



WORKING GROUP PAPER

# Teacher Qualifications

APRIL 2019

#YAstandards

In 1999, in its role as a voluntary, member-based organization serving yoga schools and teachers, **Yoga Alliance (YA)** sought to ensure and preserve the quality of yoga education and practice by establishing and disseminating standards for the education of yoga teachers and by maintaining a registry of teachers who met these standards. In 2018, **YA** launched a review of its standards, calling it the **Standards Review Project (SRP)**.

One result of the **SRP** is this collection of eight collaborative, condensed, and edited working group papers to which key yoga stakeholders for **YA** and for the yoga community at large contributed. These papers represent the recommendations by each working group of the best practices for the standard, or key inquiry area, in question. There is one working paper for each; what follows is the working group paper on the notion of **Teacher Qualifications** in yoga.

## TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS UPFRONT

Yoga Alliance (YA) chose Teacher Qualifications as one of its eight areas of inquiry because its founding mission, to define and preserve the quality and safety of yoga education and practice, still holds true today. YA continues to be focused on maintaining a credentialing system that results in Registered Yoga Teachers (RYTs) who teach the highest-quality and safest-possible yoga classes globally.

YA asked the Teacher Qualifications Working Group (TQWG) the following questions for defining the best standards for Teacher Qualifications in yoga:

- ***What prerequisites, if any, should there be to take a yoga teacher training (YTT) course?***
- ***Are the current 200-hour and 500-hour systems sufficient?***
- ***Do YA-approved Teacher Qualifications standards need more hours or levels? Do they need both?***

Addressing the basics of application prerequisites, Practicum procedures and testing (online and in-person), and minimum-age requirements for participating in a YTT, the TQWG recommended four solutions for a best-practices Qualifications Standard for YA-approved RYT 200 (or “foundational”) or RYT 500 (or “professional”) Registered Yoga School (RYS):

- 1) Redefine the types of training hours and number of acceptable hours, including:
  - a) A minimum training duration balanced with a maximum number of training hours per day
  - b) The quality and quantity of time spent on mentorship hours
- 2) Clarify YA-approved Practicum guidelines and procedures
- 3) Ensure the administration and evaluation of a final written exam
- 4) Request YA to research further, manage the creation of, and approve a variety of speciality training courses that will serve as adjuncts to the RYS YTT programs

Please see the SRP [Core Curriculum](#), [Integrity](#), and [Teacher Trainer Qualifications](#) Working Group Papers for deeper inquiries into these topics.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

The consistent concern of the TQWG was the perceived low standard of many current RYS programs and, for that matter, non-YA YTTs producing unprepared and unqualified yoga teachers.

The driving belief among the TQWG was that YA should improve its standards in many ways, starting with the most prevailing and fundamental problem of the minimum time required to become an RYT 200. Today, that time is 18 days, or 10 hours a day over 18 consecutive days. An RYS 200 trainee could start and finish their program and become a teacher of yoga in two-and-a-half weeks.

## BACKGROUND AND REFLECTION

The TQWG redefined the RYT 200 and 500 designations, **biasing types of hours over the value of the number of hours themselves**. They asserted that an RYT 200 could be designated an **RYT Foundational 200** while the RYT 500 could be designated an **RYT Professional 500**. The spirit of this redefinition is to emphasize that any 200-hour program should be considered the baseline, or foundation, for any yoga teacher's (hopefully) lifelong journey of learning and training.

The TQWG did not agree on:

- The concept of “contact,” or in-person, vs “non-contact,” or not-in-person, hours within any RYS program as “mentoring,” “observing,” and “assisting” hours
- Whether any of these hours should count as contact hours; throughout the conversation, the TQWG acknowledged the rise of online learning and its impact on YTTs

Please see the [Teacher Trainer Qualifications](#) and [Online Learning](#) Working Group Papers for more information.

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## SOLUTION

Though the quantity of hours, specifically 200 hours, was debated, the **TQWG agreed that current RYS 200 standards are enough as long as the quality of content and competencies, and overall accountability systems**, are addressed and put in place and that **all hours are contact**. The group pointed out that increasing the number of hours of a low-standards school would not lead to better prepared students and rather focused on what they agreed was the more important task of “upleveling” current RYS 200 programs. In other words, the TQWG wanted to increase the quality demands on these programs and establish accountability measures to ensure quality and safety of programs going forward.

The TQWG offered solutions on Hours; Prerequisites; Testing; and Other Considerations.

## HOURS: DEFINITIONS AND DESIGNATIONS

The TQWG's common concern was the quality of YA-approved RYT 200, RYT 300, and RYT 500 programs. Understanding how important Lead Trainers<sup>1</sup> (LTs) are to the quality of a program, the group proposed that LTs should be present for all required hours except for a later-determined percentage of hours taught by a Specialist Trainer (ST). (Please see the [Teacher Trainer Qualifications](#) Working Group Paper for an in-depth inquiry and suggested overhaul of these requirements.)

### Types

The TQWG recommended that all RYS hours should be contact whereas in YA's current standards, 10% (or 20 hours) can be non-contact within an RYS 200. The group also said that if YA continued with non-contact hours, these hours should not be counted at a 1:1 ratio; one non-contact hour should not equal a full hour of training.

The **TQWG believed mentorship hours should count as contact hours.** Debating the benefit of a mentorship program at the RYS 200 level overall, the group emphasized the importance of an RYS maintaining a high quality of mentoring while keeping the teachings synchronized with its YA-approved program. With respect to hours of observing or assisting, the **TQWG generally recommended these not count as contact hours and instead be considered in the same way that reading, studying, and doing homework are considered.**

The TQWG said that an RYS 200 should be conducted at a minimum of 21 days in an intensive format and over a minimum three-month period of time for other programs.

## PREREQUISITES FOR ENROLLMENT

The TQWG debated the value of prerequisites for enrollment in an RYS and did not reach agreement. The **TQWG did agree that the minimum age for RYS registration should be 18 years of age**, though there was no agreement on this needing to be the case by the time of enrollment or by the time of graduation.

## TESTING

### Practicum Procedures and Guidelines

The **TQWG recommended that all RYSs should conduct a Practicum exam**, or observed practice teaching with feedback, before graduating a student. This Practicum, the group said, would apply regardless of the type of yoga school conducting the Practicum. The group suggested a "Practicum Grading Rubric" (idea and label are the TQWG's) that would show a trainee's ability to:

- Teach more than just cues
- Hold space for the whole class and for individual students at the same time

Any 200-hour program should be considered the baseline or foundation for any yoga teachers' hopefully lifelong journey of learning and training.

<sup>1</sup> The notion of Lead Trainer(s) and Other Trainer(s) come from YA's section of its website on [Standards Guidelines](#) (all RYS).

- Project the voice and use effective and safe verbal or hands-on assists
- Offer appropriate variations and modifications when necessary

### Written/Final Test

The **TQWG supported the need for a final written exam** in which:

- The RYS defines and publishes its own certification requirements to demonstrate what is on its written exam, what the grading scale is, what the mentorship/relationship process is relative to the exam, what the practicum exam looks like, or
- The RYS follows a YA-approved required criteria that includes a signed agreement of understanding and compliance with regard to trainee attendance and performance, practicum performance, and written exam results

The TQWG expressed concern over the following issue: while an automatic certification and thus automatic invitation to become an RYT is not desirable, “YA-standardized,” on the other hand, runs the risk of discouraging differences in curricula, methodologies, and lineages and could impact the ideas of diversity, accessibility, inclusion, and equity. The **TQWG said these issues must be addressed before their improved Teaching Qualifications Standards could be approved by YA.**

For inquiries into assessment and other related issues, please see the [Core Curriculum](#), [Integrity](#), and [Online Learning](#) Working Group Papers for discussions.

## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

### Definitions and Designations

The TQWG recommended alternate titles for the levels of an RYT, such as RYT Foundational 200 and RYT Professional 500. Most in the group agreed that 200 hours can, if in service of quality and safety, lead to a foundational understanding of teaching. The TQWG acknowledged the benefits of the professional levels (RYS 300 and RYS 500) for deepening skills such as observing bodies, performing hands-on and verbal assists, and specializing in specific areas.

### Specialty Training for RYT 200

The TQWG discussed the need for speciality knowledge at the RYT 200 level on a wide range of issues like anatomy, accessibility, inclusion, trauma, pathologies (such as cancer), and more.

Though distinct from a possible RYT 500 and/or specialty credential on “yoga for cancer,” the TQWG did express a desire for inclusion of some type of foundational understanding of what they as yoga teachers can, and more importantly cannot, do.

The TQWG noted that the skill set required for teaching on a topic such as yoga for cancer requires a degree of expertise and responsibility beyond that which

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could be conveyed in an RYT 200 program. Given its overarching concerns on quality of RYS programs, the TQWG also implored YA to avoid empowering teachers to think they can handle teaching related to trauma. The group said that this work must be left to trained professional therapists.

Please see the [Scope of Practice](#) Working Group Paper for more information on a YA-approved Scope of Practice in yoga.

### **Continuing Education**

The TQWG stepped briefly outside its scope of Teacher Qualifications to discuss Continuing Education (CE), agreeing that teachers of CEs should be experts in their subject matter and not limited based on whether or not they were RYT.

### **Certificate Tiers**

The TQWG discussed whether there should be two separate certifications upon graduating from an RYS 200: one for those interested in teaching and one for those interested in deepening their practices. There was no agreement.

### **Online Training**

Many in the TQWG had reservations over online learning with respect to learning how to teach yoga, agreeing generally that the best way to learn was in-person. The group also generally agreed that if online learning were included in a YA-approved RYS, YA should increase the total number of hours to obtain a certificate/qualify to be an RYT. Please also see the [Online Learning](#) Working Group Paper.

### **Yoga Alliance's Role**

The TQWG believed that it is YA's role to empower an RYS to offer better and stronger programs and to encourage each RYS to take this seriously, rewarding those who train and produce high-quality, safe, and competent yoga teachers. YA must take on a bigger role in supervising RYSs, the group said, pointing to accountability areas with respect to specialty credentials for such styles as restorative yoga and yin yoga.

The TQWG pressed further with these next-step ideas and suggestions:

- Individual teachers offering an RYT 200-hour course without the backing of a school would perhaps need to be re-evaluated through YA's new standards
- YA could make 200 hours a suggested minimum and further establish metrics and communications explaining that all trainings are not made equal, educating potential RYT on the appropriateness of an RYS for them and assisting RYSs in explaining clearly what their programs offer
- YA could start a rating system on schools

Yoga Alliance could make 200 hours a suggested minimum and, further, establish metrics and communications explaining that all trainings are not made equal, educating potential RYT on the appropriateness of a RYS for them and assisting RYSs in explaining clearly what their programs offer.

# ADVISORY GROUP

Our heartfelt thanks go to the following Advisors who spent much time and energy meeting, discussing, debating, and resolving issues on the standard of Teacher Qualifications to the benefit of Yoga Alliance’s membership. The Advisors were:



**TRINA ALTMAN**



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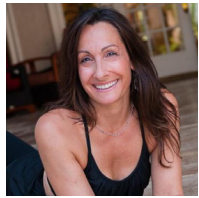
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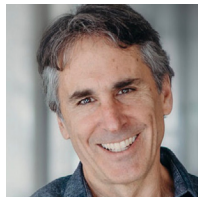
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### YOGA ALLIANCE & THE YOGA ALLIANCE FOUNDATION

Founded in 1999, Yoga Alliance is a member-based, non-profit organization that serves yoga schools and teachers across the globe, providing a world-recognized, best-in-class credential and unifying its members around a shared ethical commitment. In addition, YA delivers a strong value proposition to its members through community-building initiatives, educational resources, advocacy efforts, and social impact programs. Its sister organization, the Yoga Alliance Foundation, supports leveraged impact and direct service programs that expand the reach of and participation in yoga.