

# Glossary of Terms Related to Certification and Assessment



The following definitions have been developed to delineate the terms used to describe certification, related activities, and impacted individuals. Definition sources are cited where applicable. Some definitions below have also been identified as processes<sup>P</sup> or outcomes<sup>O</sup>.

**Accreditation<sup>PO</sup>:** Accreditation is a standards-based, quality assurance process of internal review (self-study) by the institution or program and external review by subject matter experts (peers) that includes on-site evaluation. Universities and academic programs that meet established criteria and educational standards are granted “accreditation” which is considered a seal of quality to the public. Accreditation’s main goals are to assure and enhance quality. There are two types of accreditation: institutional and specialized/professional (programmatic). (King, Laura Rasar. “Accreditation — the Basics.” Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors presentation, June 2021.)

**Board-Certified Clinical Specialist<sup>O</sup>:** A board-certified clinical specialist is a practitioner whose advanced knowledge, skills, and experience in a specific area of practice have been validated by certification.

## **Certificate<sup>O</sup>:**

- a. **Certificate of Attendance or Participation:** Certificates of attendance or participation are provided to individuals (participants) who have attended or participated in classes, courses, or other education/training programs or events. The certificate awarded 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. Demonstration of accomplishment of the intended learning outcomes by participants is not a requirement for receiving the certificate; thus, possession of a certificate of attendance or participation does not indicate that the intended learning outcomes have been accomplished by the participant. (“Defining Features of Quality Certification and Assessment-Based Certificate Programs.” Institute for Credentialing Excellence, 2010.)
- b. **Assessment-Based Certificate Program:** An assessment-based certificate program is a non-degree granting program that: (a) provides instruction and training to aid participants in acquiring specific knowledge, skills, and/or competencies associated with intended learning outcomes; (b) evaluates participants’ achievement of the intended learning outcomes; and (c) awards a certificate only to those participants who meet the performance, proficiency or passing standard for the assessment(s). Certificate programs offered through an academic institution that are associated with course credit that lead to a recognized academic certificate (baccalaureate or graduate level) are one form of assessment-based certificate programs. (“Defining Features of Quality Certification and Assessment-Based Certificate Programs.” Institute for Credentialing Excellence, 2010.)

**Certification<sup>P</sup>:** Professional or personnel certification is 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, certificate holders must maintain continued competence. The credential awarded by the certification program provider denotes that the participant possesses particular knowledge, skills, or competencies. (“Defining Features of Quality Certification and Assessment-Based Certificate Programs.” Institute for Credentialing Excellence, 2010.)

**Competence<sup>O</sup>:** Competence is the possession and application of contemporary knowledge, skills, and abilities commensurate with an individual’s role within the context of public health, welfare, and safety. (APTA House of

Delegates position “Professional Development, Lifelong Learning, and Continuing Competence in Physical Therapy”; HOD P05-07-14-14.)

**Competency<sup>O</sup>:** Competency is an observable ability of a health professional, integrating multiple components such as knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes. Since competencies are observable, they can be measured and assessed to ensure their acquisition. (Frank, Jason, et al. “Competency-Based Medical Education: Theory to Practice.” *Medical Teacher*, 2010.)

**Continuing Competence<sup>P,O</sup>:** The ongoing possession and application of contemporary knowledge, skills, and abilities commensurate with an individual’s role within the context of public health, welfare, and safety and defined by a scope of practice and practice setting. (APTA House of Delegates position “Professional Development, Lifelong Learning, and Continuing Competence in Physical Therapy”; HOD P05-07-14-14.)

**Continuing Education<sup>P</sup>:** Educational and other learning opportunities beyond the formal education required for initial entry into a profession, to assist practitioners to maintain or increase competence, to become aware of new developments, and to provide responsible, quality services. (“Glossary of General Terminology Used in Professional and Occupational Regulation.” Council on Licensure, Enforcement and Regulation, 2010.)

**Continuing Professional Development<sup>P</sup>:** The intentional maintenance and development of the knowledge and skills needed to perform in a professional context. This could mean honing current skills, it could mean developing them to a new level, or it could mean learning new skills that will allow an employee’s job role to expand or prepare them for potential promotion. CPD activities can range from formal educational activities such as instructor-led courses, workshops or seminars, to more informal approaches such as work-based learning or mentoring. CPD can also include self-directed study such as e-learning courses and structured reading. ([The CPD Standards Office webpage “CPD Meaning, What is CPD?”](#))

**Credentials<sup>O</sup>:** Credentials serve as evidence of authority, status, rights, or entitlement to privileges, and are awarded by an entity to demonstrate that its professionals have met established standards and are qualified to practice at a minimum level of competence and performance. Credentials must be periodically renewed as a means of ensuring continued quality and must be withdrawn when standards of competence or behavior are no longer met.

**Fellow<sup>O</sup>:**

- a. A learner who is enrolled in a fellowship program (eg, fellow/fellow in training in a performing arts fellowship).
- b. An honor bestowed (eg, Catherine Worthingham Fellow of the American Physical Therapy association).
- c. A member of an organization (eg, Fellow, American Academy of Orthopaedic Manual Physical Therapy).

**Fellowship Program<sup>P</sup>:** A fellowship program is a post-professional planned learning experience comprising a curriculum that encompasses the essential knowledge, skills, and responsibilities of an advanced physical therapist within a defined area of subspecialty practice.

**Learner Continuum<sup>P</sup>:** The learning continuum begins with exposure to the profession and progresses through entry-level education programs, post-professional or post-technical development, and continuing education throughout physical therapists’ and physical therapist assistants’ careers. (“A Vision for Excellence in Physical Therapy Education.” *Journal of Physical Therapy Education*, December 2021.)

**Licensure<sup>P,O</sup>:** Licensure validates the acquisition of baseline knowledge and competency that are required for safe and effective practice. Licensure is a minimum requirement for legal practice by physical therapists and physical therapist assistants.

**Lifelong Learning<sup>P</sup>:** Lifelong learning is the systematic maintenance and improvement of knowledge, skills, and abilities through one's professional career or working life. Lifelong learning is the ongoing process by which the quality and relevance of professional services are maintained. (APTA House of Delegates position "Professional Development, Lifelong Learning, and Continuing Competence in Physical Therapy"; HOD P05-07-14-14.)

**Professional Development<sup>P</sup>:** Professional development entails the ongoing self-assessment, acquisition, and application of knowledge, skills, and abilities that meet or exceed contemporary performance standards described by continuing competence and are commensurate with an individual physical therapist's or physical therapist assistant's role and responsibilities within the context of public health, welfare, and safety. (APTA House of Delegates position "Professional Development, Lifelong Learning, and Continuing Competence in Physical Therapy"; HOD P05-07-14-14.)

**Recertification<sup>P,O</sup>:** The requirement for periodic re-evaluation or reporting of activities designed to provide assurance that the knowledge and skills of the practitioner are current. Generally, more stringent than renewal requirements. ("Glossary of General Terminology Used in Professional and Occupational Regulation." Council on Licensure, Enforcement and Regulation, 2010.)

**Recognition<sup>P</sup>:** Recognition is a process by which accreditors are reviewed against established standards set by an external agency, such as the U.S. Department of Education and Council for Higher Education Accreditation. ([Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors webpage "About Accreditation: Resources, Documents and Definitions."](#))

**Residency Program<sup>P</sup>:** A residency program is a post-professional planned learning experience comprising a curriculum that encompasses the essential knowledge, skills, and responsibilities of an advanced physical therapist within a defined area of practice. When board certification exists through the American Board of Physical Therapist Specialties for that specialty, the residency program prepares the physical therapist with the requisite knowledge and skill set needed to pass the certification examination following completion of the residency.

**Specialist<sup>O</sup>:** A specialist is a physical therapist whose advanced knowledge, skills, and experience in a specific area of practice, known as a specialty, have been validated by certification.

**Specialty:** A specialty is an explicit practice focus on a patient or client population or a set of conditions within physical therapy. ([BOD P05-21-02-05](#))

**Subspecialty:** A subspecialty is a distinct subset of knowledge and skills within one or more physical therapy specialties. ([BOD P05-21-02-05](#))

**Specialization<sup>P</sup>:** Specialization is the process by which a physical therapist builds on a broad base of professional education and practice to develop greater depth of knowledge and skills related to a particular area of practice. Clinical specialization in physical therapy responds to a specific area of patient need and requires knowledge, skill, and experience that exceeds professional physical therapist practice and is unique to the specialized area of specialty or subspecialty practice. (APTA House of Delegates position "Clinical Specialization in Physical Therapy"; HOD P06-19-66-30.)

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