

Upcoming Changes to ATA's Certification Program

ATA's Certification Committee is pleased to inform all members and interested persons of some important changes in ATA's Certification Program taking effect in 2017.

As you may know, to pass the certification exam and become ATA-certified, an ATA member must translate two passages (each between 225 and 275 words) successfully. That will still be required. However, the following changes will be implemented in 2017:

1. Passage Realignment: For 13 years, ATA's certification exam has consisted of three passages, referred to as A, B, and C. Passage A is on a general topic, typically a commentary or essay-type article. Passage B consists of either a medical, technical, or scientific text written by experts for a general audience. Passage C deals with legal, commercial, or financial subjects, again written by experts for a general audience.

Starting in 2017, Passages B and C will be eliminated. Only general passages will be offered on the exam. Candidates will have to score a passing grade on two of three general passages, of roughly 250 words each, to be completed in the three-hour timeframe.

There are two reasons for this change. First, those of us on the Certification Committee became aware that we were inadvertently giving the impression that we certify translators in a "technical" or "legal" field, which is not the case. (The intent of the exam is to certify that the candidate has solid translation competence. It also indicates areas where there is room for improvement.) Second, it has also been our experience that general passages are a better tool to measure core translation competence than B and C passages.

2. Eligibility Requirements: For 14 years candidates have had to meet certain eligibility requirements to take the exam. Those requirements are related to the education and/or experience the individual brings with him or her to the exam. It has

become evident that meeting those requirements does not necessarily predict a successful outcome on the exam. Consequently, starting in 2017, the only requirement to take the certification exam will be ATA membership and agreeing to ATA's Code of Ethics and Professional Practice. We hope this will open the certification doors to a lot more people who may be qualified to translate professionally.

3. Practice Tests: It has become evident that many people who aspire to become ATA-certified do not necessarily know what type of exam they will encounter. Since the actual exam costs \$300, ATA strongly recommends that candidates first take a practice test (\$80 members/\$120 non-members) to get a good idea of what to expect before signing up for an exam. Practice tests consist of former passages from the actual exam that have been retired. This provides candidates an opportunity to practice with real exams. Practice tests are graded by the same people who grade the real exam, and they use the same grading criteria. In addition, practice tests are returned to candidates with brief explanations of their errors. Consequently, the benefit of taking a practice test first cannot be exaggerated.

In the near future we will make practice tests available for download from ATA's website. This will greatly improve the accessibility of practice tests. We hope that by making these tests more readily available people will be encouraged to take them before registering for an exam sitting.

4. Candidate Preparation Workshops: These workshops are usually well received and very beneficial to the people who want to take the certification exam. They consist of a one- to three-hour presentation in which graders explain what the exam is about, what the expectations

are, and how to prepare for the exam. These workshops are also a good tool for self-evaluation. The Certification Committee is working to increase the availability of these workshops, in the form of both live sessions and webinars. ATA also strongly recommends that exam candidates participate in one of these workshops/webinars before taking the exam. Several candidate preparation workshops will be offered during the Annual Conference in November, including a three-hour English<->Spanish session on the Advanced Skills & Training Day.

5. Computerized Exam Option: As you may already know, starting in 2017, we will be working toward offering more computerized exams. Candidates will be able to bring their own laptops, electronic dictionaries, and other resources. Candidates will input their translations using WordPad (or TextEdit for Mac) onto an ATA-supplied USB drive, with grammar and spell check utilities disabled. A full explanation of this option is available on ATA's website: www.atanet.org/certification/aboutexams_computerized.php.

It's an exciting time for ATA's Certification Program as we continue to fine-tune the process to improve accessibility and enhance the value of the credential. ●



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