Digital badges and verifiable credentials, explained

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A digital badge is a credential in a form that travels: it can be shared on a profile, checked by a machine and revoked by the issuer. Two standards come up most often, and they solve slightly different problems.

TL;DR The short version

- A digital badge is a credential that can be shared, checked by a machine and revoked by the issuer.
- Open Badges (1EdTech) packages a credential with its metadata; Verifiable Credentials (W3C) are cryptographically signed.
- A good badge links back to the issuer's record and states clear criteria, but it only proves the issuer made a claim.

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Open Badges

Open Badges is a specification maintained by 1EdTech for packaging a credential with its metadata: who issued it, who earned it, what it was for and the criteria. The point is portability and a link back to the issuer, so the badge can be checked later.

Verifiable Credentials

Verifiable Credentials is a W3C standard for credentials that are cryptographically signed. A verifier can confirm that the issuer signed it and that it has not been altered, without phoning the issuer each time.

What to look for in a badge

- A stable link back to the issuer’s record.
- Clear criteria: what was assessed, and how.
- An issue date and a status that can change.
- Signing or hosting that lets a third party check it independently.

What a badge cannot do

A badge proves that an issuer made a claim. It does not make the issuer credible. Judge the badge by the body behind it. IICTP issues digital badges tied to its public registry and governed by the TPBOK™ standard.

Related credential: Digital badges. Explore the exam facts and syllabus.

Sources and further reading

1. 1EdTech. Open Badges. 1edtech.org/standards/open-badges.
2. W3C. Verifiable Credentials Data Model. w3.org/TR/vc-data-model-2.0/.

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