

**GUIDE**

Certificates that mean something

Training records an auditor trusts

By the SkillTeam learning design team · October 2026

GUIDE · NO. 03

Certificates that mean something

TRAINING RECORDS AN AUDITOR TRUSTS

An auditor does not want to see that you trained people. An auditor wants to see that the people doing the work are competent, and that you can prove it without anyone picking up a phone.

We build short courses for companies in safety, ports and shipping, and every one of them ends in a certificate. That forced us to answer a dull question properly: what does a training record need before a stranger will believe it?

This guide is our answer. It covers what ISO 9001, ISO 45001, STCW and the Maritime Labour Convention ask for, the seven facts every certificate should carry, how to stop refreshers from lapsing, and how to let anyone check a certificate in one tap without exposing the person named on it. Where we say what we built, the screens are real.

[For HSE and training managers](#)[Quality leads before an audit](#)[Crewing and HR in shipping](#)

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01

What the standards ask for.

Put clause 7.2 of ISO 9001 next to clause 7.2 of ISO 45001 and you find the same short instruction. Decide what competence each role needs. Make sure people have it. Keep documented information as evidence.^{1,2}

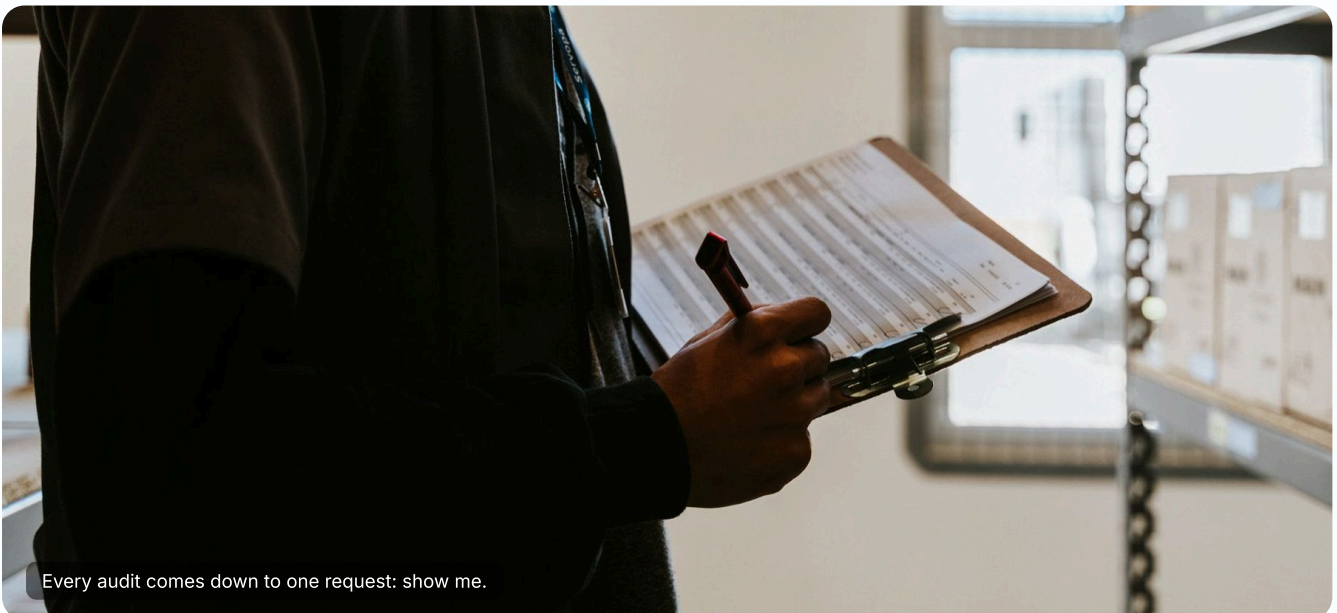
Notice what the clause does not say. It does not ask for attendance sheets. It asks for evidence of **competence**. A signed list proves that somebody sat in a room on a Tuesday. It says nothing about what they can do on Wednesday.

A note on editions. ISO published ISO 9001:2026 on 16 September 2026.³ Certified companies move to it within their certification cycle, so most audits this year still run against the 2015 wording used here. Read the new text before you rewrite your procedures.

ISO 9001 adds a line that many training files skip: where you take action to build competence, evaluate whether the action worked.¹ So the first question a good auditor asks is not “did you train them?” but “how do you know it worked?” A score against a pass mark is the plainest honest answer we know.

What counts as evidence

ISO 19011, the guidance auditors work from, defined audit evidence in its 2018 edition as records, statements of fact or other information that are relevant to the audit criteria and **verifiable**.⁴ That last word carries this whole guide. If the auditor cannot check it, it is a claim.



Every audit comes down to one request: show me.

¹ ISO 9001:2015, clause 7.2 Competence. Replaced by ISO 9001:2026 on 16 Sep 2026. [iso.org/standard/62085.html](https://www.iso.org/standard/62085.html)

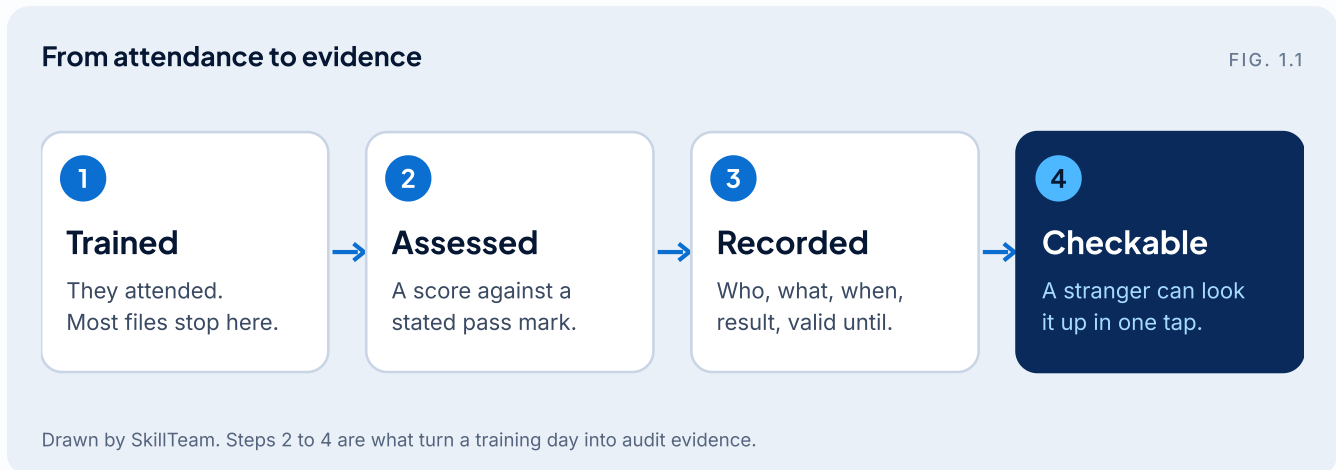
² ISO 45001:2018, clause 7.2 Competence. [iso.org/standard/63787.html](https://www.iso.org/standard/63787.html)

³ ISO 9001:2026, Quality management systems, edition 6. [iso.org/standard/9001](https://www.iso.org/standard/9001)

⁴ ISO 19011:2018, definition of audit evidence. Now ISO 19011:2026. [iso.org/standard/19011](https://www.iso.org/standard/19011)

Four steps from a training day to evidence

Most training files we are shown stop at step one. Each step after it is cheap once it is built into the course, and expensive to reconstruct the week before an audit.



One regulator already wrote the record for you

Some rules spell out the record in plain words. The US standard for forklift trucks says the employer must certify that each operator has been trained and evaluated, and the certification must include the operator's name, the date of the training, the date of the evaluation, and who did the training or evaluation.⁵ Each operator's performance is evaluated again at least once every three years.⁵

That is a good template for almost any skill on any site: a name, a date, an assessment, an assessor, and a date by which it must be done again. We use it as a sanity check on every course we build.

The UK regulator says it more gently. Its short guide on training tells employers to check that the training has worked, and notes that keeping records, even of in-house training, helps you give refresher training when it is needed.⁶ Its three questions for checking are worth pinning above any training coordinator's desk:

After the training, HSE asks

INDG345, STEP 5

- 1 Do your employees understand what you require of them?
- 2 Are they actually working as they have been trained to?
- 3 Has there been a change in behaviour and practice?

If a record cannot be checked by someone who has never met you, it is a story, not evidence.

OUR VIEW

⁵ OSHA. 29 CFR 1910.178(l)(4)(iii) and (l)(6), Powered industrial trucks. ecfr.gov

⁶ HSE (2012). *Health and safety training: a brief guide*, INDG345 rev1, step 5. hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg345.pdf

02

At sea: STCW and the Maritime Labour Convention.

Shipping had to solve the trust problem early. Crews change ships, companies and flags, and the person checking a certificate is often in a different country from the one that issued it.

The STCW Convention sets the certificates that masters, officers and many ratings must hold. Since the 2010 Manila amendments, every Party must keep a register of the certificates it issues and answer requests from other Parties and from companies that want to verify a certificate is authentic and valid.⁷ In other words, the convention assumes paper will be doubted, and builds in a way to check it with the issuer.

The Maritime Labour Convention adds the employer's side. Seafarers may not work on a ship unless they are trained or certified as competent or otherwise qualified for their duties, and every seafarer must have completed training for personal safety on board.⁸

For ship operators, the ISM Code adds the company's own duty: procedures so that new crew, and crew moved to new safety duties, are properly familiarised, and procedures to identify the training the safety management system needs and make sure it is given.⁹



A bridge watch. STCW decides who may stand it.

⁷ IMO. STCW Convention, as amended 2010, Regulation I/2, paras 14 to 16. imo.org

⁸ ILO. Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended, Regulation 1.3. ilo.org

⁹ IMO. ISM Code (resolution A.741(18), as amended), sections 6.3 and 6.5. Extract by The Nautical Institute.

What a port state inspector looks at first

When a port state control officer boards, the convention starts with paper. Control under STCW is limited to verifying that every seafarer who must be certificated holds an appropriate certificate or a valid dispensation.¹⁰ An assessment of whether people can actually do the job follows only if there are clear grounds, such as a collision or grounding, an illegal discharge, or a ship handled erratically or unsafely.¹⁰

So the first minutes of an inspection are a records check. Clean, checkable papers keep it short. Gaps give the officer a reason to look harder.

Revalidation is built in

To keep sailing, masters and officers must show medical fitness and continued professional competence at intervals of not more than five years.¹¹ Seafarers with basic training must give evidence every five years that they still meet the standard.¹² Maritime HR teams live by these dates. Most shore-side companies have nothing like them, which is why Chapter 4 exists.

Why issuers keep registers: forged paper

In 2000, a study the IMO commissioned from the Seafarers International Research Centre in Cardiff had collected 12,635 detected forgeries of certificates of competency and endorsements, reported by 54 maritime administrations.¹³ The researchers did not call that number large. They called the detection rate low, a sign of weak control worldwide.¹³ The IMO Assembly has since adopted a resolution on unlawful practices with certificates, and Parties report the fraud they find.¹⁴

FROM OUR BUILD

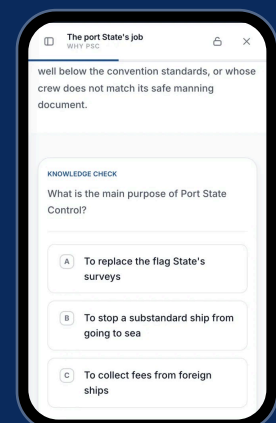
AMLA puts the exam before the track.

AMLA, the Africa Maritime & Logistics Academy, runs its marine survey courses on SkillTeam. Before a learner can open a junior track such as Port State Control, they must pass the Initiation Exam with at least 80%. Each track ends in its own final exam. The certificate follows the exam, never the attendance.

Pass mark 80%

Exam before the track

English



Real screen, Port State Control: Junior

¹⁰ IMO. STCW Convention, Article X and Regulation I/4, Control procedures. imo.org

¹¹ IMO. STCW Convention, Regulation I/11, Revalidation of certificates. imo.org

¹² IMO. STCW Code, Section A-VI/1, paragraph 3 (basic training). imo.org

¹³ IMO (2000). STW 32/6, Unlawful practices associated with certificates of competency. Note by the Secretariat on the SIRC study.

¹⁴ IMO. *Fraudulent certificates*, and Assembly resolution A.892(21). imo.org

03

The seven facts every certificate needs.

A certificate is a summary of a record. If one of these seven facts is missing, the auditor has to go and find it, and that is where trust starts to leak.

Where the seven facts sit

FIG. 3.1



Our certificate design, A4 landscape, with a sample learner. The QR and check code on the left are the eighth item: the way to check the other seven (Chapter 5).

- 1 **Name**, spelled as on the person's ID, accents included. "Nguyen Thuy Linh" and "Nguyễn Thùy Linh" are different strings in a database.
- 2 **Course**, by its exact title, plus what it covered and how it was assessed. "Safety training" is not a course.
- 3 **Score** on the final assessment. Better still, the pass mark next to it.
- 4 **Issued**: the date the person passed, not the date someone printed the paper.
- 5 **Valid until**, or the words "does not expire". A blank looks like an oversight.
- 6 **Number**: a serial in your own sequence, so the paper points to one row in your register.
- 7 **Issuer**: the organisation that stands behind it, with a named role and a signature.

What each fact protects you from

FACT	WHAT THE AUDITOR USES IT FOR	WHAT GOES WRONG WITHOUT IT
Name	Matching the certificate to the person on the roster	Two people, one name, no way to tell
Course	Matching the training to the role's required competence	"General induction" covers anything and proves nothing
Score	Seeing that the training was evaluated, as clause 7.2 asks	Attendance passed off as competence
Issued	Checking the person was trained before doing the work	A certificate dated after the incident
Valid until	Checking it is still in force today	Lapsed training nobody noticed
Number	Finding the row in your register in seconds	A search through folders while the auditor waits
Issuer	Knowing who to ask, and who is accountable	A certificate nobody will stand behind

Two numbers, not one

We put two numbers on every certificate and keep them separate on purpose. The **serial** (for example 014-0418/2026) runs in the issuer's own sequence, per company and per year, so it files neatly. The **check code** is random, twelve characters long on our certificates, and public. It is the only thing the online check accepts.

Neither can be worked out from the other. Someone who knows your numbering cannot guess a code. The code uses no 0, O, 1, I or L, so nobody misreads it over the phone.

A score means little on its own. 82% only tells you something next to a pass mark of 80%.

OUR VIEW

FROM OUR BUILD

An academy's own certificate, the same seven facts.

Academies on SkillTeam issue certificates under their own name, and the check runs on their own web address. The design can change. The seven facts and the check do not.

Issuer's name

Same facts

Same check



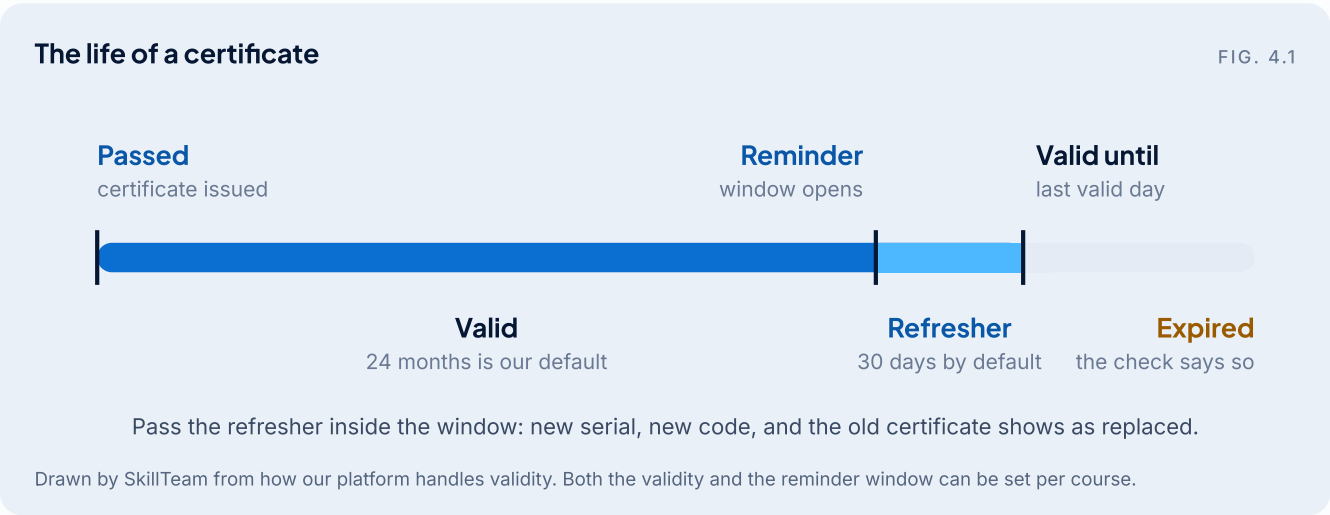
AMLA certificate design, sample learner

04

Expiry dates and refreshers that actually happen.

Most lapsed certificates are not a training problem. They are a calendar problem: the date was on the paper, and nobody was told in time.

There is also a learning reason to set an expiry. A review of 53 studies on skill decay found almost no loss right after training, and a large loss, an effect size of $d = -1.4$, after more than a year without use. Thinking tasks and tasks that need accuracy faded faster than physical ones.¹⁵ Emergency drills, first aid and lifting plans are exactly the skills people rarely use until the day they must.



Some intervals are set for you

TRAINING	INTERVAL	SET BY
STCW: masters and officers show fitness and competence	5 years max	STCW Regulation I/11 ¹¹
STCW basic safety training	Every 5 years	STCW Code, Section A-VI/1, paragraph 3 ¹²
Forklift operator evaluation (US)	At least every 3 years	OSHA 29 CFR 1910.178(l)(4)(iii) ⁵
Fire extinguisher use (US)	At hire, then yearly	OSHA 29 CFR 1910.157(g) ¹⁶
First aid certificate (UK)	3 years	HSE L74. A yearly refresher is strongly recommended. ¹⁷

¹⁵ Arthur, W. Jr. et al. (1998). Factors that influence skill decay and retention. *Human Performance* 11(1). doi.org/10.1207/s15327043hup1101_3

¹⁶ OSHA. 29 CFR 1910.157(g), Portable fire extinguishers: training and education. ecfr.gov

¹⁷ HSE (2013, amended 2024). *First aid at work*, L74, paras 74 and 75. hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/l74.htm

Three rules for refreshers that happen

Warn before the date, not after it. An expiry notice on the day it lapses is a report of a failure. Thirty days ahead is our default. For anything that needs a trainer, a room or a ship's schedule, make it sixty.

Tell two people. The learner forgets. Their manager has a roster to fill. Send the reminder to both, and make the manager's version a list, not a pile of separate emails.

Keep the refresher short. If the person still knows the material, let them prove it on the final assessment and move on. If they fail, they take the lessons again. Nobody should sit through a full day to confirm what they already know.

FROM OUR BUILD

A refresher replaces the old certificate, in public.

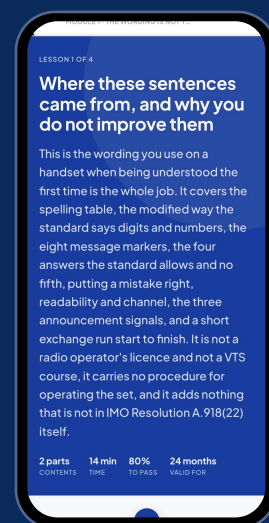
Every course sets a pass mark and a validity. Ours default to 80% and 24 months, and the reminder window opens 30 days before the end. Passing again inside that window issues a new certificate with a new serial and a new code. The old code still works, but the check page now answers **Replaced by a newer certificate**, so nobody relies on the old one.

A fail below the pass mark starts a new attempt, and every attempt is kept. The record shows what happened, not just the happy ending.

80% pass mark

24 months

Reminder at 30 days



Real screen, Maritime English: pass mark and validity shown before the first lesson

A reminder plan that works

WHEN	WHO HEARS	WHAT HAPPENS
60 days before	Training coordinator	Book a slot for anything that needs a trainer, a room or a ship's schedule
30 days before	Learner and manager	The refresher opens. One link, on the phone.
7 days before	Manager	One list of names still not done
The day after	Manager and HSE lead	Off any task that needs the certificate until it is renewed

Put the expiry date on the certificate and the reminder in someone's calendar. One without the other fails quietly.

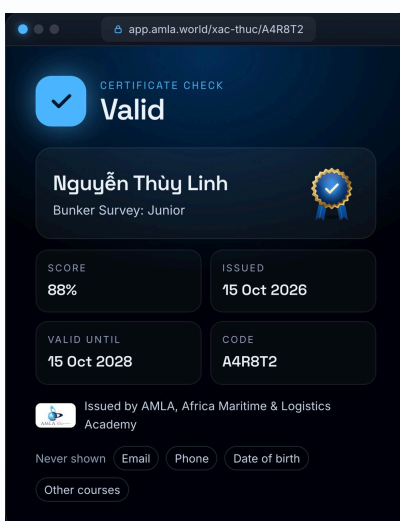
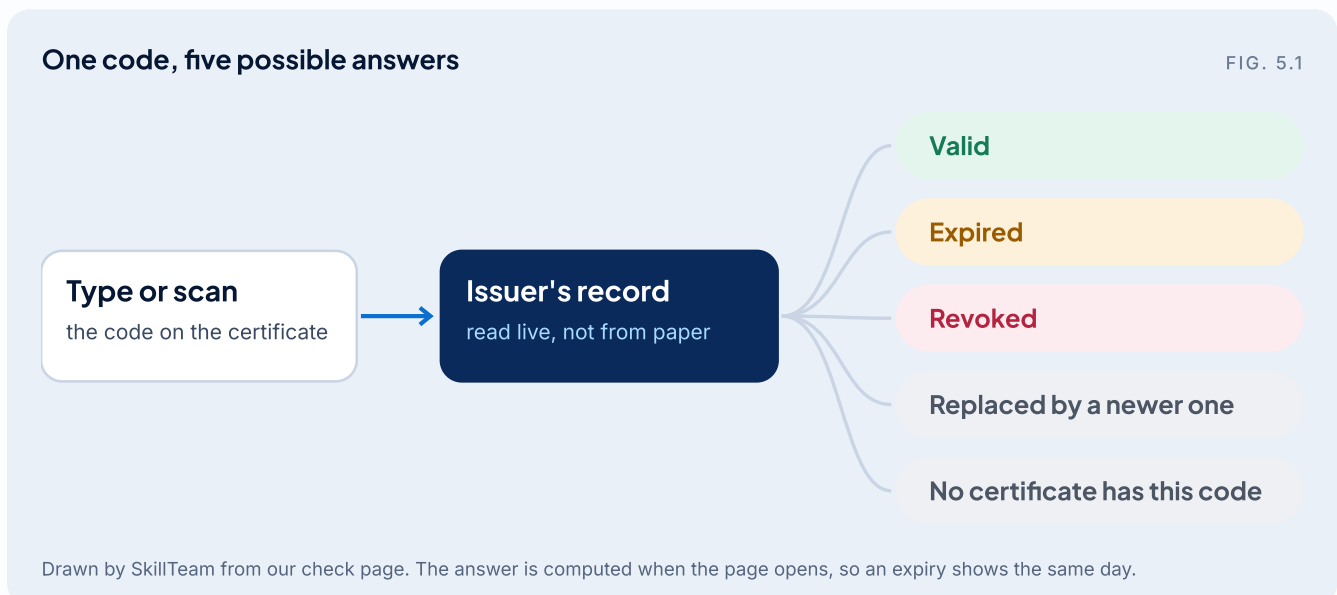
OUR VIEW

05

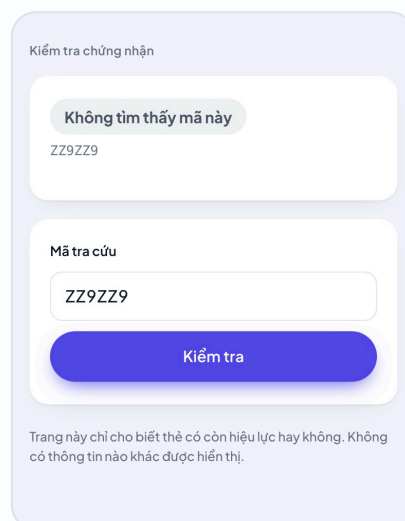
A check anyone can run.

Paper can be copied in a minute. What cannot be copied is the issuer's own record. So the certificate should point to it.

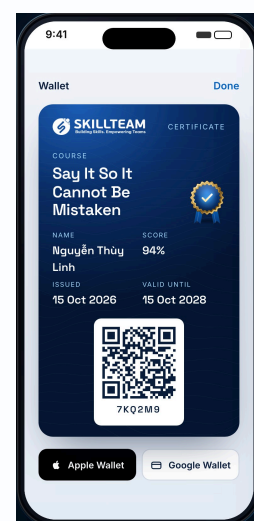
Every certificate we issue carries a check code and the address where it can be checked. The design on these pages adds a QR, so a phone camera is enough. Anyone with the code, an auditor, a port officer, a new employer, opens the check page at the issuer's address and gets the answer from the live record, not from the paper in their hand. No account, no login, no email to anyone.



Check page design, on an academy's own address



Real screen, app.skillteam.io today: a code that does not exist



Wallet card design, same certificate

What the page shows, and what it never shows

The check page answers one question: is this certificate good today? It then lists the facts printed on the paper: name, course, date passed, valid until, issuer and serial, plus the result where the score is part of what the certificate proves. Each fact is chosen one by one. Nothing is shown just because it sits in the same database row.

It never shows an email address, a phone number, a date of birth, or the other courses the person has taken. Europe's data protection law asks for exactly this restraint: personal data should be adequate, relevant and limited to what is necessary for the purpose.¹⁸ The purpose here is a yes or no on one certificate. Nothing else is needed.

SHOWN	NEVER SHOWN
The verdict, in plain words	Email, phone, date of birth
Name, course, dates, issuer, serial	Other courses, other attempts, the employer's notes
The result, where it is part of the proof	Any list of certificates. A code opens one record, never a search.

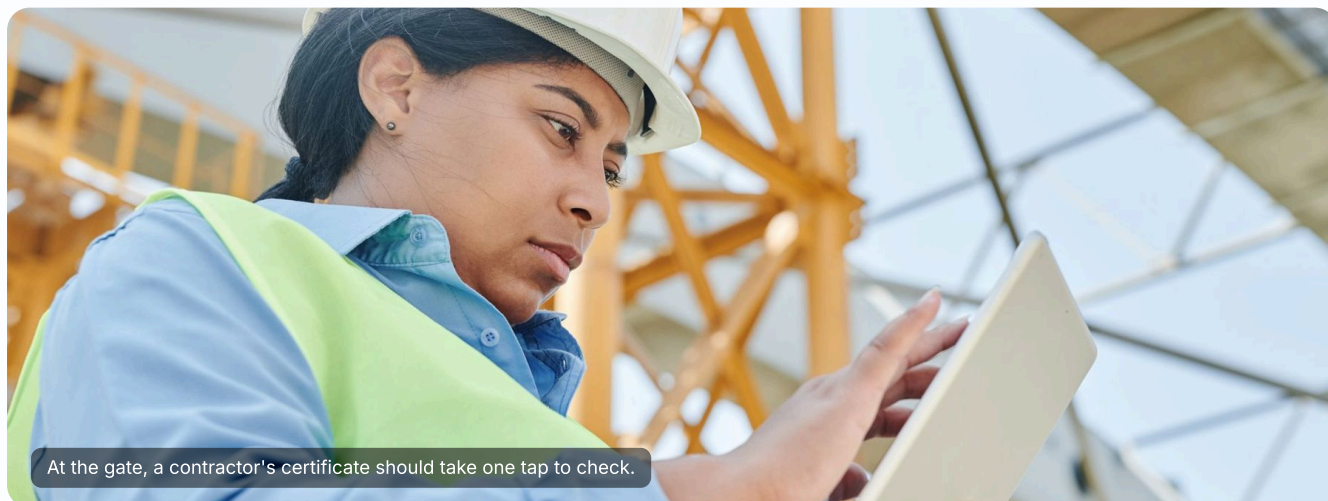
Small choices that stop abuse

- **Guessing is hopeless.** Our codes are twelve characters from a 31-character alphabet: about 790 million billion combinations. We allow 30 lookups a minute from one address. Trying them all from one address would take around 50 billion years.
- **Search engines stay out.** The check page tells search engines not to index it, so a name never turns up in a web search because of a certificate.
- **It works on a poor signal.** One small page and one stylesheet, readable on a phone at the bottom of a cargo hold.

If you need certificates that machines can verify on their own, the W3C published Verifiable Credentials Data Model 2.0 as a Recommendation on 15 May 2025.¹⁹ For most audits, a plain check page at the issuer's own address is enough, and far easier to explain.

The certificate is a pointer. The record is the truth.

OUR VIEW



At the gate, a contractor's certificate should take one tap to check.

¹⁸ Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR), Article 5(1)(c), data minimisation. eur-lex.europa.eu

¹⁹ W3C (2025). Verifiable Credentials Data Model v2.0, Recommendation, 15 May 2025. [w3.org](https://www.w3.org)

06

Your records in one export, ready for the audit.

Auditors sample. Give them a file where any row they pick can be checked in under a minute, and the sampling goes quickly.

Two tables do most of the work. The first says what each role needs, which is the “determine the necessary competence” part of clause 7.2.¹ The second says who holds what, today.

Table A: what each role needs

TEMPLATE

ROLE	REQUIRED COURSE	PASS MARK	VALID FOR	OWNER
Deck rating	Maritime English: the standard phrases	80%	24 months	Crewing
Forklift driver	Forklift operation, practical evaluation	Pass	3 years	Site manager
Office staff	Site safety induction	80%	24 months	HR

Example rows. Replace them with your own roles.

Table B: who holds what, today

TEMPLATE

PERSON	ROLE	COURSE	PASSED	SCORE	VALID UNTIL	SERIAL	CODE	STATUS
Learner A	Deck rating	Maritime English	15 Oct 2026	90%	15 Oct 2028	014-0418/2026	7KQ2M9HW4RTX	Valid
Learner B	Deck rating	Maritime English	02 Nov 2024	80%	02 Nov 2026	014-0211/2024	H3WP7DMN8QZA	Due
Learner C	Office	Site induction	10 Jan 2026	85%	10 Jan 2028	014-0032/2026	R8TZ4KJV2PXE	Valid

Sample rows, not real people. “Due” means inside the reminder window. Sort by valid until, earliest first, and the auditor sees your risk before asking.

Keep both as one export with a date in the file name. On our platform, the training matrix a company admin sees downloads as one CSV file, filtered the way it is on screen. In a spreadsheet, it is two tabs. Old exports are evidence too: they show what you knew on the day.

Sort by the date that hurts. Valid until, earliest first, puts your risk at the top of the page.

OUR VIEW

The week before the auditor arrives

Print this page. Tick it the week before. Each line takes minutes if the records were built well, and days if they were not.

☐ **Every role has a written list of required courses, pass marks and validity.**

WHY Clause 7.2 starts with deciding what competence is needed, before any training.

☐ **Every certificate carries the seven facts.**

WHY Name, course, score, issued, valid until, number, issuer. Spot-check five at random.

☐ **Every score sits next to its pass mark.**

WHY Shows the training was evaluated, not just attended.

☐ **Nobody on today's roster holds an expired certificate.**

WHY Sort Table B by valid until. Anything past today needs a decision now.

☐ **Everyone inside the reminder window has a date booked.**

WHY An auditor reads a booked refresher as control. An unbooked one is a finding waiting.

☐ **Three codes, picked at random, check out online.**

WHY Do it yourself the day before. If one fails, you want to know first.

☐ **Replaced and revoked certificates say so.**

WHY An old card that still looks valid is a risk to whoever relies on it.

☐ **Failed attempts are kept, not deleted.**

WHY A clean record with no fails ever looks edited.

☐ **The export is dated and saved where the auditor can be given it.**

WHY One file, not a tour of shared drives.

CHECKED BY

DATE

SIGNATURE

If you only do one thing, pick three certificates from your file today and try to check them the way a stranger would, with nothing but the paper. Whatever stops you is your first fix.



SOURCES

Every claim, checkable.

Every rule and number in this guide points to one of these. ISO links go to the official page of each standard. Links checked 15 October 2026.

- 1 **ISO 9001:2015.** Quality management systems: Requirements. Clause 7.2, Competence. Withdrawn and replaced by ISO 9001:2026 (published 16 September 2026); certified organisations move over within their certification cycle.
www.iso.org/standard/62085.html
- 2 **ISO 45001:2018.** Occupational health and safety management systems: Requirements with guidance for use. Clause 7.2, Competence. Current edition, with Amd 1:2024; a revision is under way.
www.iso.org/standard/63787.html
- 3 **ISO 9001:2026.** Quality management systems: Requirements. Edition 6, published September 2026.
www.iso.org/standard/9001
- 4 **ISO 19011:2018.** Guidelines for auditing management systems. Definition of audit evidence. Replaced by ISO 19011:2026 (May 2026).
www.iso.org/standard/19011
- 5 **US OSHA.** 29 CFR 1910.178, Powered industrial trucks. Paragraphs (l)(4)(iii), evaluation at least once every three years, and (l)(6), certification.
www.ecfr.gov/current/title-29/section-1910.178
- 6 **Health and Safety Executive, UK (2012).** Health and safety training: a brief guide. INDG345 (rev1).
www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg345.pdf
- 7 **IMO.** International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW), 1978, as amended. Regulation I/2, paragraphs 14 to 16 (registers and verification).
www.imo.org/en/OurWork/HumanElement/Pages/STCW-Convention.aspx
- 8 **ILO.** Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended. Regulation 1.3, Training and qualifications.
www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_norm/@normes/documents/normativeinstrument/wcms_763684.pdf
- 9 **IMO.** International Safety Management (ISM) Code, resolution A.741(18) as amended, sections 6.3 and 6.5. Extract published by The Nautical Institute.
www.nautinst.org/static/1d0bba70-43cc-448e-a6859d727dbbc008/HE01165-Extract-from-the-International-Safety-Management-Code-IMO-Resolution-A74118-as-amended-by-MS10473-MS17979-MS19580-and-MS1.pdf
- 10 **IMO.** STCW Convention, Article X (Control) and Regulation I/4 (Control procedures).
www.imo.org/en/OurWork/HumanElement/Pages/STCW-Convention.aspx
- 11 **IMO.** STCW Convention, Regulation I/11, Revalidation of certificates.
www.imo.org/en/OurWork/HumanElement/Pages/STCW-Convention.aspx
- 12 **IMO.** STCW Code, Section A-VI/1, paragraph 3: evidence every five years of maintained competence in basic training.
www.imo.org/en/OurWork/HumanElement/Pages/STCW-Convention.aspx
- 13 **IMO Secretariat (2000).** STW 32/6, Unlawful practices associated with certificates of competency. Interim report on the study by the Seafarers International Research Centre, Cardiff. Copy hosted by National Taiwan Ocean University.
[dstm.ntou.edu.tw/var/file/71/1071/img/558/STW32-6-UnlawfulPracticesAssociatedWithCertificatesOfCompetency\(Secretariat\).pdf](http://dstm.ntou.edu.tw/var/file/71/1071/img/558/STW32-6-UnlawfulPracticesAssociatedWithCertificatesOfCompetency(Secretariat).pdf)
- 14 **IMO.** Fraudulent certificates. Includes Assembly resolution A.892(21), Unlawful practices associated with certificates of competency and endorsements.
www.imo.org/en/OurWork/HumanElement/Pages/FraudulentCertificates.aspx
- 15 **Arthur, W. Jr., Bennett, W. Jr., Stanush, P. L. and McNelly, T. L. (1998).** Factors that influence skill decay and retention: a quantitative review and analysis. Human Performance 11(1), 57 to 101.
doi.org/10.1207/s15327043hup1101_3
- 16 **US OSHA.** 29 CFR 1910.157, Portable fire extinguishers. Paragraph (g), training and education.
www.ecfr.gov/current/title-29/section-1910.157
- 17 **HSE (2013, amended 2018 and 2024).** First aid at work: The Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981. Guidance on regulations, L74, paragraphs 74 and 75.
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- 18 **European Union (2016).** Regulation (EU) 2016/679, General Data Protection Regulation. Article 5(1)(c), data minimisation.
eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2016/679/oj/eng
- 19 **W3C (2025).** Verifiable Credentials Data Model v2.0. W3C Recommendation, 15 May 2025.
www.w3.org/TR/vc-data-model-2.0/

Photos: Pexels (credits in the file's assets folder). Screens: SkillTeam courses and app, October 2026. Certificate designs: SkillTeam, with a sample learner. This guide is general information, not legal advice.

SEE IT IN A COURSE

The ideas, **built.**

Short courses that teach by doing, on a phone, in any language. Each one ends in a certificate with the seven facts and a check anyone can run.



Port State Control: Junior

AMLA · marine surveys



The Port of Antwerp, and the world it works in

AMLA · ports · with Marcus



Maritime English: Entry

Speaking practice · record and replay

FOR YOUR TEAM

A course like this, from your own procedures.

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