

The best accounting courses and certifications

If your accounting career could use a boost, there are certain qualifications that can help you get ahead. You might want to focus on an accounting specialisation, study a graduate degree, or get a globally recognised certification to help you stand out.

In Australia, you have a choice of accounting certifications that can help you build credibility in your specialisation. These certifications, ranging from foundational courses to specialised accounting certificates, cater to a range of career paths and technical skill levels. This guide will explore the most sought-after certifications that can help accelerate your career.

What are certifications for accountants?

There are many different types of [accounting certifications](#) to choose from, catering to different career stages and specialisations within the accounting field. A basic certificate in accounting gives you foundational [technical skills](#), while opening doors to higher-level positions, specialised roles and even international opportunities. For accountants with a few years of experience behind them, there are more advanced degrees and diplomas that offer a competitive edge when you're looking for new career opportunities. Which [accounting certification](#) suits you depends on where you are in your career and where you want to go.

Benefits of having an accounting certification

A certification in any field will be a boost to your career. Accounting certifications can help you land your first job, get your foot in the door at a top company, and keep you moving along your career path. Accounting is a field where continuous learning and extra qualifications can get you [better pay](#), not to mention help you build a wider [professional network](#) in your industry. Here are some of the main advantages of getting accounting certifications.

Increased career opportunities

Holding an accounting certification can broaden your career prospects. Certified accountants are preferred for higher-level positions such as:

- Financial analysts
- Management accountants
- CFO roles

Flexibility to make a career transition

Looking to pivot within the accounting field? Or do you want to switch from a completely different industry? An accounting certification provides the necessary credentials and knowledge to explore new areas within accounting, such as forensic accounting, tax consultancy or auditing.

Increased pay and benefits

One of the biggest benefits of an accounting qualification is the pay rise that often follows. This is a reflection of the increased value your new specialised skills and higher level of expertise bring to an organisation.

Making connections with people in the same industry

Beyond technical skills and knowledge, an accounting certification provides an opportunity to [network and connect with peers](#) in the industry. Many certification programs include membership in professional bodies and access to exclusive events, seminars and workshops. These platforms offer a chance to [meet like-minded professionals](#), share insights and build relationships beneficial for career advancement and personal growth.

Top accounting certifications in Australia

In Australia, there is a range of online accounting certificates that cater to various [levels of expertise](#) within the accounting profession. These certifications increase your credibility because they show that you are knowledgeable and competent. They include:

- Certified Public Accountant (CPA)
- Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA)
- Certified Management Accountant (CMA)
- Certified Fraud Examiner (CFE)
- Certified Internal Auditor (CIA)
- Chartered Global Management Accountant (CGMA)
- Certified Financial Analyst (CFA)
- Financial Services Audit Certificate (FSAC)

Certified Public Accountant (CPA)

The [Certified Public Accountant \(CPA\) Program](#) is a globally recognised certification that offers knowledge and skills in financial management, auditing, taxation and business strategy. It goes beyond the basics of accounting, preparing professionals to take on different roles in different organisations.

What type of accountants will find this certification relevant? This certification is relevant for accountants in all fields, especially those looking to establish their own accounting practice or take on leadership roles in corporate settings.

Cost of certification: a CPA certification starts at \$1,505 per subject, with additional expenses such as examination fees, study materials and membership fees.

Duration of certification: you have six years to complete the three CPA Program requirements and advance to CPA status, starting from the day you join. This is designed to give you enough time to complete 36 months of work experience alongside the six CPA Program subjects.

Prerequisites for enrollment: a relevant undergraduate degree, although this can be completed at the same time as your CPA.

Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA)

The [Association of Chartered Certified Accountants \(ACCA\)](#) is the global body for professional accountants. They offer the most up-to-date skills you need for a career in finance, covering a wide range of topics, including financial reporting, taxation, audit, business law and more. Face-to-face classes are offered in Australia through partner universities and colleges.

What type of accountants will find this certification relevant? This certification is relevant for accountants who wish to specialise in financial accounting, management accounting, tax consulting or auditing. It is also beneficial for those looking to develop a career in corporate finance, financial analysis or business consultancy.

Cost of certification: the cost of ACCA certification varies. Each course is around \$300, and the total cost could be up to \$10,000, so it's a considerable investment, but one that can lead to plenty of career opportunities and higher earning potential.

Duration of certification: typically ranges from three to four years. The ACCA offers flexibility in terms of exam scheduling, allowing candidates to balance their studies with professional and personal commitments.

Prerequisites for enrolment: if you are starting out in accounting and finance or already working in finance but have no formal qualifications, you can begin your journey at their foundation level.

Certified Management Accountant (CMA)

The [Institute of Certified Management Accountants \(ICMA\)](#) is the premier body of management accountants globally, with representation in over 50 countries. The CMA is their flagship program that develops skills in areas of strategic cost and management accounting and business analysis.

What type of accountants will find this certification relevant? The CMA certification is most relevant for accountants who are focused on the management aspect of accounting. It is ideal for those who want to specialise in areas such as budgeting and financial planning.

Cost of certification: total cost varies, and candidates should also consider the cost of maintaining membership with the Institute of Certified Management Accountants

(ICMA), which is required to hold the CMA certification.

Duration of certification: you are required to pass both exam parts within three years, however you can complete it in as little as one year.

Prerequisites for enrolment: to enrol in the CMA program, you need to hold a bachelor's degree in accounting, commerce or finance or an MBA from a recognised university or professional qualification in accounting. You will also need to complete the CMA preparatory program and have five years of relevant experience.

Certified Fraud Examiner (CFE)

The Certified Fraud Examiner (CFE) credential is an internationally recognised certification focused on fraud. CFEs are trained professionals who possess a unique set of diverse skills in preventing, detecting and investigating fraud.

What type of accountants will find this certification relevant? Accountants who are interested in specialising in forensic accounting, internal auditing or compliance will find the CFE certification relevant. It's also beneficial for those working in sectors where the risk of financial fraud is high such as banking, insurance and government agencies.

Cost of certification: the cost to become a CFE includes the membership fee and costs involved in exam prep. You will also need to pay the CFE Exam fee, which is an additional \$450.

Duration of certification: CFE certification is through the CFE Exam, which takes place year-round and can be done online with a remote proctor, or in person at a Prometric test centre. The time it takes comes down to how long you need to prepare. For many, this is usually between three and 12 months, depending on prior knowledge, experience and study schedule.

Prerequisites for enrolment: to become a CFE, you must have ACFE Membership. You also need a minimum of 50 points to be certified, which means having a bachelor's degree (or equivalent) and two years of fraud-related work experience.

Certified Financial Analyst (CFA)

Recognised globally, the [Certified Financial Analyst \(CFA\) Program](#) is a three-part exam focused on providing in-depth knowledge and skills in investment analysis, portfolio management and ethical and professional standards.

What type of accountants will find this certification relevant? While primarily targeted at investment professionals, the CFA certification is also relevant for accountants who want to specialise in financial analysis and investment management.

Cost of certification: the cost of getting the CFA charter includes enrolment fees (US \$350) and exam fees for each of the three levels of the program (\$900 each). There are also costs associated with study materials and preparation courses.

Duration of certification: the CFA program is divided into three levels. Candidates typically take between two to four years to complete all three levels. The length of time will generally depend on your study schedule, exam preparation and success in passing each level of the exam.

Prerequisites for enrolment: to enrol in the CFA program, you must have a bachelor's degree or be in the final year of your bachelor's degree program. Alternatively, you can have a combination of 4,000 hours of work experience and/or higher education that was acquired over a minimum of three sequential years and achieved by the date of registering for the Level I exam.

Certified Internal Auditor (CIA)

The [Certified Internal Auditor \(CIA\)](#) is a globally recognised certification for professionals in the field of internal auditing. An internal auditor looks at their company's financial records and makes sure there are no compliance concerns, cases of fraud, or data inaccuracies. Becoming a certified internal auditor establishes your credibility and can open up opportunities for you to pivot or advance your accounting career.

What type of accountants will find this certification relevant? The CIA certification is for accountants who are involved in or want to move into internal auditing for a company.

Cost of certification: the cost for CIA certification includes exam fees for each of the

three parts, as well as application and registration fees. This adds up to about \$1,600.

Duration of certification: the time required to complete the CIA certification can vary, typically ranging from one to three years. The program offers flexibility, allowing candidates to take the exams at their own pace within four years.

Prerequisites for enrolment: to enrol in the CIA program, you must hold a bachelor's degree or its equivalent. Alternatively, you need to have two years of post-secondary education and five years of verified work experience in internal audit or its equivalent.

Chartered Global Management Accountant (CGMA)

The [Chartered Global Management Accountant \(CGMA\)](#) was developed jointly by the American Institute of CPAs (AICPA) and the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA) as a benchmark for management accounting. The CGMA program is designed to equip accounting professionals with the skills necessary to drive business success in a global marketplace.

What type of accountants will find this certification relevant? Accountants who are involved in or aspire to roles in management accounting, corporate finance and business strategy.

Cost of certification: the cost for the CGMA includes fees for the CGMA exam, as well as membership fees for either AICPA or CIMA, depending on [your location and courses](#)

Duration of certification: typically, it involves completing the CIMA professional qualification, which can take several years, followed by passing the CGMA exam.

Prerequisites for enrolment: to enrol for the CGMA designation, you must be a member of either AICPA or CIMA. You need three years of practical management accounting experience.

Financial Services Audit Certificate (FSAC)

The [Financial Services Audit Certificate \(FSAC\)](#) is a specialised certification designed for accounting professionals looking to upskill in auditing. This certification focuses on the unique aspects of auditing in financial institutions, including banks, insurance companies and investment firms.

What type of accountants will find this certification relevant? Professional accountants who are involved in or interested in auditing financial institutions to ensure they're complying with legal and industry standards.

Cost of certification: the cost of obtaining the FSAC varies, ranging from US \$719 to \$954.

Duration of certification: this self-study certification of 11 modules takes 15.3 hours in total.

Prerequisites for enrolment: there are no formal prerequisites to enrolling in this course.

Other accounting courses in Australia to improve your skills

If you're thinking of getting an accounting certificate in Australia, there are numerous other courses available that cover a wide range of specialisations, including accounts payable and receivable, business analysis, compliance and information systems. They are designed to cater to specific niches, providing targeted expertise and recognition.

Here are some of these courses:

- Accredited Payables Manager (APM)
- Accredited Payables Specialist (APS)
- Accredited Receivables Specialists (ARS)
- Certification of Competency in Business Analysis (CCB)
- Certified Accounts Payable Professional (CAPP)
- Certified Business Analysis Professional (CBAP)
- Certified Compliance and Ethics Professional (CCEP)
- Certified Government Auditing Professional (CGAP)
- Certified Information Systems Auditor (CISA)
- Certified Information Technology Professional (CITP)
- Certified Payroll Professional (CPP)

- Certified Quality Auditor (CQA)
- Certified Regulatory and Compliance Professional (CRCP)
- Investment Adviser Compliance Certification Professional (IACCP)
- Personal Financial Specialist (PFS)

Whether you're looking for foundational courses or advanced certificates, you're spoilt for choice when it comes to boosting your accounting credentials. The above certifications not only enhance technical skills but also open doors to new job opportunities and higher pay. Whether the goal is to lay a strong foundation, specialise in a niche area or pivot into a new role, there is a certification to help get you there.

FAQs

What certificate should an accountant have?

An accountant should have a CPA (Certified Public Accountant) or a CA (Chartered Accountant) certification. These two certifications are widely recognised in the accounting profession globally.

What is the most popular accountant certification?

The CPA (Certified Public Accountant) certification is often considered the most popular and widely recognised accounting certification globally. It is highly regarded in the industry for its in-depth coverage of accounting principles and practices.

How do I become a certified accountant in Australia?

To become a certified accountant in Australia, you typically need to:

- complete a relevant degree,
- gain professional experience, and
- pass a certification exam, such as the CPA or CA exams.

What is the difference between a CFA and a CPA?

The CFA (Certified Financial Analyst) focuses on:

- investment management,
- financial analysis, and

- portfolio strategy.

While the CPA (Certified Public Accountant) centres on:

- accounting,
- tax,
- audits, and
- financial reporting.

CFAs typically work in investment roles, whereas CPAs work in accounting positions.

Is it more challenging to become a CPA or CMA?

Both CPA (Certified Public Accountant) and CMA (Certified Management Accountant) pathways have their challenges. The CPA is generally considered more challenging as it covers more, takes longer to complete and has stricter licensing requirements.

Is an MBA worth it after I get an accounting certification?

[An MBA](#) can be worth obtaining after an accounting certification if you're looking to broaden your business knowledge, move into a management role or shift your career towards business management. It complements the technical skills of accounting with broader business strategy skills.

What sections are the easiest and most difficult on the CPA exam?

The easiest and most difficult sections of the CPA exam can vary depending on your individual strengths. Generally, AUD (auditing and attestation) and BEC (business environment and concepts) are considered less challenging. FAR (financial accounting and reporting) and REG (regulation) are often viewed as more difficult.