



Standard Terminology for Accreditation and Certification¹

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1. Scope

1.1 This terminology defines terms related to accreditation and certification. These terms are compiled from existing ASTM E36 standards and other sources to enable the development of future ASTM documents and to provide guidance on proper usage of the terms. The first edition of this standard contained terms relating to personnel certificate and certification programs and is expanded. The source document for each definition is cited when an appropriate document is available. Many definitions are the product of the committee that compiled this terminology, and as such, are the result of the collected knowledge and experience of the committee members.

1.1.1 Since accreditation and certification are being carried out by many different bodies in many fields, usage of descriptive terms can vary. There is no attempt to include all accreditation and certification terms in this terminology. Rather, this terminology contains those terms most commonly encountered in accreditation and certification programs.

1.2 *This international standard was developed in accordance with internationally recognized principles on standardization established in the Decision on Principles for the Development of International Standards, Guides and Recommendations issued by the World Trade Organization Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Committee.*

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 ASTM Standards:²

[D4538 Terminology Relating to Protective Coating and Lining Work for Power Generation Facilities](#)

[E1187 Terminology Relating to Conformity Assessment \(Withdrawn 2006\)³](#)

[E1424 Test Method for Determining the Rate of Air Leakage Through Exterior Windows, Curtain Walls, and Doors Under Specified Pressure and Temperature Differences Across the Specimen](#)

[E1605 Terminology Relating to Lead in Buildings](#)

[E1732 Terminology Relating to Forensic Science](#)

[E1986 Guide for Information Access Privileges to Health Information \(Withdrawn 2017\)³](#)

[E2135 Terminology for Property and Asset Management](#)

[E2159 Guide for Selection, Assignment, and Monitoring of Persons To Be Utilized as Assessors/Auditors or Technical Experts](#)

[E2161 Terminology Relating to Performance Validation in Thermal Analysis and Rheology](#)

[E2659 Practice for Certificate Programs](#)

2.2 Other Standards:

[ASAE Certification and Accreditation Law Handbook, Second Edition, 2004⁴](#)

[ICE Basic Guide to Credentialing Terminology, 2006⁵](#)

[ISO 9000 Quality Management Systems—Fundamentals and Vocabulary, 2000⁶](#)

[ISO/IEC 17000 Conformity Assessment—Vocabulary and General Principles, 2004⁶](#)

[ISO/IEC 17011 Conformity Assessment—General Requirements for Accrediting Bodies Accrediting Conformity Assessment Bodies, 2004⁶](#)

[ISO/IEC 17024 Conformity Assessment—General Requirements for Bodies Operating Certification of Persons, 2003⁶](#)

¹ This terminology is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee E36 on Accreditation & Certification and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee E36.95 on Terminology.

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² For referenced ASTM standards, visit the ASTM website, www.astm.org, or contact ASTM Customer Service at service@astm.org. For *Annual Book of ASTM Standards* volume information, refer to the standard's Document Summary page on the ASTM website.

³ The last approved version of this historical standard is referenced on www.astm.org.

⁴ Available from American Society of Association Executives (ASAE), 1575 I St. NW, Washington, DC 20005, <http://www.asaecenter.org>.

⁵ Available from Institute for Credentialing Excellence (ICE), 2025 M Street, N.W. Suite 800 Washington, DC 20036, <http://www.credentialingexcellence.org>.

⁶ Available from International Organization for Standardization (ISO), 1, ch. de la Voie-Creuse, Case postale 56, CH-1211, Geneva 20, Switzerland, <http://www.iso.ch>.

3. Definitions

access/access to a system or scheme, *n*—opportunity for an applicant to obtain conformity assessment under the rules of the system or scheme. **ISO/IEC 17000**

accommodation, *n*—in the context of personnel credentialing, a reasonable modification in an assessment instrument or its administration made to compensate for the effects of a qualified disability without altering the purpose of the assessment instrument. **ICE**

accountability, *n*—in the context of personnel credentialing, the responsibility of a governing board, committee, or other sponsor of a credentialing program to demonstrate the efficacy and fairness of policies, procedures, and assessment instruments to its stakeholders. **ICE**

accreditation, *n*—third-party attestation related to a body conveying formal demonstration of its competence to carry out specific conformity assessment tasks.

accreditation body, *n*—authoritative entity/organization that performs accreditation.

accreditation body logo, *n*—emblem used by an accreditation body to identify itself.

DISCUSSION—

See definition of **accreditation symbol** in contrast to this definition.

accreditation certificate, *n*—formal document or a set of documents, stating that accreditation has been granted for the defined scope. **ISO/IEC 17011**

accreditation scope, *n*—set of specific conformity assessment activities for which a conformity assessment body is accredited.

accreditation symbol, *n*—symbol issued by an accreditation body to be used by accredited conformity assessment bodies to indicate their accredited status.

DISCUSSION—

“Mark” is to be reserved to indicate direct conformity of an entity (for example, product, process, system, or person) against a set of requirements.

adverse action or decision, *n*—an action or decision signifying opposition.

DISCUSSION—

Adverse decisions include:

- (1) Refusal to accept an application,
- (2) Refusal to proceed with an assessment,
- (3) Refusal to grant a credential,
- (4) Any other action that impedes the attainment of a credential, and
- (5) Revoking a credential.

adverse impact, *n*—in the context of personnel credentialing, a significantly higher failure rate for candidates in legally protected classes of people, such as females, African Americans, and Hispanic Americans.

agreement, *n*—a document that sets forth the terms of an arrangement and to which the parties in the arrangement are signatories.

agreement group, *n*—bodies that are signatories to the agreement on which an arrangement is based. **ISO/IEC 17000**

appeal, *n*—request by the provider of the object of conformity assessment to the conformity assessment body or accreditation body for reconsideration by that body of a decision it has made relating to that object. **ISO/IEC 17000**

applicant, *n*—an individual entity (person or body) declaring interest in earning a credential offered by a program, certification body or accreditation body, usually through a request for information and the submission of materials. **ICE**

assessment instruments, *n*—in the context of personnel credentialing, any one of several standardized methods or tools for determining if individuals possess the necessary knowledge or skill, or both, related to the purpose of the credential. **ICE**

assessment of conformity, *n*—in the context of personnel credentialing, a process whereby an individual’s a person’s knowledge, experience, and skills are evaluated or measured against a standard.

DISCUSSION—

Activities associated with conformity assessment include testing, certification, accreditation, and quality assurance system registration.

assessor, n—an individual who has the knowledge, experience and skills necessary to perform a comprehensive assessment of another body, which includes assessment of the quality management system, policies, and procedures, etc. **E2159**

DISCUSSION—

An assessor/auditor should be fully qualified in the performance of a full assessment/audit, with the exception of evaluating specific technical areas. An assessor may also be qualified as a technical expert and bring such additional skills to the assessment/audit.

attestation, n—issuance of a statement, based on a decision following a review, that fulfillment of specified requirements has been demonstrated. **ISO/IEC 17000**

scope of attestation, n—range of characteristics of conformity assessment covered by attestation. **ISO/IEC 17000**

audit, n—~~systematic, independent, documented impartial process for obtaining records, statements of fact or other relevant information and assessing the evidence and evaluating it objectively to determine the extent to which specified requirements the audit criteria are fulfilled.~~ **ISO/IEC 17000**

DISCUSSION—

~~While audit applies to management systems, assessment applies to conformity assessment bodies as well as more generally. Internal audits, also called first-party audits, are conducted by the organization itself, or on its behalf, for management review and other internal purposes (for example, to confirm the effectiveness of the management system or to obtain information for the improvement of the management system). Internal audits can form the basis for an organization's self-declaration of conformity. In many cases, particularly in small organizations, impartiality can be demonstrated by the freedom from responsibility for the activity being audited or freedom from bias and conflict of interest.~~

DISCUSSION—

~~External audits include second and third-party audits. Second-party audits are conducted by parties having an interest in the organization, such as customers, or by other persons on their behalf. Third-party audits are conducted by independent auditing organizations, such as regulators, those providing certification and those providing accreditation.~~

DISCUSSION—

~~When two or more management systems of different disciplines (for example, quality, environmental, occupational health, and safety) are audited together, this is termed a combined audit.~~

authority, n—a body that has legal powers and rights. **E1187**

autonomy, n—in the context of personnel credentialing, organizational control over all essential credentialing decisions without being subject to approval by or undue influence from any other body. **ICE**

board/regulatory board, n—the authority responsible for preparing/developing and adopting regulations, policies, processes, and procedures to carry out the regulation; judging whether an individual or entity has met and continues to meet regulatory requirements; and recognizing the individual (certificant or license holder) or body (certification or licensure) as doing so.

candidate, n—in the context of personnel credentialing, an applicant who has fulfilled specified prerequisites, establishing eligibility to participate in the credentialing process. **ISO/IEC 17024**

certificant, n—in the context of personnel credentialing, an individual who has earned a credential awarded through a certification program. **ICE**

certificate, n—a document (letter, card, or other medium) awarded to certificate holders that designates the successful completion of the requisites of a credentialing program (certification or accreditation). **E2659**

certificate holder, n—in the context of personnel credentialing, an individual who an entity (person or body) which has been issued a certificate after successfully completing the requisites of a credentialing program (certification or accreditation). **E2659**

certificate of attendance/certificate of participation, n—a document issued after an individual attends or participates in a particular meeting or course. **ICE**

DISCUSSION—

Typically, there is no knowledge assessed prior to issuing this type of document. A certificate of attendance or participation is not a credential, because the recipients are not required to demonstrate competence through assessment or meet agreed upon professional or trade standards.

certificate program, *n*—a nondegree-granting education or training program consisting of (1) a learning event or series of events designed to educate or train individuals to achieve specified learning outcomes within a defined scope, and (2) a system designed to ensure individuals receive a certificate only after verification of successful completion of all program requisites, including but not limited to an evaluation of learner attainment of intended learning outcomes. **E2659**

~~**certification**, *n*—procedure and action by a duly authorized body of determining, verifying, and attesting in writing to the qualifications of individuals, processes, procedures, or items in accordance with applicable requirements.~~
third-party attestation of conformity to specified requirements related to products, processes, systems, or persons. **E1424**

professional certification, *n*—in the context of personnel credentialing, procedure and action by a duly authorized body of determining, verifying, and attesting in writing to the qualifications of individuals in a profession, in accordance with applicable requirements associated with that profession.

certification agency, *n*—the organizational or administrative unit that offers or operates, or both, a certification program. **ICE**

certification board, *n*—a group of individuals appointed or elected to govern one or more certification programs, as well as the certification agency, and responsible for all certification decision making, including governance. **ICE**

certification body/entity, *n*—a body that conducts certifications of conformity. **E1187**

certification mark, *n*—the symbol and use thereof which has been authorized by a certification body.

certification process, *n*—in the context of personnel credentialing, all activities by which a certification body establishes that an individual fulfills specified requirements, including application, evaluation, decision on certification, surveillance, and recertification. **ISO/IEC 17024**

certification program, *n*—the standards, policies, procedures, assessment instruments, and related products and activities through which individuals are publicly identified as qualified in a profession, occupation, role, or skill. **ICE**

committee/certification committee, *n*—a group of individuals appointed or elected to recommend and implement policy related to certification program operations. **ICE**

competence, *n*—in the context of personnel credentialing, demonstrated ability to apply knowledge and/or skills and, where relevant, demonstrated personal attributes.

complaint, *n*—expression of dissatisfaction, other than appeal, by any person or organization to a conformity assessment body or accreditation body, relating to the activities of that body, where a response is expected. **ISO/IEC 17000**

~~**computer-based testing (CBT)**, *n*—in the context of personnel credentialing, use of computers to deliver assessments, and sometimes the scoring and reporting of these assessments.~~
assessments of conformity.

conflict of interest, *n*—a conflict between the private interests and the official or professional responsibilities of an individual in a position of influence and trust.

confidentiality, *n*—the property that information is not made available or disclosed to unauthorized individuals, entities, or processes. **E1986**

conformity assessment, *n*—demonstration that specified requirements relating to a product, process, system, person, or body are fulfilled. **ISO/IEC 17000**

DISCUSSION—

The subject field of conformity assessment includes activities defined elsewhere such as testing, inspection and certification, as well as the accreditation of conformity assessment bodies.

DISCUSSION—

The expression object of conformity assessment or object is used to encompass any particular material, product, installation, process, system, person or body to which conformity assessment is applied. A service is covered by the definition of a product.

third-party conformity assessment, *n*—for purposes of the certification of persons, a conformity assessment activity that is performed by a person or body independent of the person or organization being assessed. **ISO/IEC 17000**

conformity assessment body, *n*—entity that performs conformity assessment services such as testing, calibration, inspection, and certification.

DISCUSSION—

For the purpose of this document, conformity assessment bodies are laboratories, inspection bodies, certification bodies, proficiency testing providers and reference materials producers. An accreditation body is not considered a conformity assessment body since they accredit conformity assessment bodies.

conformity assessment system, *n*—rules, procedures and management for carrying out conformity assessment. **ISO/IEC 17000**

DISCUSSION—

Conformity assessment systems may be operated at international, regional, national or sub-national level.

conformity surveillance, *n*—evaluation of conformity to determine the continuing conformity with specified requirements. **E1187**

consensus, *n*—general agreement or accord on a matter that all can support; a majority of opinion, but not necessarily unanimity.

consensus process, *n*—a formal procedure for reaching general agreement or accord, which includes the elements of due process.

constructed-response question, *n*— in the context of personnel credentialing, a type of test item in which the candidate produces the answer (for example, an essay or a fill in the blank) rather than selecting from multiple-choice options.

consultancy, *n*—participation in any of the activities of a conformity assessment body (CAB) subject to accreditation. **ISO/IEC 17011**

DISCUSSION—

Examples include:

- (1) Preparing or producing manuals or procedures for a CAB;
- (2) Participating in the operation or management of the system of a CAB;
- (3) Giving specific advice or specific training towards the development and implementation of the management system or competence of a CAB, or both; and
- (4) Giving specific advice or specific training for the development and implementation of the operational procedures of a CAB.

content domains, *n*—in the context of personnel credentialing, the set of organized categories characterizing subject matter under which knowledge and skills may be represented in specifications for assessment instruments. **ICE**

continuing competence, *n*—the ability to provide service at specified levels of knowledge and skill, not only at the time of initial certification/licensure but throughout an individual's professional career. **ICE**

continuing education, *n*—in the context of personnel credentialing, activities, often short courses, that certified or licensed professionals engage in to receive credit for the purpose of maintaining continuing competence and renewing certification or licensure. **ICE**

credentialing, *n*—the process by which an entity authorized and qualified to do so, grants formal recognition to, or records the recognition status of ~~individuals~~ persons, organizations, institutions, programs, processes, services, or products that meet predetermined and standardized criteria. **ASAE**

credentialing (licensing) authority, *n*—an entity authorized and qualified to do so, that grants formal recognition to, or records the recognition status of individuals, organizations, institutions, programs, processes, services, or products that meet predetermined and standardized criteria. **ASAE**

credentialing process, *n*—a method for maintaining quality standards of knowledge and performance, and in some cases, for stimulating continued self-improvement. **ICE**

criterion-referenced standard, *n*—a pass-fail standard determined by characteristics of the test (for example, the difficulty) rather than characteristics of the candidates (for example, the ability).

decertify/decertification, *n*—to withdraw certification from an individual.

designation, *n*—the title or trademarked label applied to the achievement of a credential. **ISO/IEC 17000**

discipline/disciplinary action, *n*—in the context of personnel credentialing, a formal, published process for the enforcement of standards governing the professional behavior (that is, ethics, standards of practice) of certificants or licensees. **ICE**

document—(1) *v*, to confirm (usually in writing) that a document is genuine;
 (2) *v*, to bear witness that someone actually signed a document, such as a will;
 (3) *n*, documentation as evidence such as policies and procedures, test reports, etc.

due process, *n*—a fundamental principle of fairness in all legal matters, both civil and criminal, especially in the courts.

DISCUSSION—

In certification, all procedures set by the certification body must be followed for each individual so that no prejudicial or unequal treatment results.

eligibility criteria, *n*—in the context of personnel credentialing, published criteria or prerequisites, often benchmarks for education, training and experience, with which applicants must demonstrate compliance in order to qualify for certification or licensure. **ICE**

eligibility requirements, *n*—the documents that support and show compliance with eligibility criteria.

endorsement, *n*—the act of pledging or committing support to a program, proposal, or candidate.

equating, *n*—in the context of personnel credentialing, a statistical process for determining comparability of scores across test forms in a given credentialing program.

equivalence/equivalence of conformity assessment results, *n*—sufficiency of different conformity assessment results to provide the same level of assurance of conformity with regard to the same specified requirements. **ISO/IEC 17000**

essential element, *n*—in the context of personnel credentialing, a statement that is directly related to a standard and specifies what a credentialing program must do to fulfill the requirement of the standard. **ICE**

examination/test, *n*—a mechanism(s) that is part of the evaluation, which measures a candidate’s knowledge or skill using one or more means, such as written, oral, practical, and observational. **E1187**

essay, *n*—an examination that requires a relatively lengthy, written response to the presentation of the writer’s topic.

multiple choice examination/test, *n*—an assessment of knowledge in which candidates select the correct response from among several choices or alternatives.

performance examination/test, *n*—an examination approach wherein candidates must interact with real or simulated systems.

DISCUSSION—

Performance examinations/tests can be portfolios, on demand tasks that may be essays or experiments in response to a prompt or a problem, long term projects, demonstrations of work, observations, etc.

practical examination/test, *n*—an examination that requires participation in an activity.

examiner, *n*—in the context of personnel credentialing, an individual with relevant technical and personal qualifications, competent to conduct or score, or both, an examination. **ISO/IEC 17024**

expert, *n*—an individual assigned by a credentialing body to provide specific knowledge or expertise with respect to the scope to be assessed. **NSI/ISO/IEC 17011**

DISCUSSION—

An expert in the context of credentialing is usually a subject matter expert that assists in designing the assessments and developing a defensible passing score.

extending accreditation, *n*—process of enlarging the scope of accreditation. **ISO/IEC 17000**

fairness, *n*—in the context of personnel credentialing, the principle that all individuals will be treated in an equitable manner throughout the entire credentialing process. **ICE**

first party, *n*—in the context of conformity assessment, a person or body that provides the object (for example, person, product, process, system, or service).

governance, *n*—in the context of personnel credentialing, control or authority; often understood as a structure describing the authority to implement the policies and practices of a credentialing body.