

## Your Path to Certification

How to get started - The certification basics

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Have you thought about getting certified, but just didn't know where to begin? As with many journeys we may begin by looking at a "map" and identifying the destination or end point. We may then locate where we are presently and trace our finger along the route until we find ourselves at the destination. Along the way we may note the waypoints or mile markers. We even might notice some potential obstacles to overcome. Regardless of the distance between the two points on the map, the first step of the certification journey begins with the desire to become certified. In this article, I will cover the basics of getting started with certification.

By deciding that you want to embark on the journey you have already taken the first step in certification. As with any trek, we need to take stock or inventory of what we have and what we will need for our travels. The certification process is no different. One of the first tasks is to select a [Level of Certification](#) and begin the [Application](#) process. There are 14 levels of certification to choose from and you will need to take a little time to review which level is best suited to your goals and current status. Regardless of what level you choose, there are a few fundamental components: education, work experience, passing the written exam, and passing a practical exam. The ACF National Office has developed a handy [Guide to Certification](#) which maps out the requirements in a simple easy to read table. From here you can easily determine what you have and what you might need to qualify for the desired level of certification.

The education component consists of what you have earned through formal schooling and/or [Continuing Education Hours](#) (CHEs) through professional development. In addition, all levels of certification require a 30 hour course in each of the following: Nutrition, Sanitation and Safety, and Supervisory Management. These courses may be taken at any accredited school or through an online organization, such as [Chefcertification.com](#). If you have already taken a course, but it is close to five years old, you will want to take an 8 hour refresher.

Work experience must be within the past 10 years and supported using the appropriate [Employment Documentation](#) form "or an official letter (on company letterhead) from your current employer stating your position and dates of employment. Past experience can be documented by a similar letter or a letter of reference." According to the [ACF Initial Certification](#) webpage, if these documents are not available, then "copies of tax records or W-2 stating time frame of work are acceptable in conjunction with validated letters from former culinary peers attesting to your employment, job title, duties and number of employees managed" could be used instead. "If you are self-employed, you may submit a business license or tax documents." The ACF National Office has also developed a [FAQ](#) webpage for certification.

The last two areas we need to look at are the written exam and practical exam. The written exam is certification level specific and is administered by [Comira](#) More

information may be found on the [Written Exams for Certification](#) webpage regarding the registration process. There are many resources to use to prepare for the written exam. However, ACF National offers “online educational opportunities through ACFEF [eCulinary Professional Development Institute](#).” Here you can find [certification prep courses](#) and [practice certification test banks](#). It is important to note that the written exam scores are valid for two years.

The practical exam is a measurement of ones skills in cooking as it relates to the level of certification being sought. It begins with locating a [test site](#) and finding the next available test date. An [ACF Practical Exam Candidate Registration Form](#) needs to be completed and sent to the ACF National Office. Preparing for the exam is as follows: read through the [Practical Exam Candidate Guide](#) for the level you are testing at and then read through it again. Create a game plan and menu for your exam. Lastly, practice, practice and practice. Once you are done practicing, practice again! More will be covered on the practical exam in a future article. It is important to note that practical exam scores are valid for one year.

So here you go! We have the map laid out in front of us, we have selected the destination, and have plotted the course. Now it is time to strap on our gear and get ready to begin the trek on the path to certification. Remember, each journey begins with a single step. If you have questions about certification please be sure to contact your local chapter certification chair person or ACF National Office at (800) 624-9458, ext. 130 or email at [certify@acfchefs.net](mailto:certify@acfchefs.net).