AWS Certified Solutions Architect SAA-C03 – How to best prepare in 5 Steps

Amazon is still way ahead as the leader in the Cloud Computing market – with Amazon Web Services (AWS) having [over 50% share of the Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) market](https://www.statista.com/statistics/1258463/infrastructure-as-a-service-software-market-share-vendor-worldwide/). AWS certification is the best way to launch or progress in your [cloud computing career](https://digitalcloud.training/top-paying-cloud-certifications-and-jobs/).

At the end of August 2022, the SAA-C03 exam replaced the previous SAA-C02 exam. In this article, I walk you through how to best prepare for the new [**AWS Certified Solutions Architect Associate SAA-C03 exam**](https://digitalcloud.training/aws-certified-solutions-architect-associate/) in 5 steps:

1. Understand the exam blueprint
2. Learn about the topics included in the SAA-C03 version of the exam
3. Use the many FREE resources available to gain and deepen your knowledge
4. Enroll in our hands-on video course to learn AWS in depth
5. Use practice tests to fully prepare yourself for the exam and assess your exam readiness

I’ll walk you through the exam blueprint and break down the various “domains” of the exam guide so you know what to expect. I will also let you know the AWS services you need to study and what type of questions you will get in the exam. Lastly, I’ll introduce the [certification training courses](https://digitalcloud.training/aws-certified-solutions-architect-associate/) from Digital Cloud Training for the AWS Certified Solutions Architect Associate so you have the best resources available to ensure you pass your exam the first time.

*Click the image above to watch Neal’s video on the new SAA-C03 exam from our* [*youtube channel*](https://www.youtube.com/c/digitalcloudtraining?sub_confirmation=1)

## **1 – Understand the SAA-C03 AWS Exam Blueprint**

This exam sits within the Associate level in the AWS training program and is recommended for individuals with at least one year of hands-on experience. The exam is intended for Solutions Architects and requires you to demonstrate knowledge of how to define a solution using architectural design principles based on customer requirements and provide implementation guidance based on best practices to the organization throughout the lifecycle of the project.

**In the “**[**AWS Certified Solutions Architect – Associate (SAA-C03) Exam Guide**](https://d1.awsstatic.com/training-and-certification/docs-sa-assoc/AWS-Certified-Solutions-Architect-Associate_Exam-Guide.pdf)**“, the following AWS knowledge is recommended:**

* One year of hands-on experience designing available, cost-effective, fault-tolerant, and scalable distributed systems on AWS.
* Hands-on experience using compute, networking, storage, and database AWS services.
* Hands-on experience with AWS deployment and management services.
* Ability to identify and define technical requirements for an AWS-based application.
* Ability to identify which AWS services meet a given technical requirement.
* Knowledge of recommended best practices for building secure and reliable applications on the AWS platform.
* An understanding of the basic architectural principles of building in the AWS Cloud.
* An understanding of the AWS global infrastructure.
* An understanding of network technologies as they relate to AWS.
* An understanding of security features and tools that AWS provides and how they relate to traditional services.

The exam includes **65 questions** and has a **time limit of 130 minutes**.  
You need to score a **minimum of 720 out of 1000 points** to pass the exam.

The **question forma**t of the exam is one of the following:

* Multiple-choice (one correct response from four options).
* Multiple-response (two or more correct responses from five or more options).

Most questions are 1-2 lines of a scenario followed by the actual question itself. They typically get straight to the point without any filler. With many questions in the AWS Solutions Architect Associate exam, you will find that there are multiple correct answers and you must select the answer that best fits the scenario. For instance, you may be asked to select the MOST secure, MOST cost-effective, or MOST operationally efficient option.

***Important:*** *Be very careful reading the wording of the question to ensure you select the correct answer! Sometimes small details can be easily missed that change the answer – so take your time when sitting the exam.*

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## **Domains, Objectives and Examples**

The knowledge required is organized into four test “domains”. Within each test domain, there are several objectives that broadly describe the knowledge and experience expected to pass the exam.

#### **Domain 1: Design Secure Architectures**

This domain makes up 30% of the exam and includes the following 3 Task Statements:

* Task Statement 1: Design secure access to AWS resources.
* Task Statement 2: Design secure workloads and applications.
* Task Statement 3: Determine appropriate data security controls

**What you need to know**

You will need to be able to use AWS Identity and Access Management to enable the appropriate permissions, as well as deep understanding of the AWS Shared Responsibility Model, couched in the knowledge of the the AWS Global Infrastructure can be used to enable the growth of large distributed and secure applications. Using native tools like Amazon VPC and all the security tooling is important also to designing architecture with a strong security posture. Understanding how encryption works too using services like the AWS Key Management Service (AWS KSM) is also important to your success in the exam.

#### **Domain 2: Design Resilient Architectures**

This domain makes up 26% of the exam and includes the following 2 Task Statements:

* Task Statement 1: Design scalable and loosely coupled architectures
* Task Statement 2: Design highly available and/or fault-tolerant architectures

**What you need to know**

You will need to know about how to plan for failure by implementing decoupling technologies like Amazon SQS, allowing for both vertical and horizontal scaling, and how to use the AWS Global Infrastructure to your advantage to building resilient architecture.

#### **Domain 3: Design High-Performing Architectures**

This domain makes up 24% of the exam and includes the following 3 Task Statements:

* Task Statement 1: Determine high-performing and/or scalable storage solutions.
* Task Statement 2: Design high-performing and elastic compute solutions.
* Task Statement 3: Determine high-performing database solutions.

**What you need to know**

Alongside everything previously mentioned, Analytics services like Amazon QuickSight, and data transformation services like AWS Glue can allow you to build highly performant and scalable architectures using a data-driven approach.

#### **Domain 4: Design Cost-Optimized Architectures**

This domain makes up 20% of the exam and includes the following 4 Task Statements:

* Task Statement 1: Design cost-optimized storage solutions.
* Task Statement 2: Design cost-optimized compute solutions.
* Task Statement 3: Design cost-optimized database solutions.
* Task Statement 4: Design cost-optimized network architectures.

**What you need to know**

There are a myriad of services which can enable a high level of cost optimization within AWS, such as the following:

* AWS Cost Explorer
* Cost and Usage Reports
* AWS Budgets
* AWS Cost Anomaly Detection

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## **2 – Which new AWS services are covered in the SAA-C03?**

There are lots of new services and features included in the new AWS Certified Solutions Architect Associate SAA-C03 exam! Here’s a list of *some* of the new services that are included:

* AWS Data Exchange
* AWS Data Pipeline
* AWS Lake Formation
* Amazon Managed Streaming for Apache Kafka
* Amazon AppFlow
* AWS Outposts
* VMware Cloud on AWS
* AWS Wavelength
* Amazon Neptune
* Amazon Quantum Ledger Database
* Amazon Timestream
* AWS Amplify
* Amazon Comprehend
* Amazon Forecast
* Amazon Fraud Detector
* Amazon Kendra
* AWS License Manager
* Amazon Managed Grafana
* Amazon Managed Service for Prometheus
* AWS Proton
* Amazon Elastic Transcoder
* Amazon Kinesis Video Streams
* AWS Application Discovery Service
* AWS WAF Serverless
* AWS AppSync

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## **Detailed Breakdown of SAA-C03 Topics**

If you’re looking for a detailed breakdown of what topics are included in the AWS Certified Solutions Architect Associate SAA-C03 exam – below are some recommendations for specific knowledge you should attain that is specifically relevant to this exam.

### **Storage**

* Know your different Amazon S3 storage tiers! You need to know the use cases, features and limitations, and relative costs; e.g. retrieval costs.
* Amazon S3 lifecycle policies is also required knowledge – there are minimum storage times in certain tiers that you need to know.
* For Glacier, you need to understand what it is, what it’s used for, and what the options are for retrieval times and fees.
* For the Amazon Elastic File System ([EFS](https://aws.amazon.com/efs/)), make sure you’re clear which operating systems you can use with it (just Linux).
* For the Amazon Elastic Block Store ([EBS](https://aws.amazon.com/ebs/)), make sure you know when to use the different tiers including instance stores; e.g. what would you use for a datastore that requires the highest IO and the data is distributed across multiple instances? (Good instance store use case)
* Learn about [Amazon FSx](https://aws.amazon.com/fsx/). You’ll need to know about FSx for Windows and Lustre.
* Know how to improve Amazon S3 performance including using CloudFront, and byte-range fetches – check out this [whitepaper](https://d1.awsstatic.com/whitepapers/AmazonS3BestPractices.pdf).
* Make sure you understand about Amazon S3 object deletion protection options including versioning and MFA delete.

### **Compute**

* You need to have a good understanding of the options for how to scale an Auto Scaling Group using metrics such as SQS queue depth, or numbers of SNS messages.
* Know your different Auto Scaling policies including Target Tracking Policies.
* Read up on [High Performance Computing](https://aws.amazon.com/hpc/) (HPC) with AWS. You’ll need to know about Amazon FSx with HPC use cases.
* Know your placement groups. Make sure you can differentiate between spread, cluster and partition; e.g. what would you use for lowest latency? What about if you need to support an app that’s tightly coupled? Within an AZ or cross AZ?
* Make sure you know the difference between Elastic Network Adapters (ENAs), Elastic Network Interfaces (ENIs) and Elastic Fabric Adapters (EFAs).
* For the Amazon Elastic Container Service (ECS), make sure you understand how to assign IAM policies to ECS for providing S3 access. How can you decouple an ECS data processing process – Kinesis Firehose or SQS?
* Make sure you’re clear on the different EC2 pricing models including Reserved Instances (RI) and the different RI options such as scheduled RIs.
* Make sure you know the maximum execution time for AWS Lambda (it’s currently 900 seconds or 15 minutes).
* AWS Batch, AWS Outposts, AWS Serverless Application Repository, VMware Cloud on AWS and AWS Wavelength are also covered on the Exam!

### **Network and Content Delivery**

* Understand what [AWS Global Accelerator](https://aws.amazon.com/global-accelerator/) is and its use cases.
* Understand when to use CloudFront and when to use AWS Global Accelerator.
* Make sure you understand the different types of VPC endpoint and which require an Elastic Network Interface (ENI) and which require a route table entry.
* You need to know how to connect multiple accounts; e.g. should you use VPC peering or a VPC endpoint?
* Know the difference between [PrivateLink](https://aws.amazon.com/privatelink/) and [ClassicLink](https://docs.aws.amazon.com/AWSEC2/latest/UserGuide/vpc-classiclink.html).
* Know the patterns for extending a secure on-premises environment into AWS.
* Know how to encrypt [AWS Direct Connect](https://aws.amazon.com/directconnect/faqs/) (you can use a Virtual Private Gateway / AWS VPN).
* Understand when to use Direct Connect vs Snowball to migrate data – lead time can be an issue with Direct Connect if you’re in a hurry.
* Know how to prevent circumvention of [Amazon CloudFront](https://digitalcloud.training/amazon-cloudfront/); e.g. Origin Access Identity (OAI) or signed URLs / signed cookies.

### **Database**

* Make sure you understand Amazon Aurora and [Amazon Aurora Serverless](https://aws.amazon.com/rds/aurora/serverless/).
* Know which [RDS databases](https://digitalcloud.training/amazon-rds/) can have Read Replicas and whether you can read from a Multi-AZ standby.
* Know the options for encrypting an existing RDS database; e.g. only at creation time otherwise you must encrypt a snapshot and create a new instance from the snapshot.
* Know which databases are key-value stores; e.g. [Amazon DynamoDB](https://digitalcloud.training/amazon-dynamodb/).
* Amazon Timestream, Amazon RedShift, Amazon Quantum Ledger Database (Amazon QLDB), Amazon Keyspaces (for Apache Cassandra, Amazon Neptune and Amazon DocumentDB also have the potential to be on the exam.

### **Management and Governance**

* You’ll need to know about AWS Organizations; e.g. how to migrate an account between organizations.
* For AWS Organizations, you also need to know how to restrict actions using service control policies attached to OUs.
* Understand what [AWS Resource Access Manager](https://aws.amazon.com/ram/) is.

### **Application Integration**

* Make sure you know the use cases for the Amazon Simple Queue Service ([SQS](https://digitalcloud.training/aws-application-integration-services/)), and Simple Notification Service ([SNS](https://digitalcloud.training/aws-application-integration-services/)).
* Understand the differences between Amazon Kinesis Firehose and SQS and when you would use each service.
* Know how to use Amazon S3 event notifications to publish events to SQS.

Of course, this is not an exhaustive list of what you need to know, just a selection of tips for what I recommend you focus your studies on when preparing for the AWS Certified Solutions Architect Associate (SAA-C03) exam. To ensure you’re properly prepared, check out the Digital Cloud Training courses mentioned below.

## **3 – FREE Training Resources**

Access free [Video Tutorials](https://www.youtube.com/@DigitalCloudTraining/videos), [Practice Questions](https://digitalcloud.training/free-aws-practice-exam-questions/) and other [**free certification training resources**](https://digitalcloud.training/free-aws-certification-training/) for the AWS Solutions Architect exam. One of these great learning tools are the [**FREE online cheat sheets**](https://digitalcloud.training/category/aws-cheat-sheets/aws-solutions-architect-associate/)on the Digital Cloud Training website which provide a deeper level of understanding for all test domains of the Solutions Architect exam. Browsing these high-quality training resources will save you lots of time on the AWS website. These exam-specific cheat sheets will help you get straight to the facts you need to know for your AWS exam.

## **4 – Enroll in our popular AWS Training**

Whether you’re just getting started with AWS Certification training, have on-the-job experience, or are continuing your education after taking other AWS exams, you will need to cover both the theory and practical aspects of Amazon Web Services in your journey.

Check out the AWS Certified Solutions Architect Associate [**on-demand training**](https://digitalcloud.training/aws-certified-solutions-architect-associate/) from Digital Cloud Training. With this instructor-led video course, you’ll be fully equipped to ace your SAA-C03 exam for the AWS Certified Solutions Architect. This is the best way to learn AWS! Delivered through guided practice exercises, this course will not not only help you pass the exam but will also ensure you’ll develop a strong experience-based skillset.

This course takes you right from creating your first AWS Free Tier account through to building complex architectures on AWS. No other course gives you so much hands-on experience with the AWS Cloud. No more death-by-powerpoint – this is about actually building architectures on AWS.

## **5 – Use Practice Exams to smash your SAA-C03 AWS exam**

The AWS Certified Solutions Architect Associate [**Practice Exams**](https://digitalcloud.training/aws-certified-solutions-architect-associate/) from Digital Cloud Training contain over 500 up-to-date practice questions that reflect the style and difficulty of the real AWS exam. After going through these questions a couple of times, you’ll feel confident when taking the real test. Practice Exams are a great way to assess your exam readiness (using our online exam simulator that is timed and scored). Practice Exams will also help you get a deeper understanding of the concepts as we provide detailed explanations and reference links for every question. But don’t leave it until the last minute, get started with AWS Certified Solutions Architect Associate Practice Exams early so you can ensure you’re on track.

All of our courses are kept up-to-date to ensure you pass your AWS certification exam the first time.

If you’re looking to pass the AWS Certified Solutions Architect Associate exam, simply follow these 5 steps outlined in this article. This will ensure you’ll comfortably pass your exam the first time with confidence.

## **Ready to Take Your Tech Career to the Next Level?**

At Digital Cloud Training we provide the highest quality [AWS training courses](https://digitalcloud.training/aws-training-courses/) in the market at affordable prices. Our training options include:

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[Challenge Labs](https://digitalcloud.training/aws-training-courses/#Labs) – Apply what you’ve learned in a real-world setting without the risk of incurring surprise cloud bills.  
[Cloud Mastery Bootcamp](https://digitalcloud.training/aws-training-courses/#bootcamp) – Build job-ready skills with this live, immersive training that can get you certified faster than you thought possible.

*Note: Last updated May 9, 2023*

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