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Certification Prep Guide Series:

How to Become a
Microsoft Certified Azure Solutions
Architect Expert

How to Become a Microsoft Certified Azure Solutions Architect Expert

This Certification Prep Guide provides an overview of the Microsoft Azure Solutions Architect Expert certification and offers helpful tips that you can use when preparing for your certification exam.

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Why get certified as an Azure Solutions Architect Expert?

Becoming a [Microsoft Certified Azure Solutions Architect Expert](#) validates the skills necessary to be successful in the role of Azure cloud solutions architect. With the retirement of the MCSE: Cloud Platform and Infrastructure certification, the Azure Solutions Architect Expert is one of three role-based certifications taking its place. Azure Administrator Associate and Azure Developer Associate are the other two. The retiring MCSE certification is valid and will remain on your transcript for one year past the Dec. 31, 2018 expiration date, at which point you will need to update to one of the new role-based certifications.

In nearly every aspect of IT, cloud plays a role. Most organizations have some dependency on a cloud platform and many of these companies use Microsoft Azure as a part of their cloud infrastructure (private, public or hybrid) to host their services as part of an efficient, globally distributed highly scalable architecture.

To remain competitive in IT, cloud almost certainly needs to be part of your skillset. The Azure Solutions Architect Associate certification is intended for individuals looking to enhance their current career or are looking to get into a new role as an Azure cloud Solutions Architect.

This guide will provide background, logistics and essential tips for the Azure Solutions Architect Expert certification exams.

What is the Azure Solutions Architect Expert certification?

Azure solutions architects advise stakeholders and translates business requirements into secure, scalable, and reliable solutions. This expert-level, role-based certification will validate your mastery of the skills needed to design solutions that run on Azure, as well as your expertise in compute, storage and security.

Two exams are required to attain this certification: Microsoft Azure Architect Technologies and Microsoft Azure Architect Design.

Who should take the Azure Solutions Architect Expert exam?

Candidates for this certification need to have advanced experience and knowledge across various aspects of IT operations, including networking, virtualization, identity, security, business continuity, disaster recovery, data management, budgeting, and governance. This role requires management of how decisions in each area affect an overall solution. Candidates must be proficient in Azure administration, Azure development, and DevOps, and have expert-level skills in at least one of those domains.

Microsoft cloud technology professionals that have completed any of the following certifications are candidates for the Azure Solutions Architect Expert certification:

- MCSA: Windows Server 2016
- MCSA: Cloud Platform
- MCSA: Linux on Azure
- MCSA: Windows Server 2012
- MCSE: Cloud Platform and Infrastructure

View the complete Microsoft Certified Azure Solutions Architect Expert track.

How will becoming a Microsoft Certified Azure Solutions Architect Expert impact your job and career?

According to the Global Knowledge IT Skills and Salary Report, certification value is at an all-time high. The IT industry continues to validate skills and capabilities learned via certifications with higher salaries. According to the report, 93% of IT decision-makers believe certification provides added value to the organization.

Individual benefits are obvious too—certified IT professionals in North America earn more than their non-certified peers. Cloud computing certifications, in particular, are associated with four of the top five highest IT salaries in the world.

Some additional benefits of certified personnel, according to IT decision-makers, include:

- Improved productivity
- Fewer skills gaps
- Faster project completion
- Quicker deployment of products and services
- Provides an edge over competitors

Azure Solutions Architect Expert exam guide

Unlike some of the technology-based certifications, the new Azure role-based certifications require that you pass two exams to become certified. One exam features topics around core solutions and the other more advance solutions.

AZ:300—Microsoft Azure Solutions Architect Technologies
- Deploy and Configure Infrastructure
- Implement Workloads and Security
- Architect Cloud Technology Solutions
- Create and Deploy Apps
- Implement Authentication and Secure Data
- Develop for the Cloud

AZ:301—Microsoft Azure Solutions Architect Design
- Design for Identity and Security
- Design a Data Platform Solution
- Design for Deployment, Migration, and Integration
- Design an Infrastructure Strategy

As mentioned, passing both exams is required for certification. You can register on the individual exam pages and schedule your exam time with Pearson VUE.

Test format: Microsoft doesn't make the exam formats or question types public. According to the Microsoft Certification exam page, a number of possible question types could be used, including active screen, best answer, multiple choice and short answer. To get a feel for what you might experience, there are current examples on the certification page.

Duration: You have 150 minutes to complete between 40-60 questions (actual number of questions may vary).

Registration fee: $165

How to prepare for the Azure Solutions Architect Expert exams

A mixture of formal and informal learning provides the most value in preparation for a certification exam.

Instructor-led training courses
Microsoft is on the cutting edge when it comes to training individuals and enterprises

on how to best deploy, manage and maintain their technology. To keep up with their innovation, Microsoft is constantly evaluating their certifications and Microsoft Official Courses (MOC) training for necessary updates. Microsoft Learning and Global Knowledge diligently work together to ensure major technology and course updates coincide. Any minor update in technology can be highlighted on the spot, which proves to be a big advantage of instructor-led training. Our Microsoft-approved instructors bring the most current real-world examples to the classroom. Instructor-led courses, enriched in real-time with current best practices and hands-on labs, are the gold standard of learning.

Recommended courses

Global Knowledge has created training tracks from the Microsoft Official Courses to correspond to the required certification exams. The new role-based training and exams feature the abbreviated technology and a three-digit number that relates the two.

Microsoft Azure Solutions Architect Technology Track (AZ-300)

- Five-day instructor-led course delivered live in classroom, virtually or in a private group.
- You will develop skills needed to manage Azure subscription and resources, implement advanced virtual networking, use shell commands to create an app service web app, use Swagger to document an API, work with Azure container registry, implement secure data for implementing SSL and TLS communications, deploy for Asynchronous processing, leverage Azure cognitive services solutions, and more.

Microsoft Azure Solutions Architect Design Track (AZ-301)

- Four-day instructor-led course delivered live in classroom, virtually or in a private group.
- You will acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to design a hybrid identity solution, secure application secrets using Key Vault, detail the various APIs available in Cognitive Services, determine the types of storage blobs to use for specific solutions components, automate the deployment of future resources for backup recovery or scaling purposes, design an app service plan or multi-region deployment for high performance and scale, design hybrid connectivity scenarios between cloud and on-premise, author a VM Scale Set ARM template, and more.

Global Knowledge also offers an Azure Solution Architect Boot Camp (AZ-300 and AZ-301), that readies students for both AZ-300 and AZ-301.

Training exclusives

Global Knowledge offers training exclusives with purchase of any Microsoft Official Course. Each course comes with 12 months access to the following benefits:

- Practice labs
- 24x7 mentoring
- Indexed class recordings
- Unlimited course retakes
- Digital courseware

Azure free trial
Microsoft offers a free trial of Microsoft Azure, where participants can spend up to $200 in credits practicing the same skills they'll need to pass the exams. [Sign up for the free trial](#).

Review exam objectives
On each exam page you'll find a list of exam objectives as well as a list of videos and prep materials that are recommended prior to testing. Take advantage of these resources if you think you need additional practice before taking the certification exam.

Recorded sessions and events
Microsoft provides videos of many of its conference and event sessions at https://channel9.msdn.com/. These supplemental sessions can be used to focus on the areas that require more review before testing.

Azure Learning as a Service (LaaS) courses
To fill any gaps in your instructor-led training, Global Knowledge has introduced [Azure LaaS](#). These courses are presented as a combination of text, downloadable eBooks, links to additional reading, videos (think YouTube), labs, and end-of-section reviews.

Meant to serve as a complement to a multi-day, instructor-led training course, these free, topic-based, on-demand courses will provide more details to enrich your learning experience and further develop your pre-exam skills.

Azure Solutions Architect Expert exam: Tips & tricks

Microsoft certifications are neither easy nor fun, according to Tracy Wallace, lead Azure instructor at Global Knowledge. The exams dive deep into the finer points of the topics being tested, and almost every question seems like a trick question because they are nearly impossible to guess.

From Wallace's blog post on tips for Microsoft certification exams:

> "So, how do you know what will be in the exam? The scary answer is that you can't, at least not everything. No matter how much you study, you will likely encounter questions you have never seen any material on (more about this later). However, breathe a sigh of relief because there is one place to go to find out most of the topics that will be on an exam. Microsoft publishes exam description pages for every exam they administer."

Find good study material
The Microsoft Official Course (MOC) is the best study material you can ask for. The MOC content is written by experts and aligns with the exam objectives. The exam questions are not recited word-for-word in the courses, but the general concepts on the exam are covered in detail by the MOC training.

There are also myriad books available as study guides. Be sure you stick to the well-

known and reputable publishers such as MS Press, APress, Sams, etc. and avoid the gray market content found on the internet. Most of the gray market sites violate Microsoft intellectual property rights and you could face significant penalties from Microsoft if you are discovered using them. A resource that most overlook is TechNet (or MSDN for Solutions Architects). While it is a massive repository of Microsoft knowledge, using a site search could help identify valuable content based on a list of skills you would like to develop.

Practice

Practice using the technology and practice taking the exam. Using the technology is one of the most important aspects of learning and maintains the credibility of the certification. According to Wallace, "certifying people that have just studied for an exam and have not ever touched the product devalues the certification."

Just because you know the technology doesn't mean you'll pass the exam. If you struggle with test taking, no amount of technology practice will prepare you for the exam. That is where practice exams come in. There are a couple of well-known companies that produce Microsoft sanctioned practice exams—Trancender and MeasureUp.

The good news? Global Knowledge offers Microsoft Official Course training that aligns with the specific exams, and each course comes with hands-on labs to practice using the technology and select courses also include six-month access to practice exams.

Manage your time

This is the universal test-taking tip that everyone knows, but few actually follow. When you sit for the exam you will be given a finite amount of time to answer a specific number of questions. Do some quick math and determine how much time you can spend on each question. From Tracy's blog:

> "I know a lot of exam candidates who have failed because they realized that they ran out of time and guessed at a number of questions. If you spend a couple of minutes on a question and don't have the answer, make a guess, mark it and move on. If time permits, go back and review the question, but only change the answer if you are sure of the right answer, or you are sure the guess you made is wrong."

For more tips on taking the certification exam, check out the full blog post, Six Tips for Passing a Microsoft Certification Exam (from Someone Who Hates Taking Tests).

How do you know if you pass?

A pass/fail status notification will be provided within a few minutes of completing your exam.

You will also receive a printed report that details your score and any feedback on your performance for the skill areas measured by the exam. Your score will then be forwarded to Microsoft by your exam delivery provider within five business days of your exam date.

What happens if you don't pass the exam?

If you happen to fall short of a passing score, you can retake the exam at your leisure. You should, however, take time to review your printed report and focus on the skill areas where you performed the weakest on the initial exam before retaking. This is where the Microsoft Training Exclusives by Global Knowledge will come in handy. Reference the class recording to review specific sections to improve those skills.

If you don't manage a passing score on the second attempt, you will be placed into a 14-day waiting period before you can retake the exam for a third time, as well as each subsequent attempt. Review all exam policies and frequently asked questions.

An exam retake is full price—unless you choose to take advantage of exam specials that Microsoft might be running. Review the current specials from Microsoft Learning.

How to maintain your Azure Solutions Architect Expert certification

Microsoft provides two recertification options for those who want to demonstrate continued competence in these areas. You can demonstrate that you're staying current in the technology by either taking a recertification exam or stay-current course within two years of earning your certification. As soon as you pass either the course or the exam, the expiration date on your certification will be extended two years from that date.

Recertification is an important indicator to IT professionals and their employers that the certification-holder has kept up with current trends in technology. Having to re-earn a certification means that you did not meet the recertification requirements within the two-year period. In other words, you have allowed your certification to expire and must repeat the entire certification process to re-earn your certification. It's much easier to recertify than re-earn.

The job role-based certifications may be renewed indefinitely, but without timely renewal, certifications expire or become inactive. To renew your certification, you must complete the recertification requirements prior to the certification expiration date.

Next steps after you obtain your Azure Solutions Architect Expert certification

After becoming a Microsoft Certified Azure Solutions Architect Expert, you can work to earn one or both of the other role-based Azure certifications—Azure Administrator Associate and Azure Developer Associate.

Once you pass the certification, to get maximum exposure, you'll want to immediately load your certificate into your LinkedIn Profile (don't forget to include your actual certificate number—LinkedIn refers to this as a "License Number").

Summary

Cloud computing delivers unparalleled value and agility compared to traditional on-premises data centers. Developing and nurturing cloud IT skills is an absolute

imperative. In fact, many organizations today are held back on major IT initiatives because of cloud skills gaps. Amplify your status by earning the Azure Solutions Architect Associate certification. You will develop the skills necessary to manage and scale existing workloads and help your company reach key business objectives.

About the Author

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Tom Tuttle is the product marketing manager for Global Knowledge's Microsoft, Application Development and Analytics learning portfolios. He believes that marketing should be relevant above all, and that he will write the marketing workflow that will perfectly align every IT professional with the right course at the right time from Global Knowledge's immense curriculum. Tom also fancies himself a chef, having once owned a popular central North Carolina-based food truck.