

BEHIND THE SCENES:

Certification Questions Answered

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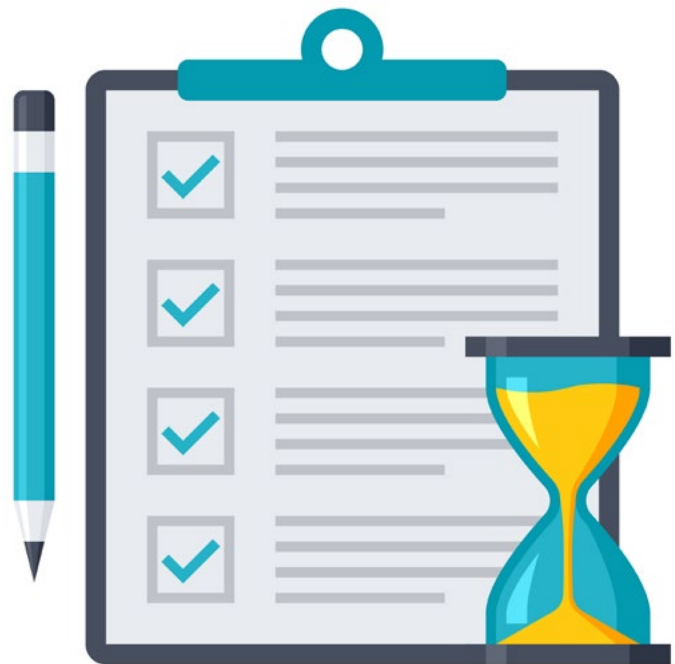
If you have ever considered taking one of our certification exams, you may have had some questions like: What kind of questions are on the exam? Who makes up the questions? How do I know if these questions are legitimate? Is there training for the exams? Why can't I get my numerical score?

Before any of these questions can be answered, we must first consider what a certification actually is.

Certifications, according to the Institute for Credentialing Excellence (ICE), are: Standards that are set through a defensible, industry-wide process that results in an outline of required knowledge and skills and has ongoing requirements to maintain; a certification holder must demonstrate that s/he continues to meet requirements (remain current) through recertification.¹ Unlike certificate programs where the prime focus is to provide instruction and training, certification programs assess knowledge and skills (competencies) you already have. This is why each of our certifications have a minimum experience (and/or education) requirement which must be met before you are cleared to take the exam.

So how does this translate to a certification exam? There are many considerations taking place behind the scenes before a question can be used in a certification exam.

1. **All questions must be vetted.** Vetting means that all questions have been reviewed by the Certification Exam Advisory Group (CEAG). The CEAG is comprised of designated members from the Technical, Education, and Certification associate boards. Depending on the complexity of the question, members may be called upon to collaborate in the review process.
2. **Terminology needs to be familiar.** Since English is the accepted global business language, authors must keep it in mind when writing an exam question. It is also important to ensure the terminology used is familiar to test takers. This means that slang cannot be used, outdated or obsolete terminology must be up-to-date, and absolutely no opinions may be expressed. Each question must have a concise, simple sentence structure that is clear to the reader.²
3. **The Body of Knowledge is tested.** While each exam question tests a candidate's experience and knowledge, there must also be a tie-back to core competencies and industry standards. AACE's Body of Knowledge is comprised of the [Total Cost Management \(TCM\) Framework](#), AACE's



[Recommended Practices](#), and the [Skills & Knowledge of Cost Engineering](#). (Note: Members have access to the TCM Framework and Recommended Practices for free!)

4. **There are specific ways candidates are tested.** Because certifications exams are a test of the candidate's knowledge, there are specific criteria we look for via exam questions:
 - a. **Basic knowledge:** The candidate's recollection of facts and information.
 - b. **Comprehension:** The demonstration of the candidate's understanding of facts and terminology.
 - c. **Application:** The use of information and knowledge in concrete applications.
 - d. **Analysis:** the ability to break information down into its parts, identifying both the parts, as well as their relationships to each other.
 - e. **Synthesis:** the ability to put pieces together to produce a new entity, generate a plan, or derive new relationships.
 - f. **Evaluation:** The ability to use evidence and criteria to judge the value of something for a given purpose.³
5. **All approved and vetted exam questions are stored in a "bank".** This bank is where questions are pulled to make up the exams. Having a large bank of questions provides room for more unique exams and randomization, which in turn protects the integrity and security of the certification program.
6. **Certified individuals are able to submit questions for CEUs.** If you are certified, you have the opportunity to submit questions through our [volunteer program](#). All questions will be reviewed by the CEAG, and if approved are awarded CEUs. Please note that if your certification is about to expire, don't count on submitting questions to get your CEUs quickly. Due to the required review for each question, it may take up to four months to receive a response.

What about education or training? Can the Certification Program provide training to me, so I can pass the exam? Is my certification considered “higher education”?

While AACE’s Education Program offers a variety of courses, the Certification Program does not have a role with/in the courses, nor does your certification apply to higher education. Here’s why:

1. **Certification exams are not tied to education.** Our exams are based on acquired knowledge, skills, and competencies. There is no relationship with higher education or attaining a degree; holding a certification will not help you earn credits toward a degree (none for which we are aware). Conversely, a certification is not designed to evaluate the mastery of a course or class.⁴
2. **Training cannot be offered by the Certification Program.** Based on the international standard set forth in ISO/IEC 17024 (International Organization for Standardization/International Electrotechnical Commission) – General requirements for bodies operating certification of persons, if the certification program offers training, it could be a threat to impartiality. All training has to be done by a separate entity (in our case, through the Education Program) to ensure that confidentiality, information security, and impartiality are not compromised.⁵

What about my results? Can I get my score?

AACE exam results are provided on a pass/fail basis only. The Certification Board adopted this industry best practice because there are potential issues and unintended interpretations or uses of scores that can arise with providing a numerical score. Here are a few scenarios you may not have considered:

1. **Using pass/fail prevents candidates/certificants from assuming meanings in performance differences.** The Certification Board has already established the metrics for passing the exams. If you pass an exam with a 73%, but your co-worker has passed with an 80%, does that make your co-worker more qualified or more certified than you? No. According to best practices, you have met the criteria to be certified.
2. **Keeping results at pass/fail keeps scoring aligned with current metrics.** As new exams are created, questions are randomized, and new standards are set, comparison becomes difficult. Not only is it difficult to compare a score on one exam six months ago to a score from this minute, it would be impossible to compare a score from 1998 to a score in 2018.

3. Providing pass/fail results also reduces ranking.⁶

Certification is not about ranking certificants in order of performance. Consider a situation where you received a 70% on your exam, and two of your other co-workers received 80% and 90% respectively. Your employer gives raises according to your performance on the exam. Although all of you passed and are certified, it is possible you would not receive the same raise as the other two.

Now that you know some of the whys of our certifications, what’s stopping you from getting certified? Certification demonstrates the holder knows the importance of adhering to certain professional standards. Certificants can be more confident in their ability to meet industry standards and employers can expect a certain level of measured performance.

The Certification Department is ready to help you. If you have any questions about any of our [certifications](#), you can contact us at certification@acei.org or +1-304-296-8444, ext. 1110.

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