

their separation. Accordingly, in the case of employees who separate and do not return by the close of the year, service which is completed prior to separation may be disregarded.

*Example 2.* The B plan in 1971 excludes from plan participation employees who work less than 1,200 hours per year. Because years of less than 1,200 hours are not taken into account under the B plan for eligibility to participate, such years are excluded under rules relating to breaks in service. Therefore, the years can be disregarded under this subparagraph.

*Example 3.* The C plan in 1971 provides for immediate participation and provides accruals and vesting credit for 1,200 hours or more in a given year. The plan provides that if a participant works less than 300 hours in a given year, he loses all prior vesting and benefit credits. The 300 hour rule is a break in service rule because the failure to complete 300 hours results in the loss of vesting and prior service credit. The 1,200 hour requirement is not a break in service rule because even though employees do not increase vesting or accrue benefits for service between 300 and 1,200 hours, they cannot lose prior vesting or benefits for such service. Accordingly, the C plan can disregard completed years only on account of less than 300 hours of service by an employee.

(c) *Special continuity rule for certain plans.* For special rules for computing years of service in the case of a plan maintained by more than one employer, see 29 CFR Part 2530 (Department of Labor regulations relating to minimum standards for employee pension benefit plans).

(Sec. 411 (88 Stat. 901, 26 U.S.C. 411))

[T.D. 7501, 42 FR 42327, Aug. 23, 1977, as amended by T.D. 7703, 45 FR 40985, June 17, 1980]

**§ 1.411(a)-6 Year of service; hours of service; breaks in service.**

(a) *Year of service.* Under section 411 (a)(5)(A), for purposes of the regulations thereunder, the term “year of service” is defined in regulations prescribed by the Secretary of Labor under section 203(b)(2)(A) of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974. For special rules applicable to seasonal industries and maritime industries, see regulations prescribed by the Secretary of Labor under subparagraphs (C) and (D) of section 203(b)(2) of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974.

(b) *Hours of service.* Under section 411(a)(5)(B), for purposes of the regulations thereunder, the term “hours of service” has the meaning provided by section 410(a)(3)(C). See regulations prescribed by the Secretary of Labor under 29 CFR Part 2530, relating to minimum standards for employee pension benefit plans.

(c) *Breaks in service.* Under section 411(a)(6), for purposes of § 1.411(a)-5(b)(4) and of this paragraph—

(1) *In general—(i) Year of service after 1-year break in service.* In the case of any employee who has incurred a 1-year break in service, years of service completed before such break are not required to be taken into account until the employee has completed one year of service after his return to service.

(ii) *Defined contribution plan.* In the case of a participant in a defined contribution plan or in an insured defined benefit plan (which plan satisfies the requirements of section 411 (b)(1)(F) and § 1.411(b)-1) who has incurred a 1-year break in service, years of service completed after such break are not required to be taken into account for purposes of determining the nonforfeitable percentage of the participant's right to employer-derived benefits which accrued before such break. This subdivision does not permit years of service completed before a 1-year break in service to be disregarded in determining the nonforfeitable percentage of a participant's right to employer-derived benefits which accrue after such break.

(iii) *Nonvested participants.* In the case of an employee who is a nonvested participant in employer-derived benefits at the time he incurs a 1-year break in service, years of service completed by such participant before such break are not required to be taken into account for purposes of determining the nonforfeitable percentage of his right to employer-derived benefits if at such time the number of consecutive 1-year breaks in service included in his most recent break in service equals or exceeds the aggregate number of his years of service, whether or not consecutive, completed before such break. In the case of a plan utilizing the elapsed time method described in

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§ 1.410(a)-7, the condition in the preceding sentence shall be satisfied if the period of severance is at least one year and the consecutive period of severance equals or exceeds his prior period of service, whether or not consecutive, completed before such period of severance. In computing the aggregate number of years of service prior to such break, years of service which could have been disregarded under this subdivision by reason of any prior break in service may be disregarded.

(2) *One-year break in service defined.* The term "1-year break in service" means a calendar year, plan year, or other 12-consecutive month period designated by a plan (and not prohibited under regulations prescribed by the Secretary of Labor) during which the participant has not completed more than 500 hours of service. In the case of a plan utilizing the elapsed time method, the term "1-year break in service" means a 12-consecutive month period beginning on the severance from service date or any anniversary thereof and ending on the next succeeding anniversary of such date; provided, however, that the employee during such 12-consecutive-month period does not complete any hours of service within the meaning of 29 CFR Part 2530.200b-2(a) for the employer or employers maintaining the plan. See regulations prescribed by the Secretary of Labor under 29 CFR Part 2530, relating to minimum standards for employee pension benefit plans.

(d) *Examples.* The rules provided by this section are illustrated by the following examples:

*Example (1).* (i) X Corporation maintains a defined contribution plan to which section 411 applies. The plan uses the calendar year as the vesting computation period. In 1980, Employee A, who was hired at age 35, separates from the service of X Corporation after completing 4 years of service. At the time of his separation, Employee A had a nonforfeitable right to 25 percent of his employer-derived accrued benefit which was not distributed. In 1985, after incurring 5 consecutive one-year breaks in service, Employee A is re-employed by X Corporation and becomes an active participant in the plan. The plan provides that, for 1985 and all subsequent years, Employee A's previous years of service will not be taken into account for purposes of computing the nonforfeitable percentage of

his employer-derived accrued benefit, solely because of his break in service.

(ii) The plan fails to satisfy section 411. Section 411(a)(6)(B) would permit the plan to disregard Employee A's prior service for purposes of computing his nonforfeitable percentage in 1985 only, but such service must be taken into account in subsequent years unless there is another break in service. Under section 411(a)(6)(C), the plan is not required to take Employee A's post-break service into account for purposes of computing his nonforfeitable right to his prebreak employer-derived accrued benefits. This provision, however, would not permit the plan to disregard pre-break service in determining his nonforfeitable right to his benefit accrued after the break. The exception provided by section 411(a)(6)(D) does not apply in the case of a participant who has any nonforfeitable right to his accrued benefit derived from employer contributions.

*Example (2).* (i) X Corporation maintains a qualified plan to which sections 410 and 411 (relating to minimum participation standards and minimum vesting standards, respectively) apply. The plan permits participation upon completion of a year of service and provides that 100% of an employee's employer-derived accrued benefit vests after 10 years of service. The plan uses the calendar year as the vesting computation period. The plan provides that an employee who completes at least 1,000 hours of service in a 12-month period is credited with a year of service for participation and vesting purposes. The plan also provides that an employee who does not complete more than 500 hours of service in that 12-month period incurs a one-year break in service. The plan includes the rule described in section 411(a)(6)(D) for participation and vesting purposes. Under this rule, an employee's years of service prior to a break in service may be disregarded under certain circumstances if he has no vested right to any employer-derived benefit under the plan. The plan does not contain the rule described in section 411(a)(6)(B) (relating to the requirement of one year of service after a one-year break in service).

(ii) Employee A commences employment with the X Corporation on January 1, 1977. Employee A's employment history for 1977 through 1989 is as follows:

Year ending December 31	Hours of service completed
1977 .....	1,000
1978 .....	800
1979 .....	1,000
1980 .....	400
1981 .....	1,000
1982 .....	0
1983 .....	400
1984 .....	1,000
1985 .....	0
1986 .....	0

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Year ending December 31	Hours of service completed
1987 .....	500
1988 .....	200
1989 .....	1,000

**§ 1.411(a)-7 Definitions and special rules.**

(a) *Accrued benefit.* For purposes of section 411 and the regulations thereunder, the term “accrued benefit” means—

(1) *Defined benefit plan.* In the case of a defined benefit plan—

(i) If the plan provides an accrued benefit in the form of an annual benefit commencing at normal retirement age, such accrued benefit, or

(ii) If the plan does not provide an accrued benefit in the form described in subdivision (i) of this subparagraph, an annual benefit commencing at normal retirement age which is the actuarial equivalent (determined under section 411(c)(3) and § 1.411(c)-(5) of the accrued benefit determined under the plan. In general, the term “accrued benefits” refers only to pension or retirement benefits. Consequently, accrued benefits do not include ancillary benefits not directly related to retirement benefits such as payment of medical expenses (or insurance premiums for such expenses), disability benefits not in excess of the qualified disability benefit (see section 411(a)(9) and paragraph (c)(3) of this section), life insurance benefits payable as a lump sum, incidental death benefits, current life insurance protection, or medical benefits described in section 401(h). For purposes of this paragraph a subsidized early retirement benefit which is provided by a plan is not taken into account, except to the extent of determining the normal retirement benefit under the plan (see section 411(a)(9) and paragraph (c) of this section). The accrued benefit includes any optional settlement at normal retirement age under actuarial assumptions no less favorable than those which would be applied if the employee were terminating his employment at normal retirement age. The accrued benefit does not include any subsidized value in a joint and survivor annuity to the extent that the annual benefit of the joint and survivor annuity does not exceed the annual benefit of a single life annuity.

(2) *Defined contribution plan.* In the case of a defined contribution plan, the balance of the employee’s account held under the plan.

Employee A’s status as a participant during this period is determined as follows:

*1978:* Employee A was a plan participant on January 1, 1978, because he completed a year of service (1,000 hours) in 1977. He did not complete a year of service in 1978 because he completed fewer than 1,000 hours in that year. Because he completed more than 500 hours of service in 1978, however, Employee A did not incur a one-year break in service that year.

*1979:* Employee A completes a year of service in 1979. Because he did not incur a one-year break in service in 1978, the plan may not disregard his 1977 service for purposes of determining his years of service as of January 1, 1979.

*1980:* Employee A incurs a one-year break in service in 1980.

*1981:* Because Employee A had completed 2 years of service prior to 1981 and had incurred one 1-year break in service prior to 1981, under section 411(a)(6)(D), the plan may not disregard his pre-1980 service in 1981. Employee A completes a year of service in 1981.

*1982:* Employee A incurs a one-year break in service in 1982.

*1983:* Employee A incurs a one-year break in service in 1983. As of the end of 1983, he has completed 3 years of service and has incurred 2 consecutive one-year breaks in service.

*1984:* Employee A completes a year of service in 1984. Under section 411(a)(6)(D), his pre-1982 service may not be disregarded in 1984 because, as of the beginning of 1984, his pre-1984 years of service (3) exceed his consecutive one-year breaks in service (2).

*1984-1988:* Employee A incurs 4 consecutive one-year breaks in service during the years 1985 through 1988.

*1989:* Employee A’s pre-1989 service is disregarded in 1989 and all subsequent plan years because his years of service as of January 1, 1989, equal the number of consecutive one-year breaks he has incurred as of that date. Therefore, as of the beginning of 1989, Employee A is not a plan participant. Employee A completes a year of service in 1989. (Although section 411(a)(6)(D) does not prohibit the plan provision under which Employee A’s pre-1989 service is disregarded, that section does not require such a provision in a qualified plan.)

(Sec. 411 (88 Stat. 901; 26 U.S.C. 411))

[T.D. 7501, 42 FR 42329, Aug. 23, 1977, as amended by T.D. 7703, 45 FR 40985, June 17, 1980]