What is a body of knowledge, and why does every profession have one?

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A body of knowledge is a structured, published description of what practitioners in a field need to know and be able to do. It gives the field a shared vocabulary and a shared standard, so that training, hiring and assessment can all point at the same thing.

TL;DR The short version

- A body of knowledge is a published description of what practitioners in a field need to know and do.
- It gives training, hiring and assessment a shared vocabulary and standard; it is not itself a certification.
- Practitioners can read its domains to see where their work sits and use its task statements as a checklist for gaps.

Read online, listen to it, or change the text size: https://blogs.iictp.org/what-is-a-body-of-knowledge

Why do professions need a body of knowledge?

Without one, every employer, trainer and exam writer defines the work differently. A published standard lets a hiring manager, a student and an examiner mean the same thing when they say “a competent practitioner”, and it gives disagreements a document to be settled against.

What does a good body of knowledge contain?

It states its scope, so readers know what the field covers and leaves out. It divides the work into domains, lists the tasks in each, and names the knowledge those tasks need. It defines its terms, cites its references, and describes how it is revised.

Is a body of knowledge the same as a certification?

No. The body of knowledge is the standard, and a certification is an assessment of a person against it. Keeping the two separate matters, because the people who set a standard should not simply grade their own training. IICTP publishes its standard openly as the TPBOK™, and its credentials assess people against it.

Who writes and updates one?

Usually a panel of practitioners and educators, working in the open where possible and revising on a schedule. A good one publishes drafts for public review, records what changed between versions, and says who is accountable for it.

How should a practitioner use one?

Read the domain descriptions to see where your work sits, then use the task statements as a checklist for gaps. Follow the references when you need depth, and check the revision date, because a standard that is not updated goes stale.

> Related credential: TPBOK™, the Technical Practitioner Body of Knowledge. Explore the exam facts and syllabus.

Sources and further reading

1. IICTP. TPBOK™, the Technical Practitioner Body of Knowledge. iictp.org/standards/tpbok.

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