

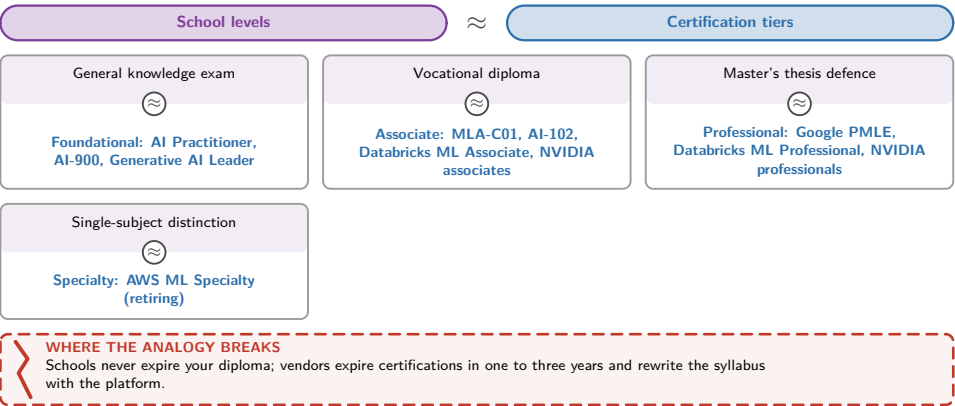


AI Certification Map and How to Choose

Certifications | Which AI certification for which role, levels, difficulty, prerequisites, validity and renewal, a decision tree; all exam facts as of 2026, verify on the official page

#Certification #CareerPlanning #AWS #Azure #GoogleCloud #Databricks

The landscape in one picture



Reading the certification tiers through school levels

Vendor	Certification (code)	Level	Main role	Validity
AWS	AWS Certified AI Practitioner (AIF-C01)	found.	PM, analyst, leader	3 years
AWS	AWS Certified Machine Learning Engineer - Associate (MLA-C01)	assoc.	ML engineer, MLOps	3 years
AWS	AWS Certified Generative AI Developer - Professional (new, verify status)	prof.	AI engineer	3 years
AWS	AWS Certified Machine Learning - Specialty (MLS-C01), retirement announced for 2026	spec.	ML engineer	until expiry
Microsoft	Azure AI Fundamentals (AI-900)	found.	anyone	no expiry
Microsoft	Azure AI Engineer Associate (AI-102)	assoc.	AI engineer	1 year, free renewal
Microsoft	Azure Data Scientist Associate (DP-100)	assoc.	data scientist	1 year, free renewal
Google Cloud	Generative AI Leader	found.	leader, PM	verify
Google Cloud	Professional Machine Learning Engineer	prof.	ML engineer	2 years
Databricks	Machine Learning Associate	assoc.	data scientist, ML engineer	2 years
Databricks	Machine Learning Professional	prof.	ML engineer, MLOps	2 years
Databricks	Generative AI Engineer Associate	assoc.	AI engineer	2 years
NVIDIA	Generative AI LLMs (NCA-GENL), Multi-modal (NCA-GENM)	assoc.	AI engineer, applied scientist	2 years
NVIDIA	AI Infrastructure and Operations (NCA-AIIO)	assoc.	platform engineer	2 years
NVIDIA	Professional tracks: AI infrastructure, operations, networking, LLMs	prof.	platform / AI engineer	2 years

Main AI certifications as of 2026 (verify codes, status and validity on each official page before booking)

Not in the table on purpose

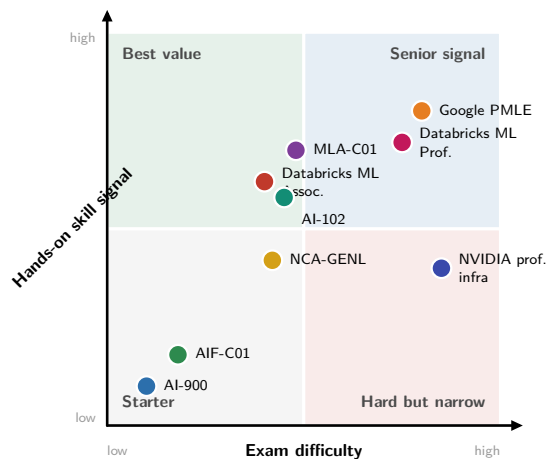
The TensorFlow Developer Certificate was discontinued by Google in 2024. Course completion certificates (Coursera, DeepLearning.AI, university MOOCs) are not proctored exams: list them as training, not certification. Security-side AI credentials belong to the cyber course.

Which certification for which role, how hard

Skill	ML eng.	Appl. sci.	AI eng.	MLOps	Research	PM/lead
FOUNDATIONAL						
AIF-C01 / AI-900 / GenAI Leader	●○○	○○○	●○○	○○○	○○○	●●●
CLOUD ML						
AWS MLA-C01	●●●	●○○	●○○	●●●	○○○	●○○
Azure AI-102	●○○	○○○	●●●	●○○	○○○	●○○
Google PMLE	●●●	●●○	●○○	●●●	○○○	●○○
DATA PLATFORM						
Databricks ML Associate	●●●	●●○	●○○	●●○	○○○	○○○
Databricks ML Professional	●●●	●○○	●○○	●●●	○○○	○○○
GPU STACK						
NVIDIA NCA-GENL	●○○	●●○	●●●	○○○	●○○	○○○
NVIDIA NCA-AIIO / infra prof.	●○○	○○○	○○○	●●●	○○○	○○○

● level 0 None · 1 Aware · 2 Working · 3 Proficient

Fit of each certification to six roles (0 none, 1 weak, 2 useful, 3 strong). Author's assessment from the exam guides' content



Author's placement: difficulty of the exam against how much it signals hands-on skill to an employer

💡 Order inside one vendor

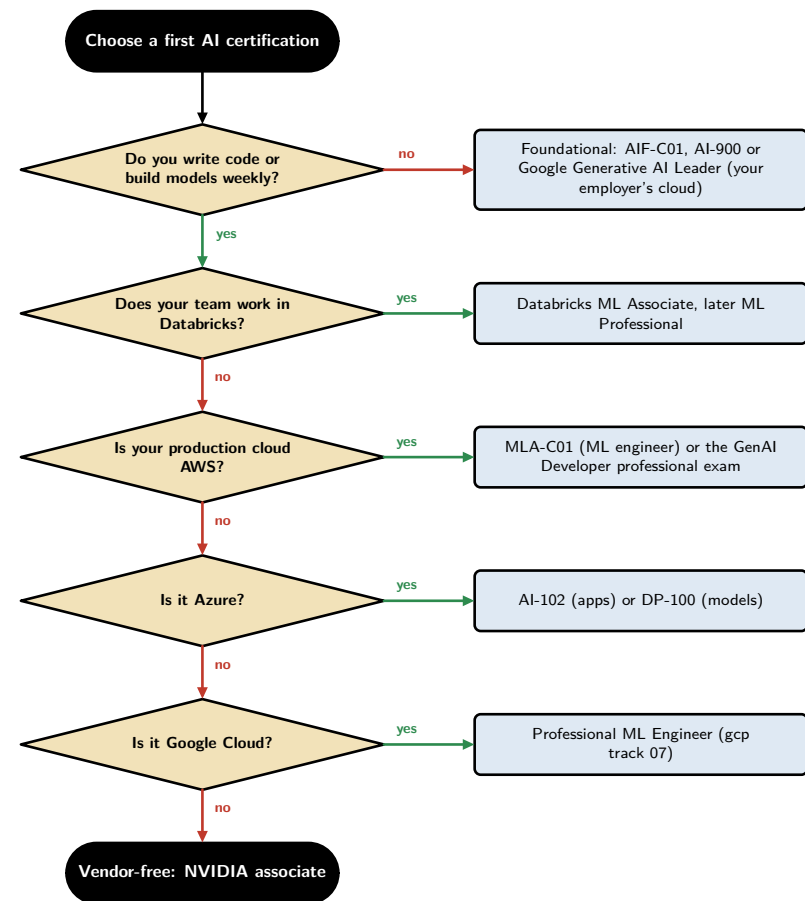
Stack credentials in one path: foundational only if you are new to the cloud, then associate, then professional after about a year of real use. On AWS, passing a higher exam in the same path also renews the lower ones (verify the current rule).

Exam	Recommended experience (vendor)	Prep hours	Main difficulty
AIF-C01, AI-900	some exposure to AI on the cloud	15-30	service names, responsible-AI vocabulary
MLA-C01	about 1 year with SageMaker AI	60-100	which SageMaker feature for which need
AI-102	Azure developer experience, Python or C#	50-90	many services, code-completion items
Databricks ML Associate	about 6 months on Databricks	40-70	MLflow and Spark ML APIs
Databricks ML Professional	1+ year of ML on Databricks	70-120	MLOps at scale, long scenarios
NCA-GENL	basic ML and LLM knowledge	30-60	breadth: transformers to NVIDIA tooling
Google PMLE	3+ years industry, 1+ on Google Cloud	80-150	service choice under constraints, long scenarios

Author's estimates of preparation time for someone meeting the vendor's experience recommendation; double it without hands-on use

📖 EXAM TIP

Vendor exams reward the vendor's answer, not the general best practice. When two options both work, the expected one is usually the **managed** service with the **least operational overhead** that meets every stated constraint (cost, latency, region, compliance).



Decision tree: your first AI certification (one answer per reader). Vendor-free end: NVIDIA NCA-GENL if you build with LLMs, NCA-AIIO if you run GPU platforms

🕒 Validity and renewal

	AWS	Recommended Microsoft	Google Cloud	Databricks	NVIDIA
Typical validity	3 years	1 year (fundamentals: none)	2 years (professional)	2 years	2 years
How to renew	retake current exam, or pass a higher exam in the path	free online renewal assessment on Learn, 6 months before expiry	retake the current exam in the renewal window	retake the current exam version	retake the current exam
Renewal cost	exam fee (50 % voucher after a pass, verify)	free	exam fee	exam fee	exam fee
Retake wait after a fail	14 days	24 hours first time, then longer	14 days, then longer	14 days	verify on the page

Renewal rules per vendor as of 2026 (verify on the vendor's certification policy page)

🚩 Myths and recap

YOU MAY HEAR

"A retired exam means my certificate is gone"

BUSTED

✅ ACTUALLY

It stays valid until its own expiry date

You cannot renew it by the same exam; plan the replacement exam instead.

YOU MAY HEAR

"NVIDIA certificates are only for hardware people"

BUSTED

✅ ACTUALLY

NCA-GENL is about LLMs and generative AI

The infrastructure and operations tracks are the hardware-side ones.

YOU MAY HEAR

"The professional exam is the best first step for seniors"

BUSTED

✅ ACTUALLY

Only if you already use that platform daily

Experienced engineers new to a cloud fail on service names, not on ML.

YOU MAY HEAR

"Fundamentals exams are useless"

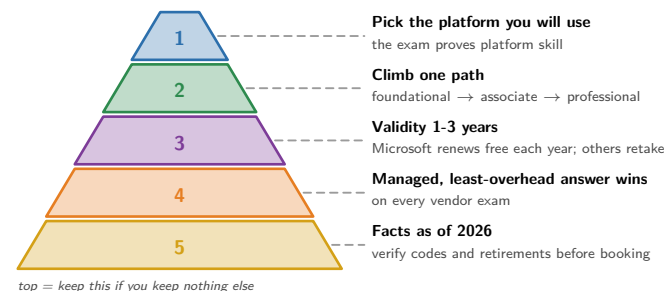
BUSTED

✅ ACTUALLY

They are cheap entry tickets for non-engineers

Useful for PMs, sales engineers and leaders who must speak the vocabulary.

Remember



Q1 Which AI certifications are foundational level?

A AWS AIF-C01, Microsoft AI-900, Google Cloud Generative AI Leader.

Q2 How do you renew a Microsoft role-based certification such as AI-102?

A Free online renewal assessment on Microsoft Learn, opened 6 months before the yearly expiry.

Q3 Typical validity of AWS, Google professional, Databricks and NVIDIA certifications?

A AWS 3 years; Google professional 2 years; Databricks 2 years; NVIDIA 2 years (as of 2026, verify).

Q4 What happens to your credential when its exam is retired?

A It stays valid until its own expiry; you renew by taking the replacement exam.

Q5 First certification for a PM who never codes, company on AWS?

A AWS Certified AI Practitioner (AIF-C01).

Q6 ML engineer whose team runs Databricks on Azure: first exam?

A Databricks ML Associate: the exam should match the platform used daily.

Q7 Which NVIDIA associate certification targets LLM builders?

A NCA-GENL (Generative AI LLMs); NCA-GENM covers multimodal.

Q8 Which answer do vendor exams usually expect when two options work?

A The managed option with the least operational overhead that meets every constraint.

Q9 Is the TensorFlow Developer Certificate still a target?

A No: Google discontinued it in 2024.