



ESD Professional Credential Exam Handbook

May 2026

Join us in shaping the future of
the ESD Industry.

International Association of ESD Professionals
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www.ESDProfessionals.org



Credential Exam Handbook

International Association of ESD Professionals

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www.esdprofessionals.org

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About the Association

The International Association of ESD Professionals (“Association” or “IAESDP”) is a professional association created to elevate the empowerment self defense industry, expand the reach of the industry, engage the community, and support instructors, instructor-trainers, researchers, writers, advocates, and other violence-prevention professionals who adhere to the principles of empowerment self defense (“ESD”).

The Association is an independent organization upholding a global standard for ESD professionals. It was formed, in part, to promote a common, well-recognized, global standard of what constitutes professionalism and competence for empowerment self defense. The Association acknowledges that ESD professionals around the world embrace a shared purpose and core principles.

Mission & Vision

The mission of the Association is to engender trust and public safety in and within the broader empowerment self defense industry through standards-setting in ESD practice and education. We accomplish this by providing support to the ESD Community, including membership services, credentialing, accreditation, continuing education, public awareness campaigns focusing on the benefits of empowerment self defense practice, and increased global reach through official agency funding.

Our vision is to establish empowerment self defense as a key tool in the international work of violence prevention.

Non-Discrimination Policy

The International Association of ESD Professionals does not discriminate against any applicant or credential candidate on the basis of race, color, creed, age, sex, gender, national origin, religion, disability, marital status, parental status, ancestry, sexual orientation, military discharge status, source of income, or any other status protected by law. All credential candidates will be considered solely on impartial criteria developed by the independent ESD Credentialing Committee, which may receive input from staff, the board, advisory councils, and members from the international ESD community.

About Credentialing

Credential Definition

A credential is a comprehensive and holistic evaluation of a person's knowledge, skills, and experience in a specific field, including education, training, work history, professional competence, and ethical considerations. A credential signifies an individual has demonstrated (and continues to demonstrate) the qualifications and competencies to meet the requirements and standards of the given subject or industry. A credential is awarded and administered by an independent oversight body including professional associations (such as the IAESDP). Credentials typically require continuing education to help stay relevant and maintain professional standards.

A credential is not the same as a certificate or certification.

A *certificate* is granted after completing a program of education focused on a specific subject or skill set. Certificate holders usually do not need to demonstrate ongoing competence through a renewal or continuing education process. Some ESD instructors provide a "Certificate of Completion" to their students after taking a course.

A *certification* is a process that validates an individual's qualifications and competencies in a specific industry or profession (or in the case of ESD, a specific teaching modality). The certification is granted after assessing that an individual meets the criteria set by the granting or training body. Certifications may need to be renewed through the granting organization. Certifications in the ESD field include going through the ESD Global levels or completing the processes for Assert, Impact, or NWMAF instructor training.

The Association does not train ESD instructors, and the Credential Program coexists with existing certificate, certification, and training programs. Earning a credential can only enhance an ESD instructor's qualifications and the worldwide recognition of ESD as an established, research-based, and trustworthy system of education.

IAESDP Credentials

Gaining one or more of the credentials offered by the IAESDP recognizes the practitioner follows the globally recognized standards and ethical practices of a qualified ESD instructor. Credentials are earned upon achieving a passing score on a credentialing exam, and maintained by meeting the established continuing education and experience requirements.

The credential exams are overseen by the ESD Credentialing Committee ("ECC" or "Committee"), an independent body made up of global ESD practitioners, people in aligned

fields, and members of the public. Neither the Association nor the ECC have a stake in the outcome of any candidate's exam results, and all systems and processes are designed to maintain the integrity of the credential exam. The Association maintains a register of all professionals holding credentials.

The Credentialing Program has been developed and maintained through research, consultation, and engagement with the worldwide ESD community, and it continuously follows best practices in credential exam development and maintenance. Credentials offered by the Association aim to establish recognized standards in ESD practice, adapt to diverse cultures and training systems, and serve to elevate the professional recognition of ESD-aligned individuals and organizations of all types and sizes.

Achieving a credential signals that the candidate's practice is in accordance with globally recognized principles of ESD, and the candidate has demonstrated competence, a commitment to social change and violence prevention, and high standards of ethical practice. A Credential also distinguishes empowerment self defense instruction from other types of self-defense offerings.

The ESDA and ESDP Credentials

Currently the IAESDP offers two credential options:

- The **ESD Associate Credential (ESDA)** is for new ESD instructors who have recently completed an ESD training or certification program.
- The **ESD Professional Credential (ESDP)** for experienced ESD professionals, instructors, or others in ESD-related work who have at least two years of training and some classroom experience.

Scope of Practice

The practice of ESD overlaps with related and tangent professions such as martial arts, healing arts, victim support and advocacy, restorative justice, social work, physical fitness and movement, physical and mental health professionals, human resources, and law enforcement. ESD instructors and practitioners will often use knowledge, skills, and experience in these associated fields to inform or enhance their individual processes and teaching methods.

The credentials awarded by the Association certify ESD instructors within the Scope of Practice described in the statement below.

The ESD practitioner demonstrates knowledge, skills, and experience in the following areas:

- Instructs participants in multiple emotional, verbal, and social skills useful in creating a sense of empowerment, agency, and self-determination.
- Instructs participants in multiple responses to threatening or harmful interactions with others, including emotional, psychological, mental, and verbal interactions.
- Instructs participants in multiple physical techniques useful for responding to violence against them or others.
- Teaches and advocates for a violence-free world and brings awareness of larger social and violence-prevention issues.

The Association Credentialing Program will not test or recognize knowledge, skills, experience, or material outside the Scope of Practice as outlined above. While an ESD professional may incorporate other related material or knowledge into their practice, those areas of expertise are administered by their own governing bodies.

The ESD Credentialing Committee

The Empowerment Self Defense Credentialing Committee (“ECC” or “Committee”) is an independent committee of ESD professionals, related industry experts, and representatives of the public from around the world. The ECC is the decision-making body tasked with making policy decisions related to the Credentialing and Accreditation Programs of the Association. This includes determining best practices, minimum program curriculum requirements, and conflict resolution pathways for the ESD industry.

The Committee is maintained following the strict guidelines set by the National Committee for Credentialing Agencies and the Institute for Credentialing Excellence. The Committee also meets the requirements set by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). It is through the work of this Committee that the IAESDP aims to establish the ESD methodology as the standard for all empowerment self defense instruction.

Exam Sessions & Application

Exam Sessions

The Association holds exams at least four times each year. Virtual exam sessions will consist of a one- or two-week window of time during which candidates can take the exam at any time. No matter the candidate's time zone, they can take the exam at the most convenient time and day for them in that window.

In any year, virtual exam sessions are generally scheduled:

- Session One: First Quarter, held in January, February, or March
- Session Two: Second Quarter, held in April, May, or June
- Session Three: Third Quarter, held in July, August, or September
- Session Four: Fourth Quarter, held in October, November, or December

The Association also may hold special exam sessions at any time, virtually or in person, for specific groups, during events, or to accommodate other needs of the ESD community.

Application

Candidates will find the credential exam application at the Credentialing section of [ESDProfessionals.org](https://www.esdprofessionals.org). Candidates should read the application and instructions carefully, as incomplete applications may delay the registration process, which could result in the candidate being unable to take the exam in their preferred exam session.

Applications for all exam sessions are accepted on a continuous basis. Incomplete or late applications may cause a candidate's exam to be delayed to the next exam session.

Confidentiality of the Exam

It is critical to the integrity of the exam and the Association Credentialing Program that the exam and all its contents remain confidential. All exam candidates read and sign the Association Confidentiality Policy when they submit their application. This protects the integrity and confidentiality of the IAESDP Credentialing Exam before, during, and after the exam process. In the rare instance that a candidate violates the Confidentiality Policy, the ECC will consider whether nullification of exam scores, revocation of credentials, or a ban on future credential application and exam opportunities is appropriate.

Application Evidence Chart

Requirement	ESD Associate Exam Application	ESD Professional Exam Application
Candidate contact information	X	X
Exam Session	X	X
ESD Training & Education	X	X
ESD Teaching Experience*	X	X
Other (non-ESD) education or experience	X	X
Curriculum Vitae or Resume	Optional	X
ESD Biography	X	X
Headshot	X	X
Action Shot (optional)	Optional	Optional
Association Member Status	X	X
Exam Cost – Select Tier	X	X
Financial Assistance Request	Optional	Optional
Accommodation Needs	Optional	Optional
Background Check	US Residents Only	US Residents Only
Two Letters of Recommendation	Not Required	X
Code of Ethics and Confidentiality Agreements	X	X

Instructions are also provided in the Application form.

*ESD Associate exam applicants who do not have ESD teaching experience may simply note this in the appropriate section.

Application Materials Details

- Headshot to be used in promotional materials, high resolution.
- Action shot to be used in promotional materials (optional), high resolution. This action shot should only include the applicant, unless the other person's face(s) cannot be seen.
- Short biography, written in third person ("She studied at...") and under 250 words. This also will be used in promotional materials.
- Review the exam pricing section of the Association website for the most up-to-date exam costs. Tiered pricing and scholarships are available, and everyone is encouraged to apply no matter their financial state.
- Background Check **for US Residents only**. For people located outside the United States, a background check is not required at this time. If it is still in progress, candidates may email the completed background check after submitting the application. If they do not have a background check source, the Association recommends candidates use this affordable option: BackgroundReport.com/self (choose the "Check Yourself" option and select "Basic").
- To request any accommodations for taking the exam, indicate preferences and needs in the accommodations section of the application. Please see the [Exam Accessibility Policy](#) below for more information.
- To request financial assistance, please have ready: current employer and dates, annual income in US dollars, the amount the candidate could pay for the exam, the reason for applying to receive financial assistance, and a document ready to upload with proof of income and expenses. This upload can be tax documents, paystubs, or as simple as a letter, on letterhead, explaining financial need.
- For ESD Professional Exam applicants only: Names of two references who will be submitting Letters of Recommendation.
- [Association Code of Ethics](#) Acknowledgement. Please read [The Association Code of Ethics](#) prior to filling out the application.
- [Confidentiality Agreement](#). Please read the [Confidentiality Agreement](#) prior to filling out the application.

Letters of Recommendation

It is required that each ESDP credential candidate request two (2) [Letters of Recommendation](#) from individuals who can provide a character reference. References could include: ESD colleagues, mentors, trainers, co-instructors, or students; and/or colleagues, supervisors, clients, mentors, or mentees *in any other field*. The aim is to find someone who can speak to the candidate's integrity and has general knowledge of their teaching, empowerment, trauma-informed, social justice, martial arts, or similar experience.

References need to be over 18 and NOT someone the candidate has a direct familial or romantic relationship with such as a spouse or relationship partner (long or short-term), parent, sibling, or child. **References only need to fill out a short online form, they should not send a letter.**

Exam Application Process

- Apply on the [Association Website](#) and include all supporting documents and acknowledgements. If aiming for a specific exam session, please make sure to have the application in by the due date.
- ESDP Applicants: Ask references to submit [Letters of Recommendation](#) as soon as they can, and no later than the application due date.
- The application will be reviewed by the credentialing program staff. They will request additional information or documents if needed.
- When the application is accepted, candidates will be sent confirmation that they may take the credentialing exam at the indicated exam session.
- Candidates will be sent an invoice link to provide payment for the credential exam upon application acceptance.
- Before the exam session opens, candidates will receive an email with the link to a couple of short systems tests. It is recommended the candidate complete the tests prior to taking the exam to make sure they understand how to navigate the software and ensure device compatibility.
- Prior to the exam session, the candidate will receive an email with instructions for how and when to access the exam. The links will arrive in two ways: 1) through the Mettl software and 2) from the Credential Program Manager.

Any questions concerning any step of the application or process should be directed to credentials@esdprofessionals.org.

Exam Accessibility Policy

Accommodation Requests

The Association believes in equality of opportunity and access through a commitment to honoring learning styles, dignity, and independence. The Association endeavors to maintain an environment in which everyone feels safe and welcome.

The Association will work with individuals to remove barriers to accessibility and provide individualized support as needed. Accommodations are available for both virtual and in-person test-takers. No negative consequences or penalties in scoring will be imposed upon candidates who request accommodation.

The Association will do its best to honor all accessibility and accommodation requests, with the caveat that the exam is hosted on a third-party software that the Association does not have design or programming control over. Candidates may submit accommodation requests on the application form or via email to the Credential Program Manager.

Examples of some of the provisions available:

- Additional breaks to access medications, nutrition, hydration, or movement
- Additional time to complete the exam
- Designated support person, translator, or interpreter
- Options to take the exam in multiple sittings
- Use of approved assistive devices

The Exam administrator will work with candidates to create individualized accessibility plans based on the needs of the candidate and working within the limitations of the software platform.

Language Accessibility

Currently the exam materials, this handbook, and direct communications (email and text app) about the exam are only available in English.

The Association website and application form on the website are available in several languages available through AI translation. See www.esdprofessionals.org for language choices.

Currently, the ESD Professional Exam, including the exam questions, interface, and essay question input (the exam-taker's answers), is only available in English.

Currently, the ESD Associate Exam, including exam questions and interface, is available in English, Spanish, and Portuguese. Check the Association website to see if other languages have been developed since this publication.

The Association is committed to ensuring credentialing exams are available in multiple languages. Please check the website or contact the Credentialing Program Manager (credentials@esdprofessionals.org) for more information and to request a language be prioritized.

Exam Administration

Currently, the exams are hosted on the [Mercer | Mettl](#) platform. This is an online software designed to be accessible for people around the world, provides a user-friendly testing platform, and which allows proctoring for virtual exam takers.

Proctoring

The credential exams are “proctored,” which means the exam sessions are supervised by software to ensure integrity, prevent cheating, and verify the identity of the exam-taker.

Currently, remote AI (recorded artificial intelligence) proctoring is done through the testing software to monitor a candidate’s:

- Screen: to prevent accessing websites and other documents
- Webcam: to identify cheating via looking at phone, notes, or other sources
- Audio: to identify if the test-taker is talking to someone
- Verify identity: through taking a screenshot of the test taker and their ID before the start of the exam.

Virtual proctoring data is not shared with any third parties. The data is only reviewed by the Credential Program Manager. If there is suspected cheating, the relevant screenshots or data will be shared with the ECC to review for disciplinary actions.

If required, in-person exam proctoring will involve a designated and trained person in the testing room overseeing the exam process, verifying identities, and monitoring candidates.

Technical Considerations

The following technical considerations will help produce a smooth test-taking procedure:

Device: Exams are best taken on a laptop or desktop computer that has a webcam and microphone, either built-in or separate hardware. Candidates should contact the Credential Program Manager (credentials@esdprofessionals.org) as soon as possible if they do not have access to a desktop or laptop or if the device doesn't have a microphone and webcam.

Mobile phone or tablet: Mercer | Mettl does have an app which allows the use of a mobile phone or tablet for exams. This interface may not be as convenient or easy to use for the

test-taker, and may have some flaws. In the Association's commitment to accessibility, we will work with the test-taker who may need to use a phone or tablet.

Browser Settings:

- Candidates should take the test in the most recent version of Chrome, Firefox, or Safari.
- Turn off the pop-up blocker or permit pop-ups for the software platform in browser settings, otherwise the test window may fail to open.
- Disable plugins such as Grammarly or LanguageTool before beginning the exam as they may prevent saving.
- Close all tabs and other programs on the device before beginning the exam. Navigating outside of the exam window at any time will result in a warning. If the activity persists, the exam will be closed and may not be considered for scoring.
- Don't refresh the webpage at any time, as it will submit and close out the exam.

Internet: Ensure a stable internet connection with a minimum speed of 512 kbps. Test internet connection speeds here: <https://fast.com/>. **Exam responses are automatically saved. If there is a brief disconnection due to internet connectivity issues, the candidate will be able to resume the exam without contacting the credential program staff.**

Permissions: Candidates will be monitored via video/screen feed, and audio during the session. Candidates will need to allow webcam, audio, and screen sharing with the software. When prompted, allow screen capture, and select "entire screen."

Identity Verifications: Before taking the exam, the software will ask to take a screenshot of the candidate's face and another of an identity card to verify the identity of the individual taking the exam. The identity card can include a government issued ID, a student or military ID, a workplace security badge, or other. If this is a hardship or if there are concerns about this requirement, please reach out to the credentialing program staff.

Exam Links: Candidates will be emailed private exam link(s). Each exam link is single use. If the exam is available in multiple sections (such as the ESDP exam), the candidate will receive multiple links.

Once the candidate begins the exam, it cannot be rescheduled. Should the candidate exit out of the exam, close the browser, or fail to complete the exam, the Association cannot guarantee the exam will be validated.

If the candidate has trouble with internet connection, software, or other problems, the candidate does have a short period of time in which they can restart the exam after a technical issue. If the issue is longer than 10 or 15 minutes, the candidate should contact the credential program manager. Staff will respond as soon as possible, taking into

consideration time zone differences. Every effort will be made to reschedule uncompleted sections.

Breaks: Candidates are allowed to take brief breaks during the exam. The AI proctoring software will track the length of time the test taker is not present. **DO NOT CLOSE YOUR BROWSER WINDOW**, close your computer, click on submit buttons, or anything else. Just leave your computer as-is when taking breaks.

Exam Security Policy

To keep the exams fair and to make sure all candidates have the same chance to demonstrate their knowledge without an unjust advantage, the Association asks all exam takers to ensure they follow best ESD practices of confidentiality, ethics, and integrity.

The exams are intended to be an assessment of an ESD practitioner's knowledge, skills, and abilities at the moment in time in which they take the exam

Sharing exam questions or answers or cheating on an exam in any way compromises the credibility of the exams for all ESD professionals. It also harms the ESD experts around the world who contribute(d) to the creation, grading, and maintenance of the exams; and it harms the integrity of ESD as a practice.

Cheating on an exam includes, but is not limited to:

- Doing “live” research during an exam by accessing webpages, books, notes, making calls, talking to someone in the room, asking a smart speaker or virtual assistant (Alexa, Echo, Siri) or using other sources in any way.
- Leaving the test-taking screen for a “break” but using that time to conduct research or ask someone the answer to a question.
- Obtaining or attempting to obtain information about specific questions on an exam from other test-takers or credentialed professionals.
- Taking screenshots, videos, or photographs of exam questions, or writing down the questions and/or answer options to purposely share other candidates.
- Submitting the writing of another test-taker or a published or unpublished source without citation.
- Taking an exam for someone else.
- Using any type of AI (such as chat.gpt) to answer multiple choice questions or draft answers for open response questions.
- Purposefully sabotaging connection to the exam software such as unplugging a device, stopping internet connection, or closing the browser window in order to allow time to research an answer.

Cheating will be reviewed by the ECC Review Committee, which will determine the consequences. Consequences of cheating may include the removal of or not granting of a credential at any time.

Rescheduling, Cancellation & Refund Policy

Rescheduling an Exam

After applying, candidates may reschedule to the next exam session by notifying the credential program manager. If something comes up after the start of the exam session which prevents the taking or completion of an exam, the Association will work with the candidate to find a solution that works with the test taker.

Cancellation

After submitting an application, candidates may cancel their exam session at any time *prior to payment*. Once cancelled, the candidate can either withdraw their application or keep the application open for up to one year after the submission date.

Refunds

The Association will consider refund requests on a case-by-case basis prior to the start of the candidate's chosen exam session. Please contact the Association to discuss the circumstances.

Choosing an Exam

The ESD Associate and ESD Professional Credentials are each meant to serve an ESD instructor at different points in their career. The exams have been created by ESD experts to meet globally recognized standards within the ESD industry.

The Association recognizes that ESD practitioners enter the profession with a broad range of personal and career experiences; with a variety of differing skills, knowledge, and abilities; and with outlooks formed by varying international and cultural contexts. In addition, the Association is an independent organization that does not promote or align to any one ESD practice or methodology. For these reasons, candidates do not need to have completed any particular training course or certification, nor have a specific job-type in the industry to be eligible to apply for an exam.

However, it is strongly recommended that candidates both have a clear understanding of ESD principles and practices that are normally gained through a certificate-granting program of education, mentorship from an ESD professional, or other training system.

To determine which exam to take, consider the following:

ESD Associate Credential: If you are a newly certified ESD instructor, have recently completed a training course, and have little to no ESD teaching experience, you are likely ready to take the ESD Associate credential exam.

Individuals may also want to take the Associate exam if they are coming from a self-defense, martial arts, or other instructional paradigm that may have differing classroom management or trauma-informed expectations from empowerment self defense. This exam also would serve those who are very new to or have limited practice teaching physical self-defense techniques.

Individuals may also take the Associate exam as a practice test for the ESD Professional exam. This would give the individual a good idea of the subject areas covered by the ESD Professional exam.

ESD Professional Credential: The Association suggests candidates have at least two years or at least 100 hours of ESD education and teaching experience combined to successfully pass the ESD Professional exam. If you have been teaching and training ESD for at least two years, have a clear understanding of ESD principles and practices, have some sort of ESD education, and have experience teaching ESD to groups, you are likely ready to take the ESD Professional credential exam.

In some cases, the ESD Professional exam may also serve as a comprehensive evaluation of an instructor's capabilities after completing a rigorous training process. In order to be

successful in passing this exam, the individual should have a good idea of how to teach ESD through mock workshops or through previous facilitation experience.

Aligned Industries

If you are a martial arts instructor or other ESD-aligned provider who teaches with empowerment and trauma-informed methods, select the option which best fits with your experience level and knowledge of ESD-specific practices.

For more personalized guidance on which exam to take, reach out to the credential program manager at credentials@esdprofessionals.org.

Potential ESD Instructor Timeline

1. Receive training and/or a certification from an ESD instructor training program or mentor. (Look for IAESDP Accredited trainers to ensure ethical practices and program quality.) Or work with an ESD instructor mentor to fill in gaps in your ESD-specific knowledge.
2. Take and pass the ESD Associate Credential Exam to provide you with a credential as you start teaching.
3. Teach ESD for 1-2 more years and continue your ESD instructor education. Gain experience and training in classroom management, teaching and coaching physical and verbal skills, trauma-informed practices, and curriculum development.
4. Take and pass the ESD Professional Credential Exam to provide you with a professional-level credential that will signal to partners, participants, grant providers, and others that you are in alignment with the ethics, values, and global standards of the ESD industry.
5. Become an ESD instructor mentor to help guide those who are new in the industry toward credentialing.

ESD Professional Exam Details

ESDP Recommended Education and Experience

Training & Education

A candidate's ESD education may involve the supervision or instruction by suitable experts in the field, including formal training, certificate-granting programs, and mentorship. Training may be supplemented by additional independent practice, study, research, guidance, or work in ESD or adjacent fields. The education may be of any sort and carried out in any capacity, but at least 50 hours of ESD-aligned training is recommended.

A thorough understanding of physical techniques and their execution is strongly recommended for success, but martial arts education or alignment with a specific martial arts practice is not required.

The Association recognizes that individuals and organizations may have been facilitating ESD-type programs (that they created or were passed on to them) without knowing about existing ESD methodologies. In this case, these individuals might be aided in educating themselves about the ESD industry and currently accepted practices through continuing education opportunities, articles, blog posts, groups, and mentorship available through the many ESD-aligned organizations.

Regardless of the educational source, candidates should thoroughly review the [Core Competencies](#) covered in the ESD Professional exam.

Experience

To have the most success with the ESDP exam, a candidate's experience should involve time spent as an ESD instructor, as an assistant to an ESD instructor, or otherwise engaging with or teaching participants in a facilitated ESD course. The experience may be of any sort and carried out in any capacity, but at least 50 hours of active facilitation as well as familiarity in managing groups of at least ten participants would be highly beneficial. Some curriculum development experience may also be advantageous for successful completion of the ESDP exam.

Specialty facilitation experience such as working with certain age groups (i.e. older adults or children) or specific populations (i.e. immigrants or LGBTQ+) is not necessary.

ESDP Exam Structure & Overview

Exam Format & Length

The ESD Professional Exam can be taken in two ways:

1. **Standard - Two Sections.** We recommend most exam takers take the exam in two sections. This means the exam taker will be sent two exam links, and they can take the exam at two separate times during the exam window.
2. **Accommodation - Five Sections.** If an exam taker is unable to take the exam in two sittings due to time constraints or need for accessibility, the exam can be offered in five sections. This means the exam taker will be sent five exam links, and they can take the exam at five separate times during the exam window.

The entire exam takes approximately three to five hours total to complete. If the candidate is taking the exam in two sections, each section may take about 1.5 to 2.5 hours on average. Candidates should ensure they have at least this much time set aside to take each section.

For some, the exam may take more time. If a candidate is concerned that they may take more than ten hours total, please let the administrator know before starting the exam so they can provide timing accommodations in the software. The time it takes someone to complete the exam is not taken into account when scoring.

Candidates may take each section at any time convenient to them during the exam window. This allows for flexible scheduling, especially for those that may need more time to take the exam or who have busier schedules.

NOTE: Candidates need to ensure they do not forget to take all sections of the exam. If taking the exam in multiple parts, each part is provided as a separate link.

Once an exam section has been started, it cannot be restarted. Should the candidate exit out, close the browser, or fail to complete all exam sections in the time given, the Association cannot guarantee their responses will be saved, that they can restart the exam, or that the exam can be graded. If the test taker needs to take a short break, they are to leave the browser open; there is no way to pause the test.

If there is an emergency and the test taker has to leave a test session before finishing, they should reach out to the Credential Program Manager as soon as possible.

ESDP Exam Sections & Modules

The exam consists of five modules. The Association has currently split the five modules into two sections for most test takers. If taking the exam in five sections, the test taker is sent a link to each separate module.

Exam Section One

- **Module 1: Emotional, Verbal, and Social Skills.** The purpose of ESD; how to differentiate ESD from other forms of self-defense; communication; intuition; boundaries; spectrum of violence; intimate partner violence; sexual assault; emotional manipulation; and other related topics.
- **Module 2: Physical Skills.** When it is appropriate to use physical techniques; context and risk evaluation; goal to escape safely; choosing effective physical techniques; how to execute and teach common techniques such as palm heel strike, eye strike, groin strike, rear elbow strike, strangulation response; misconceptions about physical attacks and responses; what to do after a physical confrontation; and other related topics.

Exam Section Two:

- **Module 3: Safety and Trauma-Sensitivity.** Physical safety in the teaching environment; safety equipment; safety flaws; accommodating student injuries or limitations; safe behavior with physical interactions; emotional safety; trauma sensitivity; and other related topics.
- **Module 4: Ethics and Social Change.** Differentiating ethics, morality, expected behaviors; inclusion and equity; appropriate touch; confidentiality; sexual harassment; intimate relationships; child abuse; reporting; recognizing own bias; intersectionality; gender/identity-based violence; IAESDP Code of Ethics; and other related topics.
- **Module 5: Classroom Management.** Class plans and curriculum development; setting up role play; emergency reporting; time management; co-teaching; body positivity; movement; and other related topics.

ESDP Question Types

The exam consists of multiple choice and open response questions.

Multiple Choice questions may appear too complicated to easily answer or may appear to have more than one correct answer. Candidates are encouraged to select their answers based on the concept being tested in the question and the module topic (found at the top left of each page or in the section instructions). There will always be one option that best addresses the concept and topic, according to current, widely accepted ESD practices.

Open Response questions can usually be answered with a paragraph or two. Candidates are also welcome to provide answers in list form when appropriate. Lengthy responses are not required, although the question should be answered completely. **All open response questions will be graded on content alone and there are no penalties for style, grammar, or spelling.** Test takers are not required to explain the reasoning for responses. The exam is intended to test the "what" and not the "why".

Sample Question & Answer

The exam is designed to evaluate a candidate's understanding and knowledge of the core subject areas listed in the [Core Competencies](#) and how those concepts are put into practice.

ESD concepts can be highly nuanced, dependent on many variables, and subject to the context of each individual situation. Some questions, especially single-select multiple choice, may present more than one answer that seems to be correct. These types of questions often leave a candidate wishing they could respond with, "it depends." The exam questions are designed to test knowledge of concepts, not to provide specific prescriptions or outcomes. Candidates are encouraged to select their answers based on the concept being tested and which of the possible answers best illustrates that concept.

Question: Sam and Alex enjoyed dinner and several alcoholic drinks at Sam's apartment and are now relaxing on the sofa. Sam would like to initiate sexual intimacy. Which of the following best demonstrates respect for consent in this situation?

- A. A subtle stroke on Alex's thigh, then waiting for a response.
- B. Leaning over to kiss Alex.
- C. Saying, "I would like to have sex with you tonight."
- D. Saying, "I would enjoy being intimate with you, but we have had too much to drink."

Answer and Reasoning: Option D is the correct answer because, of those provided, it best demonstrates the concept of consent. Within the context of the relationship between Sam

and Alex, each of these various ways of initiating sexual intimacy might be accepted or even welcomed. One or more answers may have initiated a strong reaction. However, there is only one best answer based on understanding the broad concepts of consent. Answer B may be understood as an acceptable invitation in Sam and Alex's relationship, but because it is unilateral, it does not allow for the possibility of mutual consent. Answers A and C provide for Alex's response and thus demonstrate at least the possibility for mutual consent. Only answer D provides for the complete understanding that consent is not possible when one (or both) partners may be incapacitated. Answer D demonstrates the broadest knowledge of the concept of consent and is the best answer.

ESDP Exam Content: Core Competencies

The Association recommends candidates have a comprehensive knowledge of the following subject matters which have been identified as Core Competencies for the profession. The Core Competencies List (otherwise known as Subject Matter List) was created through an interactive process involving lively discussions among Advisory Council members, consultation with additional ESD experts from around the world, and staff research.

Module 1: Emotional, Verbal, and Social Skills

- Abuse and intimate partner violence
- Active disengagement (Run principle)
- Active sharing (Tell principle)
- Assertiveness, passivity, aggression, including impact on interactions with others
- Boundaries including preparation, flexibility, setting, violations
- Communication formula
- Confident body language
- Consent
- De-escalation
- Differentiating ESD from other forms of self-defense or self-protection
- Effective confrontation (Fight principle)
- Emotional awareness (Think principle)
- Emotional manipulation
- Grooming
- Intervention
- Intuition
- Micro-aggressions / Identity-based aggressions
- Positive affirmations
- Purpose of ESD
- Sexual assault
- Situational awareness
- Spectrum of violence
- Stalking
- Street harassment
- Two sides to every story mythology
- Use of voice (Yell principle)

Module Two: Physical Skills

- Choosing effective physical techniques
- Defensive or ready stance
- Effective physical tools of the body
- Evaluation of context and risk
- Front elbow strikes
- Front/rear rotating elbow strikes
- Goal in a physical altercation to escape safely
- Knee strike
- Misconceptions about physical attacks and responses
- Palm heel strike
- Pinch finger eye strike
- Principles of fighting from the ground
- Rear elbow strikes
- Release from wrist grab
- Response to a hair or scarf grab
- Response to body grab from behind
- Side fist strike (Hammer fist)
- Soft techniques and appropriate use of them
- Steps to take after a physical confrontation ends
- Strangulation response
- Techniques not recommended
- Tools of surroundings
- Vulnerable targets
- When it is appropriate to use physical techniques

Module Three: Physical and Emotional Safety

- Adaptive/stress response
- Alternate movements to accommodate participant injuries or limitations
- Emotional safety for inclusive practice
- Emotional safety in the teaching environment
- Emotional safety when sharing and receiving personal stories
- Emotional safety with role-play
- General plan to address trauma in the classroom
- Holding pads safely
- How to promote stable and safe relationships
- Importance of ice-breaker or get-to-know-you exercises

- Importance of opening circle
- Managing vicarious and personal trauma
- Modeling safe behavior with physical interactions
- Physical safety in the teaching environment
- Physical signs/symptoms of trauma response
- Principles of sensitivity to trauma
- Safety equipment
- Safety flaws when practicing physical technique
- Specific plan to address an individual trauma-response event
- Warm-ups
- Window of tolerance

Module Four: Ethics and Social Change

- Appropriate touch
- Child abuse
- Confidentiality
- Cultural sensitivity/cultural humility
- Differentiating ethics, morality, expected behaviors
- Ensuring your own health
- Ethical financial practice
- Gender-based violence
- IAESDP Code of Ethics
- Identity-based violence
- Importance of having an ethics policy
- Inclusion and equity
- Intersectionality
- Intimate partner violence
- Intimate relationships with colleagues and peers
- Intimate relationships with participants
- Instructor self-care
- On-going education
- Physical abuse
- Recognizing your own biases
- Reporting
- Research and evidence-based practice
- Sexual harassment
- Statistics and laws (local)
- Teaching what you do not know

Module Five: Classroom Management

- Adaptability
- Body positivity and movement
- Collaboration in curricula development
- Contingency planning
- Co-teaching
- Creating exercises and games that are relevant
- Emergency reporting
- Energy level and pacing
- How to adapt class plans for different groups
- How to create class plans
- Layering of concepts
- Record-keeping
- Scope of practice
- Setting up role-play
- Teacher v. authority
- The purpose and use of games and play
- Time management
- Updating curriculum on a regular basis
- Value of scenarios and role-play

ESDP Exam Results & Grading

Scoring / Grading Process

To receive an overall passing grade, the candidate must receive a passing score on each of the five modules of the exam.

Multiple choice questions are graded by the computer against pre-determined answers.

Open response questions are graded by Credentialed ESD peers who follow a detailed scoring rubric in a blind process. The blind marking process means graders do not know who wrote the open response answers, and candidates will not know who graded their exam.

Maintaining the integrity of grading is a key component of the ECC and IAESDP. Because most people know of one another in the current ESD industry, the following processes are in place to preserve confidentiality:

- Credentialed ESD Professionals are eligible to be graders if they do not have knowledge of the test takers through their specific role working or volunteering with the IAESDP or by providing a reference for one of that exam session's candidates.
- Graders follow a scoring rubric that allows for nuance and cultural context. They are instructed to ignore style, spelling, and grammar, and to be aware of personal biases.
- All exams are graded a minimum of three times, and ideally four to five times. This addresses the idea that some graders might be too "easy" or too "hard" on the candidate.
- Test takers are encouraged to not reveal who they are, their affiliations, or their location when answering open response questions.
- To maintain the integrity of other test-takers, candidates may not reveal test components to anyone after taking the exam, including exam questions and answers.
- Only the IAESDP Credentialing Program Manager manages the blind grading process and score calculations.

Notification of Results

Candidates can expect to be notified of exam results by email within 30 to 45 days of the final day of the exam session (See Grading Delay Policy below for exceptions). Because the open response questions are graded by people with their own busy ESD lives and organizations, the IAESDP asks for patience while waiting for exam results.

The ESDP exam is pass/fail, and the results provided will indicate a pass or fail for each module and for the exam overall. A candidate needs to pass all five modules to pass the exam and be granted the credential.

Grading Delay Policy

If there are fewer than three test takers in a given exam session, the Credential program will push back the grading of those one or two exams to the next exam session. This is because:

- It protects test takers. Test takers benefit by the blind grading process when multiple exams are reviewed in their grading period. If a grader may know the test taker, it makes it less likely they'll be able to pinpoint that specific exam.
- It protects graders. There are at least three to five graders for each exam. To honor the volunteer time it takes to grade, it's an easier ask to spend time on multiple exams as opposed to just one. Also, grading is easier and more fair when reading multiple exams (allowing compare and contrast).
- It protects the Association. Fewer resources and work hours are spent on low quantity grading periods.
- It protects the integrity of the credential. The Association believes that even though the ESD industry is small, it is vital to ensure that the credential program follows the highest standards.

Re-Taking the Exam

Individual Modules: Candidates receiving an unsuccessful score on one or two modules are not required to retake the entire exam. Instead, candidates are allowed to re-take just the module(s) which they failed to receive a passing score to gain the full credential. These candidates are encouraged to acquire more education in the Core Competencies of that specific module topic area before re-attempting the module. If re-taking one or two modules within one year of the original attempt, candidates need not reapply or pay a second time. If re-taking the module(s) after one year, further payment may be required by the IAESDP but will not be equal to the full exam cost originally paid.

Full Exam: If a candidate does not pass three or more Modules, they may be asked to re-take the full exam. In the case of failing to pass at least half the exam, candidates are strongly encouraged to complete additional study, education, mentorship, or experience before attempting the exam a second time. When re-taking the exam within one year, candidates need not reapply or pay a second time. When re-taking the exam after one year, candidates will need to reapply and pay again (a discount may be offered). Candidates

who fail the exam twice consecutively will be required to demonstrate additional education, experience, mentorship, or similar investment in their practice.

Grievances & Appealing Exam Results

If an exam candidate does not pass, they may file a grievance with the ESD Credentialing Committee to appeal their exam results. All appeals must be filed within 90 days of the exam result notification. Appeals will be adjudicated by the Review Panel assigned by the ESD Credentialing Committee. The Review Panel will not include graders of the exam in question. The Review Process will be conducted in as fair and impartial a manner as possible.

Celebrating the ESDP Credential

Awarding Credentials

Upon gaining a passing score on the exam, candidates will be sent their digital ESDP Credential through [Accredible](#), an online badging and credential certificate platform. With Accredible, candidates can download their credential certificate in PDF form to be shared online or printed. They can also download their credential badge, which can be placed on their website and social sites like LinkedIn to showcase their achievement.

The Association does not create printed certificates to send to ESD Professionals.

Announcing Credentials

The Association will announce new Credentialed ESD Professionals on their website and social media. ESDPs are asked to also share with their networks. The Association will provide templates for ESD Professionals to notify their contacts of their achievement.

Citing the Credential

Those who pass the ESDP exam are awarded an ESD Professional Credential (“ESDP”). Once a candidate has earned an ESDP, they may place “ESDP” after their name to indicate their qualifications. Example: Hana Devi-Smith, ESDP.

It is the responsibility of all credentialed professionals to maintain their Credential through the Association's credential renewal program and fulfill the requirements. Should a candidate fail to do so, they will no longer be permitted to use the ESDP mark.

However, credentialed professionals who are no longer practicing ESD may use the mark indefinitely, as long as they follow it with "emeritus," like this: Hana Devi-Smith, ESDP, Emeritus.

ESDP Credential Renewal Requirements

Credential Renewal Summary

The Association has developed standardized Professional Development and Experience requirements for all credentialed Empowerment Self Defense Professionals (ESDPs) seeking to maintain their ESDP Credential. These requirements aim to ensure that credentialed ESD Professionals maintain high levels of competence, uphold trauma-informed principles, and continuously enhance their practice through education, experience, and reflection.

ESD Professional credentials must be renewed every three (3) years. There is no need to retake the ESDP credentialing exam once passed. Instead, the Association has developed a program that promotes growth and career advancement for credentialed professionals.

Requiring structured professional development and aligned experience will:

- Maintain professional integrity and credibility of ESD Professionals
- Ensure that ESD delivery is consistent with current research and industry standards
- Encourage reflective practice and lifelong learning.
- Promote global alignment with the principles of empowerment, consent, safety, trauma-awareness, and inclusion.

Three Steps to Credential Renewal

To maintain an ESD Professional Credential, all ESD professionals must complete and submit the following “Three Steps to Credential Renewal” by the time their credential expires, three years from the acquisition date, and every three years thereafter.

Three Steps to Credential Renewal:

Step 1: Accrue 18 hours of professional development or mentorship; and

Step 2: Accrue 60 units of facilitation, teaching, mentoring, volunteering, or other experience-based practices; and

Step 3: Create a reflective statement describing at least three insights and their impact on your ESD practice gained from the continuing education and experience hours.

Step 1: Professional Development Requirement

An ESD Professional must complete eighteen (18) hours of professional development, continuing education, coaching, or mentorship to renew their credential. With three (3) years between renewal periods, this averages six (6) hours per year. There is no requirement that the hours be evenly divided per year.

Professional development, education pursuits, coaching, and mentorship may take place in person or online, through webinars, guided trainings, or coursework. There does not need to be a certification, certificate of participation, diploma, or any other award granted, though this can be an added benefit for the ESD Professional's career. Those taking credit-bearing or graded courses should receive a passing grade; but there is no requirement to take these types of courses for renewal.

There is no requirement that the course, webinar, or mentorship cost money. If you are struggling to find free opportunities for professional development within your home location, interest area, or accessibility needs, please reach out to the Association for assistance.

A note on counting contact hours: Please round down to the nearest ½ hour (For example, a 5 hour 15 minute long program will count as 5 hours). Also, do not count breaks longer than 5 minutes (For example, an 8 hour program with 1 hour for lunch will count as 7 hours).

Professional Development Topic Areas

Below is a list of suggested professional development areas and topics. If you are unsure if a program will count, please reach out to the Credential Program Manager before committing to the program (credentials@esdprofessionals.org).

- Trauma-informed practices, mental health, and psychology: Includes trauma theory, trauma-informed facilitation, nervous system regulation, mental health, and psychological safety, mandatory reporter training, psychological first aid, mental health first aid, and similar.
- ESD topics: Includes gender-based violence, situational awareness, de-escalation, community engagement, advocacy, inclusivity, and teaching specific communities. Includes trainings to support survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, childhood trauma, trafficking; and any specialized trainings for instructors offered by ESD organizations, including the Association.
- Professional growth and pedagogy: Includes teaching methods, communication, classroom management, ethics, leadership, professional practice, public speaking, and curriculum development.

- Physical skills, movement, and somatic practices: Includes martial arts training, belt advancement, weapons defense, yoga instructor training, somatic training, and similar.
- Business development: Includes organizational management, strategic planning, financial management, bookkeeping, non-profit development, grant writing, marketing, business coaching, and similar.
- Receiving mentorship or coaching: Meeting with a mentor one on one or in small groups to help hone and improve teaching, business, or ESD skills.
- Independent Study: Depending on your situation and access to continuing education or mentorship, individuals may propose a course of independent study based on their needs and resources. Please reach out to the Credential Program Manager for approval (credentials@esdprofessionals.org).

Professional Development Report

ESD Professionals will submit a Professional Development Report with documentation of professional development hours. The report should include: course title or mentor name, meeting dates, number of hours, and a brief description of learning.

Step 2: Experience Requirement

An ESD Professional must accrue sixty (60) hours of teaching-related experience, including facilitation, teaching, mentoring, volunteering for an ESD organization, or related practice to renew their credential. With three (3) years between renewal periods, this averages twenty (20) hours per year. There is no requirement that the hours be evenly divided per year.

Experience hours may take place in person or online. Participants can be one-time or repeat. There is no requirement that participants pay for the coaching or facilitation. Please follow the guidelines set in the Association Ethics handbook as well as other ESD ethics guides when pursuing payment for services.

If you are struggling to find enough opportunities for teaching or experience within your region, ability level, or knowledge area, please reach out to the Association for assistance.

See the list below for calculating task-based volunteer hours such as joining a board or committee.

Experience Areas

Below is a list of suggested ways to gain experience in ESD facilitation, teaching, or similar. If you are unsure if an experience will count, please reach out to the Credential Program Manager before committing (credentials@esdprofessionals.org).

- ESD teaching and instructing: Teaching or co-teaching ESD-focused workshops or courses. Note: Pre-recorded virtual courses where there is NO face-to-face time with attendees do not count toward experience hours.
- ESD-related facilitation: Presenting or teaching workshops, courses, and talks on topics approached with an ESD lens, such as DEI, violence prevention, safety, sex education, trauma-informed practices, movement and martial arts, and similar.
- ESD instructor training: Training new ESD instructors in advanced workshops, certificate programs, new hires, and similar. Note: Pre-recorded virtual content where there is NO face-to-face time with attendees do not count toward experience hours.
- Providing ESD mentorship or coaching: Active mentoring and coaching one-on-one or in small groups of new or experienced ESD instructors; or business mentoring for ESD businesses or organizations.
- Volunteering with ESD-associated organizations, including:
 - Committee or board membership for an ESD-related organization including the IAESDP: One (1) full year of volunteering for one (1) board or committee equals four (4) contact hours. Max eight (8) hours per year; meaning you can count two (2) boards or committees per year. (Calculate partial years accordingly.)
 - ESDP exam grading for the Association: One (1) exam session equals two (2) contact hours. Max eight (8) hours per year / four (4) exam sessions.
 - Writing, peer reviewing, or editing ESD related essays or articles: One (1) article equals two (2) hours. Please reach out to the Credential Program Manager to discuss longer or more in-depth projects such as book-length or research projects.
- Other experience: Submit your experience-based proposal to the Association for approval (email credentials@esdprofessionals.org).

Experience Report

ESD Professionals will submit an Experience Report with documentation of experience contact hours. The report should include: experience title, dates of contact, number of hours, and a brief description of facilitation.

Step 3: Final Reflection Requirement

An ESD Professional must write or create a reflective statement to renew their credential. This reflective statement is best compiled after all Professional Development and Experience hours have been completed.

Reflection Guidelines

- **Format:** The Reflection can be submitted as a written statement, audio or video recording, a slideshow, or done as a live and recorded interview with a member of the ECC or Credentialing Program Manager.
- **Contents:** Describe at least three (3) insights and their impact on your ESD practice gained from the past three years of professional development and experience.
- **Length:** Minimum of 600 words, 5 minutes video or audio recording, 5 minutes live interview, 12 slides. The reflection may be longer if you wish.

If you need assistance with the reflection for any reason, including accessibility needs, please reach out to the Credential Program Manager for assistance (email credentials@esdprofessionals.org).

Renewal Process

To renew the ESDP credential, please submit the following to the Credential Program Manager at least one month before the expiration of your Credential:

1. Professional Development Report – Total of 16 Hours
2. Experience Report – Total of 60 Hours
3. Reflection – Detailing 3 insights gained from professional development and experience over the past 3 years.
4. Renewal payment

Credential Renewal Cost

The Credential Renewal payment will be based on a sliding scale based on income and financial need. See the Credential Renewal section of the Association website for current pricing.

Late Fee

If renewing six (6) or more months of credential expiration, a late fee will be added to the renewal cost. See the Credential Renewal section of the Association website for the current fee.

ECC Review

The three documents will be checked for integrity and accuracy by the Credential Program Manager. They will then be reviewed by one or more members of the ESD Credentialing Committee. The Committee member(s) will be looking for:

- Integrity and ethical practices;
- Commitment to growth in ESD;
- Adherence to the CE requirements.

After being approved by the ECC, the individual will be notified via email that their credential is renewed, their Accredible badge and certificate will be updated, and the IAESDP will announce their Credential renewal achievement online (candidates may opt out).

Non-Compliance and Grace Period

Failure to meet the renewal requirements by the 3-year expiration will result in a Conditional Credentialed status. ESD Professionals under conditional status will have six (6) months to complete the missing requirements before their Credential will be suspended.

ESD Associate Credential Renewal

ESD Associate credentials cannot be renewed. Instead, take the ESD Professional Exam three years from gaining the Associate credential.

ESD Associate Exam Details

Description of an ESD Associate Exam Candidate

The ESD Associate Exam candidate is an entry-level ESD instructor who has been recently certified to teach ESD workshops by a qualified trainer. This candidate knows enough material to teach holistic ESD seminars up to 10 hours in length that cover basic verbal skills, physical skills, understanding the brain and stress, as well as grounding and self-care. They also know the principles of trauma-informed teaching, uphold inclusivity and ethical values, and are able to promote the basic principles of ESD to interested parties. An entry-level ESD instructor is dedicated to acquiring experience teaching and increasing their ESD knowledge through continuing education.

ESDA Recommended Education and Experience

Training & Education

A candidate's ESD education may involve the supervision or instruction by trained experts in the field, including formal training or certificate-granting programs and mentorship. The education may be of any sort and carried out in any capacity, but at least 30-hours of ESD-aligned training is recommended.

A basic understanding of teaching and performing physical techniques is highly recommended for success, but martial arts education or alignment with a specific martial arts practice is not required.

The Association recognizes that individuals and organizations may have been facilitating ESD-type programs (that they created or were passed on to them) without knowing about existing ESD methodologies. In this case, these individuals might be aided in educating themselves about the ESD industry and currently accepted practices through continuing education opportunities, articles, blog posts, groups, and mentorship available through the many ESD-aligned organizations.

Regardless of the educational source, candidates should thoroughly review the [Core Competencies](#) covered in the ESD Associate exam.

Experience

A ESD Associate candidate need not have any time spent in the classroom as an ESD instructor, though this may be helpful. This exam was designed to test knowledge that

entry-level instructors should hold, including an understanding of classroom facilitation practices that could be gained from ESD instructor training.

ESDA Exam Structure & Overview

Exam Format & Length

The ESD Associate Exam is designed to be taken in one sitting. For most test takers, it takes around 1 to 1.5 hours. Some test takers may need more time. The time it takes to complete the exam is not taken into account when scoring.

Candidates may take the exam at any time convenient to them during the exam window. Once the exam has been started, it cannot be restarted. Should the candidate exit out, close the browser, or fail to complete the exam in the time given, the Association cannot guarantee their responses will be saved, that they can restart the exam, or that the exam can be graded. If the test taker needs to take a short break, they are to leave the browser open; there is no way to pause the test.

If there is an emergency and the test taker has to leave before finishing, they should reach out to the Credential Program Manager as soon as possible.

ESDA Question Types

The exam consists of multiple choice questions, some of which are multiple choice with images. Multiple choice questions have a main question and a series of answers. Some questions may appear to have more than one correct answer. Candidates are encouraged to select their answers based on the concept being tested in the question and the section topic (found at the top left of each page or in the section instructions). There will always be one option that best addresses the concept and topic, according to current, widely accepted ESD practices.

Sample Question & Answer

The exam is designed to evaluate a candidate's understanding and knowledge of the core subject areas listed in the [Core Competencies](#) and how those concepts are put into practice.

The ESDA exam is created to test a candidate's knowledge of the essential and widely understood concepts of ESD instruction. When reviewing the multiple choice questions in

the exam, candidates should keep in mind the purposes and basic methodologies of ESD. Candidates should also read questions carefully to make sure they understand if the question is asking for an example or an exception (see sample question below).

Question: Verbal self-defense skills in an ESD class are best taught in the following ways, EXCEPT:

- A. Handouts or articles
- B. Activities and games
- C. Role-play scenarios
- D. Demonstrations or skits

Answer and Reasoning: Option A is the correct answer. Of the answers provided, it is the option NOT typically found successful in ESD classes. Note that the use of “except” in the question directs the test taker to find the answer that is not typical. ESD methodologies and teaching practices are usually focused on active learning, through games and practice. While answer D is also not an active technique, many ESD instructors do demonstrations as a way to engage students. Answer A is the least common ESD teaching method.

ESDA Exam Content: Core Competencies

The Association recommends candidates have a comprehensive knowledge of the following subject matters which have been identified as Core Competencies for the entry-level ESD instructor. The Core Competencies List (otherwise known as Subject Matter List) was created through an interactive process involving consultation with ESD experts from around the world and staff research.

Domain 1: ESD Principles and Ethics

- Core values and philosophies of ESD
- Professional ethical behavior
- Impact of systemic and interpersonal violence
- Community agreements
- Emotional and physical safety
- Self-defense myths and misconceptions
- Responding to disclosures
- Power dynamics in ESD
- Trauma-awareness

Domain 2: ESD Physical Skills

- Basic physical techniques, ie. palm strike, knee to groin, wrist releases
- Identify targets
- Mechanics of effective strikes
- Warm up techniques
- Safe pad holding
- Simple adaptive or modified instruction
- Providing coaching and feedback

Domain 3: Verbal, Emotional, and Awareness Skills

- Verbal boundary-setting
- Situational awareness
- Intuition
- Red flags and abusive behavior in relationships
- Assertiveness
- Emotional regulation

Domain 4: Classroom Management and Trauma Awareness

- Recognize trauma responses
- Group facilitation
- Grounding techniques
- Group and individual check ins
- Cultural awareness

Domain 5: Curriculum and Preparedness

- Basic structure of an ESD class
- Class preparation
- Teaching different learning styles
- Welcoming students
- Activities to support skill development
- Collaboration with co-instructors
- Adaptability and flexibility with material

ESDA Exam Results & Grading

Scoring / Grading Process

To receive an overall passing grade, the candidate must receive a passing score on the entirety of the exam. The exam is graded by the computer software against pre-determined answers.

Notification of Results

Candidates can expect to be notified of exam results by email within 14 days of the final day of the exam session. The ESDA exam is pass/fail, and the results provided will indicate a pass or fail for the exam overall.

Re-Taking the Exam

Full Exam: If a candidate does not pass the exam, they will need to re-take the full exam. Prior to retaking, candidates are strongly encouraged to complete additional study, education, mentorship, or experience before attempting the exam a second time.

When re-taking the exam within one year, candidates may be offered a discounted rate for the second exam session. When re-taking the exam after one year, candidates will need to reapply and pay full price again (within their chosen price tier). Candidates who fail the exam twice consecutively will be required to demonstrate additional education, experience, mentorship, or similar investment in their practice.

Grievances & Appealing Exam Results

If an exam candidate does not pass, they may file a grievance with the ESD Credentialing Committee to appeal their exam results. All appeals must be filed within 90 days of the exam result notification. Appeals will be adjudicated by the Review Panel assigned by the ESD Credentialing Committee. The Review Process will be conducted in as fair and impartial a manner as possible.

Celebrating the ESDA Credential

Awarding Credentials

Upon gaining a passing score on the exam, candidates will be sent their digital ESDA Credential through Accredible, an online badging and credential certificate platform. With Accredible, candidates can download their credential certificate in PDF form to be shared online or printed. They can also download their credential badge, which can be placed on their website and social sites like LinkedIn to showcase their achievement.

The Association does not create printed certificates to send to ESD Associates.

Announcing Credentials

The Association will announce new Credentialed ESD Associates on their website and social media. ESDAs are asked to also share with their networks. The Association will provide templates for ESD Associates to notify their contacts of their achievement.

Citing the Credential

Those who pass the ESDA exam are awarded an ESD Associate Credential (“ESDA”). Once a candidate has earned an ESDA, they may place “ESDA” after their name to indicate their qualifications. Example: Hana Devi-Smith, ESDA.

ESDA Credential Renewal

At this time, the ESDA credential expires in three years and is not renewable. It is suggested that within those three years, an ESD Associate gains the experience and education suggested to apply for the ESD Professional exam.

Extensions of the ESDA credential will be granted on a case-by-case basis if the candidate is currently pursuing education or experience applicable to the ESDP exam. Contact the Credential Program Manager to enquire.

Frequently Asked Questions

How much does credentialing cost?

Please check the Credentialing section of the [Association website](#) for the most current prices for all the credentials currently offered. The Association is committed to making credentials as accessible as possible for practitioners in all income levels, with all economic situations, and in all areas of the world. Tiered pricing levels, scholarships, and Association member discounts are all available to help every candidate achieve their goals of being Credentialed. If there is a concern about pricing, please contact the Credentialing Program to discuss options.

How do I know which exam to take?

The ESD Associate Credential or “ESDA” for new ESD instructors who have recently completed an ESD training program or certification. It is recommended candidates have at least 30 hours of training or mentorship from an aligned ESD program or individual before applying. This exam is designed for those who are newly certified or have recently completed a training course, and who have little to no ESD teaching experience.

The ESD Professional Credential or “ESDP” for experienced ESD professionals who have at least two years and/or 100 hours of ESD experience and training before applying. Candidates should have a clear understanding of ESD principles and practices, have some sort of ESD education or worked with a mentor or peer, and have experience teaching ESD to groups. Another way to assess readiness is that a candidate should be able to discuss or define at least 90% of the ESDP [Core Competencies List](#) before applying.

The Association recognizes that many ESD practitioners may have taught themselves, learned from fellow professionals outside of formal certificate programs, or are the trailblazers who created and developed their own Empowerment Self Defense programs. Therefore, we do not have a blanket recommendation with regard to ESD education. However, for those who are newer to ESD, we may recommend some formal training or mentorship with ESD instructors or organizations, especially those with Accredited instructor training programs.

For martial artists or other ESD-aligned providers who are familiar with trauma-informed and empowerment-based teaching, select the option that best fits with your experience level.

How do I study for the exams?

Both the ESDA and ESDP exams are designed to test a candidate's ESD-based knowledge (factual or theoretical understanding), skills (practical proficiencies developed through training and experience), and abilities (the practice or the capacity to perform the tasks related to the work). Therefore, the way to prepare for the exam is to have ESD-specific education and experience.

Since candidates really want to study, the Association also suggests, but in no way requires, that candidates go through the Core Competencies List in the pertinent exam section and think about, talk through, or write a short description, definition, or experience related to each subject matter. If there are gaps in knowledge of terms, the candidate can reach out to fellow instructors to discuss. Candidates who know 90% or more of the Core Competencies are probably ready to take the exam. Candidates for the ESDP exam might benefit from going through both lists and the phrasing is different for some of the topic areas.

How do I pass the exam?

Both the ESDA and ESDP exams are pass/fail.

ESDA exam: To receive an overall passing grade, the candidate must receive a passing score on the entirety of the exam. The exam is graded by the computer software against pre-determined answers.

ESDP exam: To receive an overall passing grade, the candidate must receive a passing score on each of the five modules of the exam. A candidate must pass each module to pass the entire exam, but a perfect score is not required. The ESDP exam is graded in two ways: 1) multiple-choice questions are graded by the software, and 2) open response questions are graded by Credentialed ESD peers who are members of the Credential Pool. They will use an answer key, and all exams are graded by multiple people.

What happens if I fail the exam?

The Association and the ECC want every candidate to succeed—with their credential and in their ESD career. Therefore, a candidate may always re-take if they do not pass. ESDA exam takers may retake the whole exam; ESDP exam takers may redo one or two modules if they passed the other four or five. Otherwise they may be asked to retake the entire exam.

There is no limit to how many times a candidate can retake the exam, but the Association doesn't expect this to happen very often.

Is it true I'm going to be recorded while taking the exam online?

Who is watching the recordings? Integrity is a core value for the IAESDP as for the entire ESD industry. The Association and ECC have extensively researched exam-taking protocol to find the right solution for offering an exam to a global ESD community who reside in various time zones and have busy lives. To accurately test an ESD practitioner's *own* knowledge, skills, and abilities, it's vital the exam and processes be free from cheating or ethics violations.

Virtual exam sessions, therefore, are *proctored* by the test administration software. Proctoring is a cheating reduction system that records testing and flags issues through artificial intelligence. The test-taker's screen, audio, and video are recorded and screen captured, and the software also performs simple identity checks. **ONLY** the Association Exam Administrator will review concerning activity flagged with the AI proctoring software. No one at the software company is reviewing Association materials.

If any unethical behavior is identified, it will be reviewed by the ECC Review Panel.

In person exam sessions will be proctored through the observation of a trained individual who will be in the room while the testing is taking place.

Feel free to reach out if there are any questions about how the exam is administered and proctored.

Do you offer testing accommodations?

I have a disability or health issue, limited time, or another issue that may affect my test taking, can I ask for accommodations to more successfully take the exam?

Accessibility is a high priority for the Association. Accommodations can be made for exam takers who suffer from test anxiety, speak English as a second language, or need accommodations for health or disability, lack access to childcare, or for any other reason.

Please indicate on the exam Application the accommodation you need. If there isn't a procedure in place, the Association will work with the applicant to find a solution.

Does the Credentialing Exam compete or interfere with existing ESD Certificate Programs?

Can I still take the exam if I have a certification through one or more organizations like NWMAF, ESD Global, IMPACT, ASSERT, or others?

An ESD credential from the Association in no way interferes or competes with existing programs. In fact, the Association wants to drive more participants to the many existing ESD certificate programs to help expand the reach of ESD and make ESD the self-defense industry standard around the world. **Gaining a credential only adds to the qualifications of an ESD instructor or trainer.**

Part of the mission of the IAESDP and the Credentialing Program is to bring attention, more clients, and more financial success to ESD practitioners. The Association recommends that credential candidates for either exam *first* train and earn a certificate from ESD instructor-trainers and organizations prior to taking the a credential exam.

ESD certificate programs (such as NWMAF, ESD Global, ESD organizations worldwide, IMPACT chapters worldwide, ASSERT, No Means No Worldwide, and the other organizations and individuals training people how to teach ESD) are to the Association credentialing program what law schools are to the bar exam. One must **FIRST** go to law school, **THEN** they take the bar exam. Being trained in ESD first prepares individuals for teaching ESD, and training provides the essential knowledge, skills, and abilities to be successful instructors in the field. It is not an either-or equation.

The Association strives to create a higher demand for certificate and training programs through the Credentialing program. A credential does not interfere or compete with certificate and training programs because a credential tests what a candidate knows at the time of their exam. A credential is not an education program. It is a test of skills, knowledge, and abilities.

Everyone benefits if everyone in the field works together to broaden the reach of ESD to the millions of people throughout the world who need it.

Why should I bother to get an ESD credential?

Through Credentialing and other programs, the Association shows the world the value of ESD and makes it more broadly sought as a legitimate and effective way to combat and reduce violence. The Association strives to promote a common, well-recognized, global standard of what constitutes professionalism and competence for ESD instructors and

other ESD Professionals. Gaining a credential signals that an ESD practitioner behaves in accordance with globally recognized principles of ESD, and they demonstrate professional competence, a commitment to social change and violence prevention, and high standards of ethical practice.

Credentials provide the ESD industry (including instructors, trainers, and certificate programs) with an objective, standardized measure of competency. Policymakers, ESD clients, and institutions (such as schools, universities, NGOs, governments, and corporations) will see that an ESD instructor has been tested by an independent body. They don't need to sort out what qualities, experience, or training indicate competence in ESD; they can simply look to a universal credential.

In addition, the existence of the Association, the Credentialing program, Accreditation Program, and Code of Ethics helps institutions justify sponsoring ESD courses and helps policymakers propose violence-prevention programs. Credentialing protects the reputations of ESD instructors and organizations by issuing credentials only to those who understand and practice the principles and ethics of ESD.

The ESD Credentials offered by the Association are trustworthy because the Association is an independent industry organization. This means the Association does not offer ESD instructor certifications and has no stake in the outcome of any one credential exam. The IAESDP and the independent ESD Credentialing Committee adhere to the strict guidelines set by the National Committee for Credentialing Agencies, the Institute for Credentialing Excellence, and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). The IAESDP continuously partners with industry leaders, new instructors, international consultants in related fields, and the general public to better programs and help the ESD industry as a whole.

Ultimately, earning a credential will help an ESD instructor find more work, gain recognition, and achieve more success in their ESD career than they would without the credential.

An Invitation to Participate

The Association has ongoing opportunities available for those wishing to participate in the continuing development, evaluation, and growth of the Credentialing and Accreditation Programs.

ESD Credentialing Committee

The ESD Credentialing Committee (“ECC”) is an independent body made up of volunteers from the international ESD community, professionals in aligned industries, and members of the public. The ECC is instrumental in the development of the Credentialing Program, including the exam, Accreditation Program, and continuing education. The ECC maintains strong links of communication between the Association, Credentialed Professionals, and the ESD community.

The Advisory Council positions are volunteer and require a commitment of approximately 15 hours per month. The ECC has designated subcommittees for Credential Development and Accreditation. Please contact the Credential Program Manager if you are interested in joining a the committee.

Credentialing Pool

Members of the Association’s Credentialing Pool assist with the grading of exams, and they may be asked to join a subcommittee to develop further credentials, evaluate Accreditation applications, or similar tasks. Members of the Credentialing Pool volunteer to help with these tasks as needed and as their availability allows.

To be eligible to join the Credentialing Pool, an individual must have earned an ESD Professional credential. The Credentialing Program will reach out to credentialed professionals periodically to gauge their availability and interest in grading exams or assisting with other projects.

Acknowledgements

Thank you for participating in the IAESDP Credentialing Program. The Association believes ESD credentials will help ESD instructors build their client base and enjoy great success in their ESD practices. As the Credentialing Program grows, so too will the reach of ESD worldwide.

The Association wishes to thank Sheila Watson who worked tirelessly for two years to create the ESD Professional Credential exam and Credentialing Program. Watson educated herself about credentialing rules, practices, and procedures, consulted with a psychometrician, and consulted with ESD experts from all over the world through her work with the original Credentialing Advisory Council and the group of exam testers who became the first members of the Credentialing Pool. Watson did all this according to the highest ethical standards while conducting herself with exemplary decorum and integrity. This program would not exist without Watson.

The Association also wishes to thank past and present members of the Association's Board of Directors and ECC for championing the Credentialing Program and the ESDP exam.

The success of the Credentialing Program could not be possible without the work of the founding Credentialing Advisory Council and the numerous volunteers from around the globe who participated in the development, review, and testing of the exam and Core Competencies.

The Association would also like to thank consulting psychometrician Amanda Dainis with Dainis & Company, Inc.

Finally, the Association would like to thank Yehudit Zicklin-Sidikman for her vision, her perseverance, and her incredible generosity. Without her, none of this would be possible. Her work to further the ESD mission to prevent violence is unparalleled. We talk about saving the world; Zicklin-Sidikman makes it happen.



Our Member Services



ESDP Credentials

International ESD Standards Credentials give your clients peace of mind, knowing that you are a member of a highly skilled industry.



International Directory

ESD Instructors, Certificate Programs, and Events from around the world, all in one easy to navigate, lead-generating online listing.



The Idea Bridge

A continuing Education & Community Platform for ESD Professionals that functions like SkillShare but focuses on the training that matters most to you.



WebESD

Low-cost website and email hosting services for ESD Professionals, starting as low as \$10/ month.



Business Toolkits

From legal templates to easy-to-follow How-Tos guide you through some of the most asked questions as you start your ESD Career.



Liability Insurance

Affordable liability insurance for the ESD Professional is now available with your very own, dedicated Insurance Consultant.

Become a Member Today

We welcome everyone working in the ESD profession, whether you are an instructor, instructor-trainer, business owner, or volunteer. If you are working in the violence-prevention arena and believe in the principles of ESD, the IAESDP is your home!