

I. Purpose

The Association of Firearm and Tool Mark Examiners offers a certification program to qualified AFTE members. The purpose of this program is twofold:

- To demonstrate to interested parties that successful applicants have met a standard of excellence in knowledge and skill for a qualified examiner as defined by AFTE.
- To promote professionalism among firearm and toolmark examiners by establishing certification as a level of accomplishment.

II. Qualifications

Effective February 16, 2014, the qualifications necessary to apply for certification are as follows:

All regular, distinguished, emeritus, and provisional AFTE members in good standing are eligible if they can demonstrate the following:

1. Training and experience equivalent to the two-year course of study described in the AFTE Training Manual.
2. Three years paid experience as a Firearm and/or Toolmark Examiner following successful completion of a competency test and authorization by the applicant's laboratory to perform firearm and/or toolmark identification casework. Training and experience must equate to five years of total experience as a Firearm and/or Toolmark Examiner.
3. Possession of an earned baccalaureate (four-year) degree or equivalent from an accredited academic institution. Although it is desirable that the candidate has had major coursework in physical science, natural science, forensic science, criminalistics, criminal justice, police science, industrial technology, or related fields of study, possession of a baccalaureate degree in any subject will meet the basic requirement (this requirement does not apply to applicants for recertification if they were certified or began the certification process prior to June 1, 2006).

III. Definitions

The following definitions are specific to this document:

Appeal: The process whereby a candidate who has failed either a written examination or practical component during the AFTE certification process requests the Certification Committee to review the correctness of the failed result.

Applicant: A person who has submitted an application for the AFTE Certification Program.

Candidate: An applicant who is eligible to take a certification examination.

Certificant: An AFTE member who holds a current and valid AFTE certificate of competence in one or more of the offered subject areas.

Proctor: The person who monitors the written and/or practical testing component(s) of the AFTE certification process for a candidate.

Recertification: The process whereby an AFTE certificant renews their certification after the prescribed time period.

Revocation: To have one's certification(s) rescinded by AFTE as a punitive action.

Suspension: A period during which a certificant is not considered by the Association to be certified due to noncompliance with the annual proficiency testing requirements or application filing deadlines specified in the AFTE recertification policy. If the areas of noncompliance are successfully resolved by the certificant in the prescribed manner, the suspension will be temporary. If not, the suspension may lead to revocation.

Termination: To have one's certification(s) ended by AFTE, either voluntarily or involuntarily.

IV. Procedure

Qualified applicants can choose any or all of the following three subject areas in which to become certified:

1. Firearm Evidence Examination and Identification (FA-AFTE)
2. Toolmark Evidence Examination and Identification (TM-AFTE)
3. Gunshot Residue Evidence Examination and Identification (GSR-AFTE)

For eligible applicants, the certification procedure consists of the successful completion of both a written and a practical examination in each of the subject areas they have selected. These examinations were developed and validated in conjunction with an independent firm to meet applicable guidelines for certification examinations. The independent agency chosen to participate in the development and validation of certification tests, Cooperative Personnel Services (currently known as CPS HR Consulting, or simply "CPS"), was designated by the AFTE Board of Directors after the completion of a competitive bidding process and the recommendation of the Certification Committee. For an overview of the development of the AFTE Certification Program, refer to the Summary Report, which originally appeared in the AFTE Journal (Kowalski, Kenneth F., "Summary Report on the Development of Certification Examinations for Practicing Firearm and Toolmark Examiners," AFTE J., Vol. 32, No. 4, Fall 2000, pp. 373-379). For a complete description of the program written by CPS staff and edited by the AFTE Certification Committee, refer to the AFTE Report of Occupational Analysis and Certification Examination Development.

Starting in 2012, written examinations are now offered exclusively online and are administered by the National Forensic Science Technology Center (NFSTC). Written examinations consist of 100 multiple choice questions, with a time limit of three hours to complete. The applicant is responsible for designating a qualified proctor to monitor the testing process. See Proctor Requirements (Section VII), below. The minimum passing score for any of the written examinations is 70%. Refer to the Study Guide for a listing of the appropriate references to study for each examination. The timeframes of upcoming online testing periods ("open seasons") will be posted on the AFTE website homepage. All certification examinations are conducted in the English language.

Practical examinations are mailed directly to the candidate's designated proctor, who will administer them at a suitable and mutually acceptable location, such as the candidate's workplace. Since there are a limited number of practical examination kits, their availability may be limited at any given time depending on how many

candidates are taking a particular test at the time a request is made. They will be issued to waiting candidates on a first-come, first-served basis. Practical examinations are designed to be worked like actual casework, with the exception of technical review. Each practical examination, which consists of two parts, is designed to take a total of approximately eight hours to complete; however, there is no time limit. If the candidate should feel they need more than eight hours to complete an examination (including time over one or more additional days), the additional time will be allowed depending upon the proctor's availability. In such circumstances, the candidate and proctor will need to work together to facilitate the time extension; the proctor is accountable for the security of the test materials during the intervening periods (overnight, etc.) when it is not being actively worked on by the candidate. Upon completion of a practical examination, the examination kit must be mailed back to the Certification Committee with the candidate's answer sheets and notes; no documentation of the test may be retained by the candidate or proctor. Return postage for the examination kit is the responsibility of the candidate or their agency.

The written and practical examinations cannot be taken on the same day. Candidates can only take the practical examination for a particular subject area after successful completion of the written examination for that area. Separate applications are required for the written and practical examinations; however, applicants can use a single application form to apply to take either the written or practical examinations in more than one subject area. For example, an applicant can use a single application to apply to take all three written examinations during a single online testing period.

Examinations are graded by the Certification Committee in accordance with procedures determined by the test validation study. Test results are reported as pass/fail only. No information regarding the number of times a candidate takes any certification examination will be released by the Committee. Both the applicant and proctor will be required to sign security (confidentiality) agreements. Candidates must agree not to divulge any information pertaining to the contents of any certification examination including, but not limited to, any questions or answers to which they may have been exposed. No notes or documentation may be retained by either the applicant or proctor upon completion of the examinations. There is no restriction to the time interval that elapses between when an applicant passes the written examination and when they pass the practical examination in a particular subject area to become certified.

Candidates should expect to be notified of their written examination results within approximately two weeks after the close of the scheduled online testing period, after the Chairperson has received and verified the results from the NFSTC. Candidates will typically be notified of their practical examination results within a few days after the returned examination kit is received and graded by the Committee.

Successful candidates receive a certificate of competence in each relevant subject area that is valid for five years from the date of issue. Candidates will be notified of any unsuccessful attempt to certify within a selected area. If a candidate should fail either the written examination or either part of the practical examination within a selected area, a six-month waiting period is required before retesting should the candidate choose to take the test again. An additional examination sitting fee will be required for any retesting. Failure in one subject area does not affect the certification process in any other area.

In order to maintain their certification, certificants must recertify every five years. Recertification requires the certificant to accumulate and document points as outlined in the AFTE Recertification Policies and Procedures prior to the end of the original certification or most recent recertification period. Successful recertification extends the certification period for an additional five years, for which a supplemental certificate will be issued.

Note: All prospective applicants for certification must attest on their application that they have read and understand the Recertification Policies and Procedures before their application will be accepted.

V. Appeals

The members of the Certification Committee will act as the Appeal Panel to evaluate all appeals. The written examinations have been determined to be content valid. All questions were reviewed by a panel of AFTE members, in cooperation with CPS, and each was determined to be properly worded, applicable (relevant), and the correct answer to each has been verified. Therefore, no appeal as to the clarity, applicability (relevancy), or correctness of examination questions will be allowed. The Committee will, however, review written tests for possible scoring errors.

The appeal of a written or practical examination must be directed in writing to the Chairperson of the Certification Committee within thirty (30) calendar days of the date the candidate was notified of the results.

The decision of the Committee is final. Further information on the formalized appeal process will be provided to the candidate prior to testing.

VI. Suspension and Revocation

Certification may be temporarily deactivated or suspended (possibly leading to revocation or termination) under any of the following circumstances:

1. It is determined that the certificant has reported an unsatisfactory result on an annual proficiency test in a subject area relevant to their area(s) of certification.
2. The certificant does not comply with the annual proficiency testing reporting requirement for recertification.
3. The certificant's recertification packet is not received by the Certification Committee by the recertification date (expiration date).

Refer to the [AFTE Recertification Policies and Procedures](#) for further details.

Certification may be revoked if it is determined that any of the following have occurred:

1. The certificant knowingly participated in any fraud associated with the certification process.
2. The certificant divulged any information pertaining to the contents of a certification examination including, but not limited to, questions and answers from the examination(s).
3. The certificant has committed a violation of the AFTE Code of Ethics pertaining to their use of the scientific method, expression of opinions and conclusions, or court presentation (Code Sections I, II, and III). This condition applies to cases resulting in public censure only and only after the entire ethics enforcement procedure has been completed.
4. The certificant violated the AFTE Code of Ethics and the violation results in expulsion from AFTE.
5. The certificant has failed an annual proficiency test in the relevant subject area(s) in which they are certified and has not successfully remediated it within the prescribed time period. This condition only applies to the certification in the subject area that is relevant to the failed proficiency test.

Revocation of certification, if related to a violation of the AFTE Code of Ethics, is not final until the certificant has had an opportunity to represent themselves in accordance with the AFTE Bylaws and the AFTE Code of Ethics. Certified status may be reestablished upon reinstatement of AFTE membership or if sufficient evidence is presented to absolve the certificant of all charges.

In addition, if a certified AFTE member voluntarily terminates or allows their membership to lapse in the Association, any certifications they hold at that time will be revoked, to become effective on the date their AFTE membership expires. The only exception to this policy is if the certificant is on voluntary leave from their certification(s) at the time their AFTE membership lapses or expires. In this instance, the certificant must reactivate their AFTE membership and be a member in good standing before they may request to have their certification(s) reinstated.

VII. Proctor Requirements

The proctor is responsible for ensuring the integrity of the examination process. It is the applicant's responsibility to find a qualified proctor and arrange for them to oversee the applicant's written and/or practical tests. Proctors must be available to be present at the testing site for the duration of the test(s), which can be scheduled for a mutually agreeable date and time. Persons who meet the following requirements are eligible to act as a proctor for the AFTE certification examinations:

1. An AFTE member who is AFTE certified in the subject area(s) they are proctoring, and have a minimum of five years in good standing as a regular, distinguished, or emeritus member of AFTE.

OR

2. Non-AFTE members who are members of another professional organization in the forensic sciences with an enforceable code of ethics. For example, a latent print examiner who is a member of the International Association for Identification (IAI) or a lab director who is a member of the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors (ASCLD) may proctor an examination. It is preferable, but not required, that this person also holds certification in their respective forensic specialty.
 - a. If qualifying under this provision, prospective proctors must provide proof of other certification (e.g. copy of certificate or most recent notification of certified status) or proof of other forensic organization membership. This documentation must accompany the certification application.

Whenever possible, every attempt should be made by the applicant to find a certified AFTE member to serve as their proctor for the certification tests. *Note: Most AFTE Members who are not AFTE certified are ineligible to be proctors.

*AFTE Members who were members of the Angoff Committee involved with developing the AFTE certification examinations, while currently not eligible to take the certification examinations to become certified themselves, are allowed to act as proctors for any of the examinations. All other AFTE members cannot act as a certification proctor until such time that they become AFTE certified, and then may only proctor examinations in the area(s) in which they are certified.

Instructions and security documents will be emailed to the designated proctor prior to the test date.

VIII. Fees

The sitting fees for taking the examinations are commensurate with maintaining a self-sustaining certification program. These fees are required at the time of application; applications will not be acted upon before payment is received. The fees are as follows (U.S. Dollars):

- Written Examinations: \$50.00 per subject area
- Practical Examinations: \$200 per subject area
- International Shipping*: \$130.00

The fee for recertification is \$50.00 per subject area (see [Recertification Program](#)). Fees can be paid either by PayPal, personal check, or agency purchase order. Cash is not accepted. PayPal is the method of payment preferred by the Committee. Checks must be made payable to AFTE. Purchase orders requiring an invoice from AFTE should be addressed to the AFTE Treasurer.

PayPal payments can be processed by going to the AFTE Online Store.

Once the application has been submitted and the applicant has been determined to be eligible, these fees are not refundable. If the applicant is determined to be ineligible, all fees will be refunded minus a \$25.00 processing fee. Only those applicants who believe that they meet all the requirements for the Certification Program and each examination for which they are applying should submit an application.

*Within the United States (including Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands), AFTE pays for the initial shipment of any practical examination kits to the applicant's proctor. Unfortunately, high shipping costs for sending these kits to destinations outside of the United States have necessitated the collection of an additional fee from all international applicants in order to recoup these expenses (effective October 1, 2015). Return shipping costs, regardless of the location, are the responsibility of the sender.

IX. Application

Interested AFTE members seeking certification who meet the qualifications described above must submit an application (see link below) to the Certification Committee Chairperson. Applicants will be advised of their eligibility as soon as practicable after their application is received.

The application and additional required documents (see below) may be submitted via email or regular mail to the Chairperson at the below addresses.

[AFTE Certification Application](#)

Additional Required Documents:

1. A recent photograph of the applicant (approximately 2" x 3" or 5 cm x 7.5 cm)

2. A copy (does not need to be an original) of the applicant's college diploma and/or college transcripts bearing the seal or identifying information of the college.
3. Copy of résumé or curriculum vitae
4. Payment or proof of payment
5. Proctor's proof of other certification or forensic organization membership (if applicable)

Note: A separate application is required to take the written and practical examinations; however, the additional required documents above only need to be submitted with the first application (for the written examination(s)).

For applicants with degrees from academic institutions outside of the United States:

In order for the Committee to recognize the equivalency of an applicant's foreign degree to a four-year baccalaureate degree from an accredited U.S. institution, the applicant must have their academic credentials independently evaluated. There are several agencies available online that provide fee-based credential evaluation services for foreign degree programs. Although AFTE cannot recommend or endorse a particular company for this service, only reports from agencies that are members of either the National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (NACES) or the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) will be accepted for consideration. If the evaluating agency finds the applicant's degree to be equivalent to a four-year baccalaureate degree, copy of the evaluation report must be submitted with the certification application for review. Without this documentation, the candidate's application may be denied.

Applications submitted to the Certification Chairperson will not be acted upon until payment is received (see Section VIII for fee and payment information).

Mail or email your completed applications to:

Carolyn Martinez
Corpus Christi Police Department (Firearms)
321 John Sartain
Corpus Christi, TX 78401
(361) 886-2638
carolynma@cctexas.com or certification@AFTE.org

X. The Significance and Responsibilities of AFTE Certification

A candidate is not deemed "AFTE Certified" in a particular subject area until they have passed both the written and practical certification examinations for that area. When a certificant becomes certified or recertified, they will be notified of their certified status and the date on which it becomes effective. This date is also printed on their certificate. From that date onward, as long as they maintain their AFTE membership and certification status in good standing, the certificant may state that they are "AFTE certified in [Firearm, Toolmark, and/or Gunshot Residue] Evidence Examination and Identification," or similar wording. If an applicant has passed only the written examination component or failed any of the examination components, they may not state they are certified until such time that they have successfully passed both the written and practical examination components for the subject area(s) in which they are seeking certification.

A Certified Members Roster and the effective dates of their certifications or most recent recertifications is maintained on the AFTE website. If a member's certification is suspended or terminated for any reason, they will be notified of the effective date of the suspension or termination and their name will be removed from the list of certified members on the website. The names of suspended certificants will be restored to the list if and when their certification is reinstated.

A certificant who is in good standing and is actively participating in the recertification process is considered by the Association to be "active". Certificants who are on voluntary leave from their certification(s) will be

considered “voluntarily inactive”. A certificant’s current status will be indicated in the list of certified members on the AFTE website.

It is incumbent upon all AFTE certificants to accurately convey the current status of their certification in any professional communications in which this information is being requested or volunteered. A member whose certification has been suspended or terminated must avoid giving the impression (expressed or implied) that they are currently AFTE certified in the suspended or revoked subject area(s) on any documentary record (e.g., résumé, C.V., biographical summary, etc.) or during court testimony.

AFTE certification is not intended as a substitute for firearm and/or toolmark examination and identification training programs or continuing education received by AFTE members in accredited forensic laboratories.

XI. Post-Nominal Letters

All active certificants in good standing have earned the right to use the following honorific post-nominal letters (abbreviations) to signify their accomplishment:

- FA-AFTE = AFTE certified in Firearm Evidence Examination and Identification
- TM-AFTE = AFTE certified in Toolmark Evidence Examination and Identification
- GSR-AFTE = AFTE certified in Gunshot Residue Evidence Examination and Identification

Examples of letters used in combination to indicate multiple certifications:

- FA/TM-AFTE
- FA/TM/GSR-AFTE

XII. Written Certification Examination Portal

Once the candidate has been approved to take the AFTE written certification examination(s) and their proctor is ready, the candidate may access the Written Examinations by entering the Online Certification Test Portal anytime during the approved testing dates. A username and password is required to log in to take the examination(s). The username and password will be sent to the candidate and proctor, respectively, via email prior to the start of the open testing dates. Additional instructions will also be included. If you are a certification candidate or proctor and have not received such an email at least a few days prior to the start of the open testing dates, contact the Chairperson of the Certification Committee.