

Use Recertification to Jumpstart Your Professional Development

Are you looking for new job opportunities? Interested in expanding your current responsibilities? Want to position yourself for a new role in your organization? The recertification process can be a stepping stone to all of these goals. Recertification is not just an “exercise” necessary to maintain your certification. It’s a terrific opportunity to implement a professional development plan to boost your career. Here’s how to do it:

Step #1: Identify your strengths and weaknesses.

The first step in the process is to pinpoint your current professional strengths and weaknesses. Since the content outline for the certification examination represents the scope of expertise necessary for competent professional practice, reviewing this outline is a good place to start your self evaluation. If the content outline is structured around professional tasks, rate your proficiency on each task using the following scale:

How proficient are you in carrying out this task?

- (0) Not sure
- (1) Not at all proficient
- (2) Somewhat proficient
- (3) Moderately proficient
- (4) Very proficient

Or, if the content outline for the examination consists of knowledge areas, rate the extent of your knowledge as follows:

What is the extent of your knowledge in this area?

- (0) Not sure
- (1) No knowledge at all
- (2) Slight familiarity
- (3) A moderate degree of understanding
- (4) In-depth mastery

Tasks in which you are less proficient or knowledge areas that you have not yet fully mastered may be good targets for your professional development plan. Even if these tasks or knowledge areas are not required in your current role, they may be important in other jobs you seek in the future.

You might also consider how frequently you engage in each task or use each knowledge area. You may be “rusty” in tasks or topics that are not part of your current job or there may be some tasks in which you have had little experience over the years. Further education or training in these areas could be beneficial.

Some certification providers offer self-assessments or practice examinations to assist individuals in preparing for certification. These assessments and examinations are another tool you can use to evaluate your strengths and weaknesses. Typically, the assessment mirrors the certification examination in content and difficulty, but unlike the real examination, you get the answers to the questions! Often the assessment also provides an explanation of why the incorrect options are wrong. These explanations make the self-assessment a learning experience, as well as an evaluation. If the self-assessment or practice examination specifies not just your total score, but also the number of questions you answered correctly in each content domain, this makes it easy for you to identify areas for further professional development.

Step # 2. Identify other knowledge gaps or areas in which you wish to develop greater expertise.

Future career opportunities and your effectiveness in your current role could perhaps be enhanced by developing more specialized or more in-depth expertise than is specified in the examination outline or by gaining expertise in an area *outside* of the categories in the examination outline. For example, if you aspire to a managerial role, additional education or training in supervision and leadership may be valuable. Be sure you understand which professional development activities will be applicable toward your recertification requirements hours and which will not, so you can plan accordingly.

Step #3. Determine what types of continuing education and professional development activities will be most effective in helping you to accomplish your goals.

The table below lists different types of activities that are often recognized by certification providers and highlights some of the unique professional development benefits of each. Use this information to help you determine which types of activities will best aid you in achieving the professional goals you've identified.

Activity	Professional Development Benefits
Educational program	<p>Each lecture/workshop/session typically covers a narrow topic, so your time is used effectively (i.e., you concentrate only on the specific areas in which you wish to further develop your knowledge/skills); if you are attending an annual conference, you may be able to find several sessions on your selected topic, thus creating your own "educational track" for the conference</p> <p>May be most effective approach if your weaknesses are limited to a very narrow area or if there are narrow topics you wish to pursue in a variety of different content domains</p> <p>Provides an opportunity to interact with, and seek further clarification from, an expert on the topic (i.e., the instructor or presenter)</p>

Activity	Professional Development Benefits
Academic coursework	<p>Typically covers a broad content domain</p> <p>May be most effective approach if your weaknesses are concentrated primarily within a single content domain or if you wish to target several knowledge areas/skills in a particular content domain</p> <p>Provides in-depth instruction and a comprehensive learning experience, including the opportunity to learn from other students</p> <p>Includes one or more assessments (test, project, etc.) to evaluate your mastery of the content</p> <p>Can obtain academic credits as well as credit toward recertification</p>
Self study, including audio conference, or online educational program	<p>Typically, the scheduling and pace of the program are fully or partially under your control – may offer more flexibility and convenience than other learning experiences</p> <p>Often, there is an opportunity to interact with, and seek further clarification from, an expert on the topic (i.e., the instructor)</p>
Professional speaking/teaching	<p>Demonstrates your in-depth mastery of the topic</p> <p>Positions you as an expert or knowledgeable professional on the topic</p> <p>Demonstrates that you possess other skills that may be important for your career (e.g., public speaking, teaching)</p> <p>Increases your professional visibility</p>
Academic teaching	<p>Demonstrates your in-depth mastery of one or more broad content domains</p> <p>Typically requires that you stay current in the field</p> <p>Positions you as an expert or knowledgeable professional on the content domain</p> <p>Demonstrates that you possess other skills that may be important for your career (e.g., public speaking, teaching)</p>

Activity	Professional Development Benefits
Writing questions for certification examination	<p>Requires you to drill down and thoroughly understand the specific concept or issue on which you have elected to write and thus, may be an effective approach if your weaknesses are limited to a very narrow area or if there are narrow topics you wish to pursue in a variety of different content domains</p> <p>Encourages you to think more broadly and critically about typical situations you encounter in your professional role</p> <p>Gives you an opportunity to learn how others in a similar role might handle specific work situations (through interactions with other test item writers)</p>
Authoring/Publishing	<p>Demonstrates your in-depth mastery of a topic</p> <p>Positions you as an expert or knowledgeable professional on the topic</p> <p>Demonstrates that you possess other skills that may be important for your career (e.g., writing, research)</p> <p>Increases your professional visibility both within and outside your organization (e.g., the publication can be announced in the organization newsletter and local newspapers)</p>
Volunteering/Mentoring in a Related Area	<p>Gives you an opportunity to network with and learn from others working in similar roles</p> <p>Increases your professional visibility outside your organization</p>

Step #4. Outline your professional development plan and your goals for the recertification period.

Begin this step by deciding what your primary professional goals are for the next few years. Would you like to expand your knowledge in a particular area, position yourself for a promotion, pursue an advanced degree, etc.? Next, list each knowledge area or skill you want to target during the upcoming recertification period to help you accomplish these goals. Lastly, specify what professional development activities you will engage in related to the knowledge or skill to be targeted and the approximate time period in which you will complete each activity. You now have a concrete professional development plan that can serve as a roadmap to achieving your career goals.

Step #5. Evaluate your success in accomplishing your professional development goals and identify your goals for the next recertification period.

At the end of the recertification period, repeat Step #1 to evaluate your progress and update your professional development plan for the next recertification period. Complete your proficiency or knowledge mastery ratings once again or retake the self-assessment examination and compare your current results to those from the start of the recertification period. This information will help you to identify your accomplishments, determine what knowledge or skills still need further work, and decide what new knowledge and skills you would like to address in the next recertification period.

Follow the five easy steps outlined above for each recertification period and you will make significant progress toward accomplishing your career goals. Don't miss this opportunity to jumpstart your professional development.