

# THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO **DIGITAL CERTIFICATE DESIGN**

 Accredible

## FOREWORD

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Thank you for downloading the Accredible Definitive Guide to Digital Certificate Design. This guide is for issuers creating digital certificates for candidates, students, members, and affiliates. In this guide we will explore what information to include, how to keep certificates consistent to brand style guidelines, and what additional features can be added to digital certificate designs.

*Who we are: Accredible is an industry-leading digital credentialing platform. Founded in 2013, Accredible believes that everyone should be able to prove their credibility with ease regardless of who you are, where you live, or how you gained your knowledge.*

*Our experience serving millions of credentials globally has enabled us to understand and meet the needs of organizations undergoing digital transformation. As one of the longest-serving digital credentialing platforms, our insight into the space is unique and unrivalled. We provide actionable guidance at every step from research and evaluation, through to launch, growth, and development. Our knowledge informs the best practices for organizations to start, scale, and succeed in digital credentialing.*

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### Who is this guide for?

This guide offers actionable advice for organizations designing digital certificates to deliver to their candidates, students, members, or affiliates. Use the included print-friendly checklists to plan digital certificate details and provide guidance for inhouse or external graphic designers.

### How to use this guide

Use this guide to:

- Plan digital certificate designs ready for printing
- Establish what information to include in the design
- Explore additional features to add to certificates
- Understand what goes into successful design

# AN INTRODUCTION TO DIGITAL CERTIFICATES

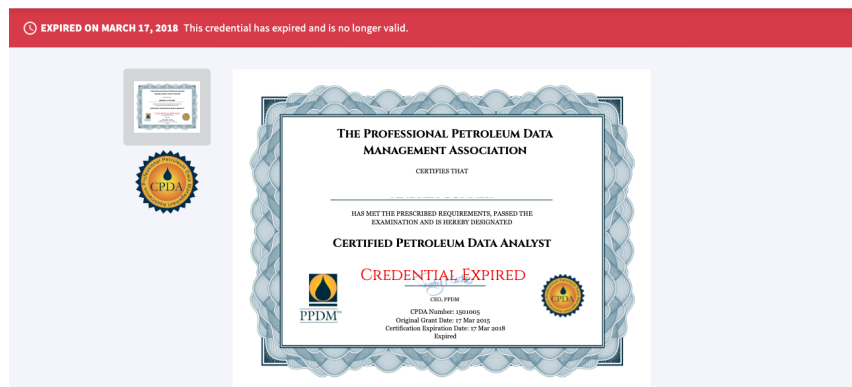
## What is a digital certificate?

Digital certificates are the digital equivalent of physical certificates given to candidates for meeting certain criteria. The most common use of digital certificates is to represent achievement in education, such as earning a degree or completing a training program. Digital certificates are also used to represent association membership, recognize attendance or affiliation with an event, and replace insecure PDF certificates.



Digital certificates provide greater control over validity than their physical counterparts. For example, on discovering learner fraud a college will want to invalidate an issued certificate but must rely on the learner to return or destroy their physical copy. The learner can still present the certificate as valid or include the achievement on their resume. If the third-party fails to verify the certificate directly with the college, they are unlikely to know that it is invalid.

In comparison, digital certificates take one-click to verify and should the certificate have expired or be withdrawn, this is clear to see and near impossible to spoof. The inclusion of a scannable QR-code in the digital certificate design ensures that printed or downloaded copies of digital certificates are also easy to verify.



# AN INTRODUCTION TO DIGITAL CERTIFICATES

## How to use a digital certificate

Physical certificates are hung on the wall or filed away in a drawer. The certificate is easily lost or damaged and typically carries a cost to be replaced. Due to instances of credential fraud, some learners are even discouraged by their educational institution to share their physical certificate.

Digital certificates are made to be shared. In one-click, digital certificates are shared to popular social media platforms including LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter, or easily embedded in an email signature or on a webpage. This encourages recipients of digital certificates to celebrate with their friends, family, and peers online - while boosting visibility for the issuer's brand and programs.

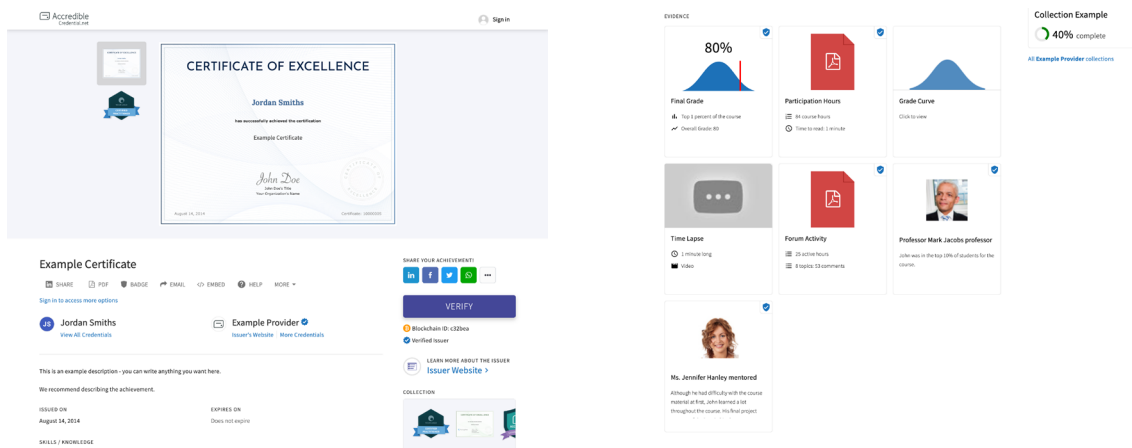


Digital certificates can be added to Digital Wallet Cards for presentation and verification of skills and qualifications on-the-go. This is useful for candidates that need to present proof-of-ability to be eligible for work or during a job interview, or provide evidence of association membership.



## PLANNING A DIGITAL CERTIFICATE DESIGN

Digital certificates are hosted on a dedicated webpage which includes plenty of space for including additional information such as course or association details, evidence of knowledge application, transcripts, and exam scores. This prevents cluttering the certificate design with supporting information but ensures it is available to inform third-parties. Often with a physical certificate, this information is only available at an additional cost. This prevents thorough verification and can lead to higher instances of credential fraud.



Issuers are able to focus on the key information in their design that identifies what the certificate is issued for, who it was issued to, and the issuing authority. If information needs to be updated or corrected at a later date, the design can be easily edited from the dashboard without the cost of reprinting and mailing out.

### What information should be included on a digital certificate?

To support the design process, the information to be included on the digital certificate should be planned and decided before handing off to design.

The most common information included on a digital certificate includes the issuer’s branding or logo, the name of the certificate, the recipient name, the date of issuance, and a signature from an issuer stakeholder. Where applicable, some issuers also include the certificate ID, an expiry date, number of hours spent, value of educational units, and the job-role of the stakeholder.

The Accredible credentialing solution supports dynamic text known as ‘attributes’ across both digital certificates and digital badges. Attributes are dropped into the design and automatically return the required information in the final design when the certificate is generated. This is useful when using a single certificate design across many courses where the course name needs to change or for including recipient names or ID numbers without creating additional admin work.

## PLANNING A DIGITAL CERTIFICATE DESIGN CHECKLIST

### Planning a digital certificate design checklist

Use the below checklist to help establish the information to include to inform each certificate design.

*Yes/No/Comments*

Will attributes (dynamic text) be used in the design?

What information will be included in the digital certificate design?

Certificate or course name

Recipient name

Issuer name

Issuer logo

Stakeholder signature

Brand colors

Issue date

Expiry date

Total hours to achieve

Value of educational units

Custom attributes

Is the brand style guide available for reference?

Is a graphic designer required?

## CREATING A DIGITAL CERTIFICATE DESIGN

The look of digital certificates should be instantly recognizable as belonging to the issuing organization. This helps to boost visibility for the organization when digital certificates are shared and embedded online. The appearance of a digital certificate influences how it is perceived and contributes to motivating candidates to earn the certificate.

Digital certificates can be created through Accredible. **Sign in via the dashboard** to access the designer via the 'Designs' tab.

Accredible's certificate design tool is an easy-to-use drag-and-drop designer that includes templates to get started, and an image upload feature for adding logos, custom typography, and additional elements. This guide will refer to Accredible's Certificate Design Studio but the advice can be applied across all graphic design applications.

### Choose a layout

Before starting to add design elements and details to the digital certificate, first establish the paper size and orientation. There are two options for each, US Letter or A4 for paper size and landscape or portrait for the orientation. The options for paper size and orientation are found in the 'Document' tab in the menu on the left side of the designer.

Digital certificates can be created from scratch or built off of a pre-existing template. The library of templates is available across both paper sizes and orientations and are customizable in the brand colors and according to brand style guidelines. Templates are found in the 'Templates' tab via the menu on the left side of the designer.





## CREATING A DIGITAL CERTIFICATE DESIGN

### Optional background image

If a background image is required or has been designed, this should be optimally sized to the measurements of the chosen digital certificate layout. Avoid using images that are too small or large that require scaling and can create distortion or pixelation.

### High-quality printing

If the intent is to produce digital certificates ready for high-quality printing, the background image should meet the following size requirements:

Paper Size	Orientation	High-quality background image size
US Letter	Landscape	3418 x 2668 pixels
US Letter	Portrait	2668 x 3418 pixels
A4 Paper	Landscape	3626 x 2598 pixels
A4 Paper	Portrait	2598 x 3626 pixels

Background images added for high-quality printing should not exceed the given sizes. This can lead to slow loading times on the credential page or cause downloads and shares to fail.

To enable high-quality printing, navigate to the ‘Document’ settings tab in the designer (where paper size and orientation can be found) and tick the box to ‘Enable HQ PDF for printing’. This will add a ‘bleed area’ to your certificate. The bleed area ensures the background image reaches the edge of the certificate and is trimmed after printing. Important details such as certificate text, attributes, or branding images should be positioned so they don’t overlap or sit too close to the bleed border.

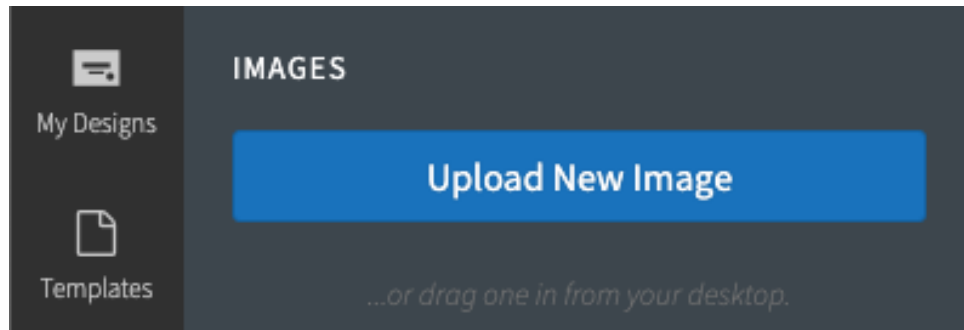
### Add branding

The issuer of the digital certificate should be identifiable at a glance. Logos and branding should be clear and legible on the certificate, rather than squished into a corner or stretched across the design which causes distortion. Where brand colors have been used on the certificate, ensure that once the logo is added it is still visible and doesn’t get lost against the background.



## CREATING A DIGITAL CERTIFICATE DESIGN

Add the logo or branding prior to any additional design elements such as icons or decorative images. This helps to keep the focus on the issuer, rather than cluttering the design and trying to fit everything in together. Once the logo has been added to the design, it's easier to see where additional elements can be included. Make sure to include the right size logo for the design, enlarging a logo image file that is too small can cause distortion and appears low-quality.



The Accredible certificate designer includes ‘smart guides’ which appear during the design process. Smart guides make it easy to align elements to the overall design or to elements within the design and will helpfully snap images and text into preferred positions. For finer control over positioning, designers can also use the keyboard arrow keys to nudge a selected element in small increments of 1px or hold shift + arrow key to move in 10px increments.



## CREATING A DIGITAL CERTIFICATE DESIGN

### Add attributes

For digital certificate designs that need to generate constantly changing information as dynamic text, the Accredible designer includes the use of attributes. To access attributes, designers need to be signed into the Accredible dashboard. The certificate designer is accessed via the ‘Designs’ option in the navigation bar, followed by clicking the ‘Create Certificate Design’ button on the right-hand side of the page.

Once in the designer, navigate to the ‘Attributes’ option in the left-hand design menu and then select one of the default attributes to drop into the design. The appearance of the attribute is fully customizable including the color, alignment, font, sizing, and spacing.

[recipient.name]

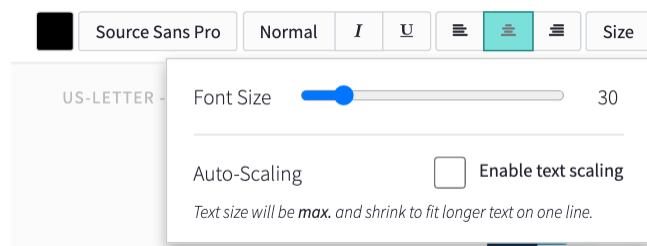
has successfully completed

[group.course\_name]

on [credential.issued\_on]

Custom attributes can be set up by scrolling to the bottom of the default attribute list and clicking the ‘Manage Attributes’ button. *This will navigate the user away from the page so make sure to save any designs you are working on first.* Once the custom attribute is set up, navigate to the design tool or previously saved design and access the ‘Attributes’ option as before.

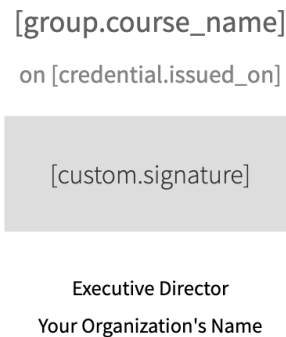
Generated dynamic text, particularly recipient names, can change in length and number of characters. To account for this when adding an attribute, in the formatting bar click the button labelled ‘Size’. This will bring up the font sizing slider and an ‘Auto-Scaling’ checkbox. Tick the box to enable auto-scaling and this will prevent longer length attributes from exceeding the design boundaries and getting cut-off.



## CREATING A DIGITAL CERTIFICATE DESIGN

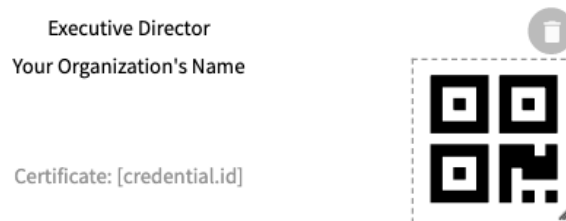
### Add signature

Signatures are a common feature on official certificates. Digital certificates can also include a stakeholder or course tutor signature. Signatures should be produced using dark ink on white paper and then scanned or photographed or created digitally using graphic design software. The signature image should be trimmed to remove excessive white-space. Add the signature image using the 'Upload New Image' button via the 'Elements' tab on the left-hand side of the certificate designer.



### Add QR-code

To accommodate printed and PDF certificates, the designer offers the inclusion of a QR-code. The QR-code provides an easy-to-scan link to the live credential page to verify the authenticity of the physical or downloaded copy.



The QR-code can be edited to include two brand colors, with a handy contrast checker to ensure that it is scannable, and can be sized appropriately to fit the certificate design. The generic QR-code that appears in the designer is replaced with a unique image when a certificate is generated.



## CREATING A DIGITAL CERTIFICATE DESIGN CHECKLIST

### Creating a digital certificate design checklist

Use the below checklist to inform the certificate process and what needs to be included or represented in the digital certificate design.

#### Before creating the certificate design

	<i>Yes/No/Comments</i>
What paper size will be used for the digital certificate design?	
What orientation will be used for the digital certificate design?	
Will a background image be required?	
Is the background image optimally sized?	
Will the certificate require high-quality printing?	
Is the background image sized for high-quality printing?	
Is an optimally sized logo image file available?	
Are additional decorative elements going to be used?	
What do the decorative elements need to represent?	
Have decorative elements been designed?	
Are decorative image elements optimally sized?	

## CREATING A DIGITAL CERTIFICATE DESIGN CHECKLIST

*Yes/No/Comments*

Are attributes going to be used in the design?

Do custom attributes need to be set up?

Do attributes need to auto-scale?

Will a signature be used in the design?

Has a signature image been created and trimmed?

Will the certificate require a QR-code?

What colors will be used for the QR-code?

Do the QR-code colors meet the contrast requirements?

### After creating the certificate design

*Yes/No/Comments*

Does the certificate design meet the brand guidelines?

Is the certificate issuer recognizable?

Is the text legible and correct?

Do the decorative elements fit the context of the design?

For HQ printing: Does the background image cover the bleed area?

Is there any text or branding imagery overlapping or positioned too closely to the bleed area?

## IN SUMMARY

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Designing a digital certificate requires thought about what the digital certificate represents and what key information should be included. Important elements to remember when designing a digital certificate:

- Digital certificate designs should be instantly recognizable as belonging to the issuer.
- When adding branding and additional imagery to the digital certificates design, image files should be optimally sized.
- The background image should be optimally sized to the paper size and orientation.
- If the digital certificate requires high-quality printing, a larger background image is required.
- If the digital certificate requires high-quality printing, all important information should be positioned without overlapping the bleed area.
- Included imagery and decorative icons should be relevant to the award.
- If intended for printing or download, a QR-code should be included as a link to the live credential.

Experience making digital certificates by **signing up for a free issuer account** with the option to issue digital certificates and digital badges for up to 20 unique recipients.

Looking to issue digital credentials to over 20 unique recipients or require additional control over branding the credential experience? **Get in touch with the Accredible team** for further information or **to request a demo**.

 Accredible

*Accredible is the industry-leading digital credentialing platform that securely issues, manages, tracks, and verifies millions of high-stakes credentials across the globe. Accredible integrates with leading learning software including Canvas, D2L Brightspace, Kajabi, Kryterion Webassessor, Moodle, Thinkific, and more. Over 1,900 leading universities, associations, and technology companies such as Google, Skillsoft, Slack, the Association of Corporate Treasurers, Chartered Banker Institute, University of Cambridge, AMPP, Hootsuite, IEEE, Cengage, MIT, Rutgers, INSEAD, IAPP, UC Berkeley, AMBA, and The Digital Marketing Institute rely on Accredible to create, deliver and manage digital certificates and open badges. Learn more at [accreditable.com](https://accreditable.com)*

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