

# AZ-500 vs SC-300: Which Microsoft Security Certification is Better in 2026?

Microsoft security certifications are changing in 2026, and many candidates are confused about whether they should choose **AZ-500** or **SC-300**. Both certifications are security-related, both are associate-level Microsoft credentials, and both can support cybersecurity careers. However, they are not the same certification, and they do not lead to the same type of security role.

**AZ-500** is the exam for **Microsoft Certified: Azure Security Engineer Associate**. It focuses on securing Azure environments, including identity, networking, compute, storage, databases, Microsoft Defender for Cloud, and Microsoft Sentinel. Microsoft lists AZ-500 as scheduled to retire on **August 31, 2026**, so timing matters for anyone planning this path.

**SC-300** is the exam for **Microsoft Certified: Identity and Access Administrator Associate**. It focuses on Microsoft Entra ID, user identities, authentication, access management, workload identities, and identity governance. Microsoft's latest SC-300 study guide lists updated skills measured as of **April 27, 2026**.

## The Main Difference in Simple Words

AZ-500 is broader Azure security. SC-300 is deeper identity security.

If you want to secure Azure resources, networks, workloads, databases, monitoring tools, and cloud security posture, AZ-500 fits better. It is designed for people who work directly with Azure security controls and cloud protection.

If you want to specialize in identity, access, authentication, authorization, governance, Microsoft Entra ID, Conditional Access, and workload identities, SC-300 fits better. It is more focused, but identity is one of the most important parts of modern cybersecurity.

In 2026, the choice is not only about difficulty or popularity. It is about your role. A cloud security engineer may prefer AZ-500. An identity and access administrator may prefer SC-300. A security professional working in Microsoft 365, Entra ID, and access governance may get more direct value from SC-300.

## AZ-500: Best for Azure Security Engineers

AZ-500 is best for professionals who want hands-on Azure security skills. Microsoft describes the Azure Security Engineer Associate certification as covering secure identity and access, secure networking, secure compute, storage and databases, and securing Azure using Microsoft Defender for Cloud and Microsoft Sentinel.

This makes AZ-500 useful for cloud security engineers, Azure administrators moving into security, SOC analysts working with Azure alerts, infrastructure security professionals, and people responsible for protecting Azure workloads. Candidates preparing for this Microsoft cloud security path can also review [AZ-500 exam questions](#) to become more familiar with Azure security scenarios and exam-style practice.

AZ-500 is more technical across the Azure environment. You should understand identity, but you also need networking, virtual machines, storage security, database security, cloud posture management, threat protection, monitoring, and incident detection. It is a good choice if your work involves securing Azure infrastructure and hybrid cloud resources.

The important 2026 factor is retirement. Since AZ-500 is scheduled to retire on August 31, 2026, candidates should decide quickly whether they want to complete it before that date or move toward newer Microsoft security paths such as SC-500 when available.

## SC-300: Best for Identity and Access Security

SC-300 is best for professionals who want to specialize in identity and access management. Microsoft's SC-300 skills measured include implementing and managing user identities, implementing authentication and access management, planning and implementing workload identities, and planning and automating identity governance.

This makes SC-300 highly relevant because identity is now central to security. Many attacks begin with stolen credentials, weak authentication, excessive permissions, unmanaged apps, or poor governance. A professional who understands identity can reduce major security risks before they become incidents.

SC-300 fits roles such as identity administrator, IAM analyst, Microsoft Entra administrator, security administrator, cloud access specialist, and Microsoft 365 security professional. Microsoft's SC-300 course also focuses on designing, implementing, and operating identity and access management systems using Microsoft Entra ID. Learners focusing on identity security and Microsoft Entra concepts can also review [SC-300 exam questions](#) to practice access management and governance scenarios before the real exam.

Unlike AZ-500, SC-300 is not about securing every Azure resource type. It is narrower, but deeper. If your target job mentions Entra ID, Conditional Access, MFA, access reviews, privileged access, application access, workload identities, or identity governance, SC-300 may give better career value.

## AZ-500 vs SC-300 Quick Comparison

Area	AZ-500	SC-300
Certification	Azure Security Engineer Associate	Identity and Access Administrator Associate

Main focus	Azure security across cloud resources	Microsoft Entra ID and identity access
Best for	Cloud security engineers and Azure security admins	Identity admins, IAM specialists, access governance roles
Core skills	Networking, compute, storage, Defender, Sentinel, identity	Users, authentication, workload identities, governance
2026 status	Scheduled to retire August 31, 2026	Active exam with 2026 skills update
Career direction	Azure cloud security and security operations	Identity security and access management

## Which Certification Is Better for Cloud Security?

AZ-500 is better if your goal is cloud security engineering. It covers more Azure security areas and gives you a wider view of protecting cloud infrastructure. It is useful if you want to secure workloads, review security posture, manage Defender for Cloud, understand Sentinel, and protect Azure networking and data services.

However, the retirement date matters. If you can prepare and pass before August 31, 2026, AZ-500 can still be useful. If you are starting later in 2026, it may be smarter to consider newer Microsoft cloud security certification paths instead.

SC-300 can still help cloud security professionals because identity is part of every cloud environment. But SC-300 alone does not cover the full Azure security engineer skill set. It is stronger as an identity specialization.

## Which Certification Is Better for Identity Security?

SC-300 is clearly better for identity security. It goes deeper into Microsoft Entra ID, authentication, application access, workload identities, and governance. These skills are important in modern zero-trust environments.

If your role involves managing users, groups, Conditional Access, MFA, identity protection, access reviews, lifecycle workflows, app registrations, enterprise applications, and privileged access, SC-300 is the stronger choice.

Identity security also connects well with Microsoft 365 security, compliance, endpoint security, cloud security, and governance. That makes SC-300 a strong certification for professionals who want a focused but highly valuable Microsoft security path.

**This concept is explained in greater depth in a YouTube video shared by Cert Empire:**



<https://youtu.be/tnQwQPjBEJU?si=v9cyAsDvrC4TJp-d>

## Which One Should Beginners Choose?

Beginners should not choose only by exam name. If you already understand Azure administration, networking, storage, and security basics, AZ-500 may be possible. But it is not the easiest first Microsoft security exam.

SC-300 may feel more focused for beginners who want to learn identity and access management. However, it still requires comfort with Microsoft Entra ID, Azure basics, authentication concepts, and security governance.

A practical beginner path is to learn Azure fundamentals first, then identity basics, then choose your direction. If you want broad cloud security, choose AZ-500 only if you can complete it before retirement. If you want a longer-lasting identity path, choose SC-300.

## Career ROI in 2026

AZ-500 can offer strong ROI for Azure security roles, but its 2026 retirement changes the calculation. It may still be worth it if your employer wants it now, your preparation is already advanced, or you need the Azure Security Engineer credential before the deadline.

SC-300 may offer stronger long-term ROI for candidates focused on identity security. Identity and access management is not going away. [Microsoft](#) Entra ID continues to be a major part of enterprise security, and SC-300 directly supports that skill area.

Cert Empire can support candidates at the final practice stage by helping them review exam-style questions after they understand Microsoft security objectives, identity controls, Azure security tools, and scenario-based exam logic.

## Final Insights

AZ-500 is better for broad Azure cloud security, but it is scheduled to retire on August 31, 2026. SC-300 is better for identity and access management, and it remains a strong active Microsoft security certification path in 2026.

Choose AZ-500 if you are already preparing, need Azure security engineer validation, and can pass before retirement. Choose SC-300 if you want a focused identity security path with strong long-term relevance in Microsoft environments.

The smartest choice depends on your job goal. For cloud infrastructure security, AZ-500 has the broader scope. For identity security, access control, and Microsoft Entra expertise, SC-300 is the better certification.

Those who prefer visual summaries can explore Cert Empire's [Instagram post](#).

## FAQs

**Is AZ-500 retiring in 2026?**

Yes, Microsoft lists AZ-500, Azure Security Engineer Associate, as scheduled to retire on August 31, 2026. Candidates should plan carefully before starting preparation.

### **Is SC-300 better than AZ-500?**

SC-300 is better for identity and access management. AZ-500 is better for broader Azure security, including networking, workloads, Defender for Cloud, and Sentinel.

### **Should I take AZ-500 before it retires?**

Take AZ-500 if you are already prepared or need Azure Security Engineer validation soon. If starting late in 2026, consider newer Microsoft security paths.

### **What jobs does SC-300 help with?**

SC-300 supports roles like identity administrator, IAM analyst, Microsoft Entra administrator, access governance specialist, security administrator, and Microsoft 365 identity security professional.

### **Which exam is easier, AZ-500 or SC-300?**

SC-300 may feel easier if you focus on identity. AZ-500 is broader and may feel harder because it includes networking, workloads, monitoring, and security tools.

**Read More: [DA0-001 vs DS0-001: Updated 2026 Guide to Choose the Right CompTIA Data Certification](#)**