



# **New Members Guide**

AUSTIN FOOTBALL OFFICIALS ASSOCIATION

The members of the Austin Football Officials Association welcome you to our organization. We're pleased that you're joining AFOA, and we want to make your introduction to officiating Texas high school football as stress-free and exciting as we can.

The tradition of Texas high school football is legendary around the country, as is the reputation of our parent organization, the Texas Association of Sports Officials, for its role in providing distinctive professional development for all of us and in supporting local chapters, including AFOA. Choosing to officiate interscholastic athletics means taking on significant responsibility that offers, however, richly rewarding service to student-athletes, their coaches, and their communities.

The experience of officiating a football game differs substantially from watching or playing a game, and it will change forever how you watch games in the future! Your focus will narrow considerably from the big picture and action around the ball to spheres of activity where competitive confrontations are taking place. You will come to understand what your responsibility is on every play, based on the position you work and the game situation.

Our training program will support your study of rules for sure, but it will also support your study of mechanics—that is, where you should be and what you should be looking at. Our goal is for the game to begin to slow down for you as you gain on-field experience in middle school and subvarsity games. As you become comfortable with *thinking* less about what you should be doing, your confidence will grow as you develop *intuition* about what you should be doing.

Officiating football will keep you involved in the game you love, give you a good workout, provide extra money, support student-athletes, and foster lasting friendships. Our training staff is eager to work with you. Ask questions and ask for help whenever you need to. Your success is our success.

You're going to have much to learn, but you won't be doing so alone. We will have your back throughout your orientation.

You have our best wishes for an exciting, productive first season.

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# 1. Getting Started

## Training Program

For new members, mandatory training meetings are scheduled at one location south and one north, typically on Monday evenings from 6:00 until 8:00, from early July through early November. The sessions include classroom and on-field instruction, provided by veteran AFOA members. If by August you find that officiating football is right for you, you'll complete the registration applications for membership in TASO and AFOA.

## Registration

When you join the Austin Football Officials Association, you must also join our parent organization, the Texas Association of Sports Officials (TASO). Unlike in most other states where officials are members of and governed by the state athletic association, TASO is an organization of independent, self-governing sports officials.

You only need to complete two steps to get started.

- Join TASO, following instructions for “New Applicants” at <https://taso.org/>, which will include making an online payment of \$40.00.
- Join AFOA, following instructions at <https://www.austinfootballofficials.org/become-an-official>.

As a new member of the state and local organizations, you'll be all set to work scrimmages, middle school games, and sub-varsity games. You'll also be set to see varsity games up close during paid assignments on chain crews or running the play clock or game clock on Friday nights.

# 2. About Us: TASO and AFOA

## Mission and Structure

Working closely with the major statewide bodies responsible for interscholastic athletics—including the UIL, TAPPS, and the associations for Texas high school coaches and athletic directors—TASO's role is critical to serving the common goal of ensuring fair, challenging, and safe athletic competition.

TASO includes seven divisions individually governed by a board of directors elected by the membership throughout the state, comprising officials for baseball, basketball, football, soccer, softball, volleyball, and water polo. Overall TASO policy is set by the TASO board of directors comprised of the president and president-elect (or vice-president) for each of the seven sports divisions.

## History

In the 1930s, the farsightedness of the Southwest Conference (SWC) was responsible for the genesis of the idea that sports officials in Texas could enjoy independence from membership in state athletics associations oriented to serving the interests of their member schools. Motivated by a commitment to develop better-trained officials for SWC competition, the collegiate conference developed local associations under the umbrella of the Southwest Officials Association (SOA).

Eventually this arrangement evolved into the more aptly named Southwest Conference Official's Association (SWOA), formed specifically to train and support collegiate officials for football and basketball. By 1977, when ever-increasing numbers of high school officials were joining the SWOA, SOA became the state-wide governing body specifically for high school officials in football, basketball, and baseball. Divisions for volleyball, softball, and soccer were added in later years. In 1999, SOA rebranded to the Texas Association of Sports Officials, and the water polo division was added in 2021.

Today TASO comprises approximately 16,000 members in 196 local chapters across its seven divisions.

## Officials' Classification

One ranking metric for TASO officials is based on their classification by *division*, a measure of game experience and professional development as indicated by the accumulation of points for working on the field and attending TASO educational programs. New members—unlike transfer members with previous experience—are classified as Division V officials.

You accumulate points in two ways: (1) on-field work in scrimmages, chain-crew assignments, and games and (2) off-field preparation at TASO events including the annual state meeting, regional workshops, and local clinics. As you accumulate points, you raise your classification as you pass these thresholds:

Division V:	0-59	points
Division IV:	60-179	points
Division III:	180-359	points
Division II:	360-659	points
Division I:	660	points

## Eligibility: Continuing Education and Testing

To be eligible to work games, TASO members must satisfy requirements in two areas: participating in specified educational programs and demonstrating proficiency by completing required testing.

You can complete the education requirement—and earn points—in one of three ways: watching required video presentations online, attending a regional pre-season clinic, or attending the TASO Annual Meeting.

You can complete the testing requirement by achieving a qualifying score on the *New Officials Test* and, optionally, on the *Football Rules Test* required of all other TASO members. The tests are only offered online at <https://taso.org/>. New members must achieve a minimum score of 70 on the New Members test or Football Rules test to be eligible to work sub-varsity games. New members are not required to take both tests, but to be eligible to work a varsity game, new members must achieve a minimum score of 70 on both tests. New members typically don't work varsity games, but under certain circumstances they may be asked to do so—but only if they have achieved the minimum qualifying score on the Football Rules test and the New Members test.

To be eligible to work a varsity playoff game, all TASO members must achieve a minimum score of 90 on the Football Rules test.

### **Dues and Game Fees**

The annual dues you pay to TASO and AFOA cover operating costs associated with administrative operations, rules books, salaries, subscriptions for Zoom and RefTown, facility rentals, recruiting and retention, ongoing members' professional development, new member training, and the annual season-end chapter social. Your TASO benefits include an insurance package providing chapters and members with director and officer liability, general liability (including sexual abuse and molestation coverage), and accident protection.

The UIL, with input from TASO, establishes annual minimum game fees and mileage compensation schedules to be paid by public schools. Typically, other state-wide member associations such as the Texas Association of Private and Parochial Schools (TAPPS) and the Southwest Preparatory Conference (SPC) adopt the UIL fees schedule. Unique to football, UIL game fees for varsity contests are based on net gate receipts. Recently, the UIL established an ongoing fee increase mechanism that provides stability and predictability of annual fees adjustment for multiple seasons in the near future.

TASO officials are independent contractors. In most cases you will be paid directly by schools for your services. In addition to schools that pay you by mail with a traditional check, many schools use direct deposit or a third-party platform such as ArbiterPay. On game day at the game site, some schools require officials to sign in upon arrival, but at most game sites no paper work is required. All schools access personnel staffing information through RefTown, so you do not need to leave a pay sheet.

Your W-9 information is securely stored on RefTown, accessible only by schools' authorized business office staff.

### 3. Getting Game Assignments

New members are eligible to receive assignments for scrimmages, middle school games, high school subvarsity games, chain crews, and press-box assignments to operate the game clock or play clock. Assignments for youth league games, such as Pop Warner, are available through AFOA members who serve as coordinators for such leagues.

AFOA game assignments are generated by three officers—the executive secretary who is responsible for all varsity games and two assistant secretaries who are responsible for everything else, one for games on Monday-Tuesday-Wednesday and one for games on Thursday-Friday-Saturday. Typically, schools schedule middle school games for Monday-Wednesday and subvarsity games for Thursday-Saturday.

To make yourself available for being scheduled, set up your account on the RefTown website. All your game assignments will appear in RefTown, with complete information about who your partners are, the number of games, the location, starting time, and fee you'll receive. When you set up your RefTown account, be sure to include for the assignment secretaries information about your daily availability, including what time you're available to leave work or home for an assignment and how far you can travel to get to an assignment.

For each game assignment, RefTown will show contact information for your co-officials, and you can see whether your co-officials have viewed the assignment and responded that they have accepted the assignment. Nevertheless, you should ALWAYS contact all of your co-officials—by phone, email, and/or text message—several days before the game to confirm that they know about the assignment, know where the game site is, know how early they can arrive, and know where you will be parking.

During your pre-season training you will receive extensive instruction in using RefTown, and you can also access a tutorial within RefTown, as explained at the end of this guide.

#### **Working Middle School and Subvarsity Games**

Typically, AFOA assigns four-person crews for every non-varsity game. However, on very busy days, you may be in a three-person crew. AFOA tries to include at least one more experienced official in the crew, often in the Referee position. Many of our veteran officials welcome non-varsity assignments and the opportunity to meet new members and help them learn on the job.

If your work schedule permits you to arrive at a game site relatively early, take advantage of the opportunity to do so. Let your co-officials know about this, and several if not all of you may be able to take some time to have a thorough pre-game review of rules and mechanics. On days when you do not have an assignment, consider keeping your uniform with you in the car or at your workplace. Due to weather or other contingencies, last-minute vacancies can occur, and the assistant secretary may call or send a mass email looking for someone available to step into a game.

Of course, working your non-varsity schedule presents your best opportunity to make a good first impression on your co-officials and veteran officials who may be on your crew. Resolve to follow four best practices:

- Honor your commitments. Game turn-backs have a ripple effect that impact your partners and the assistant secretary's workload.
- Be on time. Plan ahead. Know where you're going. Know how to get there. Allow for delays due to Austin traffic. In the event you're unavoidably delayed by the boss, car trouble, or traffic, let someone on your crew know what's going on. Have your crew members' contact information already entered into your phone.
- Dress for success. Keep your uniform clean—including your shoes. Maintain a professional personal appearance. Follow AFOA guidelines for grooming.
- Watch how you act. If you must change into your uniform when you arrive, find a private place to do so. After the game, remove your striped shirt before leaving the game site. Watch what you say at all times about teams, coaches, fans, or co-officials. Understand that almost anything you do may be recorded by someone's phone.

### **Working Chain Crew Assignments**

We strongly suggest that you keep Friday nights open to work chains or serve as a timer. For many of our Friday night varsity games, the home coach has requested that AFOA provide a three-person crew to operate the down markers and perhaps two timers as well. That means we are being asked to provide 10 or 12 officials for that one game site, so most if not all of our officials may be needed on many Friday nights.

When you receive a chain crew assignment, be sure you contact the official listed in RefTown as the Head Linesperson as early as possible to confirm you have accepted the assignment. He or she may have additional details to share with you about when the on-field crew will arrive, where they will park, what their pre-game routine will be, and when you can have a brief orientation for that evening. You will probably decide among yourselves which two chain crew members will hold the "stakes" at either end of the chain and who will operate the "down box." During each series of plays until there's a first down, the stakes do not move, while the box moves when instructed after a play is over, to mark where the ball is and what down is coming up.

If you find that the sideline is crowded, with players or coaches making it difficult for you to operate the chains efficiently, resist the temptation to run over, bump into, or move people out of your way. Inform the wing official responsible for the chains that you're having trouble, and let him or her take care of the situation. When the crew consists of seven officials, the line judge (L) will supervise you in the first half; for the second half the wing officials will switch sides, so the Head Linesperson (H) will supervise you in the second half.



Never comment to coaches, players, or anyone on the sideline during the game. Know the down and distance every play. Offer assistance to the L or H only if he or she asks. When a penalty is enforced or when there is a measurement, the L or H will give you instructions.

Working in a chain crew provides an excellent opportunity to see the speed and skill of varsity play up close. Many crews invite chain crew members to sit in on their pre-game preparations and halftime discussions, where you can learn a great deal from veteran officials as well as establish connections and networks to help you in the coming years.

You must execute an assignment to work the chains with the same professionalism as you would for an assignment on the field. You can't make a good first impression with the veteran crew you're working with if you don't resolve to follow the same four best practices listed earlier: honor your commitment, be on time, dress for success, and watch how you act.

You and the timers are essential members of the AFOA crew that evening. If this were not so, why would schools contract with AFOA to provide chain crews and timers instead of relying on cheap-to-use parent or school staff volunteers? A chain person or timer who is a no-show, or late, or lazy, or mistake-prone does disproportionate damage to the reputation of AFOA and of the crew working that night.

Seek out opportunities to work every Friday night, and bring your best to the job.

### **Working Varsity Scrimmages**

Spring and fall scrimmages are open to all officials, providing excellent opportunities for new members to work on the field in a five-person crew, experience the speed of a varsity game, and network with veteran officials. We recommend that you work as many scrimmages as possible.

If you're not assigned to a scrimmage, check RefTown to see the schedule. If you see a location you'd like to go to, contact the crew chief to get details of the scrimmage format and see whether you'd have an opportunity to work. Some varsity crews choose to work a scrimmage as a unit to work on their coordination and communication, so that location might not be the best option for you. Look for scrimmages that appear to be short-handed.

## **4. Putting Your Uniform Together**

AFOA doesn't recommend purchasing your uniform components piecemeal at local discount sporting goods outlets. The inventory selection may be limited and the merchandise may be inferior or shoddy. A uniform suitable for youth league or recreational games may not support the professional presence you want to project for Texas middle school and secondary school athletics.

Several reputable online vendors specialize in providing high-quality merchandise to outfit high school and college officials. Most such vendors also offer a "starter package" with the essential elements for outfitting new officials, at reduced cost compared to buying items individually. At

most clinics and workshops provided by TASO and local chapters, you can visit officials' vendors in person and purchase your uniform and equipment on the spot.

TASO has designated three "gold vendors" that are authorized to sell merchandise, uniforms, casual apparel, and miscellaneous items that display the TASO logo:

- *Stripes Plus*, 806-352-1245, <https://stripesplus.com/>
- *Official Gear Outlet*, 432-853-0514, <https://officialsgearoutlet.com/>
- *Ump Junk*, 210-364-1110, <https://umpjunksa.com/>

If you're not shopping for merchandise with a TASO logo, other vendors are suitable as well.

Here are the essential uniform elements you'll be shopping for.

### Dressing for Success

**Shirts** Black-and-white-striped TASO-approved polyester shirts, short-sleeved and long-sleeved. The long-sleeved shirt is necessary because wearing a long-sleeved undershirt or sweatshirt beneath a short-sleeved shirt is not permissible.



**Pants** Full length black pants with one-and-one-quarter-inch white strips along the seams of the legs. The pants must not be cuffed and must continue to the shoe without a break. Pants are mandatory for varsity and chain crew assignments.



**Shorts** Knee-length black shorts with one-and-one-quarter-inch white strips along the seams of the legs. Shorts are authorized for scrimmages and sub-varsity assignments.



**Under-wear** Black t-shirt and black compression shorts/tights. If you are wearing a short-sleeved officiating shirt, you must wear a short-sleeved black undershirt.



**Belt** Black leather belt, with a width in the range of 1.25 - 2 inches



**Hat** Fitted black cap with white piping—not mesh and not adjustable. You do not need a white cap.



Socks Black socks that don't extend higher than the ankle.



Shoes Predominantly black shoes with black laces and appropriate soles or cleats. Some white trim is permissible, but the predominate color must be black.



Whistle Pea-less, plastic Fox 40 lanyard whistle or finger whistle.



Lanyard Black straight or looped style, for use with a whistle requiring a lanyard.



Flag Light gold foul marker weighted in the center with pebbles, sand or beans.



Bean Bag White or Black. Blue bean bags are not appropriate.



Chain Clip Many types are available. You'll need this when you work on a chain crew.



Pencil You will need something to write with during the game. Short, non-eraser pencils are commonly used and are sold by uniform vendors.



Game Card Game Card: Plastic reusable or paper disposable game card recording details such as timeouts and fouls. Pre-printed game cards are commonly sold by uniform vendors.



Down Indicator Rubber band or elastic accessory. Various types are sold by uniform vendors. Umpires may use an indicator to note the lateral position of the ball each down.



The uniform for chain crew members is the same as for varsity games except for the striped shirt. Wear instead an all-white polo-style shirt. A small logo on the white polo is acceptable as long as it is appropriate. You will need your chain clip but not your other accessories.

Finally, here are a few game preparedness and fashion tips.

- Carry backups: spare whistle, down indicator, flag, game card, and pencil.
- Be prepared: have a gauze or bandage tucked away in case minor, inadvertent contact causes you to bleed.
- Think ahead: if you're working the judge position, carry a second bean bag in case you must both mark the spot where a kick ends and another critical spot, such as the end of a run when there's a fumble during a runback.
- Look sharp: don't let your flag hang out by carrying it loosely in your belt or back pocket.
- Look interested: don't slouch, stand with hands on hips, cross legs, or fold arms.
- Look professional: wear a clean uniform with buffed shoes, and be well groomed and free of flashy jewelry

## 5. It's My First Game ...

### Preparation

Check RefTown for information about day, date, location, visitor and home teams, kickoff time, number of games, type of games, co-officials, game fee, and mileage fee. Note whether the location of the game is the same as the location of the home school. Consult a map and satellite views to see where the field is in relation to the neutral facility or the home team's campus. Note where to park and where dressing rooms are if you're going to need facilities.

Contact every one of your co-officials, at least a day or two before the game. Try email or texting or phone calling, but don't give up trying to make contact. Confirm with your co-officials that they're in the game, when they'll arrive on site, where they'll park, what uniform you'll all wear depending on the weather. Will it be hot or cold, dry or rainy? Wear short sleeves or long? Wear shorts or pants? If you're unsure whether there's a dressing room available at the game location, ask the crew chief—usually the official designated as Referee—for information.

If you have not been able to contact someone in the crew by the day before the game, let the Referee know. If you don't want to work one or two persons short for two games, don't give up confirming your co-officials will be there.

## **Arrival at Game Site**

Depending on your work schedule and the facilities at the game site, you may arrive in civilian clothes or already dressed in most of your uniform. If you're not in uniform, try to be dressed neatly. If you're in uniform, don't put on your striped shirt until you arrive.

At most locations you can simply walk into the field area through a convenient gate. However, at some stadiums there may be a sign-in form that an administrator will direct you to; usually a school official will seek you out if that's the case. At no location will you ever be paid immediately or asked to leave a paysheet or IRS form with personal information.

## **Pre-game Conference**

It's not always possible to have a pre-game conference with your co-officials. If you do have one, take advantage of the time to talk about mechanics and procedures for the coin toss, halftime, end-of-game, and other administrative matters.

Typically you'll work the position assigned to you in RefTown, especially in your first game! But you may find as the season progresses that some crew members will want to try out or get more experience at a particular position, particularly if you have multiple games for the evening. You can work such an arrangement out as a crew.

In a four-person crew, the unofficial crew chief is typically the Referee, who does not wear a white hat in non-varsity games. The Umpire works in the middle behind the defensive line. The Linesperson works on the visitor sideline, controlling the chain crew. The Judge works on the home sideline, dropping deeper in punt situations.

For varsity games, some crews wear shirts with their position designated on the back by a one-letter placard, as do all college crews. The abbreviations are *R* for referee, *C* for center judge, *U* for umpire, *L* for line judge, *H* for head linesperson, *F* for field judge, *S* for side judge, and *B* for back judge. AFOA provides four-person crews for 6-man varsity games and five- or seven-person crews for high school 11-man varsity games.

For non-varsity games, the official listed as Referee, accompanied by the Umpire, should meet briefly with the head coaches while the teams are warming up, to certify that players are properly equipped and to determine whether the home coach has lined up a chain crew. The Linesperson should meet briefly with the chain crew for a quick orientation.

## **Debriefing**

After the game, consider whether there's time for a quick debriefing in the parking lot, especially if you're with an established veteran or two who can provide feedback and answer questions for you. If there isn't the time or the will to do so, consider whether you'd like to contact anyone in the crew later that week or at a chapter meeting to chat. Sometimes veteran officials are reluctant to volunteer comments, but when asked to will do so gladly. If you ask for feedback, avoid being defensive. If you find information useful, use it. If not, look forward to the next assignment!

## 6. What Happens Next Year?

Every year, beginning with your first, be sure to keep a thorough, detailed, and accurate record of every officiating activity you undertake. Include meetings, training, workshops, clinics, scrimmages, chain crew and timing assignments, and of course game assignments. You need that record both as an independent contractor who must file a tax return every year and as a member of TASO who needs to submit a year-end accounting of those activities for which you earn points.

All TASO members in all sports must re-register every season. For football officials, registration and dues payment for TASO are typically submitted by late March or early April. You can use late registration for the coming season, but you will pay a late registration fee and, if you delay past the AFOA deadline, you will be dropped from active membership status in RefTown. Your local dues for AFOA are typically paid by early October, after members have had over a month of game assignments to set aside funds.

For AFOA members, the new season essentially starts in late spring when varsity teams in the 5A and 6A UIL classifications may conduct spring practices, which offer an opportunity to work scrimmages, just as in August. After NCAA rules changes are announced, typically in April, the first TASO training for earning points begins with regional rules clinics in late June and with the annual TASO state meeting in late July. As a second-year official, you will want to be prepared to attend AFOA training for returning and transfer members, also beginning in July or August.

## 7. Useful Resources: Rules Book, Study Guide, Links and Podcasts

### Rules Book

As an active member of TASO, you receive a physical copy of the *NCAA Football Rules Book* every year, usually in early to mid-summer if you attend a regional rules clinic conducted by AFOA. Until then, use your rules book from the previous season to revisit the rules, focusing on areas that you're still not quite fully in command of. You can also consult a searchable PDF version of the previous or new NCAA rules book through at least three sources:

The official NCAA homepage at <https://www.ncaapublications.com>

The AFOA homepage at <https://www.austinfootballofficials.org/foa-members-info>

The CFO homepage at <https://plus.refquest.com/>

Take note of that third source: *CFO* refers to the College Football Officiating board, which is the umbrella membership organization that is home for officials working college conferences around the country at all levels. In 2020 former SEC officiating coordinator Steve Shaw succeeded Rogers Redding as the CFO National Coordinator of Officials, and he also serves as the Secretary-Rules Editor for the NCAA Football Rules Committee. Shaw was the keynote speaker at the 2023 TASO Annual Meeting in Dallas.

For several years TASO and CFO have enjoyed a cooperative association to provide TASO football members access to the CFO website, which is the central hub for NCAA football

officials to view the NCAA Football Rules Book and Case Book, mechanics manuals, rules interpretations, training videos, and weekly in-season quizzes. The cost for NCAA officials is \$100, but through RefQuest Plus, TASO football members may register for an account for the discounted fee of \$40.

## Study Guides

Perhaps the indispensable resource for football-specific rules study is *The Redding Study Guide to NCAA Football Rules*, now published by George Demetriou.

Rogers Redding, who holds a Ph.D. in physical chemistry from Vanderbilt University, began publishing his annual study guide in 1991 while also serving for many years as an instructor at officiating camps sponsored by TASO.

Dr. Redding began his officiating career in Texas as a high school football official. He officiated in the Southwest Conference from 1988-1993 and served as a referee in the Southeastern Conference for nearly a decade. His post-season assignments have included the 1999 SEC Championship (Florida-Alabama) and three national championship games: at the 1991 Orange Bowl (Colorado-Notre Dame); 1993 Sugar Bowl (Alabama-Miami); and 1998 Rose Bowl (Michigan-Washington State).

After retiring from officiating on-field in 2004, Dr. Redding served as a technical advisor and instant replay official for the SEC before becoming the conference's coordinator of officials. Dr. Redding also served as the NCAA Secretary and Rules Editor from 2008-20017.

*The Redding Study Guide* is available from Amazon, from the several officials' equipment vendors, and from Double S Distributors at Box 2537, Denton, Texas, 76202, to name a few.

## AFOA Website

Your own AFOA dashboard at <https://www.austinfootballofficials.org/> contains links to an extensive collection of resources, accessible from one location, under the *Member Info* tab at the top:

- NCAA Football Rules Book
- UIL Rules Exceptions
- Texas 6-Person Football Rules
- Mechanics Manuals for 4- 5- and 7-Person Crews
- Manual for Chain and Clock Operators
- Texas Football Stadium Database
- NCAA Foul Report Form
- UIL Pay and Mileage Calculator
- TASO Policies and Bylaws
- TASO Insurance Information
- Incident Reporting Form for UIL
- Incident Reporting Forms for TAPPS

## Rules Plus Study Sessions and *Rules+* Podcast

For in-depth discussion of rules, mechanics, and interesting plays, many AFOA members participate in a voluntary study session for 1 hour before every regular chapter meeting in the fall. AFOA has also launched a weekly podcast, *Rules+: Officials Earning Our*

*Stripes*, to support year-round intensive rules study, with new episodes airing on Wednesdays through Spotify, Apple, and Google. You can check RefTown and the AFOA website for details.

## 8. RefTown Tutorials

You can find tutorials and help topics for using *RefTown* on the home page by clicking the *RefTown/Help* link at the top right to reveal a drop-down menu. Choose *Knowledge Base*.

