

Demystifying US Chess Tournament Director Certification Requirements

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Chapter 7 of the US Chess Federation's Official Rules of Chess covers the requirements for Tournament Director (TD) Certification. As an Associate National Tournament Director and head of a large affiliate with many TD's on our roster, I routinely assist my TD staff in determining if they have met the requirements for the next certification level and usually prepare their experience form for them to submit to the TD Certification Committee. I find myself in this position because Chapter 7 is written in a way that is incredibly difficult to decipher. I have been promising people for years that I would write something to interpret the certification rules to help TDs determine on their own if they've met the requirements (and know which credits to go after) and prepare their own experience forms. At last, I have a moment to deliver on this promise!

There is a hierarchy of TDs in the US Chess system – Club, Local, Senior, Associate National, and National. I will not cover FIDE certification here.

Rules or Conditions that Apply to all TD Levels

Safe Play Certification: Please note that in addition to the certification rules below, every TD must be SafeSport trained to gain and maintain certification.

[US Chess to Require Safe Play Training | US Chess.org](#)

Definition of an "Active" TD: In order to waive testing requirements for renewals, you must be an "Active" TD. Currently, this means a Chief or Chief Assistant TD – the number of tournaments to be considered "Active" is listed under each level below. Please note that there is a TDCC motion before the EB to allow any TD working the event to be considered active – not just the Chief and Chief Assistant. US Chess will notify members through normal channels when this change is approved.

Current US Chess membership: If you let your membership lapse, at a certain point your TD certification will also lapse, even if you were otherwise within your certification period. Contact the TDCC to determine how to regain your TD status once you renew your membership.

One Credit per Tournament: It's common for TDs to be listed in more than one capacity on a rating report – e.g. Chief Assistant for the overall tournament, and Chief of one or more sections. At all levels of TD certification, you may only count one credit per tournament. You may choose which credit to apply based on requirements for that TD level. Overall Tournament Chief or Chief TD counts all players in all sections of the tournament in the total number of players. Section Chief or Chief Assistant counts only the players in that

section. A section that by itself meets the numbers required for your certification level counts as a stand-alone tournament for your record.

Established US Chess Rating: To move above Club TD, you must be an established, not provisional, over-the-board regular/dual rated player yourself. See “The US Chess Rating System” - <https://new.uschess.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/the-us-chess-rating-system-revised-september-2020.pdf>).

Event Size Limitations Note: Please note the language “should not” under event size limitations at each level. While you cannot plan to be the Chief TD for an event that exceeds this size, US Chess understands that circumstances may arise that put you in this situation, such as unexpected loss of the Chief TD, or an unexpected number of on-site entries. If the language says “cannot,” it means exactly that.

Club Tournament Director

HOW TO GET STARTED: To become a Club TD, you simply need to read the latest edition of the rulebook, and any updates since its last publication (available on the US Chess website at [RulebookChanges.pdf \(uschess.org\)](#)), then complete a form attesting that you have read the book and meet all requirements to become a Club TD -- [club-td-application-fillable-aug2023.pdf \(uschess.org\)](#). Once emailed to the TD Certification Committee (address on the form), they will issue your Club TD certification, good for three years. There is no test to get started.

RENEWING OR UPGRADING: Club TD is as high as you will ever go if you are not an established rated player. If you do not meet that requirement, and/or if you fail to gain the credits listed below to get “promoted” to Local TD, you have to take a test by the end of your first three-year certification period. The test is open book, multiple choice, and pretty basic, going over the rulebook. You need 70% to pass. If you fail, you have to wait two months to retake it. If you fail again, you have to wait six months to retake it (each additional time). After passing that test, if you are an active TD for at least three tournaments (format unspecified – e.g. Swiss, Match, Quads, etc.) in the three-year term, you can just apply to renew every three years without additional testing.

LIMITATIONS: Keep in mind that as a Club TD, you *should not* be Chief TD for any tournament with more than 50 players (60 if you have a computer pairing program and an assistant – which is usually the case). Even if under 50 players, a Club TD *cannot* be Chief for any National Championship events. So, if you are an established rated player and are actively directing, you should look to move up to Local TD if you want to direct larger events.

Local Tournament Director

In order to become a Local TD and beyond, you first need to be an established rated player. It never matters what your rating is, just that you have one and it's not provisional.

DIRECTING CREDITS REQUIRED: You need a minimum of three directing credits to become a Local TD. *Please note that three directing credits is nowhere near enough experience to pass some versions of the Local TD test.*

Your three tournaments need to have a collective total of at least 50 players, and they need to be in Swiss format, over-the-board (unless otherwise specified). The time control and number of rounds are unspecified in the rulebook.

CREDIT 1: You need to be Chief TD – no way around that.

CREDIT 2: You need to be Chief or Chief Assistant – no exceptions.

CREDIT 3: You have options for your third tournament credit. If you get another Chief or Chief Assistant, it's a done deal. If not, here are your options.

- You can just be any old assistant TD – on the floor or in the backroom (pairing) for a third tournament.
- Remember that your combined total needs 50 players, so if all these tournaments are really small, you can use any combination of two additional small tournaments in any TD capacity to get your third credit and meet the overall numbers you need.
- Another option is to be a TD (in any capacity) for a US Chess rated ONLINE tournament.
- Less common, you can attend a TD workshop generally only offered at the US Open. US Chess often instead offers this workshop online shortly before the US Open, making it much easier for all TDs to access and count for credit.
- Very uncommon, you can pass the Local TD test under supervision (CLOSED BOOK) at a National championship. If you do that, your only experience requirement is that first Chief TD credit (with at least three rounds). You need to request this option in advance. Note that the TDCC reports very few pass the closed book exam. If you have the experience to pass, then you likely have the credits to qualify to take the open book test anyway.

TESTING REQUIRED: There are two ways to test to become a Local TD. Both tests are open book and multiple choice.

CLUB RENEWAL TEST: First, if you meet the credit requirements listed in this section, you can request to take the Club TD renewal test. If you score at least 80% on that test, you will be upgraded to Local TD.

LOCAL TD TEST: Second, you can meet the credit requirements listed in this section and request to take the Local TD test. TDCC reports that the Club and Local TD tests are exactly the same. However, local affiliates report that those requesting the Club TD test receive a very basic version going over the rules, while those requesting the Local TD test receive a much more challenging version more akin to the Senior exam. These exams may all be in the same pool for both Club and Local TD, but when in doubt / with minimum credits, request the Club TD exam.

Once you've gotten your credits and filled out your Local TD experience form ([localtdexperienceform.pdf \(uschess.org\)](#)), email it to the TD Certification Committee and request to take your test

RENEWAL: Your certification is good for four years. At the end of that time, if you have not been an active TD, you will need to take another version of the Local test to recertify. If you have active for at least four tournaments (format and time control unspecified in rulebook) in that four-year period, you can renew without testing, but you need to ask the TDCC for the renewal.

LIMITATIONS: As a Local TD, you *should not* be Chief for events exceeding 100 players (120 with computer pairing and an assistant, which is normal). If you want to direct larger events, National Championships, or FIDE-rated events, you will want to keep moving up!

Senior Tournament Director

DIRECTING CREDITS REQUIRED: You need a minimum of ten directing credits to become a Senior TD. The tournaments must have a combined total of at least 400 players.

CREDITS 1-5: You need to be Chief TD of five over-the-board Swiss tournaments of at least 50 players and four rounds each. Note that the rulebook does NOT specify the time control; however, substitutions for other credits *imply* that the tournaments must be Regular rated (Dual rated counts as Regular). No exceptions.

CREDIT 6: You need to be Chief TD or Chief Assistant TD of an over-the-board Swiss tournament of at least 50 players and four rounds. No exceptions.

CREDITS 7-10: If you get another four of this type of tournament as Chief or Chief Assistant, you are all set. If not, you have other options. And here is where the official rulebook gets very confusing, giving some substitutions that are actually covered under primary credits. I have weeded out Rulebook substitution paragraphs that are simply unnecessary.

Most common options

- You can be a TD in any capacity (doesn't have to be Chief or Chief Assistant) at a US Chess rated ONLINE tournament of Swiss format, at least four rounds, with at least 50 players. You can count TWO such tournaments toward your final four credits.
- You can be Chief TD of a Round Robin tournament (Regular rated *implied*) with at least six players with a mean rating of 1400 OR Chief TD of two Quick or Blitz Round Robins with the same requirements. You can count this Round Robin option as ONE credit.
- You can group together a whole bunch of smaller tournaments (fewer than 50 players) where you were Chief or Chief Assistant. They can be any time control. They must be in Swiss format and must have at least four rounds each. The total number of players in all the events combined has to be at least 100. You can count this grouping as ONE credit. You CAN count the same tournaments you used for Local TD certification.

Very unlikely options

You can attend a TD workshop generally only offered at the US Open for ONE credit. Note that starting in 2024, an online option for this workshop will often make it more accessible to all TDs.

- You can pass the Senior TD test under supervision (CLOSED BOOK) at a National championship. If you do that, your experience requirements are reduced (won't list them here because this option is rarely, if ever, used). You need to request this option in advance. Note that the TDCC Chair reports *never* seeing or hearing of anyone passing the Senior TD test closed book.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS: In addition to the credits listed above, you need to submit three tournaments of any size for rating online. This implies that you know how to use the pairing program and submit the results to US Chess. If you are FIDE certified as an FA or IA coming from another country, there are other paths to Senior TD certification in the US – see the Rulebook if this applies to you.

TESTING REQUIRED: Once you've earned all the required credits, you fill out a Senior TD Experience Form ([seniortdexperienceform_0.pdf \(uschess.org\)](https://www.uschess.org/seniortdexperienceform_0.pdf)) and submit it to the TD Certification Committee to request your Senior test. The test is open book and multiple choice (30 four-point questions for 120 points plus one 20-point pairing question) and is quite difficult. You must pass with 80% (112/140 or better). If you fail the test, you must wait two months to retake it. If you fail again, you must wait six months for each additional attempt.

RENEWAL: Once you pass the exam, your certification is good for five years. If you are actively directing in at least five tournaments in five years, you can apply to the TDCC for renewal without testing. If you are not active, you will need to test again.

LIMITATIONS: As a Senior TD, you *should not* be Chief TD generally for tournaments exceeding 300 players (360 with computer pairing and an assistant, which is common). If you want to be a Chief TD at National Championships or larger tournaments, you will need to keep moving up!

Associate National Tournament Director

DIRECTING CREDITS REQUIRED: You will need a total of ten directing credits, as follows, to become an ANTD.

CREDITS 1-4: You must be Chief TD of four Swiss format tournaments (Regular/Dual time control) of at least 100 players. No exceptions.

CREDIT 5: You must be Chief TD of a Swiss format tournament (Regular/Dual time control) of at least 100 players that awards at least \$1000 in cash prizes. No exceptions.

CREDITS 6-7: You must be Chief TD or Chief Assistant TD of two more Swiss format tournaments (Regular/Dual time control) of at least 100 players that award at least \$1000 in cash prizes each. If you can't get that many players, you can count the same format tournament with the same cash minimum for at least 50 players for both credits, but you can only be the Chief, not the Chief Assistant.

CREDITS 8-10: If you can get another three Chief TD credits at Swiss tournaments with 100+ players (no cash requirement), you are all set. If not, you have options.

- You can be a TD of any title and capacity for a US Chess rated ONLINE Swiss tournament of at least four rounds with at least 100 players. You can do TWO such tournaments to count toward your final three credits.
- You can group together three (implied Regular/Dual rated) or six (Quick/Blitz rated) Swiss tournaments of at least 50 players to count as ONE credit only if you were Chief TD at all of them. And you can do this up to THREE times (9 total smaller tournaments or 18 Quick/Blitz) to cover all these final credits. You CAN count the same tournaments you used for Senior TD certification.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS:

1. You must work at an event that awards a National title – e.g. scholastic National Championships, National Open, etc. – OR at an event with at least 300 players and \$5,000+ in monetary prizes. At that event, you must be a Chief TD (a section that awards a title counts) or Chief Assistant to an NTD. This is implied as a Regular rated event, as you can also meet this requirement by doing two such Quick or Blitz rated tournaments.
2. You must be Chief TD of a Round Robin tournament with at least six players with a mean rating of 1400 or above – Regular rated implied. You can also meet your Round Robin requirement with two Quick or Blitz rated tournaments. If you used the Round Robin substitution credit for Senior TD, you CAN count the same event(s) here.
3. You must submit four tournaments for rating online. You CAN count the same ones you submitted for Senior TD.

TESTING REQUIRED: Once you've earned all the required credits, you fill out an ANTD Experience Form ([antdexperienceform_0.pdf \(uschess.org\)](#)) and submit it to the TD Certification Committee to request your ANTD test. The test is open book and ESSAY format. You must pass with 80%. An experienced NTD grades the exam. If you fail, you can request a regrade from two additional NTDs. Regrading is automatic if your first grade was between 70-79%. The final result will be a grade that is common to two of the three graders. A failed test will only be given to a second regrader if the first regrader gives it a passing score. If you fail the test, you must wait three months to retake it. If you fail again, you must wait one year for each additional attempt.

RENEWAL: Once you pass the test, your certification is good for six years. If you are an active director with at least six credits within your six-year term, you can request renewal from the TDCC without testing. If you are inactive, you will need to test again.

LIMITATIONS: The only limitation on an ANTD is that you can't be Chief TD of a tournament that awards a national title and averages 150 players in the previous 5 years, plus the U.S. Championship events (invitational). But you've come this far, so if you're an active TD, keep pushing for NTD!

National Tournament Director

DIRECTING CREDITS REQUIRED: You will need a total of 15 directing credits to become an NTD, as follows. The good news is that if you've already made ANTD, you really only need another FIVE similar credits, as you can count the ten you used for ANTD (if they are the right fit)!

CREDITS 1-8: You must be the Chief TD for eight Swiss format tournaments (Regular rated) of at least 100 players. No exceptions. Remember that a single section with 100+ players counts.

CREDIT 9: You must be the Chief TD for one (Regular rated) tournament of at least 100 players that awards at least \$1000 in prize money. No exceptions.

CREDITS 10-11: You must be Chief TD or Chief Assistant TD of two more Swiss format tournaments (Regular time control) of at least 100 players that award at least \$1000 in cash prizes each. If you can't get that many players, you can count the same format tournament with the same cash minimum for at least 50 players for both credits, but you can only be the chief, not the chief assistant.

CREDITS 12-15: If you can get four more Chief TD credits for Swiss tournaments with 100+ players, you are all set. If not, you have options. Remember, if you used these options for ANTD, you can still count them here.

- You can be a TD of any title and capacity for a US Chess rated ONLINE Swiss tournament of at least four rounds with at least 100 players. You can do TWO such tournaments to count toward your final three credits.
- You can group together three (implied Regular rated) or six (Quick/Blitz rated) Swiss tournaments of at least 50 players to count as ONE credit only if you were Chief TD at all of them. And you can do this up to FOUR times (12 total smaller tournaments or 24 Quick/Blitz) to cover all these final credits. You CAN count the same tournaments you used for Senior TD certification.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

1. You must be Chief Assistant to an NTD at an event that awards a national title and averages over 150 players in the previous five years. It can also be the U.S. Championship, U.S. Women's Championship, or U.S. Junior Championship should you be so lucky. If you can't get a tournament in that category, you can substitute two tournaments – one must be Chief Assistant of one section of this national

tournament on the floor, and the other must be Chief Assistant of one section of this national tournament in the backroom (pairing).

2. You must work at an event that awards a National title – e.g. scholastic National Championships, National Open, etc. – OR at an event with at least 300 players and \$5,000+ in monetary prizes. At that event, you must be a Chief TD (a section that awards a title counts) or Chief Assistant to an NTD. This is implied as a Regular rated event, as you can also meet this requirement by doing two Quick or Blitz rated tournaments. If you did this for ANTD, you can count it again here.
3. You must be Chief TD of a Round Robin tournament with at least six players with a mean rating of 1400 or above – Regular rated implied. You can also meet your Round Robin requirement with two Quick or Blitz rated tournaments. You CAN count your Senior or ANTD Round Robin credit again here.
4. You must be Chief or Chief Assistant to an NTD or ANTD for a team-vs-team or individual-team tournament of at least 50 players and at least four rounds (implied Regular rated). You can also count two such tournaments in Quick or Blitz time control. If you work scholastic events routinely, this is an easy credit to pick up, as many scholastic events are individual-team format (top individual scores count toward team scores). The other common way to earn this credit is directing a tournament with a four-board team format.
5. You must submit five tournaments for rating online. You CAN count the same ones you submitted for Senior or ANTD.

TESTING REQUIRED: Once you've earned all the required credits, you fill out an NTD Experience Form ([ntdexperienceform.pdf \(uschess.org\)](https://www.uschess.org/ntdexperienceform.pdf)) and submit it to the TD Certification Committee to request your NTD test. The test is open book and ESSAY format. You must pass with 80%. An experienced NTD grades the exam. If you fail, you can request a regrade from two additional NTDs. A failed exam is only given to a second regrader if the first regrader gives it a passing score. Regrading is automatic if your first grade was between 70-79%. The final result will be a grade that is common to two of the three graders. If you fail the test, you must wait three months to retake it. If you fail again, you must wait one year for each additional attempt.

RENEWAL: There is no renewal required. NTD certification is good for life, as long as you remain a current US Chess member.

LIMITATIONS: None. An NTD can direct events of any size and format.