

Starting Strength

Starting Strength Coach: From Certificate to Certification

by

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This past weekend at the second annual Starting Strength Coaches Association Conference, a momentous announcement was made regarding the future of the Starting Strength Coach credential.

In January 2014, the SSC credential will begin the process of going from certificate to certification. Until now, the certificate testified that on the weekend the certificate holder attended the Starting Strength Seminar, he displayed competence in lifting and coaching according to the Starting Strength model, and understood the mechanics, physiology, and programming material necessary to coach to our standard. While already a difficult-to-obtain, industry-leading standard, the credential did not testify to the ongoing competence of the certificate holder.

The SSC credential will now become a certification. Retaining it will require triennial completion of a rigorous series of Maintenance of Certification (MOC) requirements that ensure all SSCs stay current on our model and methods, as well as relevant research and ideas in the literature. It also ensures that everyone holding the credential is actively coaching, so that no SSC's skills erode through lack of use.

This decision is an important step in the process of establishing and maintaining the highest standards of evaluation and practice in the fitness industry, which will be further buttressed by our pending accreditation by ANSI.

The Starting Strength Coach certificate has, for the past 3+ years, already served as the only one of its kind in the industry. We have been the only organization that teaches a thoroughly analyzed model for performing and coaching the basic barbell lifts, and certifies coaches as competent in the teaching and coaching of that model.

We will continue to do so, with the added value provided by the assurance that everyone holding the SSC credential is current in their skills and correct understanding and application of the Starting Strength model and methods.

Obtaining the SSC certificate has already been more difficult than any other fitness industry credential, with an average passing rate of 10-20% since 2011. We will now ensure that the same rigorous

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standard of quality is applied not only to the acquisition of the credential, but to its maintenance as well.

The full text of the MOC requirements follows. We trust that the value and importance we place on the quality and integrity of our Starting Strength Coach Certification is both apparent and borne out by the practices of every person who bears the credential. The Starting Strength Coach (SSC) certification process began in 2010. Since that time, the standards for certification have become more rigorous, the teaching progressions have been refined, the overhead press has undergone a major revision in technique and teaching, and the Starting Strength Coaches Association (SSCA) was inaugurated at the first Starting Strength Coaches Association Conference (SSCAC) in October 2012. The SS model continues to grow in popularity, in parallel with the increasing recognition of the benefits of barbell training for health and performance in all populations. The SSC must be positioned to play an important part in a growing and rapidly changing industry.

The time has come to establish a process for Maintenance of Certification (MOC) which will insure that certified SSCs are providing a safe, valuable, high-quality service to their clients in a manner that comports with the SS model.

The foundations of the MOC process are the principles of Community, Content and Contribution. The SSCA must be a **Community** of strength and conditioning professionals, with a solid command of the core **Content** and techniques of the SS model as well as the fundamentals of exercise physiology, who **Contribute** essential coaching and educational services to the public, their clients, and each other.

The SSC MOC model enshrines these principles by requiring SSCs to satisfy four requirements over a three-year cycle, as below.

The Four Requirements for SSC Maintenance of Certification

1. **Regular seminar audits** (Content);
2. **Regular attendance at the SSCAC** (Community, Content);
3. **Completion of required readings** (Content); and
4. **Documentation of coaching practice** (Contribution).

Looked at another way:

Community: Attendance at the SSCAC at least once every three years.

Content: Audit of seminar once every three years; SSCAC Attendance, annual reading requirement.

Contribution: Documentation of coaching practice (DCP) and the production of teaching materials for the SS website.

This MOC model, which is described in detail below, was created with the invaluable input and support of the SS Coaching Staff, and will take full effect on January 1, 2014.

Maintenance of Certification Components

1. AUDIT OF SEMINAR (Content): SSCs will complete an audit of the SS Seminar *once every three years*. Audit slots will be available for all seminars, which are taught across the country. The seminar tuition will not apply. To satisfy this requirement, the coach must attend the *entire* seminar. The coach will attend all lectures and will observe (but not participate in) all platform sessions. The written exam will not be required. Attendance at the seminar will earn CEUs for the auditing SSC.

2. ANNUAL READINGS (Content and Contribution). The SSCA Science Committee will annually select 10-15 readings that coaches will be expected to read. Readings will include original investigations of high quality and/or importance, review articles, important technical articles, selected abstracts, and appropriate editorials and other articles. Materials will be selected based on their relevance, they will not necessarily have to be recent, and both the volume and difficulty of the required readings will be maintained at a level appropriate for busy strength and conditioning professionals. Original basic science investigations (eg, laboratory and animal investigations) will *not* be used unless they are of singular importance. The selected readings will be announced and presented at the annual SSCAC by the Chair of the Science Committee, beginning in October 2013.

The reading requirement may be satisfied in three ways.

- a. **Readings Test.** Satisfactory performance on an online test (necessarily open-book) will complete this requirement for the year.
- b. **SSCAC Attendance.** Attendance at the annual presentation of the readings at the SSCAC will also satisfy the requirement. No test will be required in this instance.
- c. **Articles for the SS Website.** The coach may also fulfill this requirement by publishing an article on the SS site. (Please note that the coach may not claim two annual reading completions simply by attending the SSCAC *and* publishing an article in the same calendar year; see below.)

Notwithstanding multiple routes to completion of the reading requirement, the coach can only complete one reading requirement per year, and must take *at least one required reading test in the 3-year MOC interval*. In other words, even if the coach attends three consecutive SSCACs, he or she must still take at least one test on the required readings during the 3-year cycle. No coach need take more than two tests during the 3-year cycle, since SSCAC attendance is required at least once during this interval and will allow the coach to meet the reading requirement for that year (provided the coach attends the readings presentation).

Readings and the attendant tests will be maintained in an online library accessible to all certified SSCs, and the coach may take a test for any year that he or she has not already completed. The online platform for the reading tests will be up and running by January 2014, and the first readings will be presented at the SSCAC in October 2013.

3. ATTENDANCE AT SSCA CONFERENCE (Community, Content and Contribution). Every SSC must attend the SSCAC *at least once every three years* to maintain certification. The SSCAC provides the SSC with opportunities for community-building, participation in guiding the growth and direction of our organization, continuing education, exposure to new coaching and training techniques and concepts, fulfillment of the DCP requirement (below) *for that year*, and fulfillment of the Required Reading requirement (above) *for that year*.

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4. DOCUMENTATION OF COACHING PRACTICE (Contribution). This is a critical component of the MOC process, in accordance with our goal of developing and growing a powerful model of coaching practice and a corps of outstanding coaches with the theoretical and practical expertise to help people get strong.

The SSCA offers four mechanisms for the satisfaction of this requirement.

a. **Documentation of coaching services.** This is the most straightforward and obvious route. Coaches who provide documentation of at least 150 client contact hours for the preceding year will meet the DCP requirement in full. The provision of coaching logs, schedules and the coaches' attestation of practice will be satisfactory, subject to audit by the Certification Committee.

b. **Production of platform videos or articles for the SS site.** This will be the most difficult and uncommon route, but represents an option for fulfillment of the DCP requirement for particularly industrious, knowledgeable and talented coaches. The quality and content of these productions will comport with the standards of the site and the SS model. Platform videos will be practical presentations, focused on the identification of problems and solutions in coaching practice, and will conform to a fixed format to be established by the SSCA. Production of a platform video accepted for presentation on the SS website will fulfill the annual DCP requirement in full.

Please note that an article published on the site may fulfill *either* the DCP requirement for that year *or* the reading requirement for that year, but not both.

c. **Attendance at the SSCAC.** Attendance at the SSCAC will fulfill the DCP requirement *for that year*.

d. **Competition.** SSCs who provide documentation of training for and participation in a local or national competition will fulfill the DCP requirement for the year in which the competition is held.

This MOC model will be administered by an SSC Certification Committee, which will be seated at the 2013 SSCAC to be held in Wichita Falls in October 2013. The Certification Committee will make refinements and revisions to the policy, as indicated. **The Certification Committee will also adjudicate special circumstances (such as Coaches who are military personnel on overseas deployment, disciplinary matters, etc) on a case-by-case basis, pending the adoption of specific policies for such contingencies.**

The MOC policy takes effect on January 2014. At that time, the clock starts for all currently certified SSCs, *regardless of their certification date*. All coaches must meet their annual DCP and reading requirements in 2014 and every year thereafter, and all currently certified coaches must meet their triennial Seminar Audit and SSCAC Attendance requirements by December 31, 2016. (See Appendix for examples.) Coaches certified after December 31, 2013 will see the clock begin on their annual requirements on January 1 of the calendar year following the year of their certification. For example, a coach certified in May of 2014 will see his clock start on January 1, 2015. Yes, we know all of this isn't completely "fair." Life's rough. Get a helmet.

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SUMMARY OF THE STARTING STRENGTH COACH MAINTENANCE OF CERTIFICATION MODEL			
SEMINAR AUDIT	SSCAC ATTENDANCE	READINGS	DOCUMENTATION OF PRACTICE
<p style="text-align: center;">Once every three years.</p> <p>Attendance at <i>entire</i> seminar is required.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Once every three years.</p> <p>Also meets requirement for both readings <i>and</i> DCP in the calendar year in which attended.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Once yearly.</p> <p>Three routes to fulfilment:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Online test. All SSCs must take at least one test every 3 years. 2. Publication of article on SS website.* 3. Attendance at Readings presentation at SSCAC. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Once yearly.</p> <p>Three routes to fulfillment:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Documentation of 150 hrs of client contact for the year. 2. Publication of article or platform video on SS website.* 3. Attendance at SSCAC.** 4. Competition documentation.
<p>* Publication of an article may count toward <i>either</i> the Readings Requirement <i>or</i> the DCP for a calendar year, <i>but not towards both</i>. Coaches must pass at least one Readings test during the three year MOC cycle.</p> <p>** DCP requirement can be met by SSCAC attendance only once during each 3-year cycle.</p> <p>*** The Certification Committee may determine that a failure to fulfill the annual requirements constitutes an abandonment of the credential.</p>			

In practice, this means that every SSC’s *annual* MOC clock (readings, DCP) starts on Jan 1, but every SSC’s *triennial* MOC clock (SSCA and SS Seminar attendance) starts ***according to the date of their last recert or initial certification***. The SSCA does not recertify as an entire group in the same year.

The SSC certification process changed radically in 2011, at which time the standards for becoming an SSC became much more stringent. ***Accordingly, all certificates issued prior to January 1, 2011, will expire on March 31, 2014.*** Coaches certified prior to 2010 must recertify by attending the seminar (at a discounted rate), passing the platform examination, and successfully completing the written test. SSCs from the 2010 class who are currently Staff Coaches or who are on the list of interns are exempted from this provision; they will enter the MOC cycle with all existing coaches and their certificates will expire in December 2016, as below.

Starting Strength Coach certifications will henceforth be issued with an expiration date. ***Certificates issued prior between January 1 2011 and December 31 of 2013 will be invalid after December 31, 2016. Certificates issued prior to January 2011 will be invalid after March 31, 2014.*** Coaches who do not satisfy the recertification or MOC requirements will be removed from the roster. ***Individuals without valid and current SSC certificates may not represent themselves as Starting Strength Coaches.***

Coaches who lose their certification for failure to meet MOC requirements *may* have recourse to a rigorous re-certification process, to be determined by the Certification Committee. No such

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process yet exists, and the SSCAC does not guarantee that any such process ever *will* exist. A word to the wise is sufficient. ***We're serious about this.*** If you want to be a Starting Strength Coach, you have to step up and maintain your certification. We've made it as simple as possible for you...but no simpler.

Online tests for the reading requirement and documentation of coaching practice must be submitted by December 1 of the calendar year to which they are to be applied. Platform videos and publications will be applied to the requirements for the calendar year in which they were submitted for publication.

Illustrative examples of application of the MOC model are to be found in the Appendix.

This model for Maintenance of Certification insures that SSCs will continue to grow and learn throughout their coaching careers. It insures the product they offer will be safe and beneficial for clients and compliant with the SS model. It insures the SSC certificate will accrue a reputation for rigor and serious professional commitment. It will also weed out the dickheads and *poseurs* who, by their very natures, will find the rigors of this process insurmountable.

This initial MOC policy is adopted by executive discretion and takes effect January 1, 2014, barring any revisions to this policy at the discretion of the SSCA Certification Committee. The final document will be duly published to all currently certified SSCs prior to January 1, 2014.

April 29, 2013

Revision 1: May, 2013

Revision 2: October, 2013

Wichita Falls, TX

Detroit, MI

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Appendix

EXAMPLE 1: Satisfactory MOC for SSCs certified 2011-2013.

YEAR	SEMINARAUDIT	SSCAC ATTENDANCE	READINGS	DOCUMENTTION OF PRACTICE
2014		Attended: Triennial requirement satisfied.	Annual requirement for 2014 satisfied by SSCAC attendance.	Annual requirement for 2014 satisfied by 2014 SSCAC attendance.
2015	Attended: Triennial requirement satisfied.		Annual requirement for 2015 satisfied by passing online test.	Annual requirement for 2015 satisfied by publication of platform video on SS website.
2016			Annual requirement for 2016 satisfied by article published on SS website.	Annual requirement for 2016 satisfied by documentation of 150 client contact hours for 2016.
<p>MOC requirements not met: Certification expires Dec 31, 2016, or on Dec 31 of any year in which annual requirements are not satisfied.</p> <p>MOC requirements met: Certification valid Jan 1, 2017 through Dec 31, 2019.</p> <p>Given the vagaries of primate ethology, this structure promises to produce an insane run on seminar audit spots and SSCAC registration in late 2016. Don't be dumb about this. Get your triennial requirements out of the way in year 1 or 2. Don't scramble for spots at the last minute.</p>				

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EXAMPLE 2: Satisfactory MOC for SSCs certified 2011-2013.

YEAR	SEMINAR AUDIT	SSCAC ATTENDANCE	READINGS	DOCUMENTATION OF PRACTICE
2014			Annual requirement for 2014 satisfied by passing online test.	Annual requirement satisfied by documentation of 150 client contact hours for 2014.
2015		Attended: Triennial requirement satisfied.	Annual requirement for 2015 satisfied by SSCAC Attendance	Annual requirement for 2015 satisfied by SSCAC Attendance.
2016	Attended: Triennial requirement satisfied.		Annual requirement for 2016 satisfied by passing online test.	Annual requirement for 2016 satisfied by documentation of 150 client contact hours in 2016.
<p>MOC requirements not met: Certification expires Dec 31, 2016, or on Dec 31 of any year in which annual requirements are not satisfied.</p> <p>MOC requirements met: Certification valid Jan 1, 2017 through Dec 31, 2019.</p> <p>Given the vagaries of primate ethology, this structure promises to produce an insane run on seminar audit spots and SSCAC registration in late 2016. Don't be dumb about this. Get your triennial requirements out of the way in year 1 or 2. Don't scramble for spots at the last minute.</p>				

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EXAMPLE 3: Satisfactory MOC for SSCs certified after 2013.

(Our example uses a coach certified in March of 2015; the clock starts for this coach in the calendar year following certification.)

YEAR	SEMINAR AUDIT	SSCAC ATTENDANCE	READINGS	DOCUMENTATION OF PRACTICE
2016		Attended: Triennial requirement satisfied.	Annual requirement for 2016 satisfied by SSCAC attendance	Annual requirement for 2016 satisfied by 2016 SSCAC attendance
2017	Attended: Triennial requirement satisfied.		Annual requirement for 2017 satisfied by passing online test.	Annual requirement for 2017 satisfied by publication of platform video on SS website.
2018			Annual requirement satisfied by article published on SS website.	Annual requirement for 2018 satisfied by documentation of 150 client contact hours in 2018.
<p>MOC requirements not met: Certification expires Dec 31, 2018, or on Dec 31 of any year in which annual requirements are not satisfied.</p> <p>MOC requirements met: Certification valid Jan 1 2019 through Dec 31, 2021.</p>				

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APPLICATION OF THE SSC MOC MODEL: SSCs RECERTIFY BY YEAR OF INITIAL CERTIFICATION			
Initial Certification	First Recertification Period	Second Recertification Period	Third Recertification Period
2011 – 2013 (The “Grandfathers”)	Jan 1, 2014 – Dec 31 2016	Jan 1 2017 – Dec 31 2019	Jan 1 2020 – Dec 31 2022
Anytime in 2014	Jan 1 2015 – Dec 31 2017	Jan 1 2018 – Dec 31 2020	Jan 1 2021 – Dec 31 2023
Anytime in 2015	Jan 1 2016 – Dec 31 2018	Jan 1 2019 – Dec 31 2021	Jan 1 2022 – Dec 31 2024
Anytime in 2016	Jan 1 2017- Dec 31 2019	Jan 1 2020 Dec 31 2022	Jan 1 2023 Dec 31 2025
<p>Note that the first recertification period begins in the calendar year after initial certification and may incorporate a significant grace interval. Certificates will bear dates of issue and expiration as indicated above.</p>			