



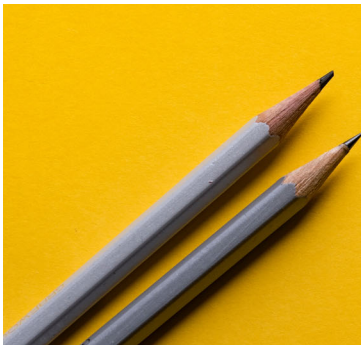
AAO Voluntary Certification Program Handbook



American
Association of
Orthodontists®

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See [aaoinfo.org/education](https://www1.aaoinfo.org/education) for more information
<https://www1.aaoinfo.org/education/orthodontic-staff-education-aao-voluntary-certification-program/>

Group or individual training option:
<https://www.trapezio.com/academy-courses/soa-prep-course/>

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF ORTHODONTISTS VOLUNTARY CERTIFICATION PROGRAM FOR ORTHODONTIC ASSISTANTS – The Hallmark of Excellence

Background:

The American Association of Orthodontists (AAO) is the foremost professional association in the specialty of orthodontics. As a specialized agency, AAO Services, Inc. grants the AAO Voluntary Certification Program® for orthodontic clinical assistants who demonstrate a high level of knowledge and proficiency. Voluntary certification is a process of non-governmental review of work experience, leadership, professionalism, education and knowledge within the orthodontic assisting profession. Individuals who earn certification confirm their commitment to quality and continuous improvement through a rigorous and comprehensive review. This is the hallmark of excellence in orthodontic clinical assisting.

Benefits of Voluntary Certification:

- Advances the art and science of the practicing orthodontic clinical assistant
- Maximizes professionalism within the orthodontic assisting specialty
- Increases the value of orthodontic assistants to employer doctors
- Raises the standard of orthodontic clinical assisting practice and ethics
- Recognizes a threshold of knowledge and proficiency within orthodontic assisting

ELIGIBILITY AND APPLICANT INFORMATION

Eligibility

Eligibility to apply is based on satisfying the established core requirements and accumulating an additional 40 qualifying points as listed below. The application is available for download on the www.aaoinfo.org Web site.

I. Eligibility Core Requirements

1. Passage of the AAO Voluntary Certification Program® exam (***Before paying for the test, determine if you satisfy II. Eligibility – Additional Requirements.***)
2. Current CPR certification

II. Eligibility - Additional Requirements

Once the two (2) core requirements listed above are met, the applicant will need to obtain a minimum of an additional 40 points **to qualify and apply for certification**. Candidates **may fulfill any combination of points** to equal the minimum requirement.

II. Additional Requirements	Points
1. Orthodontic assisting experience	40
2. Education – Only successful completion of a dental assisting or Orthodontic assisting training program that leads to a certificate or a diploma are acceptable	40
3. State proficiency testing , e.g., x-ray, coronal polishing	15
4. Professional contribution to the field	15
5. Membership in professional organizations	10

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Before submitting your application, total your points to determine if you meet or satisfy the 40 points. Do not submit an application with less than 40 points or you will forfeit your application submission fee.

Eligibility – Documentation

The Core Eligibility Requirements and “Additional Requirement” options you have chosen must be verified by the following documentation.

1. **Passage of the AAO Voluntary Certification Program® Online Examination** - Submit the exam score report for submission with the application.
2. **CPR Certification** – The applicant is required to submit a photocopy of their current CPR card which is dated and signed by the instructor with the applicant’s name or signature on the card. An exemption will be allowed if the applicant submits a letter from a physician verifying physical limitation preventing CPR certification.
3. **Experience in Orthodontic Assisting** – The applicant is required to submit a completed AAO member Orthodontic Employer Work Experience form (available online- duplicate form as needed) signed by the AAO member employer. Verification of a minimum of 2250 hours of employment within a four year period of time is required.
4. **Education (Beyond High School)** – The applicant is required to submit a certificate of completion, diploma or school transcript from a dental assisting or orthodontic assistant training program. The school should be either accredited by a Regional Accrediting Commission, be State Post-Secondary Education approved/certified, or be a program endorsed by the American Association of Orthodontists.
5. **State Proficiency Testing** – The applicant is required to submit a photocopy of their proficiency certificate or State permit.
6. **Professional Contribution to the Field**
 - Published articles in the *Orthodontic Staff News*, constituent or component newsletters, etc. – 2 Points
 - List presentations made at the AAO Annual Session, constituent or component meetings – 6 Points
 - List presentations (list location and dates) made to schools, civic organizations, etc. – 2 Points
 - List presentations (list location and dates) such as lunch and learns given to orthodontic or general dentists’ staff – 1 Point
7. **Membership in Professional Organizations** – The applicant is required to submit a photocopy of their current professionally related membership. The AAO Orthodontic Staff Club is also accepted.

(Employer designated awards do not qualify for points on the application.)

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Voluntary Certification Exam

To take the AAO Voluntary Certification Program® online exam and for additional exam information, go to www.aaoinfo.org.

AAO Voluntary Certification Program® Exam Content

The exam consists of a 250 multiple-choice item exam. You will have three hours to complete the exam.

Approximate Percentages of Questions in Content Areas

Orthodontic Sciences – 20%

- Oral and Dental Anatomy and Terminology
- Orthodontic Treatment
- Patient Education
- Infection Control

Orthodontic Clinical Procedures – 60%

- Orthodontic Appliances
- Orthodontic Instruments
- Appliance Removal
- Intraoral and Extraoral Auxiliaries
- Appliance Fabrication/Removal/Retention
- Diagnostic Records
- Dental Radiology

General Assisting Procedures – 20%

- Patient Positioning
- Oral Hygiene and Appliance Care
- Charting
- Patient and Parent Communication

Test Preparation

To prepare for the certification test, candidates are referred to the AAO endorsed Academy of Orthodontic Assisting /Trapezio.

What to know about:

Archwires

- Metallurgic components
- Properties and uses
- Termination
- Basic wire bending
- Purposes of each and priorities

Auxiliaries

- What they do
- How they are used
- When to use them

Clinically

- Brackets
- Bands
- X-ray safety
- Bonding
- De-bonding
- Patient instructions
- Secondary appliances

Diagnostic Records

- Standard records and their purposes
- X-rays techniques and safety

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- Impressions and bite registrations
- Pouring, separating, trimming models
- Clinical photography

Elastics

- How are they made
- How they are named/designated
- When to use each type
- Patient instructions
- How to evaluate cooperation

General Concepts

- Dental specialties
- Biology of tooth movement
- Roles in the orthodontic office
- Types of orthodontic treatment
- Phases of orthodontic treatment
- Directions of orthodontic tooth movement

Headgears

- When to use and which kind to use
- Cervical, Hi-pull, Reverse, etc.
- Fitting headgears
- Headgear instructions
- How to adjust
- How to evaluate cooperation

Oral and Dental Anatomy

- Names of jaw bones
- Peri-oral anatomy
- Muscles used in chewing
- Temporomandular joint anatomy
- Intra-oral soft tissues
- Tooth anatomy
- Tooth development
- Tooth numbering
- Tooth surfaces
- Tooth directions

Exam Scores and Results

A minimum exam score of 75% is required to pass the exam. Your score is displayed moments after completing your test. A score report may be printed after completion of the online examination. Results will not be provided by telephone. Print the exam score report for submission with the application.

- Malocclusions

Radiation and X-ray Safety

- Properties of x-rays
- How x-rays are produced
- Shielding and dosage
- Biologic changes from x-rays
- The “ALARA” principle

Removal and Retention

- Finishing procedures
- Removal of braces
- What is relapse
- Types of retainers
- How retainers are made
- Adjusting retainers
- Retainer instruction

Secondary Appliances

- Common appliances
- Purposes
- Fixed vs. removable
- Passive vs. fixed
- Basic fabrication

Sterilization and Infection Control

- Common infectious diseases
- Disinfection vs. sterilization
- Types of methods of sterilization
- Process of sterilization
- Personal protective equipment
- Hand hygiene
- Regulations

Terminating Wires

- Know the different kinds
- Know why each is done
- Know who to do each one

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Re-test Policy

Applicants who fail the exam may re-take the test one time at no additional fee. It is recommended to wait a period of 48 hours or longer to re-take the exam.

Candidates with Disabilities

In compliance with the American with Disabilities Act (ADA), the AAO will provide reasonable accommodations for persons with diagnosed disabilities. If you believe that you require such accommodations, please contact the [AAO Education Department](#) to receive a special accommodations form. Return the completed form along with documentation of your disability related needs from a qualified health provider.

The exam is administered only in the English language. Special accommodations will not be approved for candidates who request accommodations because English is a second language.

Application Policies and Procedures

To ensure that your application is accepted for review, please adhere to the following guidelines when submitting your application. Applications will be considered without regard to race, color, religion, creed, national origin, sex, age, sexual orientation, disability or any other legally protected characteristic.

PLEASE NOTE: *Once all requirements are met, you may submit your application.*

1. Submit the completed application form, fee payment and supporting documentation to the AAO Voluntary Certification Program® office.
2. Applications must be filled in completely and legibly, or they will be returned without evaluation. Applicants are responsible for providing a viable email address for communication purposes.
3. Supporting documentation must be enclosed with the original application, including documentation of formal education such as transcripts or diplomas, proof of professional organization memberships and published articles claimed in the application. All transcripts, diplomas or certificates of completion must be submitted with the application form in English. If these documents are in a language other than English, a translation agency must translate these documents in to English. The candidate is responsible for having the translated documents notarized. Documentation may be mailed or electronically submitted to the AAO Voluntary Certification Program® office.
4. Correspondence will be handled via email. If you have not heard from the AAO Voluntary Certification Program® office on your application submission or resubmission within 14 days, it is your responsibility to contact the AAO Voluntary Certification Program® office.

Background Information Application Questions

1. **Felony convictions within the last five years** – If in the last five years, the applicant has been convicted of, or pled guilty or not contest to a felony or any crime punishable by confinement in a state or federal prison for any length of time further documentation will be required. (It is not required to report misdemeanor convictions. If you are not certain, answer “yes.”) Documentation may include a true copy of every police report, judgment of conviction,

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sentencing order and termination of probation order, if applicable; documents should show the offense underlying each conviction, date of conviction, penalties imposed by the court, and evidence that all of the requirements imposed by the court were completed.

2. **Disciplined by a regulatory board, credentialing agency, or an educational institution** - If the candidate has lost the authorization to practice dental assisting or any profession in a jurisdiction that does or does not require registration, licensure or other recognized credential or has been dismissed by an educational institution for an ethical violation than the candidate is required to submit further documentation. Documentation may include a true copy of an official statement from the disciplinary agency or educational institution describing the offense and penalties imposed. If applicable, provide evidence of completion or expiration of all penalties.
3. **Declared mentally incompetent by a court of law** - For a court declaration of mental incompetence, documentation may include true copies of all relevant court orders and related documents.

Credential

Upon successful completion of the eligibility process, applicants will receive a certificate by mail, suitable for framing and will be authorized to begin to use the credential of Specialized Orthodontic Assistant®, (SOA). An SOA lapel pin and wallet card will also be included with the certificate.

Application Submission Fee and Testing Fee

- The application submission fee entitles the applicant to a review of their application by the AAO Voluntary Certification Program® staff to determine eligibility.
- The Application Submission Fee is non-refundable.
- The testing fee supports on-going research and development expense.

Application Tips

- Complete the application in full
- Sign the application
- Enclose all required documentation
- Enclose the application payment

Application Appeals Process

An applicant who has been notified of ineligibility due to insufficient points may (within fourteen calendar days of the notice) appeal the results in writing to the AAO Voluntary Certification Program® Review Committee. A letter of appeal should be addressed to the Chair of the AAO Voluntary Certification Program® Review Committee, American Association of Orthodontists, 401 N. Lindbergh Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63141. Appeals can also be accepted via email by contacting: [AAO Education Department](#). The appeal process is the applicant's opportunity to clarify or provide further explanation of any qualifying items that were discounted by the reviewers. It is also an opportunity for the applicant to submit any documents that were previously omitted or to submit new items of consideration for additional points.

There is no appeal allowed for applicants who are ineligible because information was misrepresented.

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Candidate Confidentiality

The identity and information concerning all applicants and approved candidates is confidential. Information concerning an applicant’s status is communicated directly to the individual via email. Application review results are not provided over the phone or to any third party.

Fees

Certification Fees	
Application Submission Fee (non-refundable)	\$25.00 USD
Exam Registration Fee (non-refundable)	\$75.00USD
Renewal Fee (every three years)	\$50.00 USD

Renewal Procedure

Your certification is valid for 3 years. After that period, **renewal is required every three years to maintain the use of the credential.** The renewal period begins exactly 36 months from the month and year that you successfully completed all requirements for initial certification.

A renewal notice will be sent prior to the expiration date. If you do not renew your certification, your certification will expire and you may not use AAO Voluntary Certification Program® credentials.

The renewal fee of \$50.00 USD is due on or before the expiration date. Your new wallet card will be mailed approximately 1 to 2 weeks after receipt of your renewal form and required documentation.

The renewal requirements are:

1. Submit 24 Continuing Education credits **or** 20 Continuing Education credits plus 4 Continuing Education points
2. Submit proof of current CPR certification (CPR certification qualifies as four (4) hours of CE credit.)
3. Complete the Continuing Education form plus submit the required documentation

Continuing Education Credits

Continuing education (CE) credit may be earned in the following manner:

1. Required CPR Certification qualifies as four (4) hours of CE credit. If the applicant holds a two year CPR card, the CE credits only apply for the year in which the certification was earned. No CE credits will be given for the second year of certification. A photocopy of the front and back of the card dated and signed with the instructor’s name with the applicants name or signature is required.
2. Continuing education courses accompanied by a photocopy of the CE credit certificate. A certificate documenting proof of attendance is required. Continuing education credits **are subject to audit.** Submitting a range of dates without specific topics will not be accepted.
3. Continuing education courses must relate to the practice of orthodontic assisting or dental assisting. Courses taken must be approved, e.g., ADA CERP, DANB, National Dental Organization or State Dental Board or be part of an AAO and affiliated organization’s official program.

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Continuing Education Points

Continuing education points may be earned in the following manner:

Continuing Education Points	Points
1. Submit articles published in the <i>Orthodontic Staff News</i> , constituent or component newsletters, etc. that have gone through an editorial review	2
2. Presentations made at the AAO Annual Session, constituent or component meetings	6
3. Presentations made to schools, civic organizations, etc.	2
4. List presentations such as lunch and learns given to the orthodontic or general dentists' staff verified by the employer	1

Revocation

A certificate holder may be subject to disciplinary action leading to revocation of AAO Voluntary Certification Program® certification if the AAO Voluntary Certification Program® Steering Committee determines the following:

- Conviction of or pleading no contest to a felony
- Documented evidence of professional misconduct, unethical conduct, or incompetence as it relates to the practice of orthodontic assisting
- Falsification of certification renewal procedures
- Falsification of eligibility requirements



Sample Test Questions

Dental Orthodontic Sciences

- 1) The pulp contains all of the following except:
 - a) Muscles
 - b) Nerves
 - c) Blood Vessels
 - d) It contains all of these

- 2) The fold in the center of the upper lip is called the:
 - a) Philtrum
 - b) Commisure
 - c) Vermillion border
 - d) Vestible

- 3) Which of the following means "towards the midline"?
 - a) Occlusal
 - b) Anterior
 - c) Lingual
 - d) Interproximal
 - e) Mesial
 - f) Distal

- 4) It takes about _____ to create new bone.
 - a) One week
 - b) Two weeks
 - c) Five months
 - d) Five Weeks

- 5) An underbite is a typical characteristic of a _____ malocclusion.
 - a) Class I
 - b) Class II
 - c) Class III
 - d) Class IV

- 6) The main purpose of the ultrasonic machine is to:
 - a) Sterilize
 - b) Polish the enamel
 - c) Disinfect
 - d) Remove excessive debris



7) Which of the following symbols represents the maxillary right 1st bicuspid and mandibular left 3rd molar?

a) $\frac{1}{3}$

b) $\frac{D}{6}$

c) $\frac{4}{8}$

d) $\frac{4}{8}$

e) $\frac{1}{3}$

8) Which of the following symbols represents both permanent maxillary lateral incisors, the permanent mandibular right canine, and the mandibular left 2nd bicuspid?

a) $\frac{2}{3} \frac{2}{5}$

b) $\frac{2}{5} \frac{2}{3}$

c) $\frac{1}{3} \frac{1}{5}$

d) $\frac{1}{3} \frac{1}{E}$

e) $\frac{1}{5} \frac{1}{3}$

Orthodontic Clinical Procedures:

9) Continuous steel ties are used to:

- a) Keep loose brackets in place
- b) Close spaces
- c) Keep teeth from moving apart
- d) Keep teeth at the same level

10) Which of the following statements about bands is CORRECT?

- a) The wire mesh pad on the inside helps to hold them tighter to the tooth.
- b) They are preferred for use on all teeth over bonded brackets.
- c) They come in 3 sizes that must be fitted to teeth (small, medium, large).
- d) None of the available answers are correct

11) In which of the following appliances are pistons used to position the mandible?

- a) Jasper Jumper
- b) Quad Helix
- c) Herbst
- d) All of these answers are correct

12) Which of the following is NOT a Fixed/Active Appliance?

- a) Schwartz Appliance
- b) Quad Helix
- c) Distal Jet
- d) Rapid Maxillary Expander

13) The appearance of the teeth after a successful etch should be:

- a) Smooth
- b) Shiny
- c) Gray
- d) Frosty-white

14) A collimator minimizes patient exposure by:

- a) Strengthening the x-ray so it acts over a shorter period of time
- b) Covering parts of the body that do not need to be exposed
- c) Narrowing the x-ray beam down
- d) None of the available answers

General Assisting Procedures:

- 15) Dental plaque is the name given to:
- a) The growth and accumulation of bacteria on the teeth
 - b) Swelling of the gingival tissue close to teeth that have not been cleaned well
 - c) The acids produced by bacteria that cause dental disease
 - d) A film of unknown composition which forms on the teeth
- 16) Fluoride is important for orthodontic patients because:
- a) It helps prevent decalcification
 - b) It keeps the braces shiny
 - c) It freshens the breath
 - d) It tastes good
- 17) Poking ligature wires:
- a) Can be caused by pulling it out when flossing
 - b) Should be pushed back in to gain relief
 - c) Can be covered with wax for temporary relief
 - d) All of these answers are correct
- 18) The proper way to correct a mistake on a chart entry includes:
- a) White out the part of the entry that is incorrect
 - b) Single line strike out the part of the entry that is incorrect
 - c) Scratch out the part of entry that is incorrect
- 19) Finger rests are used for all of the following except:
- a) To retract the cheeks
 - b) To provide a fulcrum or pivot for the hand
 - c) To keep from slipping and hurting the patient
 - d) To keep the hand steady
- 20) Properly brushing with orthodontic appliances:
- a) Requires the use of a hard bristle brush to be able to clean the brackets well
 - b) Should be done at least once every day
 - c) Requires brush strokes that go up and down
 - d) Should focus especially well on the gumline

Correct Answers

1) a 2) a 3) e 4) d 5) c 6) d 7) d 8) a 9) c 10) d 11) c 12) a 13) d 14) c 15) a 16) a 17) d
18) b 19) a 20) d