



ITIL® Certification Explained & 4 Key Questions

Holding an ITIL certification makes you more attractive to industry employers and will often help your resume clear the first cut.

But what does it take to receive an ITIL certification? Perhaps more important, will an ITIL certification [translate into higher compensation?](#)

Not sure what ITIL is? [Get a bird's eye view here.](#)

Certification in ITIL can be especially useful for IT professionals who've been unemployed for an extended period. Unemployment aside, ITIL certification can be a big employability boost for people who have an IT background but have been working outside of the field for some time.

Many employers see a current ITIL certification as a sign that a prospective employee is up to date on relevant IT trends. The problem is, there isn't just one ITIL certification. ITIL certifications exist in degrees, and finishing the certification program to the end isn't the answer for everyone.



From the most basic (foundation level) to the most advanced (master level) the certification levels build on one another like a pyramid.

The ITIL® Foundation Level Certification

Of the many ITIL certification types and levels, the most popular is the ITIL foundation level certification. This makes sense; the journey of a thousand miles starts with just one step. To earn this certification, you must sit for a one-hour exam composed of forty multiple choice questions. This exam is not considered to be difficult; the pass rate is about 85%. The foundation level exam is unique in that you are not required to take any accredited training before sitting for it. Literally anyone can take it; you don't even have to have an IT background. As a caveat, however, if you're planning to jump into the IT industry by way of an ITIL foundation level certification, then you're in for a steep uphill climb.

Even though you may be able to grasp the core principles of ITIL with minimal technical knowledge, the real challenge comes when the rubber meets the road. You will find it exceedingly difficult to demonstrate this knowledge in the field if you lack any baseline of real IT work experience.

Without an IT background, just passing the ITIL foundation level exam might get you in the door, but you will not likely survive a technical interview. There is simply no substitute for actual hands-on experience, and employers recognize this. That's why it's recommended that you don't attempt the foundation level exam without some IT experience under your belt.

ITIL® Practitioner Level Certification

The ITIL practitioner certification is meant to be a bridge between the foundation level and the intermediate level certifications. The exam is open-book and, like the foundation level exam, is all multiple choice.

While the foundation level exam is mainly focused on key terminologies and theoretical relationships, the practitioner level exam focuses on how ITIL operates in the real world.

Acquiring ITIL practitioner certification is a good choice if you want to immerse yourself in a broader study of practical, scenario-based applications of ITIL. It is also, of course, a good idea if you're looking to round out your resume.

Something to keep in mind, however, is that this certification is not a prerequisite for any of the ITIL intermediate level certifications. If you're already confident practically applying ITIL, then you're free to go straight from the foundation level to one of the intermediate level exams.

ITIL® Intermediate Level Certifications

Unlike the foundation and practitioner level exams, ITIL intermediate level exams can only be given to those who've completed specialized, AXELOS-approved trainings.

[AXELOS](#), if you don't already know, is a joint venture between the UK's Cabinet Office and a public limited company (PLC) called Capita. AXELOS owns the rights to ITIL, and they are the accrediting body for the framework.

Each of ITIL's intermediate level certifications focuses on either one of the five ITIL Service Lifecycle Phases or one of the four Service Capability Modules.



These intermediate level certifications offer a deep dive into specific components of ITIL.

You may obtain as many intermediate level certifications as you like, though most people can't just pass these tests willy-nilly. It is generally advised that you have at least two years of working experience with IT service management before attempting an intermediate level certification.

Unless you have a specific ITIL focus, the number of different intermediate certifications you complete will have a direct impact on your achieving expert level certification. That is, if expert level certification is your goal.

Each ITIL certification course is assigned a number of credits. Instead of requiring a grueling expert level exam, expert level is recognized after applicants have accumulated *at least* 22 credits. Credits are awarded through successful completion of accredited courses. It should also be noted that the Managing across the Lifecycle (MALC) exam, while not an expert level exam, is a prerequisite for expert level certification in addition to the 22 credit minimum.

Completing multiple intermediate level accredited courses is essential to reaching expert level certification—the credit value of these courses is needed to make the requisite 22 to become an official ITIL expert.

Managing Across The (MALC)

The MALC exam is a challenging, broadly focused exam that demands a commanding depth of ITIL knowledge across multiple facets of the framework.

Examinees are not permitted to use any books or references while taking the exam. To pass, at least 35 of the 50 questions must be answered correctly.

The MALC exam *must* be passed to achieve expert level certification.

Expert Level Certification

As mentioned, expert level certification in ITIL is issued on the basis of credits rather than on the completion of a specific expert level exam. Every ITIL course completed has a specific credit value, from the ITIL foundation level exam (2 credits) to the MALC exam (5 credits).

To achieve expert level certification in ITIL you must accumulate a total of *at least* 22 credits. There is no “expert level exam.” You simply submit verification of your accumulated certifications and are issued the ITIL Expert certificate.

Why Not Shoot for Expert Certification?

If expert certification is such a big deal, why wouldn't that be the goal of all IT professionals?

The first reason is simply because some have no desire or need for it. For many people, reaching expert level is a lot of work. Plus, after a certain amount of certification, they may no longer be guaranteed a corresponding pay increase as their certification level goes up.

If the latter case is true for you, is there a lot of value in pursuing certifications that won't get you paid more?

Another reason some IT professionals stop at intermediate level, or even go no farther than foundation level certification, is simply because they have no need to. Not every organization values ITIL in the same way or has the same amount of resources to use for transitioning IT operations to the ITIL framework.

Could these organizations benefit from adopting ITIL? Probably, but there are many factors to consider. For those employees who need “just the basics,” expert level certification is a lot of work with no payoff.

Master Level

Very few (less than a hundred) people can claim the title of ITIL Master.

This exceptionally challenging certification is awarded to those who have completed expert level certification and have accumulated substantial practical ITIL experience. The process of acquiring your master level certification in ITIL is a bit like acquiring your doctorate, but perhaps more difficult in some ways.

In addition to having completed the expert level exam, applicants are subjected to a rigorous peer-reviewed dissertation of sorts, where master level competency must be requested and justified. The submission process has a prerequisite of five years' experience in an IT service management leadership role, managerial role, or high-level advisory capacity.

Application fees for ITIL master level certification total about \$4,000.

Are You Considering Taking The ITIL Foundation Course?

If you're considering getting your feet wet with an ITIL foundation certification, there are some important aspects to keep in mind when shopping for courses or training programs.

Is This Course Offered by an ATO?

AXELOS has designated several organizations globally to be accredited to administer course materials and testing. These organizations are known as accredited training organizations, or ATOs. They must meet minimum compliance requirements and standards put forth by AXELOS.

This ensures not only a learning experience that is consistent with that of other certificate holders, but the peace of mind that comes with knowing that the course content is subject to regular evaluation.

Additionally, ATO course materials prepare you for the ITIL foundation exam. Even though you don't actually have to go through an instructor-led course to take the exam, the preparedness a course provides can be helpful.

Another nice feature of taking courses with ATOs is that they often include an exam voucher in the purchase price of the course. This is convenient and can sometimes result in savings, as course providers can discount the exam entrance fee as part of the course bundle.

Does the Course Offer Practice Exams?

The ITIL foundation level exam has 40 multiple choice questions, of which 26 must be answered correctly to obtain a passing grade. Mock tests, sample questions, and other training tools can prime test takers for a successful ITIL foundation exam.

Not all training materials are made equal. ATOs will have access to AXELOS-approved training materials, but if you are going your own way when it comes to test prep, look for materials that are licensed or approved by AXELOS.

These approved materials will carry a standard mark like the one that can be found on the websites of ATOs.

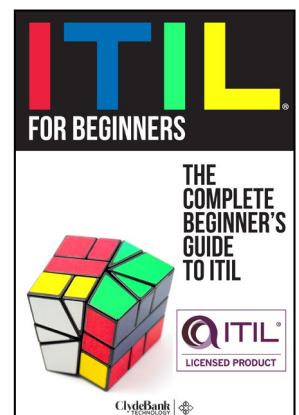
How Are the Reviews?

Just like any other purchase, an ITIL foundation course can be researched by seeing what others are saying about it. An important consideration that contextualizes reviews is the format the course is offered in.

CLASSROOM TRAINING

Classroom training is best for those who are brand new to service management. It is also a good choice (if feasible) for those who do best in group learning environments.

What does this have to do with reviews?



Service management veterans may be bored because they are ahead of the class. As a result, they could rate it lower—try to read between the lines here. Classroom training is by far the most immersive for those new to the world of service management.

ONLINE CLASSROOMS

Online classrooms offer a blend of convenience and immersive learning. Experienced service managers who are looking for a structured learning approach can benefit from an online classroom setting.

ONLINE SELF-DIRECTED AND SELF-PACED LEARNING

Self-paced learning is a cost-effective option for IT professionals or experienced service managers. These programs essentially hand over test preparation materials that can be supplemented with other guides and self-paced learning tools.

As with full courses, look for learning materials that are licensed by AXELOS to ensure that content is up-to-date and has been vetted by the creators of the ITIL framework.

This learning path is best for motivated learners looking to save money and experienced IT professionals looking to brush up on key concepts before taking the exam.

How Long Is Access to Course Materials Granted?

This is an important consideration when evaluating ITIL foundation level courses—even more so if you aren't planning on taking the exam right away. Whether or not you need a long period of access is up to you, but keep it in mind when shopping around for courses.

The Bottom Line

The bottom line when it comes to ITIL certifications is that you get out what you put in. Aspiring to the exceptional ITIL master level isn't for everyone.

Fortunately, there are a number of steps along the way that can be a better fit for IT professionals of all types and roles.