

Getting, keeping, and maintaining your ETCP certification

Getting an ETCP certification

I THINK FOR A LOT OF FOLKS taking an ETCP exam is kind of a daunting task. I know it was for me, but that was because it had been years since I had taken a standardized/multiple choice test—outside of maybe a driver’s exam. The reality is that to have enough hours to sit for this test you will have been out of school for quite a while, whether that is college or high school or an apprenticeship program if your union offers one. You have a long time before you have acquired enough hours and training to even be eligible for the exam. Let’s say you went into the union straight out of high school, it’s still going to be a few years before you have enough hours and experience to even sit for the exam. So, it may have been two, four, maybe six, or even longer for some since you took an actual sit-down paper or computer test.

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Another thing to understand is that, if in the worst-case scenario you fail, you can retake the exam. Yes, there’s a retake fee and, yes, some people think there is shame in

failing the first time. That’s because typically as entertainment technicians, most of the time we have one shot to get it right. That’s the way the business works and the way our world generally goes. The reality for testing and training is that the whole goal is to have the certification. That may take more than one shot. Practice is the driving force behind getting it right, so if you take it and you fail, it’s OK. You can retest, and now, you have even more knowledge of how the test is gonna work, so you’re less anxious about taking the exam.

Since it is a digital test, you can flag questions to mark them as ones you want to look at again. My recommendation is to answer the questions you know first and then work your way through the ones you flagged. You can pick through those by first answering the ones that only need a little bit of work on your scratch paper. Keep the harder questions flagged and continue to come back, working your way through them. The questions you don’t know can remain flagged, but maybe pick what you think is the best answer as you review them. That way, if you get to the end and don’t have time to go back to them, you’ve at least made an educated attempt at an answer instead of leaving it blank. You can go back and review those questions until your time is up.

It may be helpful to understand that each exam is a unique combination of questions



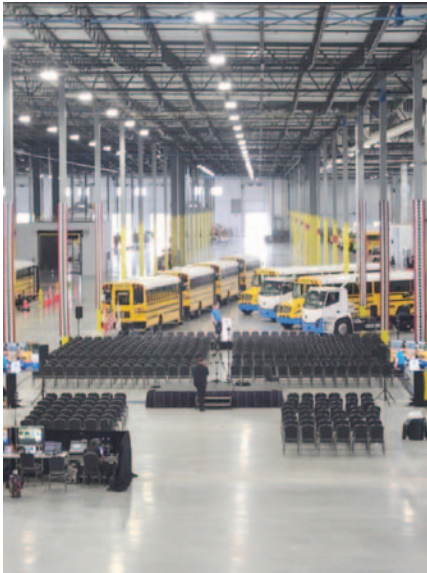
TJ at Midwest Rigging Intensive 2023.

“... most people who have one are willing to help you learn or give advice about this certification.”

pulled from a larger question bank. Practice exams are available and will give you an idea of what types of questions to expect. An excellent resource is reviewing the examination content from the ETCP website for the exam you plan on taking. It will tell you what to expect and give a little insight into how the test is put together. I would recommend taking a practice test a couple of weeks before your scheduled exam to see what you get right and see what you could use some more studying or clarification on. Then reach out to some trainers or a friend, colleague, or union member who has a certification. A unique thing about this certification is that most people who have one are willing to help you learn or give advice.

Having an ETCP certification

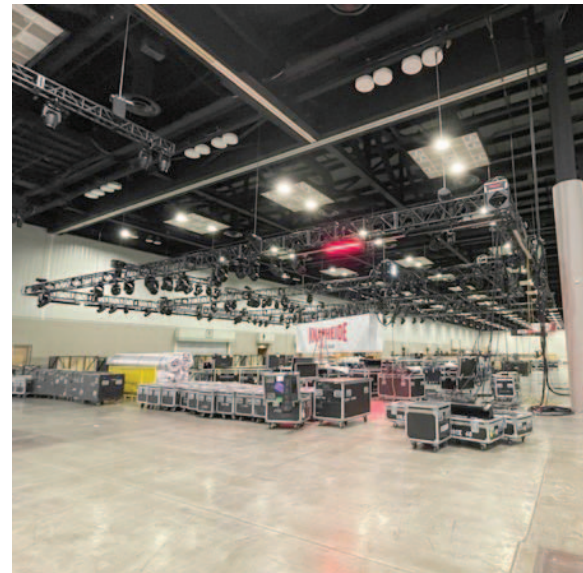
Having trained with an ETCP-recognized trainer helped get me my role at my previous employer, even though I was not an ETCP-certified rigger at the time. Just having



Grand opening for the Lion Electric plant in Joliet, IL.



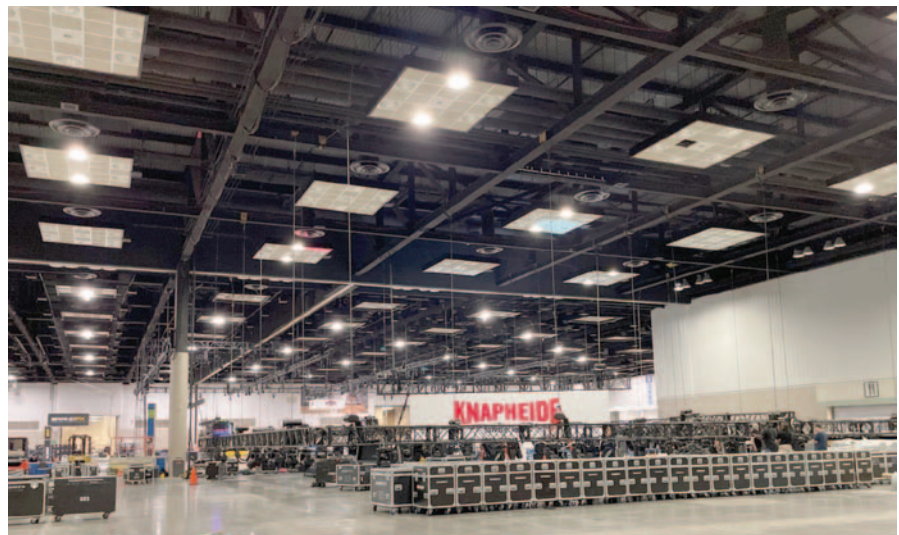
The Knapheide booth show ready for its 175th anniversary at Work Truck Week 2023 in Indianapolis IN



The Knapheide booth coming together and closer to trim at Work Truck Week 2023 in Indianapolis IN

received training from an ETCP-certified and recognized trainer was a big help in knowing that this standard of safety and expertise exists. While at my previous job, it was a criterion for my role to become ETCP-certified. The program there pays for training and for your test which is very helpful. My boss at the time, an ETCP-certified rigger, was proactive in providing training with many ETCP-recognized trainers leading those sessions. Having many opportunities for continued training to maintain your certification was extremely valuable.

Some venues, show management companies, and certain providers have contract clauses that require an ETCP-certified rigger on the crew. They may require an ETCP-certified person to either oversee or supervise certain types of events. In some cases, the policy of the venue is, “If you’re doing rigging, you have to have an ETCP-certified rigger.” In some cases, the local area, or the union local does not have enough certified technicians to meet the number of events happening there. (This is changing and getting better every year). That stipulation requires them to find outside folks to come in and supervise or travel in from other areas. An upside to being certified is that occasionally I get calls



The Knapheide booth coming together at Work Truck Week 2023 in Indianapolis IN

to come and supervise events because of that contract requirement.

To me, the importance of maintaining my certification is not that it makes me the best rigger in the world—I am by no means that person, and I would never say that. However, it does mean that I’m willing to learn. Every time you go to a training, you’re in a room with a bunch of other smart people, and you learn things. You learn different ways of doing things, and you can’t settle into bad habits. I think that

continued education and knowledge, while it also helps maintain your certification, is beneficial beyond the credits you receive. It’s making those relationships and connections and continually learning from everyone you know. If you get the certification and you think, “Alright, I’m done learning,” you’re not going to have your certification very long. The goal is to maintain both that education and drive for learning. For most of us, that’s why we pursued that certification in the first place.

Maintaining and renewing your ETCP certification

The renewal process is entirely online; thank goodness for no more paper forms! The renewal application can be found in the ETCP information portal on ETCP’s homepage, <https://etcp.esta.org>. Renewal applications may be submitted six months to eight weeks before a certification expiration date. I know many folks wait until the date on their card to start the renewal process. Please plan ahead, throw that date into your calendar, or set a reminder. To renew, a person must have 20-30 work credits (800-1,200 hours) and 10-20 education credits (10-40 hours).

Tips to make renewal easy

- The work hours must be in the same craft as the certification being renewed and be verifiable by a supervisor.
- ETCP encourages cross-training so education credits for any certification can come from electricians, rigging, or general safety courses. The number of credits per hour of training varies.
- An ETCP-recognized training program or a course taught by an ETCP-recognized trainer will provide one credit per hour of instruction (10 hours = 10 credits).
- Courses that are not ETCP-recognized will provide 0.5 credits per hour of instruction (10 hours = 5 credits).

- Any proof of completion for a class should be kept on file by a certified technician and included when you submit your renewal application. This will expedite the verification of a person’s education credits.

Expired certification?

What if your certification has expired? You may submit an appeal requesting to have your certification returned to good standing without having to take an exam again. Once an appeal is submitted, it is reviewed by a committee of ETCP Council members. There is no guarantee that an appeal will be approved, but it is a worthy step to take before applying to take the exam or completely walking away from your certification. The appeal application is also found in the ETCP information portal online. To learn more about the renewal or appeal processes, contact Christina Smith, ETCP program manager at christina.smith@esta.org.

ETCP and my current job

In my current role at Specialized Management Solutions (SMS), I don’t deal with rigging every day. However, for a few of our shows, I supervise rigging. The rules for one of the shows state, “All ceiling-supported structures are subject to inspections by an ETCP-certified rigger for structural integrity and safety,” and must meet industry and ANSI standards. It is a simple way to make sure that the person has the experience and knowledge needed and the ETCP certification backs that up. It gives you a firm leg to stand on when you know something is unsafe and a client or customer gives you the line about how they always do it that way. You can make a recommendation for a safer way to accomplish the same result. That is where the experience and additional training come in handy, along with having great connections to trainers and experts

Type of Experience	Renewal Credits	Credits
Work Experience	1 renewal credit per 40 hours of documented entertainment electrical work experience.	Min: 10 Max: 30
<i>Notes: Technicians who hold both an electrical and rigging certification, must submit work experience for each discipline, but only require a total of 10 educational credits.</i>		
Attending Training	ETCP Recognized Training = 1 renewal credit per hour/attendance Non-ETCP Recognized Training = 0.5 renewal credit per hour/attendance	Min: 10 Max: 20
Serving as a Trainer	ETCP Recognized Trainer/Training Program = 1.5 renewal credit per hour/attendance Non-ETCP Recognized Trainer/Training Program = 1 renewal credit per hour/attendance	Max: 10
<i>Notes: Certificants may train across multiple disciplines, however, the subject matter must connect to one of the following areas: entertainment safety, rigging, electrics, and/or portable power distribution.</i>		
<i>For a full list of ETCP Recognized Training Programs and Trainers as well a list of potential non-recognized course options, please visit: www.etcp.esta.org</i>		
Standards Writing in Rigging or Entertainment Electrics	ESTA, ANSI, NFPA, or other relevant standards drafting organization = 1 renewal credit per hour of scheduled meetings (Attendance must be verifiable.)	Max: 10
Taking the ETCP Examination	30 renewal credits for a passing score (Examination must be completed at least one month prior to your expiration date.)	20
<i>Notes: Taking the examination will not satisfy the 10-point requirement for training/professional development, however, the examination may be taken to fulfill the work experience requirement.</i>		

in the field. You can reach out to them to verify what you are looking at, learn if they have seen something similar, and ask how they would handle it. On some shows, we are handling large rigs across convention centers, on others I am handling some decorative banners. Across all those different things safety is still paramount, and having my ETCP certification helps keep everyone around and under us safer. ■



TJ Loane has been involved in live events since 2008, his early years were spent in shops creating sets for theatres and operas as well as a year teaching college at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point educating students about roles in live events outside of the theatre. In 2010, he began working on larger corporate meetings, special events, and product launches. Over the following years, his role grew to manage multi-city roadshows and regional corporate meetings for one of the largest trade shows and AV providers in North America. He became an ETCP-certified arena rigger during his time there and worked to update industry-wide safety standards. His experience on the show floor includes planning and supervision for some of the largest shows in North America such as RSNA, ASCO, IMTS, and Fabtech. Currently, he is the Director of Operations at Specialised Management Solutions (SMS) based in Lisle, IL. TJ believes success in a live event is attributed to understanding people and their problems.

Certification Information: ETCP Certified Rigger—Arena #2368