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CERTIFICATION GUIDE

OffSec OSCP+ Study Guide

A plain-language guide to preparing for the OSCP+ practical exam

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BEFORE YOU BEGIN

How to use this guide

What this guide covers, who it is for, and how to use it.

The **OSCP** (OffSec Certified Professional) is one of the most respected hands-on penetration testing certifications. Instead of multiple-choice questions, candidates must compromise machines in a live lab and write a professional report. Since November 2024, passing also earns **OSCP+**, a time-limited version that must be renewed.

This guide explains the certification, the exam structure, the PEN-200 course, the methodology and mindset that lead to success, how to prepare for the Active Directory portion, how to manage time and stress, how to write the report, and how to keep OSCP+ current. It focuses on strategy, concepts and defensive understanding; it does not provide exploitation walkthroughs, which you should learn only in OffSec's or other legal labs.

What this guide is, and is not

- An independent preparation companion written in its own words.
- **Not** official OffSec material; it does not reproduce course content or exam details beyond public information.
- Always read OffSec's current exam guide before booking.

Who this guide is for

- **Aspiring penetration testers** planning the OSCP+.
- **Security professionals** deciding whether it fits their career.
- **Managers** who want to understand what OSCP+ proves.

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How the guide is organized

- **Part I — The certification** (Chapters 1–8): what OSCP+ is, the exam, scoring, PEN-200, prerequisites, rules, costs and renewal.
- **Part II — Skills and concepts** (Chapters 9–21): methodology, enumeration, operating system fundamentals, web, password concepts, privilege escalation, Active Directory and defences.
- **Part III — Preparation** (Chapters 22–32): study plan, labs, notes, mock exams, time management, wellbeing, AI tools, the report and self-check questions.
- **Part IV — Exam success** (Chapters 33–40): exam day, after the exam, FAQs, renewal, careers and next steps.
- **Reference**: checklists, glossary and further reading.

Callouts

TIP
Practical preparation and exam advice.

IN PRACTICE
How a concept looks in real testing.

WATCH OUT
Common traps and rule violations.

KEY IDEA
The one thing to remember from a section.

A note on the law

Only test systems you own or are authorized to test, such as OffSec's labs. Screens are **illustrations**.

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PART I

The certification

These chapters explain what OSCP+ is and how the exam works.

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CHAPTER 1

What OSCP+ is

A hands-on certification.

A definition

The **OSCP** proves you can find and exploit weaknesses in a controlled lab under time pressure, and document your work professionally. **OSCP+** is awarded alongside it and shows the credential is current.

Why it is respected

Employers value it because it cannot be passed by memorization: you must actually perform.

KEY IDEA

OSCP+ proves persistence, methodology and practical skill.

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CHAPTER 2

OSCP and OSCP+

OSCP and OSCP+.

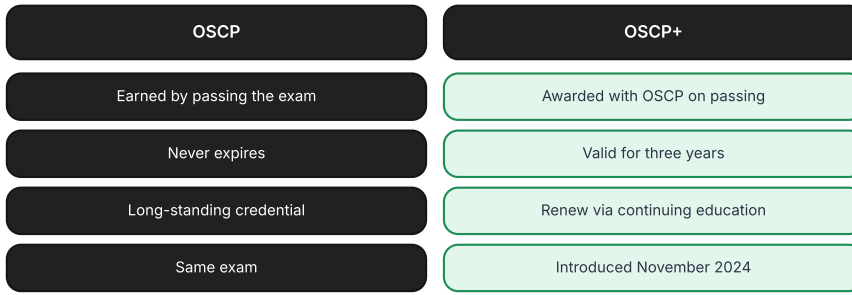


Figure 2.1 OSCP and OSCP+

Renewal options

OffSec offers continuing education paths to renew OSCP+ before it expires, such as passing a qualifying exam or completing CPE requirements. Check OffSec's current renewal options.

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CHAPTER 3

The exam

The exam.

Part	Detail
Hands-on exam	23 hours 45 minutes, proctored
Targets	3 standalone machines + 1 Active Directory set
Points	standalone 60 in total; AD set 40
Pass mark	70 of 100
Report	submitted within 24 hours after the exam

Figure 3.1 The OSCP+ exam at a glance

Assumed breach

For the Active Directory set, OffSec provides starting credentials, simulating an attacker who has already obtained a foothold. Check OffSec's exam guide for exactly how points are awarded within the set.

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CHAPTER 4

Scoring and strategy

How scoring shapes strategy.

Bonus points were removed when OSCP+ was introduced. Because standalone machines total 60 points, you cannot pass without points from the Active Directory set.

```
from itertools import product

PASS_MARK = 70
standalone_options = [0, 10, 20]       # none, user-level, full con-
trol
ad_options = [0, 10, 20, 40]           # illustrative partial outcomes

passing = 0
total = 0
for a, b, c, ad in product(standalone_options, standalone_options,
                           standalone_options, ad_options):
    total += 1
    if a + b + c + ad >= PASS_MARK:
        passing += 1

print(f"{passing} of {total} outcome combinations pass")
print("Max without any AD points:", 3 * 20, "-> cannot pass")
```

The AD values here are illustrative; the point is that Active Directory skills are essential.

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