<p style="text-align:center">ATA CERTIFICATION PROGRAM</p>

Into-English Grading Standards

<p style="text-align:center">version 2017</p>

These Into-English Grading Standards (IEGS) apply to the grading of all ATA certification examinations in which English is the target language. The individual entries address specific points of U.S. English grammar and usage, as well as various issues peculiar to the practice of translating into English and to the ATA exam. In cases where the source text is open to interpretation, the grader is required to give the candidate the benefit of the doubt whenever reasonably possible.

All decisions by candidates in translating exam passages and graders in grading them should be guided by the given passage's Translation Instructions. These instructions spell out the translation's purpose and audience. Together with the style and register of the source text, they should signal whether or not such features of informal writing as colloquialisms, slang, and contractions are appropriate. In the types of texts generally used as exam passages, these features are not appropriate.

Graders and candidates alike are encouraged to consult well-respected style guides in their work and while preparing for and taking (or grading) the ATA Certification Exam. In the past, the IEGS recommended the *American Heritage Guide to Contemporary Usage and Style* (2005 edition, now out of print) and the [American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language](). Graders should accept U.S. English punctuation and usages endorsed by any of the long list of respected contemporary style guides (including *The AP Stylebook*, *The Chicago Manual of Style*, *The MLA Style Manual*, and *The New York Times Manual*, among others). Reputable dictionaries such as the [American Heritage Dictionary](), [Merriam-Webster](), or [Dictionary.com]() are all acceptable sources of correct spelling and definitions.

Candidates are permitted to bring these Standards and any other printed reference works or materials they choose to the exam sitting and to consult them during the exam. For those taking the computerized exam, a list of internet resources candidates can consult during the exam is available in the Certification section of the [ATA website](). Requests to approve any resources not listed on the site should be addressed to Caron Mason (caron@atanet.org).

The IEGS is one of many documents about the ATA Certification Exam available on the ATA website: atanet.org/certification. Among these documents is the [Explanation of Error Categories](), which describes the error classification system used by graders. Another document on the ATA site that sheds light on how ATA Certification Exams are graded is the [Flowchart for Error Point Decisions](). As the Flowchart shows, errors that violate rules of English but do not affect meaning are "capped" at 4 error points and usually earn only 1 or 2 points. Errors that affect meaning may be given anywhere from 1 to 16 error points, depending on the error's impact on the usability of the translation for the purpose described in the Translation Instructions. Errors that disrupt cohesion (the text's logical flow and the relationship among parts of the text) will be considered more serious than those that have only local effects.

On Using these Standards: A Note to Candidates and Graders

Graders are encouraged to be open-minded about evolving usage and different approaches to style in their target language. Leniency should be exercised in dealing with stylistic and grammatical "gray areas." For candidates, the safest course is to adhere as closely as possible to the rules of usage, punctuation and grammar outlined in these standards.

Changes in version 2017

This version of the Into-English Grading Standards contains the following changes relative to the 2013 version:

- In light of changes to the structure of the ATA Certification Exam, references to B and C passages have been deleted, as have points of usage specific to specialized texts.
- Seven new sections have been added: Articles, Conditional tenses, Distinctions compulsory in the source but not in English, Hyphens, Numbers, and Verb tenses.
- Two sections have been deleted: Plain English and Legal language in C passages.
- In most error examples, specific error categories have been replaced with more general explanations.
- In the error examples, the designation "Correct" has been replaced with "Acceptable." The primary reason for this is that, especially in areas of evolving norms, graders have been instructed to accept certain usages that not all of them may agree are, strictly speaking, "Correct."

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Abbreviated forms and titles

In virtually all contexts encountered in the certification exam, the use of abbreviated forms of words is unacceptable and is penalized as an error. The following are important exceptions to this rule:

Titles used in apposition to proper names

All common titles may be abbreviated if they immediately precede a proper name. This includes religious titles and honorifics such as *the Honorable* (*Hon.*). Such titles are written in initial caps; ending these abbreviations with a period is standard in contemporary U.S. English and omitting the period may earn an error point. Except in the case of *Mr.*, *Ms.*, and *Mrs.*, the full form may be used instead. When not used in apposition, all such abbreviations are errors.

Abbreviations that contain a final but no internal periods form the plural by adding a lowercase *s* before the period (e.g., *Drs.*, *Cols.*, *Messrs.*).

Examples:
- *Prof.* (or *Professor*) *Dittmeier was responsible for the breakthrough.* Acceptable.
- *The prof. was responsible for the breakthrough.* Error.
- *The gen. returned to a hero's welcome.* Error.
- *Mr. Franklin was unceremoniously removed from office.* Acceptable.
- *Mister Franklin was unceremoniously removed from office.* Error.

The terms *Jr.* and *Sr.* are acceptable after a full name (not a surname only), preceded and followed by a comma or with no commas.

Example:
- *Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was an inspiration to an entire generation.* Acceptable.
- *Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was an inspiration to an entire generation.* Acceptable.
- *Dr. King Jr. was an inspiration to an entire generation.* Error.

Initials in personal names

Initials in personal names are capitalized and followed by a period and separated by a space from a following full form. A space between double initials is optional (e.g., *I.P. Pavlov, I. P. Pavlov*). Commonly recognized initials such as *FDR*, *JFK*, and *LBJ* are acceptable without punctuation.

Academic degrees

Academic degrees are rendered either with or without periods and may be placed after a name as an alternative to a title. Degrees and other titles that are not commonly used in English should be expanded and translated in full, regardless of whether they are abbreviated in the source.

Examples:
- *Marcus Welby, MD* (or *M.D.*) or *Dr. Marcus Welby.* All acceptable.
- *Sarah Smith, PhD* (or *Ph.D.*) or *Dr. Sarah Smith.* All acceptable.
- *Academician I.P. Pavlov* or *I.P. Pavlov, Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences*. Acceptable.

- *Akad.* (or *Acad.*) *I.P. Pavlov.* Error.

Units of measurement

Since the ATA certification exam no longer uses scientific or technical texts, candidates are encouraged to spell out units of measurement, even if they are abbreviated in the source text. Many foreign languages have a much higher tolerance for abbreviating units of measurement (kg, L, cm, etc.) than does English.

Unless so specified in the Translation Instructions, candidates will not be required to convert metric measurements to traditional U.S. measurements.

Other abbreviation rules

The only "scholarly" Latin abbreviations universally acceptable in the exam are *e.g.* (used to mean *for example*), *i.e.* (used to mean *that is*), and *etc.* (used to mean *other things of that type*). The first two must be followed by a comma and must also be preceded by a comma except when they are preceded by an opening parenthesis; *etc.* must be preceded and followed by a comma unless it comes before a closing parenthesis or at the end of a sentence. If *etc.* (or any other abbreviation ending in a period) occurs at the end of a sentence, it is followed by one period, not two.

The only abbreviations related to time that are universally acceptable are *a.m.* and *p.m.* (or the alternatives *AM* and *PM*) and *A.D., C.E., B.C.,* and *B.C.E.* (*AD, CE, BC,* and *BCE* are acceptable alternatives).

Common sense and the Translation Instructions should guide candidates in their rendering of specific types of abbreviations, such as currencies or parts of source language company names.

See also the "Acronyms" entry in these Standards.

Acronyms

For the purposes of these Standards, "acronyms" are defined as abbreviations that are formed using the initial components of two or more words. These components may be individual letters (as in *CEO*) or parts of words (as in *Benelux*).

Punctuation, capitalization, and plural forms of acronyms

In U.S. English, acronyms formed from initial letters are written in all capitals; failure to do so is an error. Although the prevailing trend is to write such acronyms without punctuation, such usage is by no means universal, and candidates will not be penalized for including a period after each letter of the acronym.

Acronyms formed from parts of words are written with initial caps, with the subsequent elements usually (but not always) in lower case, and with no periods. Certain acronyms that have come to be accepted as words (e.g., laser or scuba) follow the capitalization rules that apply to regular words.

Examples:
- *USSR, US, AIDS.* Acceptable.

- *U.S.S.R., U.N.E.S.C.O. U.S.* Acceptable.
- *Ussr, ussr, u.s.s.r., Unesco, unesco, u.n.e.s.c.o.* Error.
- *Caltech* or *CalTech.* Acceptable.
- *WHO has accomplished only some of this year's goals.* Acceptable, corresponds to source.
- *Who has accomplished only some of this year's goals.* Error affecting meaning.
- *The most informative sessions at the epidemiology conference were AIDS workshops.* Acceptable, corresponds to source.
- *The most informative sessions at the epidemiology conference were aids workshops.* Error affecting meaning.

Acronyms usually form the plural by adding a lowercase *s* without an apostrophe. However, acronyms that are all lowercase without periods, those with internal periods, those ending in *S*, and any other acronyms in which *s* alone might cause confusion are pluralized with *'s*.

Examples:
- *UFOs*. Acceptable.
- *UFOS* or *UFO's*. Error.
- *SOS's, sst's*. Acceptable.
- *SOSs*, *ssts*. Error.

Article usage in acronyms

In English, some acronyms consisting of initial letters are pronounced as words (e.g., *NASA /na-sa/*), whereas others—sometimes referred to as "initialisms"—are read by pronouncing the names of the individual letters (e.g., *UN /you-en/*). This distinction is important for correct article use. Acronyms pronounced as words, such as *NASA*, are never preceded by an article when used as nouns, whereas initialisms are generally preceded by the definite article. Acronyms consisting of parts of words, such as *Benelux* or *CalTech*, are almost always pronounced as words and thus are used without articles.

In some cases of initialisms, however, the use of *the* is less clear-cut and can vary from speaker to speaker. For example, some users might say *en-eye-aitch* (*NIH*), while others prefer *the en-eye-aitch* (*the NIH*). Except in the case of very common acronyms/initialisms, graders will exercise leniency. Note that initialisms for academic institutions (e.g., *MIT*, *UCLA*) are never written with a definite article.

Examples of common acronyms/initialisms where incorrect article usage is penalized in all cases include:
- *the UN, the EU, the GOP, the USSR, the FBI, the CIA, the IRS*. Acceptable.
- *NATO, NASA, UNESCO, AIDS*. Acceptable.
- *She works at UN but used to work at the NATO*. Two errors.

The above article rules do not apply when an acronym is used as an adjective.

Examples:
- *The AIDS researchers were stunned by what they found*. Acceptable.
- *UN aid programs are important to the Third World*. Acceptable.

Translating acronyms

Whether an acronym occurring in a source text may be repeated in the target text without translation, expansion, or explanation depends primarily on whether the acronym is readily recognizable to the specified target audience. In questionable cases, the Translation Instructions will indicate how an acronym is to be handled.

Candidates are expected to provide the correct equivalent of well-known source-language acronyms in cases where a different acronym exists in English. This is true especially of international institutions and concepts. However, acronyms specific to the source-language culture or to a third-language culture can be expanded or left untranslated where there is no well-known English equivalent (or, in the case of non-Roman alphabet source languages, simply transliterated).

Examples:
- French source passage: *OMS*—only *WHO* is acceptable.
- Spanish source passage: *SIDA*—only *AIDS* is acceptable.
- German source passage: *MwSt*—only *VAT* is acceptable.

But:
- Spanish source passage: *PRI* (for *Partido Revolucionario Institucional*)—only *PRI* is acceptable; *IRP* (for *Institutional Revolutionary Party*) is an error.
- French source passage *DOM-TOM* (for *départements et territoires d'outre-mer*)—only *DOM-TOMs* is correct; an alternative such as *ODTs* (for *overseas departments and territories*) is an error, possibly affecting meaning.

Expanding acronyms

Acronyms found in the American Heritage Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, or on Dictionary.com that are in common usage (e.g., *NATO, AIDS, UN, EU, PRC*) are always acceptable without further explanation. Candidates are not penalized for expanding acronyms that appear in the source text (as-is or translated; see "Translating acronyms" above), with or without the acronym following the expansion. If both the acronym and expansion are included, whichever comes second must be enclosed in parentheses.

Examples:
- *All Central European nations in transition joined NATO before being admitted into the EU*. Acceptable.
- *All Central European nations in transition joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) before being admitted into the European Union (EU)*. Acceptable.

Introducing acronyms

Candidates may introduce an acronym that is well known to the target audience even if the source text does not use that acronym, assuming that no information is lost in the transfer. This is especially true if the particular acronym does not exist in the source language or a paraphrase is used in the source text. In such cases, a faithful translation of the paraphrased version is also acceptable.

Examples:
- Literal translation: *The Republican Party is in dire straits*. Acceptable. Alternative translation: *The GOP is in dire straits.* Acceptable.
- Literal translation: *The North Atlantic alliance was founded in 1949*. Acceptable. Alternative translation: *NATO was founded in 1949*. Acceptable.

See also the "Abbreviated forms and titles" and "Names, personal and geographic" entries in these Standards.

Anaphora / Referents

Every language has its own set of tools for referring to previously mentioned nouns. Languages with gender, for example, can often use relative pronouns reflecting the gender of the noun referred to without risk of ambiguity. English makes use of definite and indefinite articles to distinguish between nouns that have or have not been previously mentioned, a tool some languages lack.

Candidates need not use the same method in their translation as in the source for referring back to a previously mentioned noun phrase, as long as the English sentence is grammatically correct, the referent is clear, and meaning is not affected. For example, a noun phrase may sometimes be used instead of a pronoun, or vice versa.

Examples:
- *A man was waiting for her. He looked familiar, somehow.* Acceptable.
- *A man was waiting for her. The* (or *This*) *man looked familiar, somehow.* Acceptable.
- *A man and a boy were waiting for her. The man looked familiar, somehow.* Acceptable.
- *A man and a boy were waiting for her. He looked familiar, somehow.* Error affecting meaning.

Languages differ in the degree to which employing synonymous or near-synonymous referents for the same concept or thing (sometimes referred to as "elegant variation") is considered good usage. Failure to make adjustments for this in an English target text could result an error marking.

Examples:
- Literal translation of a text from German: *Turkey is in turmoil. The financial crisis has crippled the land on the Bosporus, and social unrest looms. Meanwhile, the rise of fundamentalism has shaken the long-standing secular status quo in Anatolia.* Error potentially affecting meaning, since the equivalent of *Anatolia* is commonly used in German as a direct synonym for *Turkey*, whereas in English it is not. Furthermore, this sort of variation would be unusual in English.
- Literal translation of a text from Japanese*: Turkey is in turmoil. The financial crisis has crippled Turkey, and social unrest looms. Meanwhile, the rise of fundamentalism has shaken the long-standing secular status quo in Turkey.* Probably an error, since this lack of variation sounds stilted and repetitive in English.
- *Turkey is in turmoil. The financial crisis has crippled the country, and social unrest looms. Meanwhile, the rise of fundamentalism has shaken the long-standing secular status quo there.* Acceptable.

When the source language uses a referent equivalent to *it* or *this* to refer to a previously described situation, event, etc., it is acceptable and frequently desirable in English for a neutral noun to be added to make the

reference more explicit. However, selecting a noun that has not been previously used in the text and that involves a value judgment or other judgment about the nature of the referent will be considered an error.

Examples:
- Literal translation of source: *This situation has led to rampant inflation.* (In the source text, it is clear what the equivalent of the pronoun *This* refers to.)
- *This has led to rampant inflation.* Acceptable if reference is clear.
- *It has led to rampant inflation.* Error.
- *This situation* (or *circumstance, state of affairs*, etc.) *has led to rampant inflation.* Acceptable.
- *This lack of control has led to rampant inflation.* Acceptable only if *lack of control* has been previously specified or clearly implied, otherwise error affecting meaning.
- *This manifestation of selfishness has led to rampant inflation.* Acceptable only if *manifestation of selfishness* or a near synonym has been mentioned or implied in text, otherwise error affecting meaning.

See also the "Approximately synonymous terms and translations of cognates" entry in these Standards.

Approximately synonymous terms and translations of cognates

A term that a grader considers less than ideal is acceptable if <u>all five</u> of the following conditions apply:
- one (not necessarily the first) of its definitions in the recommended dictionaries is acceptable in context or the term used is listed as a synonym of an acceptable term (in that term's appropriate sense);
- it is not generally considered to be nonstandard U.S. English and is not labeled in recommended dictionaries as belonging to a register that is unacceptable in the given context, or is labeled as predominantly other than U.S. English;
- the usage is grammatically appropriate;
- the dominant sense of the word (or the word as part of a phrase) used by the candidate does not create ambiguity or distortion of meaning; and
- the use of a synonym does not prevent or impede understanding (for instance, in an idiom or set phrase). (See the "Idioms" and "Phrasal verbs" entries in these Standards for additional examples.)

Examples:
- *transport* used for *transportation* in the sense of *the act of being transported.* Acceptable.
- *nowadays* for *today* (meaning *these days*). Acceptable if appropriate to the given register.
- *Nevertheless, throwing money at the problem did not provide a solution.* Acceptable.
- *However, throwing money at the problem did not provide a solution.* Acceptable (*nevertheless* appears as AH definition 4 of *however*).

But:
- *I was very tired but decided to go to the concert nevertheless.* Acceptable.
- *I was very tired but decided to go to the concert however.* Error.
- *His sister was also a doctor.* Acceptable.
- *His sister was too a doctor.* Error.
- <u>State control</u> *is an important factor in psychology.* Intended meaning is *control of mental states*; dominant meaning is *government control*. Error affecting meaning.

The same rules apply to the use of English cognates of source words.

Examples:
- *What did you think of him? He was very <u>amiable.</u>* Translated from Spanish. Acceptable. *Amable* in Spanish would most frequently be translated into English as *nice* or *kind.*
- *My car broke down again; that awful <u>machine</u> is always failing me*. Translation from Russian. Acceptable. The Russian cognate of *machine* means both *car* and *machine*. It is clear that the previously mentioned car is the machine in question, and the register is acceptable in light of the translation instructions.
- Translated from Spanish: *Your dinner was very rich. Rico* in Spanish conveys delicious. Error affecting meaning.

See also the "[Anaphora / referents](#)" and "[Register](#)" entries in these Standards.

Articles

While many of the source languages within the ATA Certification Program use articles, many do not, and even other Indo-European languages with an article system similar to that of English do not have completely analogous rules for their usage. A thorough review of the many and complex rules governing the use of articles in English is beyond the scope of this document. Here we mention only the main ones, emphasizing the few wrong usages that may lead to a translation error affecting meaning. In general, a single misuse of an article that does not create ambiguity will be graded as a minimal error (usually 1 point); however, candidates who lack a command of English article usage can easily accumulate enough of these 1-point errors to make the difference between passing and failing.

The

The definite article *the* is used when a singular or plural noun refers to something specific, that has been specified either by previous reference, grammatically, or because a justified assumption has been made that the speaker and listener agree on what specific object is being referred to. *The* is used with both singular and plural concrete nouns, as well as with abstract nouns and noncount nouns if a particular instance is specified or being referred to.

The with singular count nouns

Examples:
- *The man you asked me about is arriving tomorrow.* Acceptable.
- *A man you asked me about is arriving tomorrow.* Error (if more than one man had been asked about, one would normally say: *One of the men you asked about...*).
- *Someone is knocking; please answer a door.* Error affecting meaning (it is assumed the person to whom the request is directed knows which door is being referred to; the indefinite article might well cause confusion).
- *The government forbade all such actions.* Acceptable in a context discussing a particular government.
- *A government forbade all such actions.* Error affecting meaning if the source is referring to a particular government.
- *Government forbade all such actions.* Error affecting meaning if the source is referring to a particular

government. (Government without any article refers to the concept, not a particular one capable of forbidding actions.)
- *The love he felt for his children saved his life.* Acceptable. (The love is specified.)
- *The rice we bought on sale is full of insects.* Acceptable (A particular packet of rice is specified).
- *The humor in American comic strips may be hard for foreigners to understand.* Acceptable.

The with plural nouns

Examples:
- *Thank you for the flowers.* Acceptable. (Particular flowers are specified.)
- *Thank you for flowers.* Error in above situation.
- *The children next door can be noisy.* Acceptable.
- *Children next door can be noisy.* Error unless stated as a general rule, not in reference to a particular place.
- *Children can be noisy.* Acceptable if referring to children in general, error affecting meaning if referring to specific or previously described children.

Exception to the only-if-specified rule

The, which is not usually correct for generic references, may be used generically for species of animals, inventions, and musical instruments, in the singular.

Examples:
- *The cat is a mysterious creature.* Acceptable.
- *Who invented the cotton gin?* Acceptable.
- *Who invented cotton gins?* Acceptable.
- *Do you play the guitar?* Acceptable.
- BUT: *Do you play guitars?* Error.

A (An)

The indefinite article *a (an)* is used in the singular either generically or to mean any member of the named class, or a particular member not yet specified. *A* is virtually never used with noncount nouns.

Examples:
- *An apple can be red, green or yellow.* Acceptable.
- *A cup of coffee would be welcome now.* Acceptable.
- *A man was coming toward us.* Acceptable. (Particular member of named class not yet identified.)

An is used before nouns that are pronounced with an initial vowel sound. This means that, even in writing, words beginning with the letter *u* pronounced with an initial *yu* sound, such as university, are preceded by *a*, while words starting with the letter *h*, but pronounced with an initial vowel sound, such as *hour*, are preceded by *an*. See discussion in section on "[Acronyms.](#)"

No article

No article is used when a plural count noun refers to a class in general or any member(s) of that class.

Examples:
- *I like apples.* Acceptable.
- *I like the apples.* Error possibly affecting meaning, unless some particular apples are being specified.
- *Bananas are yellow.* Acceptable.
- *The bananas are yellow.* Error, unless a particular bunch is being referred to.

Similarly, no article is used with noncount nouns.

Examples:
- *Rice is white.* Acceptable.
- *The rice is white.* Error, unless some particular rice is being referred to.
- *The rice we bought on sale was full of insects.* Acceptable.

Gerunds, nouns formed from verbs (e.g., walking, texting), and nouns referring generically to emotions or ideas are not preceded by an article. Using an article before such nouns is only correct if the noun is attributed to a particular person, situation, or example. Note that such nouns preceded by adjectives cannot be used with an article.

Examples:
- *Sleeping is one of her only pleasures.* Acceptable.
- *Love makes the world go round.* Acceptable
- *The love makes the world go round.* Error.
- *The love of money was his downfall.* Acceptable (also acceptable without the article).
- *The romantic love is the subject of most popular songs.* Error.

Gerunds are used without an article to refer to a process. Abstract nouns referring to generic emotions, ideas, etc., are typically used without an article unless identified as specific to a situation.

Examples:
- *I like eating apples.* Acceptable.
- *Obtaining a college education has always been important to me.* Acceptable.
- *The obtaining of a college education has always been important to me.* Error.
- *Part of a judge's job is settling disputes.* Acceptable.
- *A settling of disputes is a difficult process.* Error.

Some is used before plural count nouns and noncount nouns to refer to a number greater than one of specified things. It may be left out without substantially altering the meaning.

Examples:
- *I ate some bananas for lunch.* Acceptable.
- *I ate bananas for lunch.* Acceptable.
- *We went to visit some friends.* Acceptable.
- *We went to visit friends.* Acceptable.

Capitalization in headings and titles of works

Headings

Two systems exist in U.S. English for capitalizing headings. Most often main headings are written with initial capitals for many categories of words or words with four or more letters (title-case capitalization or headline style). Sentence case capitalization capitalizes only the first word and all proper nouns or other words that would normally be capitalized (names of companies or associations, laws, government agencies, etc.). Any of these approaches will be accepted on certification exams as long as they are applied consistently.

Many of the source languages included in ATA Certification Program language pairs follow what we refer to here as the sentence-case capitalization rule: only the first word is capitalized. Treating a headline using sentence case as a one-sentence paragraph by placing a period at the end is an error. In English, headings are never followed by a period. The lack of a period in a sentence set apart from other text is a cue that this is a heading.

Example:
- *Education in the developing world.* Error for period, since this is not a sentence.

In the headline or title-case system, articles, coordinating conjunctions, prepositions (with possible exceptions for longer prepositions, such as *between, under,* or *through*, if the four-or-more-letter rule is applied) and the *to* of infinitives are not capitalized unless they are the first word in the heading or follow a colon. Capitalization errors will be treated as separate errors if they involve different parts of speech.

Examples:
- *Education in the Developing World* - Acceptable.
- *Education in the developing world* - Acceptable.
- *EDUCATION IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD* - Acceptable.
- *Education **I**n the Developing **w**orld* - Two errors (in bold).

Capitalization of titles

Titles of books and articles in exam passages may use either title-case capitalization or sentence-case capitalization. It is acceptable to use the title-case system for book titles in conjunction with the sentence-case system for article titles in a single passage. The titles of periodicals should be in title-case style.

Examples:
- *The first publication to report the story was* The Washington Post. Acceptable.
- *The first publication to report the story was* The Washington post. Error.
- *The first publication to report the story was* USA today. Error possibly affecting meaning.

The usual rule in U.S. English is for the titles of books, plays, and periodicals to be italicized and those of articles and parts of books (sections, chapters), as well as songs and non-book-length poems, to be enclosed in quotation marks. Since italicization is not feasible in a handwritten exam, candidates will be advised in the Translation Instructions to represent italics by underlining the respective words; in keyboarded exams,

failure to use italics properly will be marked as an error.

Collective and mass nouns

Collective and mass nouns are generally treated as singular for the purpose of subject-verb agreement. But it is often acceptable to use collective nouns with a verb in the plural form if the members of the group in question are acting as discrete individuals or are considered as such. This is especially true if the sentence also includes a plural pronoun referring to the same group. If the use of plural pronouns or verbs seems awkward, it is always acceptable to change to an alternate form, e.g., *team* to *team members*, or *jury* to *members of the jury* or *jurors*.

Examples:
- *The team (team members) were changing back into street clothes.* Acceptable.
- *The team was changing back into its street clothes.* Acceptable.
- *The team was changing back into their street clothes.* Acceptable.

However, the British practice of always treating certain collective singular nouns as plurals is unacceptable in U.S. usage and will be marked as an error if the group is considered as a whole or is acting in concert.

Example:
- *The committee are in session.* Error.

The word *data* may be used as a singular mass noun in the sense of information or a body of facts. The word *media* is acceptable as a singular mass noun when referring to news outlets as a whole.

Examples:
- *What shall we do with all this data?* Acceptable.
- *The media is not the appropriate forum for deciding this matter.* Acceptable.

However, the plural forms are also acceptable: *all these data*, *the media are*. Inconsistent use of the singular or plural form of *data* or *media* in a single passage (that is, using it with a singular verb in one sentence and with a plural verb in another) will be marked as a Cohesion error.

In other contexts, *media* is the plural of *medium* and cannot take a singular verb. Nor can *media* be used in the place of *medium*.

Examples:
- *The artist's favorite media is charcoal and watercolor.* Error.
- *Which media did you use for backup, CD or DVD?* Error.

Finally, *the number of...* is always followed by a singular verb, while *a number of...* is followed by a plural verb. Deviations are an error.

Examples:
- *The number of people involved in the scandal have been growing.* Error: verb should be *has*.
- *A number of people has voiced disapproval of the way the hearings have been conducted.* Error; verb

should be *have*.

Fractions, percentages and other parts of a whole follow the same rules for subject-verb agreement as count and noncount (mass) nouns, as illustrated in the following examples:

- *Two-thirds of the wine in his cellar **was** destroyed by the earthquake.* Acceptable: *wine* is a noncount noun.
- *One-third of the respondents in the survey **say** they think football is a violent sport.* Acceptable: *respondents* is a count noun.
- *Studies show that over 65% of Americans **attends** church regularly.* Error: *Americans* is a count noun.
- *Ninety-five percent of the acreage on that lot **is** unusable.* Acceptable: *acreage* is a noncount noun.
- *According to our research, about half of the samples (49.5%) **was** spoiled in transit.* Error: *samples* is a count noun.

See also the "Non-US usage" entry in these Standards.

Commas

Because comma usage in English can differ significantly from conventions in a source language, commas tend to account for a significant share of the errors candidates make on the ATA Certification Exam. Comma issues in the following contexts are addressed here:

- Overview
- Dependent clauses (with subordinating conjunctions)
- Independent clauses (with coordinating conjunctions)
- Conjunctive adverbs
- Compound predicates
- Introductory words and phrases
- Comma between subject and predicate
- Digressions/interrupters
- Special contexts (list/serial/Oxford comma, dates, proper names, places, quotations, parentheses)

The use of commas with restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses and with phrases in apposition is a common source of errors. These rules are treated in detail in the "Restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses and appositives" entry in these Standards.

Overview

There are many instances in English in which the use of a comma is considered optional. In these cases, either option is considered acceptable on the exam. In our examples optional commas are shown in parentheses.

Example:
- *I said yes(,) but he said no.* Acceptable.

In cases where it is optional to use a pair of commas to enclose a phrase, the use of a single comma is an error.

Examples:
- *I learned as a result that she was blind.* Acceptable.
- *I learned, as a result, that she was blind.* Acceptable.
- *I learned as a result, that she was blind.* Error.

Dependent clauses (with subordinating conjunctions)

When a main clause is followed by a dependent clause, no comma is required if misreading is unlikely; however, the use of a comma is acceptable. When the dependent clause precedes the independent one, in most instances a comma should be inserted before the independent clause.

Examples:
- *We will provide the drinks if you bring the food.* Acceptable.
- *We will provide the drinks, if you bring the food.* Acceptable.
- *If you bring the food, we will provide the drinks.* Acceptable.

Independent clauses (with coordinating conjunctions)

If two independent clauses are joined by a coordinating conjunction (such as *for, and, or, nor, but, yet,* or *so*), a comma is optional if the clauses are relatively short and misreading is unlikely. However, an error may be marked if a comma separating long independent clauses is omitted, making the sentence more difficult to understand.

Examples:
- *I went(,) but my friend stayed behind.* Acceptable with or without a comma.
- *Scientists around the world are experimenting with hundreds of drugs but so far the hoped-for cure has proven elusive.* Omitting comma after *drugs* could be marked as an error.

It is an error to join independent clauses with a comma not followed by a coordinating conjunction. This common error is frequently called a comma splice and is a type of run-on sentence. See the "Run-on sentences/comma splices" entry in these Standards.

Conjunctive adverbs

Conjunctive adverbs, such as *hence*, *therefore*, *nevertheless*, *however*, *still*, and *indeed*, are used to join clauses and sentences and can occupy initial, terminal, or medial positions within the larger unit. In most cases, they are set off from other words in that clause or sentence by commas. In initial position, however, commas are optional only after one-syllable adverbs (e.g., *hence*, *now*, *still*, *thus*, *then*) and required after adverbs of two or more syllables. In terminal position a comma is always required before the adverb. In medial position commas are usual but optional for all adverbs except *however*, which must be enclosed in commas (or, as below, preceded by a semi-colon and followed by a comma).

Examples:
- *He was a brilliant general; nevertheless, it is a mistake to think he could govern a country.* Acceptable.
- *He was a brilliant general; nevertheless it is a mistake to think he could govern a country.* Error (comma required after *nevertheless*).
- *Thus(,) we are forced to conclude that we must find another candidate.* Acceptable (both with and without a comma).

- *The search for one should(,) therefore(,) begin immediately.* Acceptable (both with and without a pair of commas).
- *The search for one should however begin immediately.* Error.
- *He might be considered for a cabinet post though.* Error.

See also the "Misplaced adverbs" entry in these Standards.

Compound predicates

If a coordinating conjunction is not followed by a full clause (subject + predicate), the two clauses are not normally separated by a comma. In relatively simple, short sentences, separating such compound predicates with a comma may be considered an error, though in many cases a negligible one. However, a comma may be used in this position to set off the end of the sentence as a digression or afterthought. In some cases it may not be possible to tell whether or not the end of the sentence is an afterthought in the original.

In more complex sentences, a comma between two predicates may be acceptable or even necessary to prevent misreading. The omission of a comma in such cases will only be considered an error if it affects the understanding or usefulness of the target text.

Examples:
- *In his act he both sings and dances.* Acceptable.
- *In his act he both sings, and dances.* Error.
- *He is not without talent. He sings, and even dances a little.* Acceptable (afterthought).
- *The Senate met for an additional two weeks beyond the deadline established the previous spring but failed to reach a satisfactory compromise.* Acceptable.
- *The Senate met for an additional two weeks beyond the deadline established the previous spring, but failed to reach a satisfactory compromise.* Acceptable.
- *He watched as his aunt slipped the dessert spoon into her pocket, and cringed in embarrassment.* Acceptable.
- *He watched as his aunt slipped the dessert spoon into her pocket and cringed in embarrassment.* Error possibly affecting meaning.
- *He bought milk, bread, and beans, and picked up the dry cleaning.* Acceptable.
- *He bought milk, bread, and beans and picked up the dry cleaning.* Acceptable.

Introductory words and phrases

Commas are generally optional after introductory phrases unless the phrases are long or a misreading is possible.

Examples:
- *While eating, the children were quiet.* Acceptable.
- *While eating the children were quiet.* Error possibly disrupting comprehension.
- *To William, Shakespeare was boring.* Acceptable.
- *To William Shakespeare was boring.* Error possibly disrupting comprehension.

Commas are optional after short introductory phrases, especially relating to time and place. However, if the omission of the comma would lead to ambiguity or confusion, a comma should be used. Interjections (such as *oh*, *my goodness*, *yes,* and *no*) that are used to introduce sentences should be followed by a comma. Even

in cases where a comma would usually be omitted, no errors will be assessed for inserting a comma after any introductory phrase.

Examples:
- *On July 6(,) we will celebrate his birthday.* Acceptable with or without a comma.
- *In the rain, forest animals can always find shelter.* Acceptable (reflects source meaning).
- *In the rain forest animals can always find shelter.* Error affecting meaning.
- *"No I guess not," she said.* Error (for missing comma after *no*).
- *This morning(,) we got up early.* Acceptable with or without a comma.

Comma between subject and predicate

In some languages, a comma is often inserted in order to separate a long subject clause from the verb. Reproducing this usage in an English target text is an error.

Examples:
- *The high unemployment rates that have prevailed in recent years, remain intractable.* Error.
- *A heavily loaded dump truck with faulty brakes, failed to stop at the light and crashed into another vehicle.* Error.
- *Sending a police force to prevent hostilities, turned out to be useless.* Error.

However, a digression or adverbial phrase enclosed by commas may intervene between the subject and the predicate.

Examples:
- *The high unemployment rates that have prevailed in recent years, however, remain intractable.* Acceptable.
- *High unemployment rates, which began during the last recession, remain intractable.* Acceptable.

Digressions/interrupters/parenthetical comments

Words or phrases that function as digressions or interrupters or offer amplifying information may be set off with commas, dashes, or parentheses. All of these boundary markers must occur in pairs, except in the case of a single comma or dash marking the start of a digression at the end of a sentence. There is no need for different digressions in a single passage to be punctuated in the same way, or for the punctuation used for digressions to reflect the source-language punctuation. In fact, the thoughtless replication of such source-text punctuation in a way that does not reflect standard U.S. English usage is a frequent source of error markings.

In some source languages, dashes are used considerably more frequently than in English to indicate a digression; in English, dashes tend to be used for abrupt or emphatic digressions. Dashes and parentheses should also be used to set off lengthy interrupters in the middle of a sentence that themselves contain commas. Dashes are preferable to parentheses when the material inside them is about to be discussed further.

Examples:
- *On weekends she slept late into the morning, and sometimes even the afternoon.* Acceptable if the source text makes it clear that the adverbial phrase *on weekends* governs both clauses.
- *She slept late into the morning, and sometimes even the afternoon, on weekends.* Acceptable if the source text makes it clear that the adverbial phrase *on weekends* governs both clauses.

- *She slept late into the morning, and sometimes even the afternoon on weekends.* Acceptable if the source text makes it clear that the adverbial phrase *on weekends* governs only the second clause.
- *She slept late into the morning—and sometimes even the afternoon—on weekends.* Acceptable if the source text addresses weekend sleeping habits only.
- *She slept late into the morning (and sometimes even the afternoon) on weekends.* Acceptable if the source text addresses weekend sleeping habits only.
- *The case worker assigned to this matter—John Smith—lost the file.* Acceptable.
- *Four tragedies—Hamlet, Macbeth, King Lear and Othello—are generally considered among Shakespeare's best plays.* Acceptable.

Special contexts (serial comma, dates, proper names, places, quotations, parentheses)

Serial comma

Commas are required between items in a list not joined by conjunctions. When commas are required within the items in a series, clarity sometimes demands the use of semicolons to separate the items on the list. But if there is no possibility of misreading, then the use of commas rather than semicolons is acceptable and may be preferable.

Examples:
- *We met with Mr. Fenty, the mayor of Washington; Mr. Surovell, our local delegate; and Mr. Moran, our Congressional representative.* Acceptable.
- *We met with Mr. Fenty, the mayor of Washington, Mr. Surovell, our local delegate, and Mr. Moran, our Congressional representative.* Could be marked as an error (introduces ambiguity).

The serial comma before the conjunctions *and* or *or* may be either used or omitted unless omission would result in ambiguity or confusion.

Examples:
- *The company reported its assets, liabilities(,) and earnings.* Acceptable with or without the serial comma.
- *The company reported expenditures for acquisitions, research and development and investments.* Could be marked as an error (introduces ambiguity).

Dates

Dates presented in the month-day-year format require a comma after the day, but a comma following the year is optional. If just the month and year are included, no comma is necessary. The so-called international or military format of day-month-year is acceptable but no commas should be used.

Examples:
- *He was born on December 21, 2000(,) in Alabama.* Acceptable with or without the second comma.
- *He was born on 21 December, 2000.* Error.
- *He was born on 21 December 2000.* Acceptable.
- *December 2017 was a bleak month.* Acceptable.

Proper names

Jr. or *Sr.* after a personal name and *Inc.* and *Ltd.* after a company name can be presented either without

commas or enclosed in a pair of commas. Commas are not used for Roman numerals with names.

Examples:
- *Raymond Renz(,) Jr.(,) won the race.* Acceptable with two commas or no commas.
- *ABC Design(,) Inc.(,) won the contest.* Acceptable with two commas or no commas.
- *ABC Design, Inc. won the contest.* Error.
- *John D. Rockefeller, IV.* Error.

Places

Commas are optional with two-letter state and territory abbreviations without internal periods. It is acceptable to use a pair of commas, to use a single comma following the city name, or to omit the commas entirely.

Examples:
- *I lived in Washington, DC, at the time.* Acceptable.
- *I lived in Washington, DC at the time.* Acceptable.
- *I lived in Washington DC at the time.* Acceptable.

Numbers

Commas should be used to separate groups of three digits for numbers of five digits or more. The comma is optional for four-digit numbers. Use of a period instead of a comma for this purpose as well as omission of the comma is an error. The use of a comma instead of a period to indicate decimals is also an error. See also the numbers entry in these Standards.

Examples:
- *The stadium has a capacity of 9(,)000.* Acceptable with or without a comma.
- *The stadium has a capacity of 11000.* Error.
- *The stadium has a capacity of 11.000.* Error.

Years, page numbers, addresses, and decimal fractions do not contain commas.

Quotations

Commas are always required to set a direct quotation off from the rest of the sentence.

Example:
- *"This has been a disaster," the senator was quoted as saying, "that we may never recover from."* Acceptable.

However, if a quotation is integrated into the syntax of the sentence, no comma should be used.

Examples:
- *Her delighted reply was "of course."* Acceptable.
- *The decision was deemed a "travesty" by the defendant's supporters.* Acceptable.
- *The lack of funding for this urgently needed and highly popular program is, "an inexplicable omission that must be corrected immediately," said the mayor.* Error for the comma following *is*.

See also the "[Quotation marks](#)" entry in these Standards.

Commas and parentheses

When a parenthetical phrase falls within a sentence, other punctuation (commas, colons, dashes, and semicolons) comes after, never before, the parenthetical phrase. Under no circumstances should a comma ever be placed before a closing parenthesis; a period can be placed before a closing parenthesis only if a complete sentence falls within parentheses.

Examples:
- *He gave her a Bible (and later a rosary), which she kept.* Acceptable.
- *He gave her a Bible, (and later a rosary) which she kept.* Error.
- *He gave her a Bible (and later a rosary,) which she kept.* Error.

Conditional tenses

The rules governing tense sequences in complex conditional sentences in English are quite complicated and specific. Such sentences are divided into four classes, depending on the exact nature of the relationship between the clauses. Most sentences of this type involve the word *if*. Other words such as *when* or *while* are also possible. These rules apply whether the *if* subordinate clause follows or precedes the main cause. Note that no comma is required before *if* or the equivalent when the subordinate clause follows the main clause, but a comma is usual when the subordinate clause comes first.

Type Ø: Used when the time referred to is the present or when the reference is to something that is true in general and the situation is real and possible. In this case both clauses are in the simple present.
- *If you heat it, ice turns to water.* Acceptable.
- *Ice turns to water if (when) you heat it.* Acceptable.

Negative truths also use present tenses, with introductory phrases such as *unless* or *if not*.
- *Water remains in liquid form, unless you heat or chill it beyond a certain point*. Acceptable.

Such contingencies may also be expressed with the main clause in the simple future, but the subordinate clause must be in the present.
- *Water will boil if you heat it enough.* Acceptable.
- *Water will boil if you will heat it enough.* Error (see section on [tense sequence](#)).

Type 1: Used to refer to the **probable future result of a possible condition**. The main clause is in the future and the subordinate clause is in the present even if it refers to something in the near future. Conditional modal verbs such as *could*, *may* and *might* are also acceptable instead of *will* in the main clause. **This type of conditional is a common source of errors.**
- *If you don't hurry, you will be late.* Acceptable.
- *We will get wet if it rains later.* Acceptable.
- *If it will rain later, we will get wet.* Error.
- *If you hurry, you might still be on time.* Acceptable.

Type 2: Used for **a hypothetical condition and its probable result**. The main clause is in the present

conditional (using *would* or, less often, *might* or *could*) and the subordinate clause is in the simple past.

- *If you got more sleep, you would not be so irritable*. Acceptable.
- *If you get more sleep, you would not be so irritable*. Error.
- *If I spoke another language, I would try to get a job abroad*. Acceptable.
- *We might win occasionally if we had one more good player on our team*. Acceptable.

In sentences of this type, the appropriate form of the verb *to be* in the *if* clause is the subjunctive *were* for all persons.

- *If I were president, I would raise the minimum wage*. Acceptable.
- *If I was president, I would raise the minimum wage*. Error.
- *If we were rich, we would give more to charity*. Acceptable.
- *If she were not my daughter, I would date her*. Acceptable.

Type 3. Used for **putative past conditions that did not occur (called counterfactual) and their probable past results**. The main clause is in the perfect conditional or perfect continuous conditional, and the subordinate clause is in the past perfect. If the verb in the subordinate clause is *to be*, the appropriate form is *had been*.

- *If I had studied harder, I would (might) have passed the exam*. Acceptable.
- *If I had been more diligent about studying, I would have passed the exam*. Acceptable.
- *If I would have been more diligent about studying, I would have passed the exam*. Error.
- *If it had rained, they would have gotten soaked*. Acceptable.
- *If it rained, they would have gotten soaked*. Error.

If the if clause is not meant to be counterfactual, the normal past tense of *to be* applies.

- *If he was there, I did not see him*. Acceptable (I do not know whether he was there).
- *If he were there, I did not see him*. Error.

Type 4. Refers to **a condition in the past and a result continuing in the present with both conditions contrary to fact**. The main clause is in the present or perfect conditional and the subordinate clause is in the past perfect.

- *If he had not been so greedy, he would be a rich man today*. Acceptable.
- *If I had been wise, I would have avoided all these problems*. Acceptable.
- *If he had looked at the map, he would not have ended up in the wrong place*. Acceptable.
- *If he looks at the map, he doesn't get lost*. Error.
- *If he looked at the map, he wouldn't have gotten lost*. Error.

Dangling modifiers

A dangling modifier is a participle or participial phrase, an infinitive or infinitive phrase, or an elliptical clause without a subject that is placed next to a word that it cannot logically modify. Although dangling modifiers are clearly incorrect, the ordinary reader is unlikely to be confused by the supposed alternative meaning or, in many cases, even to notice it. Note: Some expressions derived from participles (e.g., *concerning, failing, considering, speaking of*) have become prepositions and may be used to introduce phrases that do not directly modify the immediately adjacent noun phrase.

The severity and category of errors associated with dangling modifiers depend on how glaring the error is

and the level of ambiguity that is actually or potentially introduced. When the grammatical parsing of the sentence produces a bizarre or humorous image, the error may be considered more severe, since it is likely to distract a reader, even if correct understanding can readily be achieved on the basis of general knowledge.

Examples:
- *To serve you better, please have identification available.* Error.
- *Please have your identification available so we can better serve you.* Acceptable recasting of above.
- *Repeatedly late to practice, the coach made the team stay until dark.* Error affecting meaning.
- *The team members were repeatedly late to practice, so the coach made them stay until dark.* Acceptable recasting of above.

Modifiers can be ambiguous in the middle or at the end of the sentence as well, although technically these may not be grammatical errors.

Examples:
- *The police chief described the capture of the criminal when he spoke at a dinner.* Could be marked as an error (introduces ambiguity, albeit unlikely to affect comprehension).
- *I shot an elephant in my pajamas.* Could be marked as an error (introduces ambiguity, albeit more likely to distract the reader than affect comprehension).

Distinctions compulsory in the source but not in English

Just as definite, indefinite, and no article convey very different meanings in English, some languages may require distinctions that can, but need not, be made in English. A good example of this is the fact that Chinese has no word for brothers or sisters but requires different terms for older and younger siblings of both sexes. Such distinctions should be made in English if they are at all relevant to the meaning of the passage.

Examples:
- *His older sister had waited up for him, while his younger sister had been asleep for hours.* Acceptable (corresponds to source).
- *One sister had waited up for him, while the other had been asleep for hours.* Error possibly affecting meaning if differentiating the sisters is relevant information.
- *He was a doctor, as was his older brother.* (Corresponds to Chinese source.) Acceptable.
- *He was a doctor, as was his brother.* (Alternative translation of same sentence as above.) Could be marked as an error affecting meaning. The severity of this error depends on the context.
- *The female/lady professor gave a lecture on the history of English.* Minor error, as the gender of the professor is irrelevant and its inclusion draws undue attention to her gender.

Languages that distinguish nouns for gender may use a masculine or feminine pronoun to refer to an individual animal. Unless gender is clearly specified or a pet with a gender-marked name is referred to, *he*, *she* or *it* is acceptable.

Examples:
- *That crow seems to have injured her wing.* (Feminine noun in Russian, where gender would have been marked three times in the sentence.) Acceptable.

- *That crow seems to have injured its wing.* Acceptable.
- *That crow seems to have injured his wing.* Acceptable.

Exclamation points

Certain languages may use exclamation points more frequently or differently than English. In particular, exclamation points may be used for expressive or rhetorical purposes in ways that are unusual or even unacceptable in English. In such cases, an English translation can usually replace the exclamation point with a period. However, where an exclamation point is strongly preferable or required in English, whatever the source punctuation, failure to include it may be treated as an error.

Examples:
- *He is causing problems!* Acceptable.
- *He is causing problems.* Acceptable even if source uses an exclamation point.
- *"What a terrible mess," she exploded.* Error.

In addition, an error may be assessed for the use of many more exclamation points than would normally be found in an equivalent English text. This would be true even if the exclamation points in the translation correspond exactly to those in the source passage.

Grammatical ambiguity in the source language

Different languages force different grammatical choices and create different kinds of ambiguity. English grammar forces choices between restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses and between definite and indefinite articles. Russian grammar, for example, does not. In the certification exam, source-text ambiguity must be reconciled with the rules of English grammar; in other words, the dictates of English grammar may force specificity where a source text is ambiguous—or require a major recasting to preserve the source text's ambiguity.

Example: Source language does not require distinction between singular and plural.
- *He was buying presents for his sister(s).* (If the overall passage makes clear or strongly suggests which is correct—*sister* or *sisters*—an error will be marked as appropriate.)

Example: Source language does not have articles.
- *He asked her to bring him the cat.* Acceptable, assuming the context makes clear which cat.
- *He asked her to bring a cat.* Error if context suggests a specific cat is meant.

See also the "Restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses and appositives" and "Articles" entries in these Standards.

He/she and gender-specific terms

Since U.S. English is in a state of transition regarding the permissibility of using *he*, *him*, or *his* as a gender-

neutral singular pronoun, these grading standards, for now, are taking an agnostic position. Candidates will not be marked off for using a masculine pronoun when their source text uses a masculine third-person pronoun (for example referring back to a masculine noun such as "person," "child," "doctor," etc.).

Example:
- *The child slowly removed his toy from the box.* (source text uses the equivalent of *his*) Acceptable.

Nor will they be marked off for using a form of *they* to refer back to a single person, a practice that has become increasingly accepted in U.S. English. As stated in a [usage note in the American Heritage Dictionary](#):

The use of the plural pronouns *they, them, themselves,* or *their* with a grammatically singular antecedent dates back at least to 1300, and such constructions have been used by many admired writers, including William Makepeace Thackeray (*"A person can't help their birth"*), George Bernard Shaw (*"To do a person in means to kill them"*), and Anne Morrow Lindbergh (*"When you love someone you do not love them all the time"*). Despite the apparent grammatical disagreement between a singular antecedent like *someone* and the plural pronoun *them,* the construction is so widespread both in print and in speech that it often passes unnoticed. There are several reasons for its appeal. Forms of *they* are useful as gender-neutral substitutes for generic *he* and for coordinate forms like *his/her* or *his or her* (which can sound clumsy when repeated). Nevertheless, the clash in number can be jarring to writers and readers, and many people dislike *they* with a singular antecedent.

Examples:
- *Everyone has their own opinion about that.* Acceptable.
- *A journalist should not be forced to reveal their sources.* Acceptable.
- *If your child is ill, they can get free treatment at the clinic.* Acceptable.

Alternative constructions such as *he or she*, *he/she, (s)he*, or the use of *she* generically, may also be used, or sentences may be recast in the plural.

Example:
- *Everyone has his own opinion on that.* Acceptable.
- *Everyone has his or her own opinion on that.* Acceptable.
- *Everyone has his/her own opinion on that.* Acceptable.
- *All people have their own opinion on that.* Acceptable.
- *Everyone has her own opinion on that.* Acceptable.
- *Everyone has a personal opinion on that.* Acceptable.
- *Journalists should not be forced to reveal their sources.* Acceptable.
- *Children who fall ill can get free treatment at the clinic.* Acceptable.

Although pronouns such as *everyone* or *someone* can use a form of singular *they* as a referent, they cannot take a plural verb.

Examples:
- *Everyone has their own opinion on that.* Acceptable.
- *Everyone have their own opinion on that.* Error.

Terms such as *chairman* or *cleaning lady* are acceptable, especially if that is the form used in the source language. It is also acceptable to use gender-neutral forms of such terms: *chair* or *chairperson*, *cleaning*

person or *house cleaner*. However, extreme attempts at gender neutrality (such as *cowperson*) could merit an error marking. Either *actor* or *actress* can be used to refer to a female thespian, and analogous usages will be accepted in the exam regardless of the exact usage in the source passage.

The use of *they* (*them*, *their*) to refer to a person of known or strongly implied gender is an error. Inconsistent usage throughout a single translation (using *they* to refer to a singular antecedent in one sentence and using *he or she* for the same purpose later on) is likely to be marked as a Cohesion error.

See also the "Possibly offensive terms" entry in these Standards.

Hyphens

Hyphens play numerous roles in U.S. English. Details of hyphen use may differ among languages (or between the source language and English) even where the general principle of their use is the same, so that reproduction of source hyphenation (even if source and target terms are cognates) may result in a punctuation error. The situations most likely to confront candidates with a decision about hyphenation include the following:

Compound modifiers

In some cases, the joining of two or more words as a single modifier requires them to be hyphenated. This rule applies only when the compound modifier precedes the word being modified. One acceptable way of handling a multi-word modifier is to convert it into a dependent clause, as in the final example below. Note that when the noun phrase is used as an adjective only the singular form of the noun is acceptable.

Examples:

- *She has a three-year-old child.* Acceptable.
- *Her child is three years old.* Acceptable.
- *Her child is three-years-old.* Error.
- *She has a three-years-old child.* Error
- *They are required to wear flame-resistant clothing.* Acceptable.
- *Their clothing was flame resistant, in accordance with the requirements.* Acceptable.
- *They are required to wear clothing that is flame resistant.* Acceptable.

Failures to hyphenate compound modifiers that can lead to misunderstanding or ambiguity may be given more error points than mere punctuation errors.

- *On your way back, stop by the first aid station.* Error possibly creating ambiguity.
- *On your way back, stop at the first-aid station.* Acceptable.
- *That requires a heavy metal detector.* Error possibly creating ambiguity.
- *That requires a heavy-metal detector.* Acceptable.

Note: Since there is no solid consensus among style guides as to whether or not it is an error to mark off for hyphenating compounds including an adverb ending in –ly, such compounds (*barely-audible*, *publicly-held*, *rapidly-diminishing*, etc.) will be considered acceptable.

Hyphenation of numbers and fractions

Compound numbers twenty-one through ninety-nine are always hyphenated. For fractions and time expressions, the same rules apply as for other compound modifiers. Since some style guides accept the hyphenated nouns "one-third," "two-fifths," etc., this usage is also acceptable (see the entry on Numbers in these Standards).

- *Our family has lived here for thirty-seven (or 37) years*. Acceptable.
- *One third of the Senate voted against the bill*. Acceptable.
- *One-third of the Senate voted against the bill*. Acceptable.
- *A two-thirds majority voted for the bill*. Acceptable.
- *The meeting is scheduled for three thirty (or 3:30)*. Acceptable.
- *We have a three-thirty meeting*. Acceptable

Common compound words and gray areas

As compound words that were once hyphenated gain in usage generally or in a particular field, they are often joined. The joined words below have made it into some dictionaries, but not others. Graders are encouraged to be lenient in such areas. An error will be marked for inconsistent hyphenation of instances of the same word.

- *She has published fascinating sociohistorical studies.* Acceptable.
- *She has published fascinating socio-historical studies.* Acceptable.
- *The program was designed to promote ethnocultural unity.* Acceptable.
- *The program was designed to create ethno-cultural unity.* Acceptable.

Some compounds, like *prerevolutionary* or directions such as *southwest*, have been common and codified in dictionaries for so long that hyphenating them can be legitimately marked off as a slight error.

- *Their research has yielded rich biochemical evidence.* Acceptable.
- *Their research has yielded rich bio-chemical evidence.* Error.
- *They live in northeast Philadelphia.* Acceptable.
- *They live in north-east Philadelphia.* Error.

Hyphens and dashes

While a hyphen joins two or more words together, the function of dashes—both the longer em-dashes, as used here, and the shorter en-dashes, usually used with spaces on either side, as in the second example below—separate parenthetical statements from the sentence proper. A hyphen may not be used in place of a dash. On keyboarded exams longer dashes with spaces on either side or shorter dashes without spaces will be marked as slight Errors. This is an issue only for keyboarded exams. Graders will accept em-dashes and en-dashes with or without spaces on the handwritten exam.

- *The leader of the opposition party - who in this case happens to be the prime minister's uncle - refused to endorse the proposal.* Error.
- *The leader of the opposition party – who in this case happens to be the prime minister's uncle – refused to endorse the proposal.* Acceptable.
- *The leader of the opposition party—who in this case happens to be the prime minister's uncle— refused to endorse the proposal.* Acceptable.

Dashes should not be followed by other punctuation such as commas or periods. The only exception is the end of a quote, as in the example below:

- *She said, "I was just about to—" but he slammed the door in her face.* Acceptable.
- *I would have invited your friend—who happens to be my aunt—, but I had no room.* Error.

Idioms

Idiomatic expressions may occur in exam passages if the idiom is considered common enough to be readily understood by a qualified candidate. Even if a more or less exact analogue of the idiom exists in English, the candidate is not required to use it, as long as the meaning of the source idiom is conveyed in a way appropriate to the text type. Either analogous idioms or straightforward translations of their meaning in context are acceptable. Uninterpretable literal translations of idioms or renderings likely to be strange or amusing to the target audience will be marked as errors.

Examples:
 German source text: *Das erscheint mir noch abwegiger als Eulen nach Athen zu tragen.*
- *That strikes me as even more absurd than carrying coals to Newcastle.* Acceptable. This is a close English analogue to the German idiom, which literally translates as "taking owls to Athens."
- *That strikes me as a completely useless* (or *superfluous*) *endeavor.* Acceptable paraphrasing.

 Russian source text: *Его обвиняли в том, что он вешал лапшу на уши избирателей.*
- *He was accused of trying to pull the wool over the electorate's eyes.* Acceptable. The Russian idiom literally translates as "hanging noodles on the electorate's ears"; this English translation conveys the meaning accurately in an equivalent register.
- *He was accused of trying to dupe the electorate.* Acceptable paraphrasing.
- *He was accused of hanging noodles on the electorate's ears.* Error.

Similar criteria will be used to evaluate literal translations of source idioms that accidentally evoke English idioms with different meanings. Literal translations of source idioms that are understandable as being analogous to English idioms but may be perceived as slightly off will be judged based on the extent to which meaning and the translation's usefulness for its stated purpose is affected.

Examples:
 Spanish source text: *Me estaba tomando el pelo.*
- *He was pulling my leg.* Acceptable.
- *He was teasing me.* Acceptable.
- *He was taking my hair.* Error; the literal translation has a significant impact on meaning.

A literal translation of a source idiom to produce a metaphorical usage that is not an English idiom *per se* is not penalized as long as the meaning can readily be deduced in context.

Example:

> Dutch source text: *De klus om onze rivieren hoogwaterbestendig te maken zodat wij de voeten droog houden, kost miljarden euro's.*
>
> - *The job of preparing our rivers for high water levels* (or *making our rivers flood-resistant), so that we will be safe from flooding, will cost billions of euros.* Acceptable. The idiom *de voeten droog houden* (literally, "keep the feet dry") is used to mean "be safe from flooding."
> - *The job of preparing our rivers for high water levels, so that we can keep our feet dry, will cost billions of euros.* Probably acceptable. The context makes the meaning of the idiom fairly clear.

But:

> Dutch source text: *Het ontwerp voorziet in opgehoogde stukken, zodat de bomen de voeten droog houden.*
>
> - *The design includes elevated areas, so that the trees are safe from flooding.* Acceptable.
> - *The design includes elevated areas, so that the trees keep their feet dry.* Likely to be marked as an error.

Translations (whether or not they are literal translations) that are similar to a context-appropriate English idiom but contain a noticeable deviation from standard wording may be marked as errors.

Examples:

> Russian source text: *Я не маменькин сынок, но звоню моей маме каждую неделю.*
>
> - *I am not a mama's boy, but I do call my mother every week.* Acceptable.
> - *I am not a mama's son, but I do call my mother every week.* Literal translation could be marked as an error.
> - *We were up to our ears in work.* Acceptable.
> - *We were up to our chins in work.* Could be marked as an error, though minor, as the effect on meaning is negligible.

Literal translations of idiomatic similes of the type *as big as a house* or *as white as a sheet* are readily perceived by readers as meaning that the referent has the quality of the respective adjective to an extreme or absolute degree and can be used even if the corresponding noun in the foreign-language simile is different. If such similes are translated literally and the divergence from English idiomatic usage is noticeable, error points will be assessed based on the degree of damage to the source's meaning.

Examples:

> French source text: *La femme de l'amiral était jolie comme une cœur.*
>
> - *The admiral's wife was as pretty as a picture* (or *as pretty as can be).* Acceptable. Appropriate transfer of the French idiom.
> - *The admiral's wife was as pretty as a heart.* Literal translation could be marked as an error.
>
> Spanish source text: *Los otros miembros de la expedición estaban tan frescos como una lechuga.*
>
> - *The other members of the expedition were as fresh as a daisy.* Acceptable. Appropriate transfer of the Spanish idiom.
> - *The other members of the expedition were as fresh as* (*a head of*) *lettuce.* Literal translation could be marked as an error.

Russian source text: *Он любил математику, как собака палку.*
- *He loved mathematics about as much as a horse loves a whip* (or *cats love baths*). Acceptable.
- *He loved mathematics about as much as a dog loves a stick.* Literal translation likely to be marked as an error. Meaning affected since it is unclear in English whether the metaphor refers to the stick being used for a beating or for playing "fetch."

In attempting to supply an equivalent English idiom, candidates may inadvertently change the meaning of the sentence in an unacceptable way.

Examples:

Dutch source text: *Ze konden hem missen als kiespijn.*
- *They could miss him like toothache.* Literal translation could be marked as an error.
- *They had no desire for his company.* Acceptable. This is a reasonable approximation of the meaning of this idiom.
- *They needed him around like they needed a hole in the head.* Probably acceptable. This is an English idiom with roughly the same meaning.
- *They avoided him like the plague.* Could be marked as an error since the Dutch wording did not necessarily imply avoidance. The seriousness of the error depends on the context.

A source-language idiom may be rendered in a different register in English as long as that register is not inappropriate in context.

Example:

Croatian source text: *Po onome pasjem vremenu malo je tko uopće izlazio iz kuće.*
- *In such inclement weather, few people even ventured out of their homes.* Acceptable rendering given register of text.
- *In such lousy weather, few people even ventured out of their homes.* Error could be marked if deemed inappropriate to text register.
- *In such crappy weather, few people even ventured out of their homes.* Likely to be marked as an error for inappropriate register.
- *In such dog's weather, few people even ventured out of their homes.* Literal translation could be marked as an error.

See also the "[Register](#)" entry in these Standards.

May and its alternatives

Use of *can* for *may* (i.e., for permission as well as ability) is becoming more acceptable in many contexts, but *may* is still preferred when used for permission.

Examples:
- *Employees may make suggestions about ways to improve services.* Acceptable.
- *Employees can make suggestions about ways to improve services.* Acceptable.
- *They asked if they might attend the conference as nonvoting participants.* Acceptable.
- *They asked if they could attend the conference as nonvoting participants.* Acceptable.

- *Unauthorized individuals may not use the facilities.* Acceptable.
- *Unauthorized individuals cannot use the facilities.* Acceptable.

In some passages, *may* and *might* may be used interchangeably to suggest reasonable probability or to express a polite request.

Examples:
- *Bronchitis may develop into pneumonia.* or *Bronchitis might develop into pneumonia.* Both acceptable.
- *Might I express an opinion?* or *May I express an opinion?* Both acceptable.

Misplaced adverbs

Misplacement of an adverb may be marked as an error if it creates ambiguity or distorts meaning.

Examples:
- *The manager hired only six new workers.* Acceptable; corresponds to meaning of source text.
- *The manager only hired six new workers.* Could be marked as an error if ambiguity is introduced (as to whether it is the number of new workers that is important or the fact that the manager did not complete other tasks).
- *The runners immediately submitted applications to compete.* Acceptable; corresponds to meaning of source text.
- *The runners submitted applications to compete immediately.* Could be marked as an error if ambiguity is introduced (as to whether the applications were submitted immediately or the applications were to compete immediately).
- *They lost nearly all their equipment.* Acceptable; corresponds to meaning of source text.
- *They nearly lost all their equipment.* Could be marked as an error if meaning of source text was that almost all of the equipment was lost.

See also the "Commas: Conjunctive adverbs," "Commas: Digressions/interrupters," and "Split infinitives" entry in these Standards.

Names, personal and geographic

Candidates are expected to provide the correct English equivalent of personal and geographic names from the source- or target-language culture.

Examples:
- Russian source text: *Москва* - only *Moscow* is acceptable.
- German source text: *Wien* - only *Vienna* is acceptable.

For languages that do not use the Roman alphabet, any reasonable transliteration of proper names is acceptable unless the correct version is provided in the Translation Instructions.

Example:
- *Пётр Чайковский*: *Pyotr Tchaikovsky* (the most common English transliteration of this name) is acceptable, as is *Piotr Chaikovskiy* (a version transliterated consistently according to an accepted scheme), unless one or the other (or a third variant) is specified in the Translation Instructions.

For third-language (neither source nor target) personal and geographic names, candidates are expected to recognize and provide the correct English equivalent for well-known persons and geographic names. Failure to do so could be marked as an error. The correct English rendition of less familiar names will be provided in the Translation Instructions.

Examples:
- *Varšava*, *Varsovie*, ワルシャワ = *Warsaw*. Anything else is an error.
- *Convenio de La Haya* = *Hague Convention*. *La Haya Convention* or *Haya Convention* would be marked as an error.

The incorrect or inconsistent transfer of diacritical marks in personal names may be marked as an error. Diacritical marks in the source language must be rendered in English either with all diacritical marks intact or with no diacritical marks indicated, consistently throughout the entire passage.

Example:
- *Bošković* or *Boskovic*. Either is acceptable.
- *Boškovic.* Error (inconsistent use of diacritics).
- *Ugrešić* and then, later in the same passage, *Drakulic* (instead of *Drakulić*). Error (inconsistent use of diacritics).

Candidates are not expected to correctly translate or transliterate lesser-known or hard-to-recognize personal or geographic names, especially those from a third-language culture. The appropriate renderings of these will be indicated in the Translation Instructions.

Examples:
- *Чан Кайши* appears in a Russian passage: Translation Instructions state "Render *Чан Кайши* as *Chiang Kai-shek*."
- *Dinariden* appears in a German passage: Translation Instructions state "Render *Dinariden* as *Dinaric Alps*."

See also the "Acronyms" entry in these Standards.

Nonparallel constructions

Nonparallel construction are considered errors. The severity with which such errors are treated depends on the extent to which they impede understanding.

Examples:
- *You must either do the job or it will be assigned to someone else.* Error.
- *You must do the job, or else it will be assigned to someone else.* Acceptable.
- *Electric cars are quiet, cause no air pollution, and gasoline is not used.* Error.

- *Electric cars are quiet, cause no air pollution, and use no gasoline.* Acceptable.
- *When parenthetical material appears within a sentence, the first word is not capitalized, nor does it close with a period.* Error.
- *When parenthetical material appears within a sentence, the first word is not capitalized and the last is not followed by a period.* Acceptable.

It is not necessary to repeat *to* in a simple series of infinitive constructions. Omitting the *to* in more complex cases could be marked as an error, especially if understanding is impeded.

Examples:
- *It became possible to earn a living, take vacations, and save for emergencies.* Acceptable.
- *It became possible to earn a living, to take vacations, and to save for emergencies.* Acceptable.
- *It became possible to earn a living, to take vacations, and saving for emergencies.* Error.

Non-U.S. usage

The ATA Certification Exam is based on U.S. English. Each instance of British (Canadian, Australian, etc.) spelling is penalized as an error. Familiar terms and usages that are more common in other English-speaking countries but familiar in the United States will usually be deemed acceptable, so long as meaning would be clear to the specified target audience. English terms and usages that virtually never occur in U.S. English or introduce confusion are marked as errors. The safest course for candidates is to avoid non-U.S. spelling and usage entirely.

Examples:
- *It was a matter of honour to him*. Spelling error.
- *I never dreamt it would happen to me*. Acceptable.
- *He tossed it into a rubbish bin*. Acceptable.
- *Required school supplies include pencils, notebooks and rubbers*. Error (has an impact on meaning, as source text clearly means *erasers*).
- *The prime minister spent two weeks in hospital.* Error (British usage).

See also the "Collective and mass nouns" and "Subjunctive mood" entries in these Standards.

Numbers

All style guides agree that large, complex numbers should be expressed in numerals, but they have different rules for using numerals or writing out numbers in word form. Some say that all numbers from zero to one hundred should be written out, whereas others call for using numerals for any number ten or above. Either is acceptable on the ATA Exam, as long as usage is consistent throughout the translation. Regardless of which rule is followed, it is unacceptable to begin a sentence with a numeral.

Examples:
- *173 ballots were spoiled.* Error.
- *A total of 173 ballots were spoiled.* Acceptable recasting of sentence.
- *One hundred seventy-three ballots were spoiled.* Acceptable.

An exception to the rule about large numbers is that numbers in the millions, billions and above may be expressed in a combination of numerals and words. Commas, not decimal points or spaces, should be used to separate groups of three digits for numbers of five digits or more.

- *The earthquake took 7 thousand lives.* Error.
- *The earthquake took 7,000 lives.* Acceptable.
- *The earthquake took 7000 lives.* Acceptable.
- *The GDP of the United States now exceeds $17 trillion.* Acceptable.
- *The GDP fell by two billion dollars last year.* Acceptable.
- *The population of the United States is 326,516,956.* Acceptable.
- *The population of the United States is 326.516.956 (or 326 516 956).* Error.

When fractions are written out in words, hyphenation is optional:
- *The teacher failed one fifth of the class.* Acceptable.
- *The teacher failed one-fifth of the class.* Acceptable.

Centuries may be written in words or numerals, but not Roman numerals.
- *She is a specialist in 19th century literature.* Acceptable.
- *She is a specialist in nineteenth century literature.* Acceptable.
- *She is a specialist in XIX century literature.* Error.

Parenthetical material and use of parentheses

Parentheses may be used to enclose asides or explanations without penalty if the sentence retains its meaning and reads normally in English, even if the original had the analogous phrase enclosed in commas or dashes.

Examples:
- *The only article of clothing he wore, a pair of ill-fitting overalls, was dirty and torn.* Acceptable.
- *The only article of clothing he wore—a pair of ill-fitting overalls—was dirty and torn.* Acceptable.
- *The only article of clothing he wore (a pair of ill-fitting overalls) was dirty and torn.* Acceptable.

Lack of parentheses enclosing an abbreviation following a complete term in its first citation will be marked as an error.

Examples:
- *This work was performed at the Naval Research Laboratory (NRL).* Acceptable.
- *This work was performed at the Naval Research Laboratory, NRL.* Error.

See also the "Acronyms: Expanding acronyms" entry in these Standards.

When parenthetical material appears within a sentence, the first word is not capitalized and the last is not followed by a period, even if it forms a complete sentence. However, if appropriate, a question mark or exclamation point may be used within the parentheses.

Examples:

- *This cat was not a Siamese. Its eyes were green (not blue).* Acceptable.
- *This cat was not a Siamese. Its eyes were green (not blue.).* Error.
- *This cat was not a Siamese. Its eyes were green (not blue.)* Error.
- *Edward (you know him, don't you?) won the prize.* Acceptable.
- *Are you aware that I found out only yesterday (March 20)?* Acceptable.
- *Are you aware that I found out only yesterday (March 20?)* Error.
- *Are you aware that I found out only yesterday (March 20?)?* Error.

When a parenthetical phrase falls within a sentence, other punctuation (commas, colons, dashes, and semicolons) comes after, never before, the parenthetical phrase.

Examples:

- *He gave her a Bible (and later a rosary), which she kept.* Acceptable.
- *He gave her a Bible, (and later a rosary) which she kept*. Error.

The correct grammar for a sentence (primarily agreement) that includes a phrase in parentheses must be determined without considering the parenthetical phrase.

Examples:

- *He gave her a Bible (and later a rosary), which was found by her bedside.* Acceptable.
- *He gave her a Bible (and later a rosary), which were found by her bedside.* Error.

When a sentence within parentheses stands alone, it begins with a capital and terminal punctuation is placed inside the parentheses.

Example:

- *Cook until golden brown. (Do not allow to burn.)* Acceptable.
- *Cook until golden brown. (Do not allow to burn).* Error.

But:

- *Cook until golden brown (do not allow to burn).* Acceptable.
- *Cook until golden brown (Do not allow to burn).* Capitalization error.

Use of brackets for parentheses could be marked as an error on computerized exams (on written exams candidates will probably be given the benefit of the doubt about whether the correct form of parentheses has been used). If a parenthetical statement is required inside of parentheses, brackets should be used. The use of slashes in place of parentheses is a practice dating back to the era of typewriters. They are not considered acceptable substitutes for parentheses.

Passive and active voice

Writing guides and teachers often frown on the use of the passive voice, but it has a place in good English writing—for instance, when the agent of an action is not known or not relevant. Passive sentences may be used to put the emphasis on the process rather than the actor. They occur with particular frequency in certain types of English writing, such as legal documents and scientific papers. In other languages that have a passive voice, this construction may be used more or less frequently than in English, or it may be used

differently.

Candidates will not be penalized for rendering individual active-voice sentences in the source text as English active-voice sentences or passive-voice source sentences as passive-voice target sentences, as long as the result is a grammatical English sentence and meaning is appropriately transferred. If a candidate uses so many passive constructions that a grader feels the overall style is inappropriate to the passage purpose and audience, an error may be marked (for example, translation of a set of instructions from German using a sequence of passive sentences in place of the more normal imperatives).

Sentences that are passive in the source text may be converted to active sentences in the English target text as long as the subject of the active sentence is clearly and unambiguously stated or implied in the source. If this is not the case and the meaning is affected, graders will assess an error. The number of points assigned to the error will depend on the extent to which meaning is affected.

Examples:
- *The attorney's argument was ridiculed and subsequently ruled inadmissible.* Acceptable: corresponds to source.
- *The court ridiculed the attorney's argument and subsequently ruled it inadmissible.* Error impacting meaning. The source does not specify who did the ridiculing.

Many "subjectless" passive sentences place the emphasis on the recipient of the action rather than the subject. Changing such sentences to the active voice and specifying a subject when the source text does not is likely to be considered an error impacting meaning.

Examples.
- *My dog had been run over.* Acceptable: corresponds to source.
- *A car* (or any specified vehicle when source does not specify) *had run over my dog.* Error possibly affecting meaning.

Sentences that are active in the source may be converted to passive English sentences, provided that no meaning is lost and that the sentence is acceptable in English and suitable to the text type.

Examples:
- *However, a trivial accident soon destroyed her state of ignorant bliss.* Acceptable: corresponds to source.
- *However, her state of ignorant bliss was soon destroyed by a trivial accident.* Acceptable.

Phrasal verbs

The term "phrasal verb" refers to a combination of an ordinary verb and an adverb or preposition with a meaning that is not predictable from the literal meanings of the elements. Such verbs are extremely common in English. Examples with adverbs include *take out, take over, take up, bring out, make over,* and *put up.* Examples with prepositions that take an object include *take after, go for, have at, stumble upon,* and *harp on.* Some phrasal verb constructions involve both an adverb and an ordinary preposition, such as *go on about* and *get away with.*

Errors in phrasal verbs virtually always involve the use of the wrong adverb or preposition. In such cases, if the intended phrase (and thus its meaning) can be readily inferred, few error points will be assessed. However, if use of the wrong adverb or preposition creates real ambiguity or suggests the wrong meaning, the error will be graded accordingly.

Examples:
- *Several people in the audience nodded off.* Acceptable.
- *Several people in the audience nodded out.* Error.
- *He was looking for his dog.* Acceptable.
- *He was looking after his dog.* Error affecting meaning.
- *By the time she arrived, he had passed out.* Acceptable.
- *By the time she arrived, he had passed away.* Error affecting meaning.

Possibly offensive terms

No word is acceptable that is clearly labeled as unconditionally offensive by any of our accepted English monolingual dictionaries and felt by the grader to be so in context. Such usage will likely be treated as an error if it is inconsistent with the source text type. However, some terms identified in the definition or usage notes of the AH Dictionary as frequently offensive—e.g., *Negro*—or as offensive to some people—such as *lady* in the phrase *lady doctor*—will not be marked as errors unless they are blatantly offensive in context, especially if analogous terms are used in the source. Regardless of the source term, "politically correct" translations, such as *black* and *female doctor*, are also acceptable in virtually all contexts. The exception would be the use of politically correct substitutes in historical contexts in which they stand out as modernisms or are parts of set phrases or references to the names of institutions.

Examples:
- *The most brilliant poet of the 19th century was confined to a lunatic asylum for the last years of his life.* Acceptable.
- *The most brilliant poet of the 19th century was confined to a psychiatric facility for the last years of his life.* Acceptable.
- *The most brilliant poet of the 19th century was confined to a nuthouse for the last years of his life.* Error.
- *In the years before his death in 1943, George Washington Carver was frequently called a "credit to the Negro race."* Acceptable.
- *In the years before his death in 1943, George Washington Carver was frequently called a "credit to the African-American race."* Error. *African-American* is anachronistic in this context.
- *Lady doctors were rare even in the late 19th century.* Acceptable.
- *Female doctors were rare even in the late 19th century.* Acceptable.

A variety of terms for people with disabilities are in current use. Terms such as *handicapped* and *crippled*, which are sometimes considered offensive or outdated, will be judged leniently. Terms such as *physically challenged individual* and *person with a visual impairment* will also be accepted, even though some people may consider such terms verbose or euphemistic. This applies regardless of the term used in the source language. In all instances, terms will have to be contextually appropriate to be deemed acceptable.

Quotation marks

With exceptions described below, only double quotation marks (straight or curly) are acceptable in certification exams. Other marks or conventions used in other countries or in special contexts to indicate quoted speech, such as 'single quotes,' «guillemets», „low nine double quotes," dashes, or italics, are not acceptable. Only the first usage of such marks in each passage will be graded as an error. Misuse of a pair of quotation marks is one error unless two different rules are violated.

In U.S. usage, commas and periods are always placed inside a closing quotation mark, while colons and semicolons are placed outside. Exclamation points and question marks are placed inside closing quotation marks only if they are part of the matter being quoted. Any deviation from these rules will be treated as an error.

Examples:
- *Though I would not use the term "disaster," I do see her point.* Acceptable.
- *Though I would not use the term "disaster", I do see her point.* Error.
- *Benjamin Franklin even called him a "cool and prudent man"!* Acceptable.
- *Benjamin Franklin even called him a "cool and prudent man!"* Error.

Single quotation marks are required for quotations within quotations. Double quotations are used in all other instances requiring quotation marks.

Examples:
- *There has been considerable controversy concerning how difficult the 'Star-Spangled Banner' is to sing.* Error.
- *A world-renowned opera singer has been quoted as saying, "I never claimed "The Star-Spangled Banner" was unsingable, just that I myself found it impossible to sing."* Error.

The use of so-called scare quotes to alert readers that a term is being used in a nonstandard, ironic, or other special sense is acceptable, but the overuse of scare quotes or the use of quotation marks simply to highlight or emphasize a term may be marked as an error, even if such usage is acceptable in the source language. Failure to use scare quotes will be penalized only in very clear cases.

In ambiguous situations, where quotation marks in the original can be interpreted either as indicative of sarcasm or as simple emphasis, either the presence or absence of quotation marks is acceptable. Quotation marks used merely to indicate that a word or phrase is a "term of art" is also permissible, but only if the term is being introduced for the first time. It is always correct to omit the quotation marks in cases like this, even if they are used in the source text.

Examples:
- *The patent office was unimpressed by this "scientific breakthrough."* Acceptable. Quotation marks indicate sarcasm on the part of the author. It would also be acceptable to indicate this in a different way, such as the use of the word *purported* instead of or in addition to the quotes.
- *The discovery of "dark matter" was a landmark event in modern physics.* Could be marked as an error if this is not the first time *dark matter* has been mentioned.

Quotation marks may be used to indicate that a person's exact words are being quoted within a paraphrase.

Example:
- *Rumi seems to be suggesting that his "golden face" is just as heavy a burden as his "iron legs."* Acceptable. Omitting the quotation marks might also be acceptable, depending on the context.

In general, words or phrases that are mentioned specifically as words or phrases rather than as semantic content are placed in quotes or italics.

Examples:
- *"Honey" has two syllables.* Acceptable.
- *"Honey" is sweet.* Error (unless the word is being used ironically for some other substance).

However, there are many unclear cases and some exceptions to this rule. If it is debatable whether a word is being used or mentioned, graders will give candidates the benefit of the doubt.

Example:
- *"Ezti" is the Basque word for "honey."* Acceptable.

For the purposes of the ATA Certification Exam, the use of quotes may be optional if specific words in the sentence (such as *name* or *call*) make it clear that a word or phrase is being mentioned rather than used. This is true regardless of whether quotes are used in the source language.

Examples:
- *His friends called him Hank.* Acceptable.
- *His friends called him "Hank."* Acceptable.
- *She always described him as a vile little prig.* Acceptable.
- *She always described him as a "vile little prig."* Acceptable.
- *I try not to use derogatory terms like "idiot" around the children.* Acceptable.
- *I try not to use derogatory terms like idiot around the children.* Acceptable.

If the omission of the quotes leads to ambiguity in such a case, an error may be marked.

Example:
- *I try not to use derogatory phrases like "an idiot" around the children.* Acceptable.
- *I try not to use derogatory phrases like an idiot around the children.* Error (introduces ambiguity).

The use of quotes with indirect reported speech is unacceptable.

Example:
- *He explained that "he had missed his train."* Error.

Italics rather than quotes are used for the titles of works that stand on their own, such as books, paintings, albums, periodicals, films, and theatrical works, while double quotes are required for the components of such works, such as titles of articles, short stories, non-book-length poems, songs, and book chapters. The two are not interchangeable, nor are single quotes acceptable in these cases. (Underlining can be used in handwritten exams in place of italics.)

Names of companies and other organizations are not normally placed in quotes in English. (Nor are they normally italicized.)

See also the "[Capitalization in headings and titles of works](#)" entry in these Standards.

Redundancy

A certain amount of redundancy is common in language, especially for purposes of emphasis, and this will not be penalized in the ATA Certification Exam. On the other hand, elimination of redundancy will not be penalized either.

Examples:
- *High rates of endemism in both flora and fauna…* Acceptable. Here *both* is a literal translation from the source.
- *High rates of endemism in flora and fauna…* Acceptable. In this case, *both* adds no new or essential information.

On the other hand, there are cases where *both* adds meaning and cannot be left out without incurring an error.

Examples:
- *Both suitcases exceeded the airline weight limit.* Acceptable. This implies that each one was over the limit.
- *The suitcases exceeded the airline weight limit.* Error introducing ambiguity (could mean both suitcases together exceeded the limit).

Similarly, addition of a redundant form—having the effect of mild emphasis, for example—will not be penalized if meaning is not affected.

Examples:
- *Experts differ as to the desirability of teenagers having after-school jobs. Some consider them an invaluable lesson in responsibility; on the other hand, others think they detract from the educational process.* Equivalent to the source language.
- *Experts differ as to the desirability of teenagers having after-school jobs. Some consider them an invaluable lesson in responsibility, <u>while,</u> on the other hand, others think they detract from the educational process.* Acceptable. The addition of *while* adds no meaning and is an acceptable redundancy in English. Similarly, if the source sentence included analogues of both *while* and *on the other hand*, no error would be marked for omission of either (or both), provided the sentences are punctuated correctly.
- *Experts differ as to the desirability of teenagers having after-school jobs. Some consider them an invaluable lesson in responsibility; others think they detract from the educational process.* Acceptable.

Redundant or somewhat redundant adjectives (*absolutely perfect, old adage, hollow tube*) will not be penalized if similar adjectives or other emphatic devices are used in the source.

It is difficult to gauge the exact effects of linguistic devices for indicating emphasis and especially difficult to

compare such effects across languages. A great deal depends on context.

Example:
- *Although the candidate criticized his predecessor's Middle East policy, the policy he adopted after his election was absolutely identical.* Introduction of redundant *absolutely* is acceptable.

Finally, some source languages may conventionally use redundancy more than English does, or in different contexts. Translations that eliminate such redundancy with no loss of meaning or cohesion will not be penalized. Retention of such redundancies will be judged on acceptability in English.

Register

Candidates are expected to find terms and phrases appropriate to the register (or language level) of the target context. Information about the target audience as indicated in the passage's Translation Instructions is often useful in making decisions about proper register.

General principles

Register decisions for into-English exams typically involve choosing between a standard English usage and an alternative that may be considered informal, highly specialized, slang, obsolete, dialect, or nonstandard in some other way. Because all passages used in the ATA Certification Exam are in a register for which standard English is appropriate, use of standard English is always considered acceptable. Graders may penalize candidates for the use of English words labeled as nonstandard in any dictionary, including bilingual ones. In some contexts, however, nonstandard terms or phrasings may be acceptable. In particular, informal or even slang terms are acceptable in contexts where a term of similar register is used in the source language and it is presented as a direct or indirect quotation. Furthermore, some exam passages may be written in a breezy, conversational tone that candidates should strive to replicate. In rare cases, the source text may break register for rhetorical purposes; such flourishes should be replicated in the target text.

Examples:
- *The opposition party claims that the new administration project is nothing more than a huge boondoggle*. Acceptable (source text uses a term in an equivalent register).
- *The opposition party claims that the new administration project is nothing more than a huge waste of money.* Acceptable (paraphrasing in a more standard register).
- *Then again, the other months were not all that great either.* Acceptable (matches the colloquial style of the source text).

Although most dictionaries of U.S. English do label some terms *nonstandard, offensive, vulgar, slang, informal, archaic, obsolete,* or *dialect*, many terms not so labeled may also be considered inappropriate to an exam passage's register. A grader who considers a term used by a candidate to be inappropriately informal for the context, archaic, or belonging to the realm of professional jargon may assess an error, even if the term is not specifically marked as such in the dictionary.

Examples:
- *If a modern family wishes to eat mussel soup...* Acceptable.
- *If a modern family desires to eat mussel soup...* Acceptable: The first definition of *desire* is *wish*, and *desire* is not marked for register in any way.
- *If a modern family has a hankering to eat mussel soup...* Acceptable: *hanker/hankering* is not marked in the dictionary as other than standard English.
- *If a modern family is jonesing for mussel soup...* Error: The term is marked as slang.

English terms marked by dictionaries as archaic, or considered by the grader to be so, are acceptable in context if they are the specific names of an archaic institution, object, or phenomenon being discussed or the name of something appropriate to the time under discussion in the passage.

Example:
- *My grandmother often reminisced about the time her father brought a gramophone home from a trip East—the first one ever seen in their small Midwestern town.* Acceptable. (Record player or phonograph also acceptable, while hi-fi or stereo would be an error.)

Expressions of politeness, honorifics, etc., may be regarded as errors if inappropriate in the English context, regardless of usage in the source.

Examples:
- *Please read these instructions thoroughly before attempting to use the product.* Acceptable.
- *Please be so gracious as to read these instructions thoroughly before attempting to use the product.* Error (literal translation inappropriate to target context).

Technical terms

Graders may penalize candidates for using terms that could be confusing or unfamiliar to a general audience, even if they are cognates of the foreign-language words used.

Examples:
- *In the movie, he is bitten by a rabid dog.* Acceptable, even if a cognate of *hydrophobic* is used in the source text.
- *In the movie, he is bitten by a hydrophobic dog.* Could be marked as an error, depending on broader context and designated audience.
- *The government fell after a series of ugly scandals*. Acceptable, even if cognate of *concatenation* is used in the source text.
- *The government fell after a concatenation of ugly scandals.* Could be marked as an error (inappropriate to target context).
- *The senator denied that he had ever been convicted of or charged with committing any unlawful act.* Acceptable.
- *The senator denied that he had ever been convicted of or charged with committing any tort.* Could be marked as an error (inappropriate to target context).
- *By and large, Spanish is written phonetically.* Acceptable.
- *By and large, Spanish is written the way it sounds.* Could be marked as an error for unnecessary lowering of register, especially if the literal equivalent of *phonetically* is used in the source text.
- *Following his mother's instructions, Jeff gave the note to his teacher.* Acceptable.

- *Pursuant to his mother's instructions, Jeff gave the note to his teacher.* Error, even if wording used in the source text could be translated as *pursuant to* in a different context.

Contractions

The use of contractions may be considered unduly informal in a text that would not normally be written in a casual register, such as an academic treatise. English writing is becoming increasingly informal, however, and in sources such as newspapers and magazines contractions and other examples of informal usage are common.

Examples:
- *You can't ever tell if a disease is going to turn into an epidemic* (in an academic journal). Error.
- *Given the current state of the economy, you just can't judge people for being out of work for months on end* (in a newspaper article). Acceptable.
- *Given the current state of the economy, you just cannot judge people for being out of work for months on end.* Acceptable.

Restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses and appositives

A **restrictive clause** is a dependent clause that identifies the noun, phrase, or clause it modifies and limits or restricts its meaning. A **nonrestrictive clause** (also known as a *descriptive clause*) does not limit the reference in this way: The noun or situation it modifies has already been identified in the text, is unique (e.g., a proper noun), or is assumed to be unique.

Examples (all punctuated correctly for the indicated restrictive or nonrestrictive form):
- *People who live in glass houses should not throw stones.* Restrictive: *People* is restricted to those living in glass houses.
- *People, who depend on air, should not pollute it.* Nonrestrictive. All people breathe air.
- *The car that is parked in the garage has bad brakes.* Restrictive: Parked in the garage uniquely identifies which car is being talked about.
- *The car, which is parked in the garage, has bad brakes.* Nonrestrictive: Only one car is under discussion, and it just happens to be parked in the garage.
- *John, whom I told you about, has lost his job.* Nonrestrictive: Proper noun.
- *My husband, who sends his regards, is undergoing surgery next week.* Nonrestrictive: *My husband* is assumed to be unique.
- *My brother who is a doctor makes more money than my brother the teacher*. Restrictive: The *who is a...* clause serves to identify and distinguish between the two brothers.

This distinction, which in English is shown principally through the use of commas and the choice of relative pronouns, is absent in some other languages. Thus, it may be unclear from context whether a relative clause in a source text is intended to be restrictive or nonrestrictive. If a sentence can be interpreted either way with no disruption of meaning, then neither interpretation will be penalized, even if the grader considers one reading or the other to be more likely.

Examples:

- *We do not starve during Ramadan, as argued by some of our atheist brothers who attack the holiday.* Acceptable (restrictive). (The source language, Arabic, does not make the restrictive-nonrestrictive distinction.)
- *We do not starve during Ramadan, as argued by some of our atheist brothers, who attack the holiday.* Acceptable (nonrestrictive).
- *He visited the old cemetery where his grandparents are buried.* Acceptable (restrictive).
- *He visited the old cemetery, where his grandparents are buried.* Acceptable (nonrestrictive).

However, in situations where a clause is unambiguously restrictive or nonrestrictive within the immediate or overall context of the text, errors will be marked if the fixed rules of English usage concerning commas and relative pronouns are violated, regardless of usage in the source text. Dashes or parentheses may not be substituted for commas in cases of nonrestrictive clauses or apposition.

See the following sub-section for examples and, more generally, the "Grammatical ambiguity in the source language" entry in these Standards.

Commas in restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses

In English, restrictive clauses are never set off with commas, whereas nonrestrictive clauses always require them. The use of commas to set off a clause that is unambiguously restrictive can be marked as an error. The severity of the error depends on whether or not meaning is affected. In many cases, whether a clause is meant to be restrictive or nonrestrictive can be determined on the basis of real-world knowledge or overall context.

Examples:
- *People, who live in glass houses, should not throw stones.* Error affecting meaning.
- *Some of the students have failed. All the students who completed the course work will graduate next month.* Acceptable.
- *Some students will fail to graduate. However, all the students who completed the course work will graduate next month.* Acceptable.
- *Some of the students have failed. All the students, who completed the course work, will graduate next month.* Error affecting meaning and introducing ambiguity.

In other cases, the noun (for example, a proper name) modified by the clause indicates whether the clause is restrictive or not. Failure to set off an unambiguously nonrestrictive clause with commas is marked as an error.

Example:
- *John whom I told you about has lost his job.* Error.

Relative pronouns

The most common relative pronouns used with restrictive clauses are *who/whom* and *that*. Nonrestrictive clauses are most commonly introduced by *which* or *who/whom*.

Examples:
- *The man who came earlier is here again.* Acceptable (restrictive).
- *The letter that came yesterday is on your desk.* Acceptable (restrictive).

- *Al, who came yesterday, is here again.* Acceptable (nonrestrictive).
- *The letter from Al, which came yesterday, is on your desk*. Acceptable (nonrestrictive, referring to the letter).

In addition, *that* (but not *which*) may stand in for *who/whom* in a restrictive clause; however, neither *that* nor *which* may stand in for *who/whom* in a nonrestrictive clause.

Examples:
- *The man that was here yesterday has returned.* Acceptable (restrictive).
- *The man which was here yesterday has returned*. Error (restrictive).
- *Al, that was here yesterday, has returned.* Error (nonrestrictive).
- *Al, which was here yesterday, has returned.* Error (nonrestrictive).

Who/whom is limited to humans or anthropomorphized objects (pets, stuffed animals, etc.) and does not apply to countries or organizations. For countries or organizations, *that* or *which* is used.

Examples:
- *My cat Fluffy, who is very sensitive, doesn't respond well to strangers.* Acceptable.
- *The dog that always accompanied him was absent that day.* Acceptable.
- *The countries who are having financial problems are also deep in debt.* Error.
- *The ten professional associations that see the greatest increase in membership will be eligible for a year-end award.* Acceptable.

That or *who/whom* may be omitted from a restrictive clause when it refers to the logical object of a transitive verb, but never from a nonrestrictive one.

Examples:
- *The bread that I bought yesterday has already gone stale.* Acceptable (restrictive).
- *The bread I bought yesterday has already gone stale*. Acceptable (restrictive).
- *This bread, which I bought yesterday, has already gone stale.* Acceptable (nonrestrictive).
- *This bread, I bought yesterday, has already gone stale.* Error.
- *The man who bought the bread is here again.* Acceptable (restrictive).

Either type of clause may also begin with *where* or *when* or with phrases such as *because of which*, *in which*, *by which method*, etc. In such cases the difference between the two types of clause is indicated only by comma usage.

Examples:
- *I wandered around the park until the moment when the birds started to sing*. Acceptable (restrictive).
- *I wandered around the park until sunset, when the birds started to sing*. Acceptable (nonrestrictive).
- *The technology stocks in which I invested have not done well.* Acceptable (restrictive).
- *Technology stocks, in which I invested, have not done well.* Acceptable (nonrestrictive)

A restrictive or nonrestrictive clause with a relationship of possession to the independent clause is introduced by *of which* or *whose. Whose* is acceptable for either animate or inanimate antecedents.

Examples:

- *The man whose dog this is lives down the street.* Acceptable (restrictive).
- *The man over there, whose dog this is, lives down the street.* Acceptable (nonrestrictive).
- *I removed the tree(,) whose roots were damaging the pipes.* Acceptable with or without a comma (nonrestrictive).
- *I removed the tree, the roots of which were damaging the pipes.* Acceptable (nonrestrictive).

Clauses (both restrictive and nonrestrictive) that are introduced by *who*, *which*, or *that* and contain a form of the verb *to be* have reduced adjective-phrase counterparts in which the relative pronoun and *to be* are omitted. These are punctuated identically to the full form. Full clauses and corresponding adjective phrases are considered equivalent, and no error is marked if one is substituted for the other in a translated text.

Examples:
- *The man who is walking down the street is my uncle.* Acceptable (restrictive).
- *The man walking down the street is my uncle.* Acceptable (restrictive).
- *The man, who is walking down the street, is my uncle.* Acceptable (nonrestrictive).

See also the "Who and whom" entry in these Standards.

Appositives

An appositive is a word or phrase that identifies the noun or pronoun immediately preceding it. If the information provided by the appositive is not essential to identify or specify the preceding noun phrase, the appositive is enclosed in commas. The commas may be omitted, however, when a proper name follows a brief noun phrase describing a personal relationship ("My loving husband Abdul") ("My manservant Lars"). This is true even if the name is not necessary to specify the referent of the preceding noun phrase. If the name is necessary for this purpose, then the use of commas is always incorrect. Otherwise, the rules for commas with apposition are exactly analogous to those for restrictive clauses.

Examples:
- *She hails from Oman, a Persian Gulf state.* Acceptable (nonrestrictive).
- *She hails from Oman a Persian Gulf state.* Error.
- *She hails from the Persian Gulf state, Oman.* Error (restrictive).
- *My husband(,) Ned(,) loves to exercise.* Acceptable with or without commas.
- *My son David loves basketball, while his brother prefers football.* Acceptable.

Run-on sentences / comma splices

Two or more syntactically complete independent clauses may appear in a single sentence in English if they are joined by a semicolon, a comma plus a coordinating conjunction, or a semicolon plus a conjunctive adverb. The common syntax error known as a run-on sentence combines such clauses in a sentence without using the appropriate joining structure. The most common form of run-on sentence, known as a comma splice, connects the two clauses with a comma but no conjunction. Although such sentences may be considered acceptable in the source language, run-on sentences must be recast when translated into English. This might involve using a semicolon, breaking the sentence up into two sentences, using a comma plus an appropriate conjunction, or using a semicolon and a conjunctive adverb (such as *anyhow*, *moreover*, *similarly*, *therefore*, *thus*, *furthermore*, *also*, *besides*, *however*, *nevertheless*, or *then*). If the second sentence

occurs in a reduced (or gapped) form that is syntactically incomplete, then the use of a comma is acceptable.

Examples:
- *In recent years adults have been smoking less, teenagers have been smoking more.* Error (literal translation of source text).
- *In recent years adults have been smoking less, (but) teenagers more.* Acceptable (the conjunction is optional).
- *In recent years adults have been smoking less; teenagers have been smoking more.* Acceptable.
- *In recent years adults have been smoking less, but teenagers have been smoking more.* Acceptable.
- *In recent years adults have been smoking less; however, teenagers have been smoking more.* Acceptable.
- *In recent years adults have been smoking less. Teenagers, on the other hand, have been smoking more.* Acceptable.

Two short clauses may be joined by a conjunction, with or without a comma.

Examples:
- *Many adults smoke, so do many teenagers*. Error.
- *Many adults smoke(,) and so do many teenagers*. Acceptable with or without a comma.

If a conjunctive adverb is used to join two independent clauses, it must be preceded by a semicolon, not a comma.

Examples:
- *These measures are reducing our company's environmental impact; therefore(,) they should be continued.* Acceptable (with or without second comma).
- *These measures are reducing our company's environmental impact, therefore(,) they should be continued.* Error.
- *The bylaws require the secretary to take minutes at every meeting, however(,) that requirement was waived by unanimous vote.* Error.

Further rules for punctuating sentences containing independent clauses can be found in the "Commas" entry in these Standards.

A second type of run-on sentence, a fused sentence, does not use any punctuation or conjunctive word to join independent clauses. Such sentences are marked as errors and, if the run-on structure is present in the source text, must be recast in the same ways as a comma splice.

Examples:
- *He sings she dances.* Error (literal translation of source text).
- *He sings and she dances.* Acceptable.
- *He sings but she dances*. Acceptable.
- *He sings; she dances.* Acceptable.
- *He sings; however, she dances.* Acceptable.
- *He sings. She dances.* Acceptable.

See also the "Commas: Independent clauses" entry in these Standards.

Sentence fragments

Languages often differ in their use of sentence fragments. Though many authorities describe sentence fragments as grammatical errors, they are occasionally acceptable in formal English writing as a rhetorical device. Other languages may use them more often and be more tolerant of them in the types of passages used in the exam. In light of this, replacing a sentence fragment in the source with a complete sentence in English is never considered an error. While sentence fragments may very occasionally be acceptable in an English translation, if warranted by context and passage tone, candidates are advised to recast sentences to avoid them in English target texts.

Examples:
- *A fine example of a phenomenon that has fascinated economists for decades: "external costs." Incurred by one person or group, but paid for by others.* Error.
- *A fine example of a phenomenon that has fascinated economists for decades is "external costs." These are costs that are incurred by one person or group, but paid for by others.* Acceptable.
- *This is a fine example of a phenomenon that has fascinated economists for decades: "external costs."* Acceptable.
- *She called for help but she received no response. None whatsoever.* Acceptable as a rhetorical device; the sentence fragment provides emphasis.

Shall and will

Both *shall* and *will* are acceptable for simple futurity for first-person subjects.

Examples:
- *We will have more information on this topic after the senator's speech.* Acceptable.
- *We shall have more information on this topic after the senator's speech.* Acceptable.

However, for second- and third-person subjects, only *will* is acceptable for simple futurity. The use of *shall* in such contexts is an error, and in some cases graders may consider this to be an error affecting meaning because of the past meaning distinction between *shall* and *will*.

Examples:
- *Experts believe that global warming will accelerate over the next 20 years.* Acceptable.
- *Experts believe that global warming shall accelerate over the next 20 years.* Error.

There is a distinction in meaning between *shall* and *will* in yes-no questions with a first-person subject. Such questions using *will* are inquiries about future events. Those with *shall* are requests for permission or participation. Failure to follow these rules may be considered an error.

Examples:
- *Will I open the window?* Error (except, perhaps, in the context of a guessing game).
- *Shall we be on time for dinner if we get there at 8:30?* Error (question about the future).
- *Will we get out of this heat? There's an air-conditioned cafe over there, but I don't know if it's open.*

Error (request for participation).

Occasional appropriate use of *shall* with the second or third person to indicate strong moral obligation or emphasize certainty of future occurrence is acceptable but not required.

Example:
- *The president vowed, "Mob violence shall not bring down our government."* Acceptable.

Split infinitives

Infinitives "split" by short phrases that read normally and are clear in meaning will incur no errors. Such constructions may be penalized as an error if so many words intervene between *to* and its verb that understanding is impeded.

Examples:
- *She set out to laboriously parse every sentence in the Sunday Times.* Acceptable.
- *She set out to laboriously and despite a long list of other tasks needing her urgent attention parse every sentence in the Sunday Times.* Error.

Unnecessary rephrasing of a sentence to avoid a split infinitive will not incur a penalty if the resulting sentence is well-formed and preserves the meaning of the source. However, when an attempt to avoid a split infinitive leads to word order that impedes understanding, an error will be marked.

Examples:
- *To better understand the required procedures, please consult the following documents.* Acceptable.
- *To understand the required procedures better, please consult the following documents.* Acceptable.
- *For better understanding of the required procedures, please consult the following documents.* Acceptable.
- *Better to understand the required procedures, please consult the following documents.* Error, possibly impacting understanding.

Stranded prepositions

A stranded (or "dangling") preposition—a preposition at the end of a sentence or clause—is generally acceptable.

Example:
- *It does not matter what cause we attribute it to.* Acceptable.

There are uncommon cases, usually involving repetition of the same or similar preposition (or a synonymous adverb), in which stranding of the preposition sounds truly awkward. These will be marked as errors and may even be found to disrupt understanding.

Example:
- *There is a log book that all participants must sign in in.* Error.

Rephrasing a sentence to avoid preposition stranding is also acceptable, though usually unnecessary. However, if rephrasing results in ambiguity, sounds awkward, or breaks up a phrasal verb or idiomatic phrase, it will be treated as an error.

Examples:
- *Where did you fly in from?* Acceptable.
- *In from where did you fly?* Error.
- *That is the sort of behavior I will not put up with.* Acceptable.
- *That is the sort of behavior up with which I will not put.* Error.

See also the "Who and whom" entry in these Standards.

Subjunctive mood

Clauses containing *if* require the past subjunctive if a situation is presented as hypothetical or contrary to fact (see also the Conditional tenses entry in these Standards). This form is identical with the past tense except in the case of the verb *to be*, which uses *were* for all persons. Violations are marked as errors.

Examples:
- *If I were rich, I would sail around the world.* Acceptable.
- *If I was rich, I would sail around the world.* Error.

However, the verb should be in the indicative mood if the word *if* can be replaced by *whether* or *though*, and in other situations where the speaker is expressing uncertainty rather than making a hypothetical statement.

Examples:
- *She asked me if I was there when it happened.* Acceptable.
- *She asked me if I were there when it happened.* Error.
- *I went running every day, even if it was raining.* Acceptable.
- *I went running every day, even if it were raining.* Error.
- *If I was rude to you, I apologize.* Acceptable.
- *If I were rude to you, I apologize.* Error.

The present (or mandative) subjunctive is used for commands, requests, or suggestions, typically with verbs such as *propose*, *recommend*, or *demand* or adjectives such as *imperative*, *important*, or *necessary*. The present subjunctive is identical to the bare infinitive of the verb. It differs from the indicative only for the verb *to be* and for the third person singular of all other verbs (*have* instead of *has*, *give* instead of *gives*, etc.).

Use of the indicative where the present subjunctive is required is typically penalized as an error.

Examples:
- *He recommends that there be no further discussion of the matter.* Acceptable.
- *He recommends that there is no further discussion of the matter.* Error.

- *It is important that each committee member have a say.* Acceptable.
- *It is important that each committee member has a say.* Error, possibly affecting meaning.

Reasonable efforts to avoid this entire issue by recasting as an impersonal construction are acceptable:

Examples:
- *It is required that all members be registered.* Acceptable: corresponds to source text.
- *All members must be registered.* Acceptable.

Note that non-U.S. English sometimes avoids the present subjunctive with a *should* construction. Such usage is acceptable in the exam.

- *He recommends that there should be no further discussion of the matter.* Acceptable.
- *It is important that each committee member should have a say.* Acceptable.

Verb tenses

This discussion primarily concerns the use and implied meaning of the major verb tenses in English and does not explicitly address related questions of syntax or specific irregular verb forms.

There are four main groups of verb tenses in English. (In the following examples, *he* refers to any third person singular noun or pronoun and *you* refers to you, we, and all third person plural nouns and pronouns.)

Formation of tenses

The "simple" tenses:
- Present: *I/you go, He goes, I/you do not go, He does not go.* (Auxiliary verb omitted in positive declarative sentences.)
- Past: *I/he/you went, I/he/you did not go.* (Simple past tense of the verb, auxiliary omitted in positive declarative sentences.)
- Future: *I/he/you will (not) go.*

The progressive tenses (all use the appropriate form of *to be* and present participle of the main verb):
- Present: *I am/he is/they are (not) going.*
- Past: *I/he was (not) going. You were (not) going.*
- Future: *I/he/you will not be going.*

The perfect tenses (all use the appropriate form of *to have* + the past participle of the main verb):
- Present: *I/you have (not) gone; He has (not) gone.* Present of *to have* + past participle of the main verb. (This may be viewed as a past tense.) Common in written English and a frequent source of errors.
- Past: *I/he/you had (not) gone.* Used only to describe event sequences.
- Future: *I/he/you will have gone.* Used only to describe event sequences.

The perfect progressive tenses (use the appropriate form of have+been+present participle):
- Present perfect progressive: *I/ you have been going; he has been going.*
- Past perfect progressive: *I/you/he had been going.*

- Future perfect progressive. *I/you/he will have been going.*

Usage Conditions and Rules for Use of the Tenses

Present tenses

Note: Present perfect tense is discussed in the section on past tenses.

The **present progressive tense** is the **true present tense**: it describes what is happening in the present moment.

Examples:
- *I am taking a walk right now.* Acceptable.
- *Right now I take a walk.* Error.
- *Am I making you angry?* Acceptable.
- *The baby is not sleeping now, so you can go see him.* Acceptable.

Note here that the present moment can be quite broadly defined and can be used with time periods that are usually considered long, such as this year, lately, these days, etc.
- *The baby is not sleeping through the night this week.* Acceptable.
- *I am still taking piano lessons.* Acceptable.
- But: *I still take piano lessons.* Also acceptable but with a slightly different emphasis.
- *He is living with his parents while his apartment is being renovated.* Acceptable.

This tense can also be used to refer to a plan, intention or expectation for the near future.
- *I am meeting with the teacher tomorrow at 10:00.* Acceptable.

Verbs referring to processes are often used in the present progressive tense when processes continue or are ongoing, though the simple present is also acceptable.

Examples:
- *Life in the U.S. is changing.* Refers to a process continuing in the present moment. Acceptable.
- But: *Life in the U.S. changes continually.* Acceptable as a much more general statement, qualified with an adverb or adverbial phrase.
- *This brick wall is deteriorating.* Acceptable.
- *This brick wall deteriorates.* Probable error with no further context.
- *This brick wall deteriorates whenever it rains.* Acceptable.

The **simple present** must be used to describe recurring, habitual or regular events.

Examples:
- *We call our children almost every week.* Acceptable.
- *He gets up early to go to work.* Acceptable, referring to a habitual, usual, or regular action.
- *He is getting up early to go to work today.* Acceptable, refers to a planned, scheduled, particular or unique event in the present or near future.
- *He is getting up early every day.* Error.
- *My son is too young to work; he goes to school.* Acceptable.
- *I am going to school to pick up my report card now.* Acceptable.

- *I go to school to pick up my report card.* Error, unless describing a regular event.

The simple present tense must be used for general truths.
- *Most animals kill only for food.* Acceptable.
- *Most animals are killing only for food.* Error.
- *That house belongs to my cousin.* Acceptable.
- *That house is belonging to my cousin.* Error.
- *The sun rises in the east.* Acceptable.
- *The sun is rising in the east.* Error if meant to be a general statement but correct if referring to what is happening at the present moment.

The following verbs are traditionally not used in the progressive form even if they refer to the present moment: *know, understand, recognize, believe, suppose, doubt, want, need, prefer, mean, love, like appreciate, dislike, fear, envy, mind, owe, doubt, recall, regard.*
- *I dislike this movie we're watching.* Acceptable.
- *I am disliking this movie we're watching.* Error.
- *I believe in freedom of religion.* Acceptable.
- *I am believing in freedom of religion.* Error.

In recent times, some of these verbs have begun to be used colloquially in the progressive tense (as in the McDonald's slogan "I'm lovin' it"). At the present time it would be wise not to use such verbs this way on an ATA Certification Exam.

Verbs used to describe a person's perceptions, feelings, thoughts, etc., and certain other verbs (*taste, smell, hear, feel, see, look, appear, cost, weigh, be, exist, contain, include, have*) are usually not used in the present progressive. However, most of these can be correctly used in this tense with altered meaning, when the emphasis is on a current action or an active rather than passive act of sensing.

Examples:
- *I think that is a very useful exercise.* Acceptable.
- *I am thinking that is a very useful exercise.* Could be marked as an error.
- *I am not saying anything because I am thinking.* Acceptable.
- *This salad smells like fish.* Acceptable.
- *This salad is smelling like fish.* Could be marked as an error.
- *He is smelling the flowers, not picking them.* Acceptable.
- *He has five children.* Acceptable.
- *He is having five children.* Error (unless he is expecting quintuplets).
- *She is having a hard time at her work.* Acceptable.
- *That idea is silly.* Acceptable.
- *That idea is being silly.* Error.
- *The children are being silly.* Acceptable.
- *That container holds 10 oz.* Acceptable.
- *That container is holding 10 oz.* Error (unless reference is to current contents rather than capacity).
- *Why is he holding an axe?* Acceptable.

Past tenses

The **simple past tense** is used for actions and situations that occurred and were completed at a specific time in the past (which may or may not be specified).

Examples:
- *I lived in Colorado when I was young.* Acceptable.
- *It was so nice yesterday, I walked to school.* Acceptable.
- *I bought a car.* Acceptable (specific time implied).

The **present perfect tense** is used to refer to situations or actions that started in the past and continue into the present, or those where an action's results continuing into the present are emphasized, rather than the occurrence of the event itself. In many cases in colloquial speech and informal writing the simple past is used instead of the present perfect, but this will be considered an error on the exam. Misuse of the present perfect is a frequent source of errors on ATA Certification Exams.

Examples:
- *We have lived in Virginia since 1981.* Acceptable (implies they still live there).
- *We lived in Virginia since 1981.* Error.
- *I lived in Colorado between 1967 and 1981.* Acceptable (the mention of a specific time precludes the present perfect).
- *I have lived in Colorado between 1967 and 1981.* Error (action clearly does not continue).
- *What did you do yesterday? I wrote a letter.* Acceptable (answers a question about a completed action).
- *What have you done recently to protest the current situation? I have written many letters to people in government.* Acceptable.
- *What have you done recently to protest the current situation? I wrote a letter to my Congressman.* Could be marked as an error if a specific time is not mentioned.
- *Yesterday I have written a letter to my Congressman.* Error (the mention of a specific time precludes the present perfect).

Present perfect used for past events

The present perfect is also used to express the past repetition of an activity where the exact time is not mentioned.

Examples:
- *We have had four rainy weekends in a row.* Acceptable.
- But: *We had four rainy weekends in a row in April.* Not an error if it refers to a specific period in the past.
- *I have made many friends through my membership in the ATA.* Acceptable.

Certain words in a sentence always trigger the use of the present perfect. They are: *never, ever, already, still not, so far,* and *just*. The present perfect tense is always correct after these words, and the use of another past tense is likely to be marked as an error.

Examples:
- *I have never seen the ocean.* Acceptable.
- *I never saw the ocean.* Could be marked as an error unless a specific time period has been referred to.

- *In all the years I lived in California, I never saw the ocean*. Acceptable.
- *Have you ever visited Madrid?* Acceptable.
- *Did you ever visit Madrid?* Could be marked as an error unless a specific time period has been referred to.
- *Did you ever visit Madrid during your trip last summer?* Acceptable.
- *I have already done most of my homework.* Acceptable.
- *I did not do my homework yet.* Error.

Present perfect progressive (used only in very specific situations)

This tense is used to refer to the duration of an event or action that began in the past and is continuing into the present. It is used with words like *since, for, all morning, all week*, etc.

Example:
- *It has been raining all morning.* Acceptable (implies it is still raining).
- But: *It rained all morning yesterday.* Acceptable (refers to a specific time in the past).
- *This building has been in this spot since 1920.* Acceptable.
- *This building was in this spot since 1920.* Error.
- But: *The Acme building was in this spot between 1920 and 1990.* Acceptable (refers to a specific time in the past).

When no time is mentioned, this tense is used to express an activity in progress recently.

Examples:
- *He has been talking recently about retiring.* Acceptable.
- *All the students have been studying for next week's exam.* Acceptable.
- *All the students studied for next week's exam.* Could be marked as an error unless a particular timeframe is implied.

With some verbs (*live, work, teach*, for example) this case has the same meaning as the present perfect when used with *since* or *for*.

- *They have lived here for four years.* Acceptable.
- *They have been living here for four years.* Acceptable.

Past progressive

This tense is used most appropriately to refer to an action continuous in the past that was interrupted or simultaneous with another action (introduced typically by *while* or *when*, respectively) or to describe a past action continuing over a specified period or in progress at a certain time.

Examples:
- *I was sleeping when you called.* Acceptable.
- *I slept when you called.* Error.
- *We were trying to study while the party was going on next door.* Acceptable.
- *At eight last night I was studying.* Acceptable.
- *It rained yesterday morning, don't you remember?* Acceptable.

- *It was raining yesterday morning so we did not go for our usual walk.* Acceptable (subtle difference in emphasis from first clause of previous sentence).

Past perfect

The past perfect tense (sometimes called the pluperfect) is used only for a past action that is being described as preceding and having been completed before another past action. If the words *before* or *after* are used in the sentence, the simple past is also acceptable.

Examples:
- *I had already washed the dishes when she asked me to do so.* Acceptable.
- *I already washed the dishes when she asked me to do so.* Error.
- *I (had) washed the dishes before she asked me to do so.* Both variants acceptable.
- *She asked me to wash the dishes, but I already did.* Error.
- *After we ate (had eaten) dinner, I washed the dishes.* Both variants acceptable.

Past perfect progressive

This tense is used to refer to the duration of an activity that was in progress before another activity or specified time in the past.

Examples:
- *The police had been searching for him for years when they caught him.* Acceptable.
- *The police searched for him for years before they caught him.* Acceptable.
- *When I saw her, it was clear that she had been crying.* Acceptable.

Future tenses

Simple future

Two forms of the simple future are used in U.S. English: *will*+bare infinitive of the main verb and *going +* infinitive of the main verb. The use of *shall* is rarely used in U.S. English but will be accepted if used correctly (see the section on [Shall and will](#)). Currently *shall* is most often used interrogatively with the pronoun *we* to suggest, propose or invite, as in *Shall we dance? Shall we invite them to dinner?*

Either *will* or *going to* is correct for predicting something.

Examples:
- *It is going to rain tomorrow.* Acceptable.
- *It will rain tomorrow.* Acceptable.
- *He will come early, as he always does.* Acceptable.
- *He is going to come early, as he always does.* Acceptable.

Only *going to* is correct when talking about a prior plan or intention.

Examples:
- *I am going to clean the bedroom tomorrow.* Acceptable.
- *I will paint the bedroom tomorrow.* Possibly acceptable, if considered as a prediction (for example, I think I will be finished with the dining room by then; or don't ask me to do it today, I'll get around to it tomorrow).
- *They're going to buy a car soon.* Acceptable.

Only *will* is correct for willingness.

Examples:
- *If you ask me, I will help you.* Acceptable.
- *If you ask me, I am going to help you.* Could be marked as an error.

The **present progressive** may be used for future time when it refers to a planned future event. In addition, the **simple present** may be used for future events that start at a scheduled time.

Examples:
- *He is leaving tomorrow morning.* Acceptable.
- *Classes start next month.* Acceptable.

Future progressive

This tense is mandated when a future event will be in progress at a particular time or when another future event occurs.

Examples:
- *We will be eating dinner when you arrive.* Acceptable.
- *We will eat dinner when you arrive.* This is an error affecting meaning if the source text does not make clear that dinner will occur only after the addressee arrives.

Future perfect progressive

This uncommon form is used to refer to the previous duration of a continuing event at a particular time in the future or when a later event occurs.

Examples:
- *I will have been working for 12 hours straight by the time this shift ends.* Acceptable.
- *Professor Brown will have been teaching for 50 years when he retires.* Acceptable (*will have taught* is also correct).

Tense sequence in complex sentences referring to the future

It is an arbitrary peculiarity of English that in complex sentences describing a time sequence or contingency in the future, the subordinate clause must be in the present tense. Such clauses start with *if, whether or not, when, while, after, before*, etc.

Examples:

- *If it rains tomorrow, we will not go to the beach.* Acceptable.
- *If it will rain tomorrow, we will not go to the beach.* Error.
- *Whether it is sunny or cloudy tomorrow, we will still go swimming.* Acceptable.
- *Whether it will be sunny or cloudy (tomorrow), we will still go swimming.* Error.
- *When you come to see us (next month), we will have plenty to talk about.* Acceptable.
- *After (as soon as) I see the doctor next week, I will call you.* Acceptable.
- *After (as soon as) I will see the doctor next week, I will call you.* Error.
- *When you get a little older, you will understand this better.* Acceptable.

Sentences with future meaning in which the subordinate clause stipulates a cause and effect or other logical relationship are not subject to this rule.

Examples:
- *Because I will be away tomorrow, you will be in charge of the office.* Acceptable.
- *Although I will be away tomorrow, you will be able to contact me by phone.* Acceptable.

Who and whom

Even though *whom* is gradually disappearing from conversational English and certain types of informal prose, its correct use as the object of a verb or preposition (where the forms *him*, *her*, or *them* can be substituted) is required in the sort of formal prose usually found in ATA exam passages. In situations such as those described below, the incorrect use of *who* or *whom* will be marked as an error. In other situations, the use of *who* for *whom* will be given minimal or no error points. All rules concerning *who* and *whom* also apply to *whoever* and *whomever*.

Who or *whom* as the object of a preposition

Directly following a preposition and functioning as its object, *whom* must be used and *who* is always an error. This applies both to interrogative and relative pronouns. However, *who* is correct if it is the subject of the following clause, even if immediately preceded by a preposition.

Examples:
- *To whom were they referring?* Acceptable.
- *To who were they referring?* Error.
- *The senator to whom that remark referred appeared angry.* Acceptable.
- *The senator to who that remark referred appeared angry.* Error.
- *We disagree about who would be the best candidate.* Acceptable: *who* is the subject of the verb "would be."
- *We disagree about whom would be the best candidate.* Error.

In some styles of writing, *who* may be considered less objectionable when it appears as the object of a preposition that does not immediately precede it. If the use of *who* for *whom* in such a situation corresponds to a register and style appropriate for the purpose, audience, and medium specified in the Translation

Instructions, graders may or may not mark a negligible error. In all instances, correct grammatical usage is a candidate's safest course.

Examples:
- *The senator to whom that remark was addressed appeared angry.* Acceptable.
- *The senator whom that remark was addressed to appeared angry.* Acceptable.
- *The senator who that remark was addressed to appeared angry.* Possible error (negligible).
- *Whom did he express his anger to?* Acceptable.
- *Who did he express his anger to?* Possible error (negligible).

If separating the word *whom* from the preposition of which it is the object is stylistically awkward, recasting is advisable.

Example:
- *The senator who was the object of that remark appeared angry.* Acceptable.

Who or *whom* in questions without prepositions

When a question is asked about the subject of a verb, only *who* is acceptable; the hypercorrection *whom* is an error. When the question is asked about the object of an action and no preposition is involved, *whom* is correct and *who* is an error, although possibly a negligible one.

Examples:
- *Who is John's girlfriend?* Acceptable.
- *Whom is John's girlfriend?* Error.
- *Whom is John dating?* Acceptable.
- *Who is John dating?* Error (negligible).

Who or whom in relative clauses (without prepositions)

Who is correct when it functions as the subject of a relative clause. The hypercorrection in which *whom* is used as the subject of a relative clause will always be marked as an error.

Examples:
- *The senator who is accused of misusing funds denied all charges.* Acceptable.
- *The senator whom is accused of misusing funds denied all charges.* Error: *who* is correct as the subject of the verb "is accused."
- *The senator whom they say has misused funds denied all charges.* Error: *who* is correct as the subject of the verb "has misused."
- *The senator whom the papers accused of misusing funds denied all charges.* Acceptable: *whom* is the object of the verb "accused."
- *The senator who the papers accused of misusing funds denied all charges.* Error (negligible).
- *Whoever is nominated by the majority party always wins*. Acceptable: *whoever* is the object of the verb "is nominated."
- *Whomever is nominated by the majority party always wins.* Error: the relative pronoun is the subject of the verb "is nominated."
- *Whomever the majority party nominates will win.* Acceptable: *whomever* is the object of the verb

"nominates."
- *Whoever the majority party nominates will win*. Error (negligible).

Who and whom in restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses

Who or *whom* may be omitted when they introduce restrictive clauses. *Who* and *whom* may not be dropped when introducing nonrestrictive clauses.

Examples with restrictive clauses:
- *The man whom the police described as the mastermind was arrested.* Acceptable.
- *The man the police described as the mastermind was arrested*. Acceptable.
- *The man who the police said masterminded the crime was arrested.* Acceptable.
- *The man whom the police said masterminded the crime was arrested.* Error.
- *The man the police said masterminded the crime was arrested*. Acceptable.

Examples with nonrestrictive clauses:
- *Robert Jones, who the police said masterminded the crime, was arrested*. Acceptable.
- *Robert Jones, the police said masterminded the crime, was arrested*. Error.

Use of *that* instead of *who* as the subject of a restrictive clause is acceptable, as is the use of *that* for *whom* as the object of a restrictive clause.

Examples:
- *He wanted to be a policeman who protects people rather than one who scares them.* Acceptable.
- *He wanted to be a policeman that protects people rather than one that scares them.* Acceptable.
- *The senator whom the Committee selected had resigned*. Acceptable.
- *The senator that the Committee selected had resigned*. Acceptable.

See also the "[Restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses and appositives: Relative pronouns](#)" and "[Stranded prepositions](#)" entries in these Standards.