



December Month 20202026

Basic Guide to Credentialing Terminology

2nd-3rd Edition

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Published by

Institute for Credentialing
Excellence 2001 K Street
NW, 3rd Floor North
Washington, DC 20006

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United States of America

Introduction

The Institute for Credentialing Excellence (I.C.E.) has as its mission to ensure competence across professions and occupations. One way in which I.C.E. intends to accomplish that mission is to provide resources for I.C.E. members and the general public that further an understanding of the intended purposes of credentialing and help differentiate among various types of credentialing programs.

Credentialing programs can serve many purposes, but the ultimate purpose of most credentialing programs is protecting the public. This public protection is normally provided through establishing standards, identifying the competencies needed in a profession, and providing information to consumers about the individuals who have demonstrated a sufficient level of mastery related to the competencies. Since the primary purpose of this document is to clarify terms, it may be helpful for the reader to understand that credentialing is an umbrella term that includes the concepts of accreditation, licensure, registration, professional certification, and education (e.g., degree programs, certificate programs) and microcredentials.

Resources consulted during the creation of this guide include:

I.C.E. (2006). *Basic guide to credentialing terminology*. Retrieved from
<https://www.credentialingexcellence.org/p/cm/ld/fid=14>

I.C.E. (2021). *National Commission for Certifying Agencies standards for the accreditation of certification programs*. Retrieved from
<https://www.credentialingexcellence.org/p/cm/ld/fid=530&blogaid=240>

I.C.E. (2021). *National Commission for Certifying Agencies AI Guidance Document*. Retrieved from
from TBD I.C.E. (2025). *ANSI/ICE 1100-2025, Standard for Assessment-Based Certificate (ABC) Programs*. Retrieved from TBD

Durley, C. C. (2005). *I.C.E. guide to understanding credentialing concepts*. Retrieved from
<https://www.credentialingexcellence.org/p/cm/ld/fid=14>

ASTM International. (2018). *Standard terminology for accreditation and certification* (ASTM E 2708-18a). Retrieved from <http://www.astm.org/cgi-bin/resolver.cgi?E2708-18a>

International Organization for Standardization. (2014). Conformity assessment—Vocabulary related to competence of persons used for certification of persons (ISO/IEC Standard No. 17027). Retrieved from <https://www.iso.org/standard/62024.html>

This document is intended to serve as a brief reference to credentialing terms and their definitions. Those seeking more complete information about credentialing are advised to consult the resource documents available through the I.C.E. In addition, interested readers are encouraged to investigate the advantages of membership and participation in I.C.E.



The Institute for Credentialing Excellence gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the following individuals in the development of this edition of the *Basic Guide to Credentialing Terminology*:
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Accommodation—

A modification in the design or administration of an examination to compensate for the effects of candidates' documented disability without altering the interpretation of the examination results (e.g., as specified by the Americans with Disabilities Act or other applicable legislation).

Accountability—

The responsibility of a board, governing committee, or other element of a credentialing body, to its interested parties to demonstrate the efficacy and fairness of credentialing policies, procedures, and requirements.

Accreditation—

The process by which an agency having authority grants time-limited formal recognition to an institution, organization, business, credentialing body or other independent entity after verifying that the aforementioned has met predetermined and standardized criteria.

Accreditation Body—

An entity that evaluates whether the processes and products of a credentialing body have met predetermined and standardized criteria.

Adaptation—

The process by which examinations or other credentialing requirements are converted to another language and/or cultural context, preserving equivalence of meaning, level of difficulty, and conceptual complexity from the original version to the adapted version. **Examination adaptation, in the context of testing, refers to modifying an assessment to ensure it accurately measures the intended knowledge or skills, regardless of language, culture, or other factors that might create bias or hinder performance.**

Adverse Impact—

An instance in which a protected class of candidates exhibits a demonstrably higher failure rate than that of the reference nonprotected population.

Appeal—

A request by ~~Applicants~~ candidates, ~~or~~ credentialled individuals or entities [of credentialing programs](#) for reconsideration of an adverse decision made by the credentialing [or accrediting](#) body regarding their desired status. [An appeal can also be made related to accreditation decisions.](#)

Applicant—

An individual or entity that declares interest in earning a credential offered by a credentialing body, usually through submission of materials.

Artificial Intelligence—

[A field of computer science involving the development of systems that can perform tasks typically requiring human intelligence, such as perception, language processing, problem-solving, and decision-making.](#)
[Artificial Intelligence \(AI\) differs from traditional automation by leveraging algorithms, data patterns, and](#)

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[adaptive learning models that enable systems to refine and improve their outputs over time. In the context of certification and assessment, AI may be used in areas such as automated scoring, AI-driven proctoring, and candidate evaluation, necessitating clear guidelines for transparency, bias mitigation, and human oversight. Refer to the National Commission for Certifying Agencies Guidance Document: Use of Artificial Intelligence in Certification Programs for additional relevant information.](#)

Assessment—

The process that evaluates an individual's or credentialing body's fulfillment of [set requirements or is an instrument or protocol designed to measure the knowledge, skill, and/or competencies associated with the accomplishment of the intended learning outcomes. Assessments may be written, oral, practical, or observational and may be used prior to, during, and at the end of education/training. This term is frequently used interchangeably with Examination.](#)

Assessment-Based Certificate—

A non-degree-granting program that provides education and training to aid participants in acquiring knowledge, skill, and/or competencies associated with intended learning outcomes; evaluates participants' accomplishment of the intended learning outcomes; and issues a certificate only to those participants who meet the performance, proficiency, or passing standard for the summative assessment(s). See also [Certificate Program](#).

Assessment Based Certificate Provider—

An entity that conducts or sponsors education/training and a summative assessment for the purpose of issuing a certificate.

Assessment Instrument—

A tool or process for determining whether candidates possess the necessary knowledge, skill, or demonstrated abilities to fulfill the requirements of a credential.

Attestation—

An individual's [confirmation assertion; based on a decision following a review](#), that fulfillment of specified requirements has been demonstrated. See also [Self-Declaration](#).

Audit—

A systematic, independent, and documented review of records and activities to assess the adequacy of system controls, to ensure compliance with established policies and operational procedures, and to recommend necessary changes in controls, policies, or procedures.

Automatic Item Generation—

The use of technology to generate large numbers of examination items by combining variable elements within a template or model designed by subject-matter experts.

Autonomy—

Control over all essential credentialing decisions without being subject to approval by or undue influence from any other body or individual(s).

Bias—



An inclination or preference that influences the treatment of candidates or a class of candidates in a manner that varies from the treatment of a reference population. See also [Fairness](#), [Rater Bias](#), and [Test Bias](#).

Candidate—

An applicant who has fulfilled specified prerequisites establishing eligibility to participate in the credentialing process.

Certificant—

An individual who has successfully completed the requirements of a certification program, who has earned the right to use the certification mark and continues to be authorized to use this mark by meeting ongoing recertification or maintenance of certification requirements.

Certificate—

A formal recognition (e.g., letter, card, digital image, or other medium) attesting to the successful completion of the requirements of a credentialing program.

Certificate Holder—

An individual who has successfully completed the requirements of a credentialing program and receives a certificate to reflect this achievement. See also [Certificate](#).

Certificate of Attendance or Participation—

A document issued after an individual attends and/or participates in an instructional event for a minimum specified time. [Certificates of attendance or participation are provided to individuals \(participants\) who have attended or participated in a class, course, or other education/training program or event. The certificate issued at the completion of the program or event signifies that the participant was present and, in some cases, that the participant actively participated in the program or event. Certificates of attendance do not usually include the result of an assessment.](#)

Certificate Program—

A non-degree-granting program that provides instruction and training to aid participants in acquiring specific knowledge, skills, and/or competencies associated with intended outcomes. When the certificate program includes a summative assessment of learning, it is known as an assessment-based certificate program. See also [Assessment-Based Certificate](#).

Certification—

[A voluntary process by which individuals are evaluated against predetermined standards for knowledge, skills, or competencies. Participants who demonstrate that they meet the standards by successfully completing the assessment process are granted a time-limited credential. To retain the credential, certificants must maintain continuing competence. Additionally, the certification process requires the assessment\(s\) to be independent of both a specific class, course, or other education/training program and any provider of classes, courses, or programs. A voluntary, nongovernmental process by which an individual is determined by a certification body to have successfully completed the requirements of a certification program and may be identified to the public and other stakeholders as a certificant. Some regulatory bodies use voluntary certification programs to meet licensure or registration requirements.](#)

Certification Board—

A group of individuals, either appointed or elected ~~to, that~~ autonomously governs one or more certification programs and to be responsible for all certification decision-making. ~~Also known~~ May also be referred to as a “certification committee,” “certification council,” or “governing committee.”

Certification Body—

The organization or administrative unit that offers and operates a certification program. See also [Credentialing Body](#) and [Licensing Authority/Body](#).

Certification Mark—

A type of trademark used to show consumers that providers of particular goods and/or services ~~have met~~ ~~meet~~ certain standards ~~set by a certification body~~. ~~Unlike a standard trademark, which identifies the source of a product or service, a certification mark indicates compliance with established criteria.~~ The certification mark is the intellectual property of the certification body and may only be used with its authorization ~~and in accordance with its specified guidelines~~ . .

Certification Process—

All activities by which a certification body establishes that individuals fulfill specified requirements, including implementing policies and procedures, reviewing applicant materials and documentation, registering candidates for examinations, administering examinations, scoring, making decisions about certification, surveilling certificants, and recertifying credential holders.

Certification Program—

The standards, policies, procedures, assessment instruments, and related products and activities through which individuals are publicly identified as having ~~mastered the~~ knowledge and skills critical to successful performance in a profession, occupation, or role.

Certification Requirements—

A set of specifications for all aspects of personnel certification (e.g., eligibility to apply to enter into the certification process or policies around examination administration, security, and recertification requirements).

Certification Scheme—

See [Certification Process](#).

Classical Test Theory (CTT)—

A traditional psychometric method of developing and evaluating examination responses based on candidates' raw scores. The two most commonly used classical item statistics are the difficulty index (p value) and discrimination index (typically the point-biserial correlation [r_{pb}]). See [also Item Response Theory](#).

Code of Conduct—

~~A set of rules and guidelines that outline the expected behavior and ethical standards within an organization, or for a specific group or profession~~ The credentialing body policies governing the

professional and ethical behavior required of credential holders. Also known as a “code of ethics.”

Commentary—

As used in the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) accreditation standards, “commentary” refers to comments, remarks, and/or observations that clarify terms, provide examples of practices that help explain a standard, or offer suggestions regarding evidence that should be documented to demonstrate compliance with essential elements.

Commission—

For the purposes of this document, “Commission” refers to the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA), the accrediting body of the Institute for Credentialing Excellence (I.C.E.), which awards accreditation to certification programs that apply for and comply with the standards as developed by the I.C.E.

Committee/Panel—

A group of individuals invited to provide advice on a specific subject or task to assist an organization or board with decision-making (e.g., examination committee or standard setting committee).

Compensatory Scoring—

A model for scoring in which candidates’ pass/fail status is determined by the total score on the examination rather than section by section (i.e., conjunctive scoring). In this model, high scores in one content area can compensate for low scores in another content area when obtaining a final pass/fail result. See also [Conjunctive Scoring](#) and [Multiple Hurdle](#).

Competence—

The ability to perform a task, function, or role at a level that meets or exceeds the prescribed minimum standards in the specified environment.

Competency—

A statement describing an ability expected of credential holders, articulated as an action performed to demonstrate a prescribed level of skill or to attain a desired outcome.

Competency Modeling—

A framework for defining the knowledge, skills, attributes and/or other characteristics needed for successful performance of a job or role. Competency models are widely used in business for defining and assessing competencies in both hard and soft skills. See also [Job Analysis](#).

Complaint—

A request (other than an appeal) by any organization or individual to credentialing provider for corrective action relating to the activities of that provider or to those of any of its interested parties.

Confidentiality—

A requirement that information and processes are not made available or disclosed to unauthorized individuals or entities:

Confidentiality Agreement—

A legal contract between at least two parties that specifies rules governing confidential material, knowledge, or information that the parties intend to share with one another but wish to restrict other parties from accessing. Also known as a “nondisclosure agreement.”

Conflict of Interest—

A situation in which an individual’s personal, business or professional interests’ conflict with the best interests of a group on which the individual holds a position of authority, especially if the individual is a fiduciary (e.g., a member of a credentialing organization’s governing body).

Conjunctive Scoring—

A model for scoring in which a score on a specific section or set of sections within an examination may determine candidates’ pass/fail status. See also [Compensatory Scoring](#) and [Multiple Hurdle](#).

Conformity Assessment Body—

See [Credentialing Body](#).

Construct—

The trait(s) that cannot be directly observed but are assessed by an examination within a credentialing program.

Construct Equivalence—

The degree to which qualitative and quantitative evidence demonstrate that two examination forms measure the same traits.

Construct-Irrelevant Factors—

Anything that affects examination scores or outcomes that is not intended to be part of the assessment (e.g., adverse administration conditions, readability level, or vocabulary).

Constructed-Response Item—

A type of examination item in which candidates produce answers (e.g., an essay or a fill in the blank) rather than selecting from multiple-choice options.

Content Domains—

A set of organized categories, based on the results of a job analysis, characterizing subject matter within which tasks, knowledge, and/or skills may be represented in examination specifications. See also [Performance Domains](#).

Content Specifications—

A description of the subject-matter domain weightings (e.g., number of items, percent of items, or numerical/percent ranges) for an examination based on the results of a job analysis or content validation study. Content specifications may be structured as an outline of knowledge areas (e.g., content domains, a list of tasks, or other formats). See also [Examination Blueprint/Outline](#).

**Continuing Competence—**

Demonstrating specified levels of knowledge, skills, or abilities throughout an individual's professional career. Related to recertification, maintaining competence, and continuing education.

Continuing Education—

Activities, often short courses, that credentialed professionals engage in to receive credit for the purpose of maintaining continuing competence and renewing a credential.

Control Structure—

The process by which the sequence of item administration is determined.

Credential—

n: The formal recognition awarded to an individual who has met predetermined standards and maintains any renewal requirements.

v: To award an authorization or qualification to an individual based upon that individual's demonstration of knowledge, skills, and/or abilities as measured against predetermined standards.

Credentialing—

An umbrella term referring to the processes by which a qualified entity grants formal recognition or records the recognition status of individuals, organizations, institutions, programs, processes, services, or products that meet predetermined and standardized criteria. Credentialing encompasses accreditation, licensure, registration, and professional certification, education (e.g., degree programs, certificate programs), and microcredentials.

The process by which a qualified entity grants formal recognition to or records the recognition status of individuals, organizations, institutions, programs, processes, services, or products that meet predetermined and standardized criteria. Credentialing includes accreditation, licensure, registration, and certification.

Credentialing Body—

The organization or administrative unit that offers and operates a credentialing program.

Criterion-Referenced Examination—

An examination that evaluates candidates' performance against a fixed set of predetermined criteria or standards rather than against the performance of other candidates. See also [Norm-Referenced Examination](#).

Cut Score—

The numerical value of correct responses required to pass an examination. Also known as "passing score," "pass-fail standard," and "pass mark."

Criterion-Referenced Cut Score: A pass-fail standard determined by evaluating candidates' examination score in relation to an external benchmark. [See also "Angoff Method."](#)

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Norm-Referenced Cut Score: A pass-fail standard determined by evaluating the distribution of candidates' scores on an examination.

Decision Consistency—

A measure of reliability that attempts to answer the question, "If the same candidates were administered equivalent forms of the same examination, to what extent would the pass/fail outcomes be in agreement?" Also known as "classification consistency" or "classification accuracy."

Designation—

An indication of a credential that an individual holds, which could be a specific title, letters, or acronyms before or after an individual's name. A credential may or may not be accompanied by a formal or distinct designation. [Refer to the NCCA Standards for the Accreditation of Certification Programs and the ICF 1100: ACAP Standard for Assessment-Based Certificate Programs for guidance on use.](#)

Dichotomous—

Scoring in which a scoreable event is judged correct or incorrect, usually with a 1 or a 0, respectively. Candidates either achieve full credit or no credit for the scoreable event. See also [Polytomous](#).

Difficulty Index/Item Difficulty—

Using classical test theory, the average score of candidates taking the item, often depicted as a *p* value. Using item response theory, difficulty is represented by the *b* parameter.

Digital Badge—

A verifiable indicator of accomplishment, skill, quality, or interest that can be earned in a learning environment or through achievement of a credential and can be displayed online. A digital badge is a dynamic, portable icon that may be embedded with qualifying information, such as issuing organization, the date on which the badge was earned, and the date on which it expires.

Disciplinary Process—

A formal, published process for the enforcement of standards governing professional behavior (e.g., ethics, standards of practice, or code of conduct) of candidates and credential holders.

Document—

n: A written statement of a policy, procedure, observation, or activity. In most instances, a document may be modified and, when modified, should include a version number and date of revision. See also "Record/Candidate Record."

v: To keep an accurate record of an activity.

Documentation—

[The collection and preservation of evidence that requirements have been met. Documentation is necessary for many aspects of credentialing programs and/or accreditation requirements \(e.g., meeting minutes.](#)

[prerequisites, qualifications of subject-matter experts, measurement quality of assessments\).](#)

Due Process—

A fundamental principle of fairness in all legal matters, both civil and criminal, especially in the courts. Procedures are set and enforced by a credentialing body to ensure no prejudicial or unequal treatment of an individual occurs in decision-making.

Eligibility Criteria—

The prerequisite qualifications that applicants must document to take an examination or achieve a credential, often include benchmarks for education, experience, training, and/or apprenticeships. Also known as “eligibility requirements.”

Endorsement—

A specific assertion of qualifications beyond a basic credential. For example, commercial pilots must get endorsement for each type of aircraft they are allowed to operate. See also [License by Endorsement](#).

Equating—

Statistical processes used to determine that classification decisions made on multiple forms of an examination are the same by converting scores on two or more alternate forms of an examination to a common scale.

Equivalence of Certification Results—

Different certification processes that can be interpreted to lead to the same level of competence or outcomes in a comparable domain of interest.

Essay—

A relatively lengthy written response to a prompt. Essay items are one example of constructed-response items. See also [Constructed-Response Item](#).

Essential Element—

For the purposes of this document, “Essential Element” refers to a statement that is directly related to an NCCA or ICE 1100 accreditation standard that specifies what a credentialing program must do to fulfill the requirements of the standard.

Examination—

Any standardized process or instrument used to determine whether candidates meet the established criteria as defined by the specifications (e.g., the knowledge or skill associated with competence to practice in a profession, role, or specialty area). [This term is frequently used interchangeably with “assessment,” but in the credentialing field examination is more often associated with a summative assessment of an individual.](#) See also [Test](#).

Examination Administration—

The process of delivering examinations to candidates (e.g., computer, paper, or orally).

**Examination Blueprint/Outline—**

A listing of the specific topics and/or tasks to be included in an examination along with information regarding the number of items that will address each content domain (i.e., weighting). See also [Content Specifications](#).

Examination Committee—

A group of subject-matter experts responsible for the development of credentialing examinations.

Examination Form—

A form consisting of a group of items corresponding to the distribution of items in conformance with the examination specifications. Alternate examination forms are often created to maintain the confidentiality and security of items, the content and results of which can be asserted to be comparable under the proper conditions.

Examination Security—

A restriction of access to specified materials (e.g., individual items and full examinations) during the process of development, maintenance, and delivery.

Examination Specifications—

A document that describes what the examination is intended to measure as well as the design and requirements for use. See also [Content Specifications](#) and [Examination Blueprint/Outline](#).

Examiner—

An individual competent to conduct and score an examination that requires professional judgment.

Examiner Reliability—

The consistency with which an examiner evaluates performance by candidates in regard to an established standard of performance. See also [Inter-Rater Reliability](#).

Facilitator/Instructor—

A knowledgeable individual or other qualified person who articulates the intended learning outcomes and enables accomplishment of the intended learning outcomes of the assessment-based certificate program and certificate program.

Fairness—

The principle that all applicants and candidates will be treated in an equitable manner throughout the entire credentialing process. See also [Bias](#).

Formative Assessment—

An assessment that is employed as part of and during the delivery of education/training in order to inform participants and facilitators/instructors about their progress in accomplishing the intended learning outcomes. Intended to promote learning rather than render a score or pass-fail judgment, in contrast to [Summative Assessment](#).

Gating Item—

An item that must be correctly answered to pass a performance examination.

Governance—

The structures (e.g., board of directors) through which control or authority in an organization are exercised to make essential decisions.

Grandfathering—

The process by which individuals are granted a credential without being required to meet the examination and/or other credentialing requirements.

High Stakes—

High stakes are associated with substantial potential for adverse consequences for the public, clients, patients, etc. Programs may also be high stakes when a participant's employment hinges on attainment of the credential. See [Stakes](#).

Inference—

The conclusion that one draws on the basis of available evidence (e.g., certificate holders are knowledgeable about a specified topic, the results of an assessment represent the level of skill a person possesses).

Information Function—

A curve in item response theory that estimates the amount of information yielded at each level of candidates' ability. There are both examination information functions and item information functions.

Instructional design methodology—

A systematic approach used to structure the design, development, and delivery of learning experiences. The framework ensures the learning experience is designed in a way that supports the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. Instructional design methodology is the overarching framework, with instructional design principles nested under the methodology.

Instructional design principles—

Rules, standards, and practices pertaining to the design, delivery, and evaluation of education/training that facilitates accomplishment of intended learning outcomes related to defined knowledge, skill, competencies, and other constructs. Generally accepted instructional design principles are defined by professional literature and standards.

Intended Learning Outcome—

A statement that identifies what a learner is expected to know, understand, or do as a result of successfully completing an assessment-based certificate program.

Internal Consistency—

A measure of reliability used to determine the overall scoring comparability for equivalent forms of the same examination.

Inter-Rater Reliability (also known as Inter-Rater Agreement)—

Any of several calculations that describe the degree to which there is concurrence between or among the individuals responsible for evaluating/scoring participant judges concur in their scoring of candidates' performance on subjectively evaluated/scored assessments. This concept also applies to concurrence on accreditation standard performance. See also [Examiner Reliability](#).

Interested Parties—

Individuals with an interest in the quality, governance, and operation of a credential program, such as the public, participants, certificate holders, certificants, candidates, employers, customers, clients, and third-party payers. Also referred to as stakeholders.

Item—

The smallest unit of measurement on an assessment. An item consists of a stimulus, response, and scoring rules. Questions Scoreable examination questions and/or tasks in examinations or assessments to which candidates must respond or perform.

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Item Analysis—

The process for evaluating result characteristics of each item in an examination. The process which examines candidate responses to individual test items in order to assess the quality of those items and of the test as a whole.

Item Bank—

The system by which items are maintained, stored, and classified to facilitate item review, item development, and examination assembly.

Item Discrimination—

A measure of how well an item is able to properly distinguish between candidates who differ in levels of competence. Item discrimination is depicted in item response theory as a parameter; in classical test theory, discrimination is typically a point-biserial correlation.

Item Response Theory (IRT) —

A mathematical model of measurement in which candidates' ability and item difficulty are converted to a single common scale that provides a standardized way of comparing candidates' performance and item difficulty over multiple versions of an examination. Several IRT models are acceptable for use. Also known as "latent trait theory." See also [Classical Test Theory](#).

Item Type or Format—

The way in which an item is structured to elicit a response from candidates. See also [Selected-Response Item](#) and [Constructed-Response Item](#).

Job Analysis—

Any of several methods used singly or in combination to identify the performance domains and associated tasks, knowledge, and/or skills relating to the purpose of the credential and to provide the foundation for examination or program validation. Also known as "task or practice analysis" or "role delineation study." See also [Competency Modeling](#).

Legacied—

The process by which individuals are granted a credential without being required to meet the examination and/or other credentialing requirements. Previously referred to as “grandfathering.”

License by Endorsement—

Obtaining a license in a U.S. jurisdiction other than the jurisdiction of original licensure (where licensure was likely earned through examination). See also [Endorsement](#).

Licensing Authority/Board/Body—

A governmental body or an autonomous body created by statute that issues and monitors a credential required by law for practice in a specified profession or role. See also [Credentialing Body](#) and [Certification Body](#).

Licensure—

The mandatory process, created by statute, by which a governmental agency or an autonomous body grants time-limited permission to an individual to engage in a given occupation after verifying that the individual has met predetermined and standardized criteria; licensure offers title protection for those who meet the criteria.

Measurement Principles—

Rules, standards, and practices pertaining to assessing knowledge, skill, competencies, and/or other constructs in a manner that supports the inferences to be made. Generally accepted measurement principles are defined by professional literature and standards (e.g., Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing).

Microcredential—

n: The formal recognition awarded to an individual who has demonstrated attainment of a narrow (or specific or limited) scope of knowledge, skills, or abilities. The scope of the microcredential can be as granular as a single skill or competency.

v: To recognize an individual who has demonstrated attainment of a narrow (or specific or limited) scope of knowledge, skills, or abilities. The scope of the microcredential can be as granular as a single skill or competency.

Multiple Hurdle—

The requirement to pass multiple sections of a single examination or separate examinations to earn a credential. See also [Conjunctive Scoring](#) and [Compensatory Scoring](#).

Needs Analysis—

A method by which one determines the requirements for the program, including needs or expectations of learners and other interested parties, prior to a learning experience, event, or program.

Norm-Referenced Examination—

An examination that evaluates the performance of candidates in comparison to the performance of other

candidates taking the same examination. See also [Criterion-Referenced Examination](#).

Objectively-scored assessment—

An assessment in which ~~type of scoring rule in which~~ responses to questions or problems ~~on an~~ ~~assessment~~ are deemed as correct or incorrect using a pre-established answer key.

Objectively-scored items—

~~Items that are scored (e.g., deemed as correct or incorrect) using a pre-established answer key.~~

Open Access—

Access to the credentialing process is available to anyone who meets the established criteria for practice in a profession, occupation, role, skill, or specialty area. For example, some programs do not have eligibility requirements to sit for the examination, but that examination may be among the eligibility requirements for a credential.

Operational Items—

Items on an examination that are scored and that contribute to the pass/fail decision. See also [Pretest Items](#).

Parent Organization—

The legal entity under which a credentialing body administers (or operates) one or more credentialing programs if the credentialing body is not independently incorporated.

Participant—

An individual who is enrolled ~~or registered~~ as a learner, student, trainee, etc., in an assessment-based certificate program.

Penalty—

A sanction imposed on candidates or credential holders for failure to comply with the policies, procedures, rules, or other regulatory statements imposed as a condition of awarding a credential.

Performance Domains—

~~The A~~ set of organized categories, ~~based on the results of a study that defines and analyzes descriptions of job related elements linked to the purposes of the credential, characterizing job analysis a role or job under subject matter within which tasks and/or skills may be represented on an job analysis examination.~~ See also [Content Domains](#).

Performance Examination—

An assessment of candidates' ability to perform tasks in a simulated or real job environment. Also known as "practical examination," "clinical examination," or "lab examination."

Performance, proficiency, or passing standard—

~~A specific level of performance, proficiency category, or score that must be achieved by a participant to successfully complete an assessment. Performance, proficiency, or passing standards are established using methods that are defined by generally accepted measurement principles.~~

Polytomous—

Scoring in which scoreable events may receive full, partial, or no credit. Polytomous item scores are usually represented by decimals, percentages, or points out of a maximum score for the event. See also [Dichotomous](#).

Portfolio—

A body of work submitted by candidates that represents their skills and abilities in the content domain(s) being evaluated.

Practice Analysis—

See [Job Analysis](#).

Prerequisite—

A documented activity or achievement required as a prior condition for next action to occur (e.g., completion of an educational program before taking a corresponding examination).

Pretest Items—

Items in an examination whose scores do not contribute to candidates' scores but that are evaluated as a result of examination administration to assist with determining the viability of the item for future use. Also known as "trial items," "try-out items," "pre-operational items," "experimental items," or "pilot items." See also [Operational Items](#).

Proctor—

An individual who supervises a written examination to maintain a fair and consistent testing environment but takes no active part in the actual testing process. Also known as "invigilator" or "administrator."

Professional Development—

The activities, such as continuing education, advanced work practice, professional association involvement, teaching, and volunteer work, that credentialed professionals engage in to receive credit for the purpose of maintaining continuing competence and renewing a credential.

Program—

[A set of related activities with a particular aim, scope, goal and target audience](#)

Program Evaluation—

[A process through which a variety of data are collected and analyzed for the purpose of determining the effectiveness of a credentialing program.](#)

Psychometrician—

An individual who practices the science of educational and psychological measurement (i.e., testing). Psychometricians evaluate the validity, reliability, and fairness of an examination, among other tasks.

Psychometrics—

The field of study concerned with the theory and technique of educational and psychological measurement, which includes the measurement of knowledge, abilities, attitudes, and/or personality traits.

Public Member—

A representative of the consumers of services provided by a credentialed population who serves as a voting member on the credentialing body with all rights and privileges, including holding office and serving on committees. The public member should bring a perspective to the decision and policymaking of the organization that is different from that of credentialed individuals and should help to balance the organization's role in protecting the public while advancing the interests of the profession.

Publicly Available—

Easily available and accessible, with or without request.

Qualification—

Support of candidates' eligibility to participate in the credentialing process, often achieved through education, training, examination, and/or work experience.

Quality Assurance Process—

An ongoing activity that informs the individuals responsible for managing a credentialing program in their evaluation of whether a process or activity meets expectations or predefined quality standards. Quality assurance activities are executed on all development processes to help maintain an expected level of effectiveness. See [Quality Management System](#).

Quality Management System—

All activities within the overall management function that determine the quality policy objectives and responsibilities and implement them by means of planning, control, assurance, surveillance, and improvement within the credentialing program.

Quality Standards—

Criteria addressing the design, development, delivery, and evaluation of assessment-based certificate programs to ensure that the program components are suitable to their purpose and function.

Rasch Model—

A mathematical method that attempts to measure latent traits like attitude or ability, showing the probability of an individual getting a correct response on an item. See also [Item Response Theory](#).

Rating—

A subject-matter expert who has been trained in the use of rubrics and rules to evaluate/score the response of participants on one or more subjectively evaluated questions, problems, demonstrations, work products,

[etc.](#)

Rater Bias—

A distortion in the scoring of subjectively scored items where a rater's disposition affects how candidates' performance is judged. The existence of rater bias is inconsistent with fairness and objectivity. See also "Bias" and "Fairness."

Rationale—

A statement explaining the fundamental bases, principles, or reasons why a policy, procedure, or requirement has been established. The explanation may include how the policy, procedure, or requirement was developed; what assumptions were made; and why the conclusions are supported.

Raw Score—

The number of correct answers provided (on a knowledge examination) or the actions taken (on a performance examination) by candidates before any conversion or scaling formula is applied.

Recertification—

The renewal of certification based on completing specified requirements (typically associated with continuing competence) within defined intervals.

Reciprocity—

The act of granting a credential to an individual holding a similar credential granted by a different program that has been deemed to be comparable (or substantially equivalent).

Record/Candidate Record—

Evidence of activities performed, events that occurred, results achieved, or statements made. Whereas a document may be changed, a candidate record is generally considered to be permanent and may consist of multiple printed or electronic documents. See also "Document."

Registration—

The process by which a governmental agency grants a time-limited status on a registry, often determined by specific requirements (e.g., experience, education, and/or examination), and often authorize those individuals to practice—similar to licensure.

Registry—

A listing of practitioners maintained by a governmental agency that includes specific information that may be publicly available. *Also known as a "roster."*

Regulatory Board—

The public authority or governmental agency responsible for exercising autonomous authority over the definition and practice of a profession. The primary purpose of a regulatory board is to serve the public by ensuring competent practice within an occupation.

Reinstate/Reinstatement—



To reactivate a credential after it has been suspended, withdrawn, revoked, removed, rescinded, dismissed, or deposed.

Reliability—

The degree to which scores/results of an assessment and pass/fail outcomes on an examination are replicable or repeatable across forms, administrations, or raters. ~~The degree to which the results of an assessment are free of measurement error. The degree to which scores are consistent, reproducible, and free from random measurement error across forms, administrations, or raters.~~

Renew/Renewal—

To make a certification and accreditation effective for a longer period upon successful completion of specified requirements. See also [Recertification](#).

Remote Proctoring—

The administration of an examination via a method that permits candidates and proctors to be in different locations and observation to take place via audio and video, either at the time of examination administration (i.e., live remote proctoring) or later after recording.

Revoke/Revocation—

The cancellation of an individual's awarded credential and their right to use a certification mark, acronym, and/or designation due to disciplinary action.

Role Delineation Study—

See [Job Analysis](#).

Sample—

A group of people, objects, or items that are taken from a larger population for measurement. The sample should be representative to ensure that the findings can be generalized from the sample to the population as a whole.

Scaled Score—

A score that results from a raw score being transformed so that different forms of the same examination can be reported on a common metric, allowing comparisons of scores across examination administrations.

Scope of Practice—

The procedures, actions, and processes permitted by law for a profession.

Scope of Certificate—

~~The inferences about participants' knowledge, skill, and/or competencies that can be justified based on the education/training provided and their performance on the assessment(s).~~

Scope of Certification—

The extent and boundaries of a certification program, typically describing the specific tasks

performed by certified individuals and the knowledge and/or skills being assessed.

Score Report—

A document that provides information on the overall performance on the examination and the pass/fail status of candidates. Reports frequently contain detailed information (e.g., textual, numerical, and/or graphical) regarding performance on specific content domains.

Scoring—

~~Scoring is the process of assigning values to examination responses to arrive at an aggregate measure of an examinee's performance on an examination or components of an examination. For selected-response items (such as multiple-choice items), scoring typically involves applying an answer key to determine whether each response is correct or incorrect. For constructed-response items (like essays or performance assessments), scoring usually relies on a human judgment of the response using a scoring rubric. Establishment of a passing score on an examination is a separate process (see Standard Setting).~~

Scoring Rubric—

~~A set of guidelines for scoring examinations and items, including point values, rater instructions (for performance examinations), and the methods for combining and scaling scores. The criteria used to guide the evaluation or rating of responses and the emphasis each component has in determining participants' proficiency with the desired result that responses will be determined as correct, proficient, or successful and weighted in a standardized manner. Scoring rules are part of the implementation of a standardized scoring scale. Also known as "scoring rules".~~

Scoring rules—

~~The criteria (often called a rubric) used to guide the evaluation or rating of responses and the emphasis each component has in determining participants' proficiency with the desired result that responses will be determined as correct, proficient, or successful and weighted in a standardized manner. Scoring rules are part of the implementation of a standardized scoring scale.~~

Security—

The processes and procedures undertaken to restrict access to documents, examinations, items, scores, and personal information of the individuals who are seeking credentials.

Selected-Response Item—

A type of item in which candidates must choose from several options presented (e.g., multiple choice, matching, drag and drop, and hot spot).

Self-Assessment—

A process by which an examination is administered, typically under non standardized and unsupervised conditions, for the specific purpose of providing performance feedback rather than a pass/fail decision.

Self-Declaration—

A statement by candidates asserting that they fulfill specific requirements. See also [Attestation](#).

Simulation—

The imitation of a real-world process or system used in a performance examination.

Speededness—

When an examination does not provide sufficient time for most examination takers to complete all items. When intentional, both candidates' ability and their speed of response are important to the examination's purpose. When unintentional, score bias may result, and validity may be detrimentally affected.

Stackable Credentials—

Microcredentials that may be combined to qualify the holder for a larger credential that is equivalent to their sum.

Stakes—

The degree to which inferences or actions of participating in a credentialing program or attaining a credential have consequences for interested parties associated with that program. The stakes must be in alignment with the scope and target audience of the credentialing program. See also High Stakes.

Standard—

A statement established by consensus provides for common criteria that must be satisfied by an applicant.

Standard Deviation—

A measure of variation or scatter around the arithmetic average or mean. Standard deviation is typically used by credentialing programs to summarize the dispersion of scores from an examination administration.

Standard Error of Measurement—

An estimate of how accurate the attained score is in relation to the "true score" (i.e., a theoretical value that represents candidates' scores without error).

Standard of Practice—

Rules, requirements, responsibilities, or conditions that describe the minimal, but essential, level of expected performance by individuals within a profession.

Standard Setting—

A process that establishes the minimum acceptable performance threshold required for candidates to be deemed to have met the knowledge and/or competence expectations on a credentialing examination or assessment. Also known as establishing the "passing point" or "cut score."

Multiple methods exist, such as Angoff Method, Bookmark, Beuk, and Hofstee. One or multiple may be appropriate depending on the content of the examination, and requires psychometric input. See cut score.

Standardization—

Ensuring that the assessment process or examination is designed, developed, administered, and scored in a consistent manner and according to a specified plan.

Standardized scoring scale—

A clearly defined system for assigning numerical value, proficiency category, etc., to responses on an assessment in order to achieve a structure that places all evaluations/scores on the same distribution and permits comparison among evaluations/scores.

Subjectively Scored Items—

Items that require a degree of judgment from subject-matter experts in their scoring.

Subjectively-evaluated/scored assessment—

Items that are scored (e.g., deemed as correct or incorrect) using pre-established rubrics or scoring rules that involve subject-matter expert raters.

Subject-Matter Expert (SME)—

An individual with specialized knowledge or expertise in a particular discipline, system, or process related to credentialing, SMEs are selected or appointed based upon their position, education, training, and/or experience to contribute to various aspects of the credentialing development process, with respect to an aspect of the credentialing process, for example, job analysis or item review.

Subscore—

Scores on a specified subset of items in an examination. Typically, these are scores for content domains, performance domains, or other content areas that may be used to provide feedback to candidates.

Summative Assessment—

An assessment that is primarily intended to render a score or pass-fail judgment at the end of training or education.” An assessment that is employed as an end-of-program measure of participants’ accomplishment of intended learning outcomes in an assessment-based certificate program. See also “Formative Assessment”.

Surveillance—

Periodic monitoring of a credentialed individual’s performance to ensure continued compliance during the periods of holding a credential.

Suspension—

Temporary withdrawal of an individual’s credential(s), typically as a result of a rule violation by that individual.

Target Audience—

A particular group of people identified as the intended recipient of a message, product, or program.

Tasks—

Activities or actions conducted while performing one’s job that may form the basis for a content

validation study, role delineation, or job analysis.

Technical Report—

A summary of the design, development, and psychometric procedures used to develop and administer the examination(s) used in credentialing. The report often addresses issues such as job analysis, validity, item writing, examination development, reliability indices, cut score determination, scoring, and equating.

Temporary License—

A practice privilege granted to an individual who is deemed likely to meet practice standards but who has not yet fully demonstrated the required level of knowledge, skill, or both.

Test—

Any standardized process or instrument used to determine whether candidates meet the established criteria as defined by the specifications (e.g., the knowledge or skill associated with competence to practice in a profession, role, or specialty area) See also “Examination”.

Test Bias—

A systematic error in an examination score that differentially affects the performance of members of a group. See also “Bias” and “Fairness.”

Testing Agency—

The entity (e.g., organization, division, or department) with the authority to develop, administer, score, and report examination results, or a combination thereof.

Testing Vendor—

A provider of examination services in the credentialing industry (e.g., candidate registration, examination administration, examination development, or psychometric analysis).

Third Party—

Any individual or entity outside of the two parties directly involved in a transaction (i.e., the credentialing body and the credentialing candidates).

Transparent—

Processes are conducted in a manner that are, and are perceived to be, open, accessible, and clear.

Undue Influence—

Improper ~~outside~~ pressure or disproportionate input on decisions about essential credentialing program policies made by what should be an autonomous governance structure. ~~long-serving~~
~~policy-making personnel may exert disproportionate impact as well. This could be internal or external.~~

Validity—

The degree to which accumulated evidence supports outcome decisions made with respect to all requirements for obtaining a credential (e.g., ~~education~~prerequisites, ~~experience~~, and assessment

instruments).

Verified Credentials—

Refers to a digital or physical credential that has been confirmed as authentic and trustworthy by a reliable source or authority. This confirmation process typically involves the validation of the information contained within the credential, such as verifying a person's identity, qualifications, or other relevant details.

Verification—

Evaluating or testing to assure conformance with a designated specification.

Withdrawal—

1. Cancellation of a credential [from the market](#) by the credential granting body. [See also “Revoke/Revocation.”](#)
2. Voluntarily ceasing to be an applicant, candidate, or credential holder.

Work Samples—

Representative examples of an individual's work as a model for performance.

Appendix—Abbreviations of Credentialing Terms

ABC — Assessment-based certificate

program ADA — Americans with Disabilities

Act

AI — Artificial intelligence

AIG — Automatic item generation

CAT — Computer-adaptive

test/testing CBT — Computer-based

test/testing CE — Continuing

education

CEU — Continuing education

units COI — Conflict of interest



Institute for Credentialing Excellence

CPD — Continuing professional

development CTT — Classical test theory

IA — Item analysis

I.C.E. — Institute for Credentialing

Excellence IRT — Item response theory

ISO/IEC — International Organization for Standardization/International Electrotechnical

Commission ITCC — IT Certification Council

JA — Job analysis

JTA — Job task analysis

KR-20 — Kuder-Richardson internal-consistency reliability formula 20

LOFT — Linear-on-the-fly testing

LOP — Live online

proctoring LRP — Live

remote proctoring

MCQ — Multiple-choice question(s)

MCSRQ — Multiple-choice single response

questions MCMRQ — Multiple-choice multiple
response questions

NCCA — National Commission for Certifying Agencies

NCHCA — National Commission for Health Certifying Agencies (now defunct; precursor
organization that re-formed as two separate but related organizations: NOCA [now known as I.C.E.]
and NCCA)

NDA — Nondisclosure agreement



Institute for Credentialing Excellence

NOCA — National Organization for Competency Assurance (now

I.C.E.) PTC — Performance Testing Council

QA — Quality

assurance QC —

Quality control

QMS — Quality management system

QTI — Question and test

interoperability

RPB — Point-biserial correlation (normally denoted as

r_{pb}) SME — Subject-matter expert

VR — Virtual reality