

ATA CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

Procedure for Establishing a New Language Combination

Version 2009, last amended January 2018

The addition of new language combinations to ATA's Certification Program is supported and encouraged by ATA's Board of Directors, Certification Committee members, and ATA Headquarters staff when there is evidence that offering certification in a new language combination will attract a sufficient and sustained flow of candidates and an adequate pool of graders. The majority of the work required to add a language combination is done by the members of the workgroup who desire testing in that combination. The role of the committee and Headquarters staff is to provide guidance, information, and oversight to facilitate the process. (Headquarters staff is unable to take on routine administrative tasks related to the establishment of a new language.)

Since this work is done by volunteers, it is important to be aware of the time and effort that will be required in order to establish a new language combination in ATA's Certification Program. The process can take several years and requires a dedicated and knowledgeable workgroup. Please note that the costs of establishing a new language pair cannot be covered or reimbursed by ATA (this includes photocopying, postage, long distance telephone calls, as well as travel expenses for attending meetings or grader training). Some grader training expenses are reimbursable upon formal introduction of the new language pair in ATA's Certification Program.

The following is the procedure for adding a new language combination for testing, as last revised in January 2018.

*Note that the steps marked with ** indicate the points where documentation needs to be provided to the Certification Program manager.*

First Steps

1. Contact the Certification Program manager at Headquarters for information about the steps of this grass-roots process.
2. Contact colleagues to discuss the matter and find volunteers to form a committee. A notice can be placed in *The ATA Chronicle*, ATA's online *Newsbriefs*, and appropriate chapter or division newsletters, and meetings may be organized at ATA's Annual Conference. Any notice to be published must come to ATA through the Certification Committee chair.
3. ** Select a chair and establish formal contact with the Certification Committee. Provide the Certification Committee with a list of the committee members. The committee must include at least four members (the chair plus three others) who are willing to act as graders in the first years of testing in the new language combination. All potential graders will be required to submit résumés and professional references at a later time.
4. The Certification Committee will appoint an ad hoc liaison to assist the committee and monitor its progress.
5. ** Prepare and submit to Headquarters a list of names and contact information of ATA members and non-members who have indicated that they are interested in taking the exam. The list must include at least 50 names, 25 of whom are ATA members who list the new language combination in their profile in *ATA's Directory of Translation and Interpreting*

Services.

At least 10 of the people on the list must sign a non-binding letter of intent confirming that they intend to take ATA's certification exam in the new language combination within two years of the date when it is first offered. This letter of intent is taken as a serious commitment to take the exam within the indicated time, and should be signed only by those who have every intention of doing so. The letters of intent need not be submitted along with the list of 50 names, and the committee can continue its work after the list of 50 names has been submitted; however, the new language combination cannot receive final approval until the required letters of intent have been submitted. Upon submission of the lists, the four-year period for completion of the process begins.

At least five of those who sign the non-binding letter of intent (a form letter) and are not members of the committee working to establish the new language combination must also indicate that they are willing to become graders after passing the exam and becoming certified. This is necessary in order to ensure that members of the original grading workgroup will have an opportunity to take the exam as soon as possible after serving as graders for the first two years. As an incentive, those who sign the letter of intent will get a 20% discount on the exam fee.

The establishment of a counterpart group (testing in the opposite language direction) is encouraged but not required.

Upon Approval

1. The Certification Committee approves the application. Once the committee's application to establish a new language combination has been accepted, work begins on grader training, passage selection, and preparation of grading guidelines. The entire process of establishing a new language combination should be completed within four years from the application acceptance date. Progress through the steps must be made each year. Committees that do not make adequate progress each year may be placed on probation.
2. Decide who will select the passages and grade the initial round of exams (at least four graders should be designated for each language combination). These graders must be ATA members who are willing to commit a minimum of two years as graders to ensure some continuity as appropriate candidates pass the exam and are brought into the grading workgroup. Graders must also be aware that this obligation requires that they forfeit their opportunity to become certified until the exam year after they are no longer involved in grading or passage selection. It is important to select the language chair and deputy language chair carefully, as they have additional duties in administering the language combination. The language chair will coordinate the activities of the grader workgroup and work closely with the liaison appointed by the Certification Committee. The deputy language chair is responsible for organizing passage selection and should be willing to assume the language chair position in the future.

The original chair and committee may or may not become the language chair and grader workgroup. If they do not take on these roles, their responsibilities will be to coordinate collection of the necessary documentation, to locate appropriate candidates to be graders, and to assist with collecting statements of interest and letters of intent from potential future candidates. Once the grading workgroup is established, the original committee's work is completed and the grading workgroup takes over. All members of the grading workgroup must be ATA members.

Grader Workgroup Development

1. ** Submit grader résumés and three independent professional references for each grader to Headquarters. On approval, the ATA's Certification Program manager will provide appropriate material, including job descriptions for the language chair and graders, guidelines for passage selection, sample passages, grading standards, and other useful information. Members of the workgroup will be given access to the grader Basecamp as a helpful resource, and the liaison will advise the workgroup on grader training, passage selection, and preparation of grading guidelines.

Note: Once the grading workgroup is selected, graders may attend any grader workshops offered by the Certification Committee, and the language chair or a workgroup representative is invited to any workshops for language chairs. At least one member of the workgroup *must* attend such a workshop before the language combination will be approved.

2. **Grader training and practice:** Train on several passages provided by the liaison. These can be former exam passages (for English-into-foreign) or texts provided by a counterpart workgroup or outside sources. All of the graders translate the passages under exam conditions and send their work to the liaison, who then distributes the anonymous translations to the other workgroup members. The graders then grade each other's exams and discuss the results. These passages may or may not eventually be used as initial passages for the startup group; this exercise is intended primarily to foster team-building, familiarize graders with the grading system and standards, and yield useful insight for later passage selection activities.
3. ** Select two passages. The grading workgroup, led by the language chair, selects two passages that will serve as the initial practice test—English translations must be provided for foreign language passages—and submits them to the Passage Selection Task Force for review and approval. (It is preferable but not necessary to submit both passages at the same time.) When a passage has been approved, the graders take the practice tests, grade each other's translations, and discuss their grading decisions.
4. Prepare grading guidelines on the basis of the grading decisions. (Sample passage-specific and language-specific guidelines from other language combinations will be made available.) The workgroup prepares passage-specific (for the two practice-test passages) and language-specific grading guidelines.
5. ** Submit grading guidelines to the Certification Committee for review.

Note: The language chair should contact ATA's Certification Program manager to arrange for at least one of the graders to attend a grader training either at the spring language chairs meeting in Alexandria, Virginia (usually April or May) or at ATA's Annual Conference. No funding is provided for this initial training.

6. Select six (or seven) more passages. The workgroup selects another six passages to serve as the initial pool of exam passages and prepares sample translations and passage-specific grading guidelines for these passages. In addition, foreign-into-English groups must select one representative text for posting as a sample passage on the ATA website. Grading guidelines do not need to be prepared for this sample.

** Submit all passage-related materials to the Certification Committee. When grader training, passage selection, and grading guidelines have been completed for eight passages (two for practice tests, six for exams) for English-into-foreign pairs or nine passages (two

for practice tests, six for exams, one sample) for foreign-into-English, present the materials to the Certification Committee for review and approval.

In addition to six active exam passages and at least two practice tests, all certification language pairs are required to maintain at least three additional passages as backups. Testing in a new pair can be approved even if the workgroup has not selected the backups, provided that the group is committed to selecting the three backup passages within six months of approval.

Before submitting passages to the Committee, the workgroup may rearrange its passage pool – e.g., decide that a passage previously intended to be a practice test will instead be an initial exam passage, or vice versa.

Final Steps

1. The Certification Committee makes a recommendation to the ATA Board. Upon receiving the Certification Committee's recommendation, the Board will vote to establish the new language combination at the next scheduled Board meeting. Once approval is given, an announcement is placed in *The ATA Chronicle* and on ATA's website and in our literature. Practice tests will be available immediately and exams may be taken at sittings following the announcement.
2. The approved graders will grade exams taken, recommend that candidates who perform exceptionally well in the exam be recruited as new graders, select new passages as needed, and work with the Certification Committee to maintain the program in subsequent years.
3. All new graders appointed after members of the original grading workgroup must be certified in the new language combination, i.e., they must have passed the certification exam. The group must have four graders at all times. No grader may step down to take the exam until a new grader is recruited. If one of the original graders steps down for any other reason, he or she must wait to take the exam until all of the other original graders have had an opportunity to do so. The Certification Committee has established procedures to ensure that grader candidates receive new passages at their exam sitting that were selected and prepared entirely without their involvement, and that the remaining graders are unaware of which exam belongs to the former grader. This will require a delay of up to six months from the time when a grader steps down until he or she may take the exam. A former initial grader may rejoin the grading workgroup only after passing the exam.