

Dear Candidate:

Thank you for ordering the ATA Practice Test passage(s). As you may know, the passage that you ordered is from a previous year's examination. The Practice Test is meant to serve as a "learning tool" for you in preparation for the Certification Examination. Practice Tests are graded by the same graders who mark examinations. When you take the Practice Test you will receive back a graded copy of your test showing you where you have made errors. This should give you a sense of the grading expectations for examinations.

There are no comments provided when you take the Certification Examination. Candidates are informed only of whether they have passed or failed the exam.

Along with your test passage, you will find:

- Instructions for Translating the Practice Test Passage
- An Explanation of the Practice Test
- Tips for Candidates
- Framework for Standardized Error Marking: **An Explanation**
- Sheets of Lined Paper *

*** This paper must be used for your translations if you hand write your test and can be found in an attachment in your e-mail. If you plan to do the test in the computerized form, follow the directions later in these instructions.**

Your practice tests and exams are copied for grading and filing purposes. On the written exam, for best results, please use pens or very dark pencils as you complete your passages. If computerized, use at least 12 point font and double or triple space. You must send your practice test back by mail or as a PDF if you choose to email it back. No other file format will be accepted.

You must send back your practice test translation within one calendar year and please allow up to 8 weeks from the time we receive your completed passage until the time you receive your graded test. Your exam results will be e-mailed to you.

Good luck on your test!

Caron Mason
Certification Program Manager

Revised March 2017

**AMERICAN TRANSLATORS ASSOCIATION
INSTRUCTIONS FOR TRANSLATING THE PRACTICE TEST PASSAGE**

Enclosed you will find a test passage in the language combination which you requested.

When doing your translations keep the following in mind:

- You are encouraged to simulate the conditions of the actual certification exam by writing the translation out by hand using ink or dark pencil or by replicating the conditions of the computerized exam. All passages should be legible when photocopied. You can further approximate exam conditions by limiting yourself to 1½ hours and by using only those references you would have with you at an exam sitting.
- If you are replicating the hand-written exam, use the paper provided. Do not double-space. Do not write in the margins. Use pen or *very dark* pencil to write.
- Write your practice test number on the upper right-hand corner of each sheet of paper you use or type it on your translation if you are doing the computerized test. The number will be on the top right of your source text and consist of letters and numbers (Example: ENG-SPA-23456). Also put your passage number (upper left corner of the source text, preceded by the word, "passage") on your translation. This will be a four digit number. ***Do not put your name or membership number on any of the pages of your practice test translation.*** This is to ensure the confidentiality of the grading process.
- If choose to do a computerized practice test. Input your translations using WordPad (or TextEdit for Mac) with grammar and spell check utilities disabled. Review the computerized exam information including allowed resources at: https://www.atanet.org/certification/aboutexams_computerized.php to replicate the exam environment. You **must double or triple space** your test for it to be graded. Put your test number on the top of each page as well as the passage number.
- Send your practice test by mail or e-mail to ATA headquarters. It is a good idea to make a photocopy of your test translation for future reference before mailing it to ATA. If you e-mail your practice test, send it to certification@atanet.org.

Because they are not clear to read (and therefore not gradable) faxed copies of practice tests will not be accepted. JPGES and photos of tests (even if converted to PDF) are also not accepted for the same reason.

- Your test will be graded according to the same standards used for the certification exam. Comments will be provided on the strong and weak points of your translation and you will be given a "Pass" or "Fail" grade. A score of 18 or higher is failing. ***Please allow at least eight weeks for processing, since graders are active translators located around the country and overseas. There are no exceptions.***

ATA CERTIFICATION THE PRACTICE TEST

As a service to candidates who are interested in taking the certification exam, the ATA offers a practice test program. It is designed to provide a practical introduction to the nature of the exam and how the graders mark, as well as an indication of whether the candidate has a reasonable chance of passing the exam.

What is the practice test?

A practice test consists of one passage from the certification exam of the previous year. Unless you request otherwise, the subject matter of the passage will be general. (The other available categories are science/technology/medicine, law/business/finance).

You may request more than one passage provided you pay the appropriate fees. There is only one passage available in each category per language combination but more will be available later in the year.

How is the practice test similar to the certification exam?

The graders of the practice test are also certification exam graders. They will apply the same grading standards they use when grading the certification exam. As with the certification exam, the anonymity of the graders is respected. Your anonymity will also be respected in that you will be assigned a code number to use on all pages of the translation. Do not put your name or membership number on your practice test pages.

The practice test should be completed by hand in ink or very **dark** pencil on the lined paper included in the packet or by computer using the computerized exam instructions.

How does the practice test differ from the certification exam?

Whereas the certification exam is not meant to be a learning exercise, the practice test is an opportunity to receive feedback by having your errors designated. The certification exam is not returned to the candidate. The practice test is returned, along with errors marked by the grader.

Whereas the certification exam is graded by two graders, and by a third grader if the first two graders do not agree on whether to pass or fail the candidate, the practice test is graded by just one grader.

Although the practice test instructions encourage candidates to simulate the conditions of the certification exam, the two exams are taken under quite different circumstances. The certification exam is a proctored three-hour exam averaging 1½ hours per passage. The time constraint for the practice test is whatever the candidates decide to impose on themselves. Whereas for the certification exam the translator must use only the resources at hand, with the practice test, translators are on their own and may use any resources they find useful. No electronic equipment of any kind is permitted during the certification examination.

If you are planning to take the examination, simulating the certification sitting will offer you the most benefit. Simulating the certification sitting means translating the entire passage in 1½ hours and writing the translation by hand or keying it in by computer. By doing this, you will be in a better position to judge whether that time limitation or other constraints will pose a problem for you.

Furthermore, you must follow the format of the certification exam by writing on every line of the paper provided and leaving the margins free on all sides. If you are doing computerized you must double or triple space. This will make it possible for the grader to make corrections and useful comments on the test passage.

Because the conditions for taking the practice test are different from those for the certification exam, passing the practice test does not guarantee that you will pass the certification exam. However, failing the practice test may mean that you are not yet ready for the certification exam. Both the practice test and the certification exam test whether or not the candidate can demonstrate professional translation skills in addition to language fluency. It is also important to remember that each practice test is only one passage from the examination and a candidate must pass two passages, the mandatory general passage and a passage in a different category, in order to pass the examination.

Why do people fail the practice test?

Major causes of failure of the practice test are the same as those for failure of the certification exam: major omissions, major mistranslations where the meaning of the original is lost, or an accumulation of target-language writing errors. Exams taken from the candidate's mother tongue into a second language account for a high percentage of failures.

Why should members take the practice test before applying for the certification exam?

From a purely practical standpoint, at \$80 per passage, the practice test is a good investment to see if the candidate is prepared to take the examination, which costs \$300.

The markings and evaluation by the grader will enable you to judge more realistically whether you should take the exam at this time, and may help your chances of passing if you do.

TIPS FOR CANDIDATES

Read both of the elective passages before you decide which to translate. Do the dictionaries you brought cover the subject matter? Are there complicated sentences that will take time to untangle?

When you finish a paragraph, read it over to yourself. Does it sound right, or does it sound awkward and stilted? Will changing the word order make a difference?

Working with a handwritten translation, instead of a word processor, may call for a different way of thinking. For example, it's not as easy to go back and insert qualifiers in the right place. Think your sentences through before you write.

Don't make hasty last-minute changes unless you're sure you made a mistake. If you're undecided, it's safer to trust your first instinct.

You will be graded on your ability to render the entire message of the original into the target language, not on your ability to rewrite or improve upon it.

- Try to preserve the register (language level, degree of formality) of the source text.
- Don't add clarifications unless you're certain that readers from the target-language culture will miss the meaning without them.
- Don't use specialized jargon or terminology where a more literal translation would convey the meaning equally well.
- The exam instructions say "Translate everything below the horizontal line." This is a reminder that any headings or subheads, for example, are considered part of the passage. Follow the conventions of your language combination with regard to words or terms that remain in the source language.
- Be sure not to add or omit information. Additions and/or omissions can essentially change the meaning. Qualifiers are also important.
- Be careful of where you place qualifiers and modifiers. Remember that word order is not the same in all languages and that careless placement can completely change the meaning.
- Alternative translations will be considered errors--major if one choice is right and the other is wrong, *but at least minor*. *It is up to you to make the selection*. The graders will not choose for you.
- Unwieldy sentences can be broken into shorter ones, provided nothing is added or omitted to change the meaning. Use particular caution in this regard when translating legal and literary passages.
- Avoid regionalisms wherever possible, using instead more standard words.

Special note for candidates taking the exam from English into German:

The new German spelling was introduced in 1996/97 and the "grace period" ended in 2006. All schools teach the new spelling now. Any deviation from the new spelling rules will be marked as an error.

If a literal translation works well in the target language, lean toward that, but not at the expense of correct usage and natural syntax.

- In a word-for-word translation you may miss part of the meaning or lapse into the “third language syndrome” (neither source language nor target language). Pretend you are reading the passage aloud in the target language. Does it sound right?
- It is especially dangerous to translate idiomatic expressions literally. Try to find an equivalent expression in the target language. For example, in the phrase “ ... hanging around the house,” “hanging around” conveys the idea that one is relaxing, being lazy. Don’t omit just because you can’t find an exact translation.

Use dictionaries judiciously, and be sure your word choices are in context. If a dictionary offers more than one translation for a word, don’t assume you can use any of them interchangeably. It sometimes helps to cross-check an unfamiliar term you have tentatively selected by looking it up in the other direction.

If a word or phrase is not in your dictionaries, apply your translation skills. Perhaps it is a compound whose parts are in the dictionary, a derivative of a word that is listed, or a cognate you can look up in the target language. In other cases, you are expected to determine the meaning from the context. Texts selected as exam passages are modified to avoid obscure terms, and you will probably be penalized if you simply note “not in dictionary.”

Watch spelling, punctuation and capitalization. Conventions vary from one language to another, and failure to follow target-language rules can change or obscure meaning.

You are not expected to make mathematical conversions of measures, distances, money, and the like. You will not be penalized if you convert correctly, but you will if the conversion is wrong.

Proofread carefully. Check

- proper names
- numerals and dates
- commonly misspelled words
- placement of punctuation and diacritical marks
- repetition (a bird in the the hand)
- grammar and usage: subject/verb agreement, prepositions, verb tenses

Don’t make hasty last-minute changes unless you’re sure you made a mistake. If you’re undecided, it’s safer to trust your first instinct.

Revised March 2006

FRAMEWORK FOR STANDARDIZED ERROR MARKING AN EXPLANATION

Revised April 2012

Incomplete passage – INC

A substantially unfinished passage is not graded. Missing titles, headings, or sentences within a passage may be marked as one or more errors of omission, depending on how much is omitted.

Illegible – ILL

It is the candidate's responsibility to ensure that the graders can clearly understand what is written. Candidates are instructed to use pen or dark pencil and to write firmly enough to produce legible photocopies. Deletions, insertions, and revisions are acceptable if they do not make the intent unclear.

Misunderstanding of original text – MU

This category applies when the grader can see—usually by back-translating the target-language text—that the error arises from misreading a word, for example, or misinterpreting the syntax of a sentence. In other words, the result is wrong because the translation was based on a misunderstood source text.

Examples:

Die große Versuchung, die die chinesischen Reichtümer auf die Hunnen ausübten...

The great temptation that the Chinese riches exerted on the Huns...

The great experiment [Versuch] that the Chinese kingdoms [Reiche] practiced upon the Huns...

The deal's complexity is mind-bending, involving six countries charged with putting down no fewer than nine guerrilla outfits that operate inside Congo.

Here, the phrase *charged with* means *responsible for*, not *accused of*.

Mistranslation into target language – MT

The meaning of the original text is not conveyed properly in the target language. For example, a term in the translated text might be much more general (*scientists* instead of *researchers*, *protein* instead of *albumin*) or more specific (*stallion* instead of *horse*) than the original term. Mistranslations can also involve the choice of prepositions, the use of definite and indefinite articles, and the choice of verb tense and mood.

In the context of this examination, regionalisms should be avoided if a more generally used word is available. (Although graders should be alert to the possibility of regionalisms and make allowances for those they recognize or can identify by research, candidates are advised not to present them with unnecessary challenges.)

Addition or omission – A or O

Something is inserted that is not clearly expressed in the original text, or something essential to the meaning is left out. The tendency to insert “clarifying” material should generally be resisted. It is permissible to shorten the ponderous modes of expression that are common in some source texts, so long as the meaning does not suffer.

Terminology, word choice – T

This error often involves terms used in various technical contexts. In an article about a nuclear reactor, for example, the German word *Brüter* should be translated as *breeder* rather than *incubator*. This also applies to legal and financial contexts where words often have very specific meanings. In more general texts, the candidate might not have selected the most appropriate word among several that have similar (but not identical) meanings.

Register – R

The register (language level, degree of formality) of the source text should be preserved in the translation. Examples of errors include using everyday words instead of medical terms (*spit* instead of *saliva*), translating a legal text into a journalistic style, using the familiar rather than the polite form of address (French *tu/vous*, German *du/Sie*), and using anachronistic or culturally inappropriate expressions.

Too freely translated – F

Candidates are asked to translate the meaning and intent of the source text, not to rewrite it or improve upon it. The grader will carefully compare the translation to the source text. If a “creative” rendition changes the meaning, an error will be marked. If recasting a sentence—i.e., altering the order of its major elements—destroys the flow, changes the emphasis, or obscures the author’s intent, an error may be marked.

Example in English:

Because she was so sensitive, Susan thought her classmates were teasing her.

Susan thought her classmates were teasing her because she was so sensitive. (obscures meaning)

Example (German into English):

Die Entscheidung der baden-württembergischen Kultusministerin Annette Schavan, die muslimische Referendarin Fereshta Ludin, 25, nicht in den Schuldienst zu übernehmen, weil sie darauf besteht, auch während des Unterrichts ein Kopftuch zu tragen, hat herkömmliche ideologische Muster und Koalitionen in Deutschland durcheinandergebracht.

Sentence not recast: *The decision of Baden-Württemberg Minister of Education Annette Schavan not to admit the Muslim teaching candidate Fereshta Ludin, 25, to a teaching position in the schools because she insists on wearing a headscarf even during class has thrown traditional ideological patterns and coalitions in Germany into a state of confusion.*

Sentence recast acceptably: *The Minister of Education of Baden- Württemberg, Annette Schavan, has decided not to accept the Muslim student teacher Fereshta Ludin, 25, for service in the schools, because she insists upon wearing a headscarf even while she is teaching. This decision has brought confusion to conventional ideological patterns and coalitions in Germany.*

(Too freely translated – F continued)

Sentence recast unacceptably: *The decision of the Minister of Education of Baden-Württemberg, Annette Schavan, not to accept the Muslim student teacher, Fereshta Ludin, 25, into the teaching profession has muddled ideological patterns and coalitions in Germany. The reason is that she insists on wearing a headscarf while teaching.*

Too literal, word-for-word translation – L

Translations that follow the source text exactly may result in awkward, often incorrect renditions. Translate literally when it works, but not at the expense of clarity and natural syntax.

Examples:

Dutch into English: *stond op het punt (was about to)* translated as *stood at the point of*
er is sprake van een syndroom (we are dealing with a syndrome)
translated as *there is talk of a syndrome*

French into English: *Ne restez pas sous la pluie! (Come in out of the rain!)* translated as
Don't stay under the rain!

False cognate – FC

False cognates, sometimes called false friends or faux amis, are words that probably are derived from similar roots and that have very similar or identical forms, but that have different meanings, at least in some contexts.

Examples:

Dutch into English: *advocaat (lawyer)* translated as *advocate*
stof (dust) translated as *stuff*

English into Spanish: *officials (funcionarios)* translated as *oficiales*
application [form](solicitud) translated as *aplicación*

Indecision—gave more than one option – IND

Graders will not choose the right word for the candidate. Even if both options are correct, an error will be marked. More points will be deducted if one or both options are incorrect.

Candidates should not add clarifications unless readers from the target-language culture will surely miss the meaning without them; nor should they use asterisks, footnotes, brackets, or other hedging devices.

Example: Spanish: *al comienzo ([al principio])*
English: *in the beginning [at first]*

Inconsistency (same term translated differently) – I

In general, a term that is used consistently in the source text should be translated consistently into the target language. Conversely, if the source text uses different terms for the same idea interchangeably, the candidate should attempt to come up with a similar variety in the target language. (Of course, graders recognize that this is not always possible.)

Example (German into English):

Die Bäume flüstern es, die Gräser zischeln es, die Winde raunen's.

*The trees whisper it, the grasses rustle it, the winds whisper it. (Another option is *murmur*.)*

Ambiguity – AMB

If the meaning is clear in the source text but ambiguous in the translation, an error may be marked. The reader should not have to puzzle out the meaning.

Examples in English:

To reduce risks to the human embryo, in-depth studies on suitable laboratory animals are needed. (clear)

In-depth studies on suitable laboratory animals are required to reduce risks to the human embryo. (ambiguous)

The probability of birth defects in humans increases as more animal species react with developmental defects. (clear)

The probability of birth defects in humans increases the more animal species react with developmental defects. (ambiguous)

Grammar – G

Grammatical errors include lack of agreement between subject and verb, incorrect verb tenses or verb forms, incorrect case of nouns, pronouns, or adjectives, and use of an adjective where an adverb is needed.

Syntax – SY

The arrangement of words or other elements of a sentence should conform to the rules of the target language. Errors in this category include sentence fragments, improper modification, lack of parallelism, and unnatural word order. If incorrect syntax changes or obscures the meaning, the error is more serious.

Examples in English:

The cupboard was infested with moths that organic foods enjoy.

Climbing the mountain, the cabin came into view.

She skis, plays tennis, and rock climbing.

The from Berlin coming and now on platform 12 arriving express train is two hours late.

Punctuation – P

The conventions of the target language should be followed, including those governing the use of accents and other diacritical marks, quotation marks, commas, semicolons, and colons. Incorrect or unclear paragraphing is counted as an error.

Spelling – SP

There is less tolerance of spelling errors in some languages than in others, for reasons that derive from the language itself as well as from the national culture. In all languages, a spelling error that causes confusion about the intended meaning is more serious.

Examples in English:

The student disagreed with the principle / principal.

The specialists agreed that systemic / systematic treatment was required.

The men set out early to peddle / pedal their bicycles through the town.

Also, if a word has alternate spellings (such as *periodo* or *período* in Spanish, *scanner* or *scanneur* in French), the candidate should be consistent throughout the passage.

Accents and other diacritical marks – D

The conventions should be followed consistently. If incorrect or missing diacritical marks obscure the meaning, the error is more serious.

Case (upper/lower) – C

The conventions of the target language should be followed.

Examples:

<i>Cien años de soledad</i> (correct Spanish title)	<i>One Hundred Years of Solitude</i> (correct English title)
<i>die deutsche Sprache</i> (correct German)	<i>the German language</i> (correct English)
<i>UNESCO</i> (correct English)	<i>Unesco</i> (correct Spanish)

Word form – WF

The root of the word is correct, but the wrong form is used.

Examples in English:

The product has been tampered with and is no longer safety.
los sitios de interés turístico translated as *the touristic sites*
The new Beetle is an economic car.

Usage – U

Correct and idiomatic usage of the target language is expected. Errors include use of the wrong preposition or misuse of a grammatical form.

Example in English:

He is married to (not with) my sister.
They were suspected of breaking (not to break) the rules.
I am going to take (not make) a walk.
He committed (not performed) a crime.

Style – ST

If the source text is characterized by a distinctive manner of expression—flowery, staccato, conversational, instructional—this should be reflected in the translation. Awkward or clumsy renditions that obscure the meaning may also be penalized.