they conform to the grading criteria. The reviewer also grades the exam again.

In the case of a reversal, the review fee paid is refunded, and you receive a certificate of certification, dated as of the original notice of failure. Your name is published in the *ATA Chronicle* with the names of other recently certified members. No disclosure is made of the fact that certification was awarded based on a review. You will not see your exam.

If the reviewer upholds the grade of fail, you will receive copies of one or both passages with at least the minimum number of errors marked to substantiate the result, along with the source text.

Q: Why can't ATA schedule the exam in my hometown?

A: ATA schedules only those exams given at the annual conference. Other exams are scheduled by local groups and chapters, by agencies, or by translators who combine their efforts to schedule a sitting. If an affordable site is available and a certified ATA member

is willing to serve as proctor, an exam sitting can be held for a small group of candidates. Contact Headquarters or visit the ATA website for more information.

Q: How does a person become a grader for the ATA certification program?

A: Graders are selected from among ATA members who are certified in the language combination they will grade. Some are translators who performed especially well on the examination; others are recommended by current graders, or express an interest to the program administrator at ATA Headquarters. As part of the selection process, potential graders are asked to grade a previously marked exam, which is then reviewed to determine that the grading conforms to the established grading guidelines.

Being a grader also requires special talents. Not all good translators make good graders. Grading requires a mix of translation skill and knowledge in the source language and the target language, flexibility, creativity, an open mind, and a commitment to ATA and the profession.

There are often opportunities for new graders to join the program. Graders are paid a stipend, but it does not come close to matching a translator's salary. If you are ATA-certified and interested, please contact Headquarters for more information.

Q: Why can't we use computers for the exam?

A: ATA is working to make keyboarded examinations possible, but no certain date has been set at which this change from handwritten examinations will take place. For the time being, no electronic equipment of any kind is permitted in the examination room. At the certification exam sitting, an exception is made for disabled persons, who may write their examination on a non-memory typewriter.

Q: Do I need to bring a calculator to convert measures, distances, currencies, and the like?

A: Calculators, like other electronic equipment, are not permitted at the exam sitting. You are not expected to make these mathematical conversions. However, if you choose to make any such conversions, you will not be penalized if you convert correctly, but you will if the conversion is wrong.

Q: How often are the exam passages changed?

A: The passage rotation schedule depends on several factors, such as demand for exams in the respective language pair and number of fail results that have been reviewed or appealed. However, any candidate who fails the exam in a given calendar year is assured of having the opportunity to take the exam in the following calendar year with a different set of passages. Because passages may be used again, candidates are bound by a confidentiality agreement not to discuss or reveal the contents of the examination. Violation of this agreement may be grounds for loss of certification.

Q: I'm a well respected medical [legal, technical] translator, but I can't seem to pass the certification exam. Why not?

A: The only way to be sure of the reasons you failed is to apply for review. If you don't

want to do that, another option is to take a practice test, which will give you some feedback on the types of errors you may be making. Keep in mind that candidates frequently do well in one passage category, but not in another. The exam is not directed to one particular specialty area.

Q: I have X years of experience as a translator already. Is there any value to practice tests for me?

A: Again, the practice test is a way for you to see what a certification passage is like, how it is graded, and what types of pitfalls to avoid when taking the exam.

Q: How does the practice test program work?

A: Practice tests are exam passages from previous years, graded by the same individuals who grade the exams. Your practice test will be returned with any errors marked and explained.

Q: Which of the three passages is used for the practice test?

A: You can request a practice test in any of the three passage categories. If you do not specify, a general passage will be sent. Each practice test costs \$50, and you can request as many as three.

Q: How will certification help me? Will it guarantee me a job?

A: ATA certification will not guarantee you work, but it can help. While there are other ways to prove yourself in the marketplace, translation agencies, bureaus, and clients often look for certification as an initial criterion when hiring a translator. ATA certification is the only widely recognized measure of competence in translation in the United States.