

AO Spine Global  
Diploma Exam  
**Frequently asked  
questions (FAQ)**



## 1. What exactly is the AO Spine Global Diploma Exam?

The AO Spine Global Diploma Exam is a summative assessment of knowledge and decision-making with respect to treating patients with spinal disorders. It enables candidates to demonstrate that they have attained a level of knowledge expected of a specialist spine surgeon after 5 years of practical experience. The content of the entire examination (parts I and II) is based on the AO Spine Curriculum.

It is **not** intended to certify competence of technical skill or ability to perform surgical procedures. It is **not** a compulsory or regulatory certificate of competence or excellence.

## 2. What are the benefits of the AO Spine Global Diploma?

- Benefit from AO Spine's global reputation as the leading global academic community in spine care.
- Worldwide credibility guaranteed.
- It's an excellent opportunity to have your theoretical knowledge in spine surgery accredited at an international level.
- Gain recognition by having proof that your theoretical knowledge has been assessed to the latest standards.

## 3. Who can register for the AO Spine Global Diploma Exam?

In order to be eligible for the AO Spine Global Diploma Exam, you will need to fulfil two criteria:

- Be an AO Spine member.
- Be an orthopedic surgeon or a neurosurgeon with more than 5 years of practice in the spinal field. You should provide evidence of specialist qualifications in orthopedics or neurosurgery (i.e. medical card) and your curriculum vitae (CV) with the proof of practice in spinal surgery for at least 5 years since qualifying as a specialist orthopedic or neurosurgeon.

**Important:** Members of the AO Spine Faculty Management task force, AO Spine Training Program Committee members, the exam committee members, or surgeons who have been involved in the part I and/or part II exam preparation, are **not** eligible for the AO Spine Global Diploma Exam.

## 4. How can I prepare for the AO Spine Global Diploma Exam?

Both the part I and part II exam parts of the AO Spine Global Diploma Exam are based on the AO Spine Curriculum: <https://bit.ly/aospine-curriculum>.

## 5. How much does it cost?

The administrative fee of CHF 100 is applicable

upon applying for the exam eligibility check of the candidate, and is non-refundable.

A regular diploma exam fee including value-added tax (VAT) applies, and is valid for both the part I and part II examinations.

If you have any questions about refunds and cancellation fees (eg, in case of failure at the exam), please read the Terms and Conditions for more details or check questions 22 and 23 in this FAQ.

\*Fee does not include transport and accommodation for the exam test center venues.

## 6. Are there any important dates or deadlines?

The application process will open in the second half of each year, and closes two weeks after the opening date.

To receive the Diploma, candidates will need to pass both part I and part II examinations.

### Part I exam

The part I exam will take place under proctored conditions in test centers around the world. Candidates are able to choose from a number of available days to take the part I exam.

### Part II exam

The part II exam is an online exam conducted under proctored conditions.

Candidates will have to register for a time slot within a given time duration.

If a candidate registers for an online exam, we recommend downloading the exam software to his/her device and ensuring all technical requirements are met in preparation for the exam.

For questions or concerns related to the software download, please contact the Pearson VUE staff.

Should a candidate register for an exam in a test center, the same conditions apply as for the part I exam.

## 7. What is the refund policy?

For detailed cancellation and refund policies, please read the Terms and Conditions.

## 8. Are scholarships available?

No, there are no scholarships available.

## 9. What are the criteria to receive the diploma?

The examination is taken in two parts: a set of multiple-choice questions, and a case-based essay-style portion using standardized clinical case scenarios. To receive the diploma, candidates must pass both exams.

## 10. What are the criteria for registration?

Candidates for the examination must apply via the AO Spine website and provide the following information by e-mail:

- Their CV demonstrating practice experience in spinal surgery for at least 5 years since completing orthopaedic or neurosurgery training
- Evidence of specialist qualifications in orthopedics or neurosurgery (eg, medical card)
- Only AO Spine members are eligible to register

Applications will be assessed by members of the examination committee within two weeks of submission of the candidate's application.

For the application process, candidates need to pay a non-refundable administrative fee of CHF 100.

Eligible candidates will be notified and invited to register for the part I examination by paying the non refundable examination fee.

For the part I examination, places are available on a first-come-first serve basis. If there are more eligible candidates than places available, eligible candidates will be able to add their names to a waiting list.

## 11. How will I know if I have been accepted for the AO Spine Global Diploma Exam?

Applications will be assessed by the examination committee within a maximum of two weeks after the application has been submitted.

Eligible candidates will be notified and invited to register for the Part I examination by paying the non-refundable fee.

## 12. Conflict of interest

The names of the candidates for the part II examination will be made known to the examiners in advance, and vice versa. Any concern about a potential conflict of interest by a candidate or examiner must be disclosed immediately to the examination committee in time to allow suitable arrangements to be made if necessary.

## 13. Where does the Part I exam take place?

The Part I exam will take place in test centers around the world. Candidates are able to choose their exam appointments from the dates available. These will be communicated well in advance by AO Spine staff to the eligible candidates.

## 14. How can candidates book an appointment for the Part I exam at the test center?

All accepted candidates will receive a link to register for their appointment at an available Pearson VUE test center near their location.

## 15. Where does the Part II exam take place?

The part II exam will be conducted through a proctored online tool that allows the candidates to take the exam from their homes.

Due to possible firewall problems, AO Spine highly recommends setting up the exam at the candidate's home rather than in the clinical environment.

## 16. How much time do I need to allocate for the exams?

The duration of the part I exam is about 2 hours. We suggest that candidates arrive at the test center at least 30 minutes before the set time for the Part I exam in order to register and receive a proper introduction.

The duration of the part II exam is about 2 hours. An additional 30-minute online registration and identification process should be considered before the start of the exam.

## 17. What is the pass mark for the exam?

The pass mark for the AO Spine Global Diploma Exam is set by the examination committee using criterion-referenced methods based on the Angoff method.

The standard of the examination is the knowledge of a spine surgeon who has been in practice for at least five (5) years.

## 18. When will I receive my diploma?

Successful candidates will receive their diploma within 4 weeks after receiving confirmation of passing the part II exam.

The document will be sent by postal mail to the candidate's address.

## 19. Who are the examiners?

The examination committee for the AO Spine Global Diploma Exam consists of experienced examiners appointed by the AO Spine Global Diploma Exam Steering Committee. All examiners are current or former examiners for a surgical college or equivalent certifying organization for surgical specialty recognition in their respective countries.

## 20. Where are the test center locations?

Available test centers will be listed on the partner's website (Pearson VUE) shortly after the confirmation of the candidate's acceptance for the AO Spine Global Diploma Exam.

## **21. What is the examination process for the AO Spine Global Diploma Exam?**

The examination is organized in two parts: a multiple-choice, questions-based test, and an online exam in a case-based essay style using standardized clinical case scenarios based on AO Spine Curriculum pathologies.

To receive the diploma, the candidate will need to pass both exams.

### **a. Part I diploma examination**

The part I exam will take place at globally available test centers under proctored conditions. It contains multiple-choice questions (MCQs) in English. The duration of the part I exam is about 2 hours. Breaks are not permitted during this time.

### **b. Part II diploma examination**

The part II exam is an online exam organized under proctored conditions. It will be a case-based exam in an essay style format following the AO Spine Curriculum and candidates will have to answer a number of questions to the cases provided.

The duration of the part II exam is around 2 hours.

## **22. What happens if I don't pass the part I exam?**

Candidates who are unsuccessful in the part I exam will not be invited to take the part II exam, but may retake the Part I exam at the next opportunity.

The administrative fee of CHF 100 and the registration fee are not refundable if the candidate does not pass the part I exam component.

## **23. What happens if I don't pass the part II exam?**

Candidates who do not successfully complete the part II exam may retake it at the next opportunity by paying a reduced examination fee and without having to retake the part I MCQ exam.

## **24. What are the language requirements?**

If English is not your first language, it is essential that your English language skills are good enough for you to take an intensive and challenging exam in English.

## **25. Is it mandatory to obtain the AO Spine Global Diploma to become faculty at AO Spine educational events?**

No, the AO Spine Global Diploma Exam is not a prerequisite for eligibility to become AO Spine faculty.

## **26. What is the format of the MCQs, and how were they developed?**

The MCQs for part I of the AO Spine Global Diploma Exam are single-best answer type. Each question contains a clinical scenario or situation and asks the candidate to choose the best answer from four options. The authors were asked to address a specific competence in the AO Spine Curriculum and provide a justification for the best answer, along with a literature reference.

The questions were developed using a three-round Delphi technique involving a panel of senior spine surgeons with expertise in each of the AO Spine Curriculum pathology domains and representing all five AO Spine geographic regions. The process was overseen by a medical educator from the AO Education Institute and a member of the AO Spine Education Commission with a qualification in surgical education.

## **27. What is the format of cases for the part II exam?**

The cases are based on the different pathologies following the AO Spine Curriculum. Each case contains 10 different questions on the case, a step by step approach is taken.

During the exam the candidate has to answer all questions of each case, proceed question after question in order to finalize the exam.

They have been developed by the examination committee following the three-round Delphi technique involving a panel of senior spine surgeons with expertise in each of the AO Spine Curriculum pathology domains and representing all five AO Spine geographic regions.

The process was overseen by a medical educator from the AO Education Institute and a member of the AO Spine Education Commission with a qualification in surgical education.

## **28. Who do I contact if I have questions or if anything is unclear?**

If you have any questions, please contact AO Spine via e-mail at: [globalspinediploma@aospine.org](mailto:globalspinediploma@aospine.org).



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