

How Long Does SOC 2 Certification Really Take?

The Straight Skinny from Someone Who's Issued Over 4,000 Reports



Summary: Vendors promise SOC 2 reports in days. They're either misunderstanding how audits work or selling you something. After more than 4,000 SOC reports, Aprio's Brett Williams gives you the honest SOC 2 timeline numbers: realistic Type I and Type II durations, the one variable that speeds up or slows every audit, and what to say when a prospect demands your report right now.

If you've spent any time searching the internet for an answer to this question, you've probably seen timelines that range from a few days to a couple of weeks. Some vendors will even tell you that you can have a SOC 2 report in hours. I'm here to tell you that is either a fundamental misunderstanding of how audits work or it's a deliberate sales tactic. Neither one serves you well.

I have issued more than 4,000 SOC reports throughout my career. I'm going to give you the numbers that most auditors won't, because the honest answer is what you need to plan your business.

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First, let's Separate Two Things People Constantly Confuse

There is a big difference between how long it takes to prepare for a SOC 2 and how long the audit itself takes. There's also a critical difference between a Type I and a Type II report. Mixing those up is exactly how vendors get away with misleading timelines.

A Type I report is a point-in-time assessment. It says: as of this date, your controls are designed and in place.

A Type II report covers an observation period, typically a minimum of 90 days during which your controls must be operating effectively.

This distinction alone changes your timeline by months.

The Type I timeline: 60 to 90 days, realistically

A Type I starts the moment you can prove your controls are in place. Not the moment you decide you want one.

Before an auditor ever shows up, you need to have documented policies and procedures in place: logical access, change management, incident response, onboarding and offboarding controls. Yes, solutions like GRC tools can help you write those policies faster than starting from scratch. But while they provide templates, you still need to document how your company operates. That's not a shortcut. It's just a better starting point than a blank page. Policies alone aren't enough. You also need to prove those controls exist, not just say you intend to do them. That means you need to complete a risk assessment, a third-party vendor review, access reviews, and document onboarding and offboarding processes, etc. Getting all this in order takes a minimum of two to four weeks for most companies, regardless of size.

Then comes the audit itself. For a smaller company, say under 25 people, the audit fieldwork can be completed in a week if you're organized and responsive. Add another week or two for the auditor to draft and issue the report.

The honest Type I number: approximately 60 days to be ready and another 30 days to have a report in hand. Anyone telling you they can get you there in two weeks when you haven't started any of the work yet is either not accounting for prep time, or they're not doing a real audit.

The one exception: I've seen clients complete a Type I in three to four weeks, but it's always been due to very specific circumstances. In every case, it was a smaller company, the scoping and document request list was prepared before the clock started, and the client had someone available to drop everything and respond to requests immediately. It's possible, but not typical, and the scoping work still must happen before that sprint even begins.

The Type II timeline: Four to seven months, depending on where you start

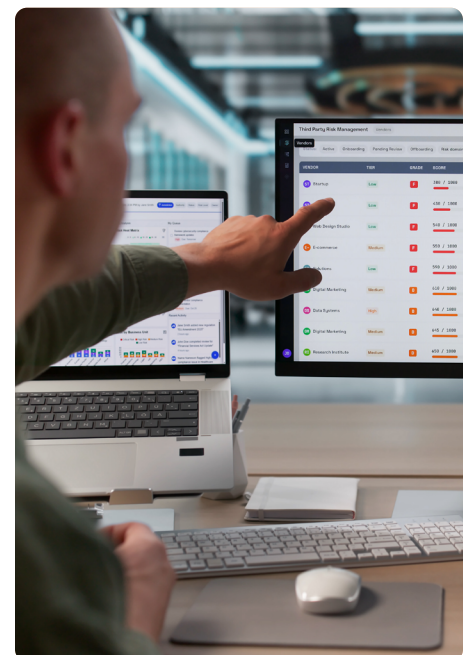
This is where the gap between what gets advertised and what's real becomes genuinely irresponsible.

The minimum observation period most auditors will accept for a Type II is 90 days. That's not a preference, it's the floor. Even if you were 100% ready the day you called, you'd still have to wait 90 days before fieldwork can begin. Then add 30 to 45 days to issue the report, and you're already nearing four and a half months. The audit itself may have only taken two weeks, but it still took over four months to have a report in hand.

But here's the thing: almost no client is 100% ready when they call. In every design meeting I do, the first one- to two-hour session where we walk through your environment and customize your controls, I ask the same questions:

- Do you have this control in place?
- What's the evidence?
- Could you show me retroactively that this was in place three months ago?

The answer to that last question is almost always no.



The rare client who walks in ready for a Type II has almost always been through a SOC audit before. First-year clients virtually always have at least one control gap, which means the 90-day clock cannot start until that gap is closed.

Add the two to four weeks of prep time before the audit period can begin, and the realistic timeline for a first-year Type II is six to seven months from “I’ve decided I need this” to “report in hand.”

What’s the absolute best case for a Type II? Technically, three months and one day, if your controls are perfect, your documentation is complete the moment you engage an auditor, and your audit team has the bandwidth to issue the report the day after the observation period closes. I’ve had the stars align like that exactly twice, in over 4,000 reports. Hitting that timeline demands more coordination and effort from both sides, not less, which is exactly why it almost never happens. Both times, it was a client who had already been through a SOC audit before.



The single biggest variable: Documentation speed

The number one thing that speeds up or slows down any Type I or Type II audit is how fast the client provides documentation. That’s it. Not the auditor’s schedule. Not the complexity of your environment. It’s simply how fast you can get us what we need.

GRC tools can help here through built-in integrations that automatically pull evidence from your AWS environment, your GitHub repository, your identity provider. But in my experience, most clients buy a GRC tool and use it as a fancy electronic filing cabinet. They use the policy templates, maybe the risk assessment module and the code of conduct acknowledgment tracking. The integrations that would actually accelerate an audit? Rarely configured. And even when they are, setting them up correctly takes time — time you’re probably trying to balance against product development, or getting those controls in place.

I once worked with a CEO who needed a Type I report two weeks after signing the engagement letter. I told him we could do it, but only if he could provide everything the moment I asked for it and everything was already in. He did. He made himself available in real time, dropped everything else, and we got the audit done in a week. That’s the exception, not the rule. However, it required him to stop running his company for a week. And even in this example, the client had done a readiness assessment with another firm.

What to say when a prospect is asking for your SOC 2 right now

This is the call I get most often: a CISO calls and says a prospect is demanding a SOC 2 report and they need it before they will sign the contract.

Here’s exactly what we tell them: The soonest you can have a Type II report in hand is three months plus four to six weeks, and that assumes you’re ready to start the audit period today. If you have one control that isn’t in place yet, the clock doesn’t start until it is. You don’t get to start your observation period with an exception already on the books.

If 90 days is the hard deadline, the honest conversation is this: A Type I might be achievable, but only if your prep work is already done or nearly done, you have a small team, and everyone is prioritizing the audit. A Type II in 90 days is not achievable for a first-year client. Full stop.

Then I suggest we provide a letter of engagement that the prospect can share with their customer showing they’ve hired a reputable firm and committed to a realistic timeline. Ninety percent of the time, the prospect either signs the contract or agrees to a Type I as a steppingstone.

The Bottom Line

Here are the numbers, without hedging

- **SOC 2 Type I:** Plan for roughly 60 days to be audit-ready, 90 days to report in hand. In a true best-case scenario, and perfect conditions, it can happen in as little as one to two weeks, but only if scoping and prep are already complete and the controls are in place.
- **SOC 2 Type II:** If you're already fully prepared, the minimum timeline is roughly four to four and a half months. For most first-year clients, six to seven months is a more realistic timeline. The best case ever that I've seen is three months and one day, and I've seen that happen twice.

If someone is quoting you a timeline faster than these numbers without asking detailed questions about your environment, your existing controls, and your documentation readiness, they're either selling you something or they're not doing a real audit. The report is only as good as the audit firm that issued it.

Plan accordingly.

Brett Williams leads Aprio's Risk Advisory and Assurance Services, where he and his team specialize in SOC 1, SOC 2, and SOC 3 examinations. Aprio holds formal partnership relationships with Vanta, Drata, Secureframe, Sprinto, Hyperproof, Anecdotes, and Spektrum Labs, and evaluates new GRC platforms on an ongoing basis.

How we can help

Aprio's Risk Advisory and Assurance Services teamwork alongside your GRC platform from day one, helping you scope the right controls, configure your integrations correctly, and walk into your SOC 2 with confidence.

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