

[About Certification and CPTC](#)[Eligibility for Certification](#)[The Application Process](#)[Educational Requirements](#)[Applicants from Canada](#)[Applicants from Outside North America](#)[Staying Certified](#)

About Certification and CPTC

What's the difference between certification, certificates, and accreditation?

Although the terms are frequently used interchangeably, the terms are not synonyms. Here are the distinctions among terms:

Certification

Recognition of professional competence. Although certification processes have slight differences, all

-	Identification of the key competencies of the profession	. If certifications recognize p
-	Assessment of key competencies in each candidate	. Certification processes req
-	Work experience in the field	. Certifications are only open to p
-	Adherence to a code of ethics	. Certification programs require th

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Continued participation in professional development

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Most certification programs

A certification body provides certifications, which is why STC has separately incorporated the STC Cer

Certificate

A means of recognizing completion of a program of study. Each certificate program has its own require

In some cases, the program of study is short term, such as the certificate programs offered by STC.

In other cases, the program of study involves several courses, such as certificate programs in technical

Certificate programs do not assess competence to perform work; they merely assess whether learners

Certificates are provided by educational entities.

Accreditation

A process of verifying that educational programs adhere to established standards of performance. For

STC is not involved in accrediting programs, nor does STC have plans to do so.

What does the designation "CPTC" stand for?

Certified Professional Technical Communicator. Candidates who earn this designation can place it beside their name (for example, Marie Doe, CPTC) and use the logo on their business cards or email signatures.

Eligibility for Certification**What are the eligibility requirements for the CPTC program?**

- Five (5) years of full-time equivalent (FTE) experience in the field
- At least a secondary-school diploma (or its global equivalent)

With a directly related or relevant bachelor's degree or above, the experience requirement is reduced. Applicants must attest to their degree and experience, all of which will be verified as part of the application process.

Note that STC membership is **not** required for eligibility. Any practitioner who meets the eligibility requirements can apply.

I work as a consultant, not a captive employee. Can I still qualify for certification?

Yes. Your work situation is not a factor in determining eligibility for certification, only the length of time that you have worked in the field.

Whether you have worked as an employee, a consultant, a contractor, a freelancer, or in a combination of roles, your accumulated full-time equivalent experience counts toward the requirement.

I have worked part-time as a technical communicator. I averaged 20 hours per week.

Does that qualify as full-time equivalent work?

Not as full time, but half time. If you have worked between 20 and 35 hours a week as a technical communicator, you may count it as half-time experience.

To calculate full-time equivalency, prorate your time. For example, if you worked 20 hours per week as a technical communicator, for calculation purposes, you have worked half time. Each year of work counts as a half-year of the required experience. You will need to have worked for 10 years half time to qualify for certification.

Similarly, if you worked for 30 hours per week, your time counts as 75 percent. You will need to have worked for 7.5 years to have the required amount of experience.

I have worked part-time as a technical communicator. I averaged up to 20 hours per week. Does that qualify as half-time equivalent work?

No. Those periods of time when you have worked fewer than 20 hours per week as a technical communicator do not count toward your cumulative experience in the field.

I am an STC Fellow (or Associate Fellow). Am I automatically certified?

No. Election to the rank of STC Fellow or Associate Fellow provides a different type of professional recognition from certification. Election as a Fellow or Associate Fellow is a recognition by your peers of your contributions to the profession or to STC.

In contrast, certification is a recognition of professional competence by a panel of assessors who use an established set of criteria to review samples of the candidate's work.

The Application Process

How long do I have to submit my package?

Once you have submitted an application and paid the application fee, the office will issue you a candidate ID number via letter. You have one calendar year from the date of the letter to submit your package. (On average, candidates usually do not need that long to prepare their packages.)

How does the cost of CPTC compare to other certification programs?

Compared to certification programs for comparable professions, the cost to obtain and maintain CPTC certification is mid-range or slightly lower.

Educational Requirements

How does CPTC certification differ from the technical communication degree offered by a college or university?

Degree programs provide the conceptual background and initial training to work as a professional technical communicator. Degree programs prepare people for the work world; many earn degrees in the field without ever having held a job in the profession.

By contrast, certification assesses the competence of a technical communication professional within the context of real jobs. As a result, STC certification requires several years of full-time equivalent work experience in the profession before candidates become eligible for certification. Candidates submit samples of their actual work in the field as part of the application package for certification.

What are the education requirements for the CPTC program?

At least a secondary-school diploma (or its global equivalent).

If you have fewer than 5 years of experience, however, and would like to seek certification, additional education might reduce the 5-year residency requirement. That's because completing formal study in a degree program in technical communication or a related or relevant field can reduce the learning needed on the job—and reduce the time needed to become a competent technical communicator.

(It's not that other degree programs are not valuable, but they do not formally prepare students for work in the field and, therefore, are not assumed to reduce the learning curve on the job.)

Related fields*

Relevant fields*

Degree level

Doctorate, or
Master's, or
Bachelor's, or
Associates
(or, in Canada, Diploma)

Doctorate, or

Master's, or
Bachelor's, or
Associates
(or, in Canada, Diploma)

Disciplines

- Technical Communication (whether a separate major or a major within another program, like Eng
 - Human Factors (usability)
 - Information Design
 - Professional Communication or Professional Writing (whether a separate major or a major within
 - Science Journalism
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- Communications (including business communications, organizational communications, commun
 - Computer Science degrees with an emphasis on human-computer interaction [usability])
 - Education degrees in the fields of Adult Education, Instructional Systems, and Instructional (Edu
 - Journalism (other than Science Journalism)
 - Library and Information Science
 - Public Relations

Impact on the residency requirement:

Reduces the requirement by 2 years (so applicants can apply with as few as 3 years of experience)

Reduces the requirement by 1 year (so applicants can apply with as few as 4 years of experience)

* This is a preliminary list. In the future, the STC Certification Commission will be developing additional qualifications for educational experience. At that time, the list of related and relevant degrees might change.

Does a master's degree or PhD in technical communication count more than a bachelor's degree?

No. Such programs do not provide additional preparation in the competencies assessed in the certification beyond what is covered in the bachelor's degree programs.

I have a degree that's not listed. Am I eligible to apply for certification?

Yes, if you have five years of full-time equivalent experience working as technical communicator.

Questions Specifically for Applicants from Canada**What colleges and universities in Canada offer directly related or relevant degrees?**

The directly related degree programs in Canada (eligible with 3 years' experience) are:

Related Programs**Relevant Programs**

Reduces the requirement by 2 years (so applicants can apply with as few as 3 years of experience)

Reduces the requirement by 1 years (so applicants can apply with as few as 4 years of experience)

School

Degree

School

Degree

Algonquin College

Graduate Certificate, Technical Writer

Concordia University

Minor in Professional Writing

Graduate Diploma in Instructional Technology

Master's or PhD in Educational Technology

British Columbia Institute of Technology

Associate Certificate in Technical Writing

George Brown College

Certificate in Technical Communications

Mt. Royal University

Bachelor's, Information Design

Humber College

Certificate in Technical Writing

Royal Roads University

Bachelor's and Master's in Professional Communication

Laval University

Master's or PhD in Educational Technology

Ryerson University

Master's of

Professional Communication

Ryerson University

Undergraduate minor in Professional Communication

Seneca College of Applied Arts & Technology

Graduate certificate in Technical Communication

Simon Fraser University

Master's or PhD in Educational Technology

Simon Fraser University

Certificate in Technical Communication

University of Calgary

Master's or PhD in Educational Technology

University of Sherbrooke (taught in French)

Baccalauréat en communication, rédaction et multimédia

University of Waterloo

Master's in Rhetoric and Communication Design

Questions Specifically for Applicants from Outside North America

I work outside of North America for a company that sells products in the United States and Canada. Does the certification apply for me?

Yes! The knowledge, skills, and abilities we are assessing apply to creating products to North American market standards. No matter where you work, if you are creating products for sale in North America, the certification is valid for you.

Staying Certified

To keep my certification, do I have to submit another evaluation package?

No. Once you receive certification, you maintain it by showing evidence of a certain number of hours of professional activity or continuing education within a given three-year period. The STC Certification Commission will accept a broad range of activities, such as tools training, attendance at professional seminars and conferences (STC-related and others), presenting and publishing papers, and volunteering in professional organizations.

As long as you keep up with your professional development, we won't be re-examining you. Rather, we seek evidence that you are continuing to move forward with your career. What direction you take in that effort is up to you.

Note: If you neither maintain your professional development nor re-take the exam, your certification expires and you will no longer have the right to use the designation CPTC.