

# ITIL Certification Guide: Overview & Career Paths

ITIL is the de facto standard for IT service management frameworks. In this certification guide we cover ITIL's current certifications and training options as well as ITIL-related careers.



ITIL, originally an acronym for Information Technology Infrastructure Library, is the preeminent framework for managing IT service delivery around the world. ITIL defines a service lifecycle model that prescribes specific processes and activities during the design, development, delivery and support of IT services. For the purposes of this discussion, IT services are any IT activities that deliver business value to a company's end users and customers. Examples of IT services include centralized corporate email and corporate websites based on back-end IT processes, such as server and network administration.

By adopting the ITIL framework, companies ensure that their services are delivered according to a set of consistent, well-defined processes that incorporate best practices, resulting in a predictable level of service for users. The benefits of ITIL include reduced cost of service development and deployment, improved customer satisfaction with service delivery, increased productivity from IT personnel, quality improvements, better management metrics of services and increased flexibility in adapting services to changing business requirements. How can one argue with any of that?

# ITIL Certification Program Overview

In July 2013, ownership of ITIL was transferred to AXELOS, which maintains the ITIL framework and accredits training and examination institutes. Hundreds of [ITIL Accredited Training Organizations \(ATOs\)](#) are available to deliver training, and ITIL certification exams are administered at the end of a training course or by an Examination Institute (EI), many of which work directly with the ATOs.

ITIL offers five different [certification levels](#):

- Foundation
- Practitioner
- Intermediate (Service Lifecycle and Service Capability categories)
- Expert
- Master

Be aware that ITIL uses a credit system for the Foundation through Expert levels, in which each certification earns a certain number of credits. Ultimately, a total of 22 credits is required to achieve ITIL Expert certification. (The ITIL Master has its own set of requirements, which you'll read about shortly). The following graphic shows the structure of the certification scheme and corresponding credits.

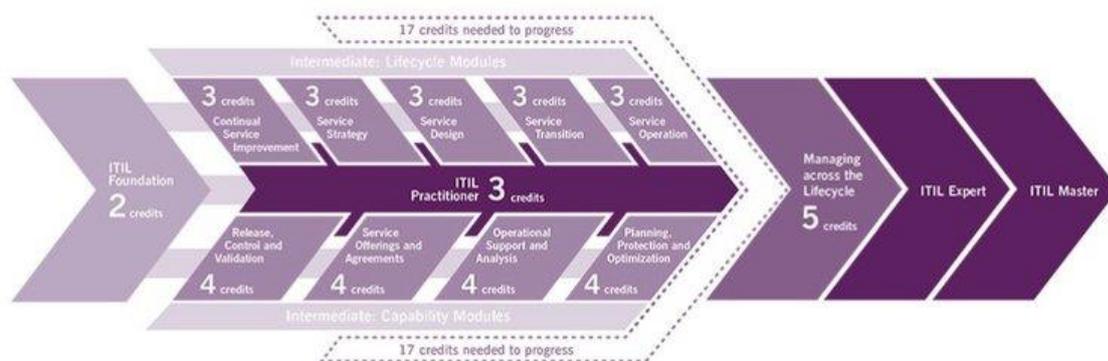


Image source: <https://www.axelos.com/certifications/itil-certifications/itil-credit-system>

## What Is ITIL?

Before you read on for certification details, it's important to understand how the ITIL IT service frameworks is structured and what it has to offer.

ITIL was first developed in Great Britain in the 1980s to establish a set of standardized best practices for IT services used by government agencies. From that inauspicious start, ITIL has been adopted, revised and expanded into a comprehensive framework for managing IT service delivery in companies of all sizes and industries.

IT has become a mission-critical service delivery mechanism for companies that rely on complex computing resources to keep their businesses operating and generating revenue. ITIL allows companies to define and implement a documented, repeatable process that assists them in staying focused on the large and small details involved in rolling out new IT services and managing those services afterward.

The ITIL service lifecycle consists of five practice areas or phases, with supporting principles within each phase:

- **Service Strategy:** This phase focuses on defining services as strategic assets, and then maintaining and implementing the strategy. Service Strategy principles address business processes, corporate governance and compliance, policies, corporate culture, and decision making, and ensure that the business is geared for service improvement.
- **Service Design:** This phase includes the assessment of business management processes (service level, availability, capacity, etc.) to design and develop new service offerings or improve existing offerings.
- **Service Transition:** This phase covers the transition from development to production operations, including testing and quality control.
- **Service Operation:** This phase defines how to manage services once in production. It addresses service operation processes, such as event management, access management, incident response, the application lifecycle and helpdesk support.

- **Continuous Service Improvement:** This phase defines new requirements to the preceding phases of ITIL based on operational feedback and service levels. It helps to ensure that policies and procedures are followed, that service level agreements are met, and the like.

Don't let the scope of ITIL scare you away from the overall value afforded by this comprehensive lifecycle for IT services. The ITIL framework gives companies the structure and discipline required to design, develop, deliver and manage new or improved services in a timely manner and, most importantly, on budget. Before ITIL, a lack of service management discipline and expertise led many IT projects to suffer budget overruns, veer off course or fail outright due to scope-creep, mismanagement and a lack of repeatable results. ITIL solves these problems quite nicely and is considered to be the pre-eminent standard for IT service management frameworks.

## ITIL Foundation Certification

The [ITIL Foundation certification](#) covers the basics of ITIL and is where most newbies start the process of learning ITIL and becoming certified. The certification has no prerequisites and anyone with an interest in the subject matter can sit for the exam.

Although the certification covers all of the five practice areas of the ITIL service lifecycle, including how the different lifecycle stages are linked to one another, an IT pro who completes the ITIL Foundation level will need to get to the Practitioner or Intermediate levels before being able to qualify for service management positions.

## ITIL Practitioner

The [ITIL Practitioner](#) is the newest entry to the ITIL certification scheme, with the exam offered for the first time in February 2016. An ITIL Practitioner is capable of explaining how to use the ITIL framework to support business objectives, and focuses on organizational change management, communications, and measurement and metrics.

The ITIL Practitioner is considered the next step after achieving the ITIL Foundation (which is a prerequisite) and emphasizes the ability to adopt, adapt and apply ITIL concepts in an organization. Although the Practitioner certification is not required for any upper-level ITIL credentials, it earns three credits toward the ITIL Expert certification.

## ITIL Intermediate

The [ITIL Intermediate](#) is module-based, each of which focuses on a different aspect of IT service management. Modules are categorized as either Service Lifecycle or Service Capability.

*The Service Lifecycle modules are:*

- Service Strategy (SS)
- Service Design (SD)
- Service Transition (ST)
- Service Operation (SO)
- Continual Service Improvement (CSI)

*The Service Capability modules are:*

- Operational Support and Analysis (OSA)
- Planning, Protection and Optimization (PPO)
- Release, Control and Validation (RCV)
- Service Offerings and Agreements (SOA)

To enable candidates to meet their own career goals, AXELOS lets you achieve qualification in one category or by choosing modules from both categories. AXELOS recommends that you have at least two years of IT service management experience, and accredited training is required.

## ITIL Expert

The [ITIL Expert](#) is an advanced certification that encompasses the breadth and depth of ITIL processes and practices across all ITIL disciplines. ITIL Expert certification is a prerequisite for the ITIL Master certification.

To qualify for the ITIL Expert, you must obtain at least 17 credits from the Foundation, Practitioner and Intermediate modules, and pass the Managing Across the Lifecycle (MALC) exam, earning a total of 22 credits.

## ITIL Master

The pinnacle [ITIL Master](#) certification demonstrates an ability to apply the ITIL framework in real-world situations. The ITIL Master encompasses all of the ITIL principles and processes covered in the Foundation through Expert certifications. An ITIL Master must demonstrate complete mastery of the ITIL framework by completing the following:

- Achieve the ITIL Expert certification
- Demonstrate at least five years of ITIL experience in a management or leadership role
- Submit a proposal for a service improvement
- Submit a work package that demonstrates your ability to apply ITIL principles to a real-world business case, including positive impacts to a business service
- Successfully complete an interview with an ITIL assessment panel

The cost of the ITIL Master runs about \$4,000 USD, which you pay after an EI accepts your initial application. Given the expense of this certification and stringent requirements, only serious candidates pursue an ITIL Master, but earning the certification indicates you've reached the highest level of achievement in your field.

## ITIL-Related Jobs & Careers

IT professionals who possess an ITIL certification have always been valued by large corporations who have adopted the ITIL framework as an internal IT standard. What is beginning to change is the fact that many small- and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) are also now recognizing the value of having employees with ITIL certifications under the collective belts.

As IT becomes more and more of a mission-critical part of most businesses, SMBs are seeing the most benefit from having ITIL-trained personnel on staff. Though no company wants to see IT projects fail, larger companies can usually absorb the loss of productivity, time and money that accompanies a failed IT service project. SMBs may not have the financial luxury of having an important IT project fail due to poor management and lack of processes. Thus, the value of an ITIL certification may actually be greater for enlightened companies that cannot afford to have critical IT projects fail.

The good news about ITIL certification is that it is a valuable skill for almost any IT professional, from system administrators to CIOs. Many large companies have dedicated ITIL coaches or mentors who help shepherd projects through the various steps of the ITIL framework. These ITIL gurus have a wide understanding of the IT landscape and can usually spot trouble with a service design document or implementation plan in a matter of minutes.

ITIL certification is also a valuable credential for IT project managers, who are in the IT service trenches every day. Most project managers are already familiar with the development lifecycle process, so the principles of ITIL come naturally for them. IT managers, architects and engineers might not ever become ITIL Masters but even a basic knowledge of the ITIL framework can assist with understanding and supporting the ITIL process.

AXELOS provides a [Career Paths](#) chart that maps IT service management job roles with skill levels. The chart is handy for certification candidates who are interested in specific jobs and need to understand how they fit into the ITIL service lifecycle.

## **ITIL Training**

Each ITIL certification webpage provides links to relevant study guides and a syllabus (where available). Those who are pursuing the ITIL Foundation cert should read the [three-part blog series](#) on preparing for and taking the ITIL Foundation exam. Those who are thinking about pursuing the Intermediate certification should use the [ITIL Intermediate Training Navigator](#) to match desired job roles and skills with the appropriate modules.

Formal ITIL training is available in self-paced online courses, instructor-led distance learning and instructor-led classroom classes. The variety of ITIL training offered and the collection of certified companies offering ITIL training ensures that anyone who is interested in learning about ITIL or becoming ITIL certified has an option that fits their learning preferences.