This glossary includes selected definitions that are frequently used in the American Nurses Credentialing Center’s (ANCC) Accreditation Program criteria and explanation of the accreditation process. In some instances, definitions from the ANA Nursing Professional Development: Scope and Standards of Practice (ANA, 2010) are also useful to understand or explain a term.


academic education
Courses taken for undergraduate or graduate credit in an institution of higher learning that may or may not lead to a degree or completion of a certificate program. Although professional development begins on entry into the basic nursing education program for the purpose of this definition, academic education refers to those courses taken in colleges or universities after the basic nursing education program.

accountability
Responsibility for adherence to the ANCC accreditation criteria as they apply to providing quality CNE.

accreditation
The voluntary process in which a nongovernmental agency or organization appraises and grants accredited status to institutions and/or programs or services that meet predetermined structure, process, and outcome criteria (time-limited).

accredited approver
An eligible organization credentialed by ANCC after having submitted to an in-depth analysis to determine its capacity to assess and monitor other organizations’ compliance with ANCC accreditation criteria that support the provisions of quality CNE activities, as well as approve those educational activities offered by other organizations or individuals in compliance with ANCC accreditation criteria.

accredited provider
An eligible organization credentialed by ANCC after having submitted to an in-depth analysis to determine its capacity to provide quality continuing education over an extended period of time.

adult learning principles
“The basis for or the beliefs underlying, the teaching and learning approaches to adults as learners based on recognition of the adult individual’s autonomy and self-direction, life experiences, readiness to learn and problem orientation to learning. Approaches include mutual, respectful collaboration of educators and learners in the assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation of education activities.” (Nursing Professional Development: Scope and Standards of Practice, ANA, 2010)

american nurses credentialing center’s commission on accreditation (ANCC COA)
The ANCC Accreditation Program is a subsidiary of the American Nurses Association (ANA) and governed by a volunteer commission whose members represent a variety of expertise from the field of continuing education including academia, educational companies, domestic and international nursing associations, and governmental organizations. The Commission on Accreditation (COA) provides strategic direction for the program and confers all accreditation decisions. The ANCCs mission is to promote excellence in nursing and health care globally through credentialing programs. They recognize healthcare organizations that promote nursing excellence and quality patient outcomes, while providing safe, positive work environments. In addition, ANCC accredits healthcare organizations that provide and approve continuing nursing education. It also offers educational
materials to support nurses and organizations as they work toward their credentials. The ANCC Accreditation program recognizes the importance of high-quality continuing nursing education (CNE) and skills-based competency programs. Around the world, ANCC-accredited organizations provide nurses with the knowledge and skills to help improve care and patient outcomes. Among its responsibilities, the COA develops program criteria, implements its national accreditation programs, accredits approvers and providers of continuing nursing education, and evaluates the Accreditation Program. Appointed by, and accountable to, the ANCC Board of Directors, the members of the COA are selected to represent a range of accredited organizations, consumers, nursing evaluation experts, adult education professionals, and the public at large, and include representatives from the Congress on Nursing Practice and Economics.

appeal
A process that allows the applicant/accredited organization to obtain reconsideration by an appellate body with regard to an adverse decision made by an original decision-making body.

approval
A decision made by an Accredited Approver that the educational design criteria or provider approval criteria have been met.

approved provider
Recognition by an ANCC Accredited Approver of a provider’s capacity to award contact hours for continuing education activities, planned, implemented, and evaluated by the provider.

approver unit
Comprises the members of an organization who support the approval of other organizations and/or continuing nursing education activities.

bias
Tendency or inclination to cause partiality, favoritism or influence.

biographical data
Information required of persons involved in the peer-review process or the planning and delivery of continuing education activities. The data provided should document their qualifications relevant to the continuing education process or a specific activity with respect to their education, professional achievements and credentials, work experience, honors, awards, and/or professional publications.

commercial interest
Any entity either producing, marketing, reselling, or distributing healthcare goods or services consumed by, or used on, patients or an entity that is owned or controlled by an entity that produces, markets, resells, or distributes healthcare goods or services consumed by, or used on, patients. Exceptions are made for nonprofit or government organizations, non-healthcare-related companies and healthcare facilities.

commercial support
Financial, or in-kind, contributions given by a commercial interest that are used to pay for all or part of the costs of a CNE activity. Providers of commercial support may not be providers or joint-providers of an educational activity.

commission on accreditation (COA)
Appointed by and accountable to the ANCC Board of Directors, this body is responsible for development and implementation of the ANCC program for accreditation of CNE. The COA is
composed of at least nine members selected from CNE stakeholder communities such as accredited organizations, consumers, nursing evaluation, and adult education.

**commitment**
Duty or responsibility of those providing or approving continuing education to meet learner needs, provide quality CNE, and support Provider Unit goals and improvements.

**conflict of interest**
An affiliation or relationship of financial nature with a Commercial Interest Organization that might bias a person’s ability to objectively participate in the planning, implementation, or review of a learning activity. All planners, reviewers, and faculty/presenters/authors are required to complete the NE-MSD Biographical Data and Conflict of Interest form.

**contact hour**
A unit of measurement that describes 60 minutes of an organized learning activity. One contact hour = 60 minutes.

**content**
“Subject matter of an education activity that relates to the educational objectives.” (Nursing Professional Development: Scope and Standards of Practice, ANA, 2010)

**content expert**
An individual with documented qualifications demonstrating education and/or experience in a particular subject matter. Also Subject Matter Expert.

**content reviewer**
An individual selected to evaluate an educational activity during the planning process or after it has been planned but prior to the delivery to learners for quality of content, potential bias, and any other aspects of the activity that may require evaluation.

**continuing education activities**
Those learning activities intended to build upon the educational and experiential bases of an individual for the enhancement of practice, education, administration, research, or theory development, to the end of improving the health of the public.

**continuing education unit (CEU)**
The ANCC Accreditation Program does not utilize this term when referring to the CNE unit of measurement. The CEU is an educational measurement utilizing criteria of the International Association for Continuing Education and Training (IACET). One CEU is equal to ten (10) clock hours of educational achievement used by many universities and professional organizations following the IACET criteria to attest to clock hour completion of continuing education activities.

**continuing nursing education (CNE) activities**
Those learning activities intended to build upon the educational and experiential bases of the professional RN for the enhancement of practice, education, administration, research, or theory development, to the end of improving the health of the public and RNs’ pursuit of their professional career goals.

**credentialing**
A generic term for licensure, certification, and registration. It can also be used as a term for a voluntary process under the auspices of private-sector associations.
deferral
An action taken when the ANCC or Northeast MSD determines that more information is needed from the applicant before an approval decision can be made.

denial
An action taken when an applicant’s written application materials substantiate that the organization is not in compliance with the ANCC Accreditation Program/Northeast MSD criteria and will not be able to comply within a definite time frame of two (2) years.

directory of accredited organizations
An electronic listing that serves as public notification of an organization’s status as an accredited approver and/or provider of continuing nursing education. All accredited organizations appear in this directory, which is available online by visiting the ANCC at http://www.nursecredentialing.org/Accreditation/AccreditedOrganizations.

distance learning
A formal educational activity in which most of the instruction occurs when the learner and the educator are not in the same place. The instruction may take place either synchronously (at the same time) (e.g., interactive video) or asynchronously (at different times) (e.g., online/Internet or correspondence courses).

domains of learning
Three areas in which learning takes place: the cognitive, psychomotor, and affective.

educational activity
A planned, organized effort aimed at accomplishing educational objectives.

educational objectives
Derived from the overall purpose of the activity, educational objectives are written statements that describe learner-oriented outcomes that may be expected as a result of participation in the educational activity. These statements describe knowledge, skills, and/or attitude changes that should occur upon successful completion of the educational activity.

eligibility
An applicant’s ability to meet certain criteria in order to be considered qualified to apply for accreditation.

enduring materials
A non-live CNE activity that “endures” over time. Examples of enduring materials include programmed texts, audiotapes, videotapes, monographs, or computer-assisted learning materials, or other electronic media that are used alone or with printed or written materials. Enduring materials can also be delivered via the Internet. The learning experience by the nurse can take place at any time in any place rather than only at one time or in one place.

evaluation
“The process of determining significance or quality by systematic appraisal and study” (Nursing Professional Development: Scope and Standards of Practice, ANA, 2010).

evaluation criteria
“Relevant, measurable indicators of significant or quality standards” (Nursing Professional Development: Scope and Standards of Practice, ANA, 2010).
evidence
Specific information that documents compliance with accreditation/approval criteria.

gift in kind
Nonmonetary support (e.g. marketing assistance, meeting room, event registration assistance, etc.) provided by the giver to the taker. (In the accreditation community the “taker” is the provider of CNE.)
goal
A measurable end result having one or more objectives to be achieved within a pre-determined timeframe.
in-service educational activities
Activities intended to assist the professional nurse to acquire, maintain, and/or increase competence in fulfilling the assigned responsibilities specific to the expectations of the employer.
jointly-provided activities
Educational activities planned, developed, and implemented by two (2) or more organizations or agencies.
joint-providership
Planning, developing, and implementing an educational activity by two (2) or more organizations or agencies.
key personnel
Individuals who contribute to the overall functioning of the Provider/Approver Unit in a substantive, measurable way, without regard to pay or employment status.
lead nurse planner
A currently licensed RN with a master’s degree or higher or international equivalent, and with either the baccalaureate or graduate degree in nursing, who has the authority within the Accredited Provider Unit to ensure adherence to the ANCC Accreditation Program criteria in the provision of CNE.
leadership
The provision of direction and guidance to individuals involved in the process of assessing, planning, implementing, and evaluating CNE activities in adherence to the ANCC accreditation criteria.
learner-directed, learner-paced activity
An educational activity in which the learner takes the initiative in identifying his or her learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing, and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes. The learner also determines the pace at which the learning activity is engaged. Learner-directed activities may be developed with or without the help of others, but they are engaged in by only one individual.
marketing materials
Method of announcing an educational activity. This may include a brochure, flyer, bulletin board announcement, newsletter, memo, e-mail, Intranet posting, electronic message or Web site.
multidisciplinary
To relate to or to include several disciplines at once, e.g., a multidisciplinary approach to planning a continuing education activity; also may be referred to as interdisciplinary.
multi-focused organization (MFO)
An organization that exists for more than the purpose of providing CNE.

needs assessment
The process by which a discrepancy between what is desired and what exists is identified.

nurse peer review leader
A currently licensed RN with a master’s degree or higher, and with either the baccalaureate or graduate degree in nursing, who has the authority within the organization to evaluate adherence to the ANCC Accreditation Program criteria in the provision of CNE.

nurse peer reviewer
A currently licensed RN with a baccalaureate degree or higher in nursing who is actively involved in evaluating each Approved Provider or Individual Activity Applicant to evaluate adherence to the ANCC criteria.

nurse planner
A currently licensed RN with a baccalaureate degree or higher or international equivalent in nursing who is actively involved in all aspects of planning, implementation, and evaluation of each CNE activity. The Nurse Planner is responsible for ensuring that appropriate educational design principles are used and processes are consistent with the requirements of the ANCC Accreditation Program.

nursing professional development
“The lifelong process of active participation by nurses in learning activities that assist in developing and maintaining their continuing competence, enhancing their professional practice, and supporting achievement of their career goals.” (Nursing Professional Development: Scope and Standards of Practice, ANA, 2010)

off-label use
Using products for a purpose other than that for which it was approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

operational
Functioning under all of the relevant criteria of the ANCC Accreditation Program, with all essential approver and/or provider unit personnel in place. Application is permitted once the provider meets the designated eligibility requirements.

organization
The overall administrative and functional structure that includes the approver unit and/or provider unit. For example, a hospital, college, association, or private business.

organizational chart
A diagram or other schematic used to depict informal and formal lines of communication and relationships within the overall organization including the Approver and/or Provider Unit.

orientation
“The process of introducing nursing staff to the philosophy, goals, policies, procedures, role expectations, and other factors needed to function in a specific work setting. Orientation takes place both for new employees and when changes in nurses’ roles, responsibilities, and practice settings occur” (Nursing Professional Development: Scope and Standards of Practice, ANA, 2010).
outcome
The impact of structure and process on the organization as a provider or approver and the value/benefit to nursing professional development.

outcome measurement
“The process of observing, describing, and quantifying predefined indicators of outcomes of performance.” (Nursing Professional Development: Scope and Standards of Practice, ANA, 2010)

peer review
Professional judgment on the quality of the continuing nursing education offered based on designated standards and criteria for continuing nursing education.

ANA’s Code of Ethics recognizes that effective peer review is indispensable for holding nursing practice to the highest standards. Peer review helps address the boundaries of duty and loyalty for all nurses, including “the responsibility to preserve integrity and safety, to maintain competence, and to continue personal and professional growth.”

planning committee
At least 2 individuals responsible for planning each educational activity; one individual must be a Nurse Planner and one individual must have appropriate subject matter expertise.

policy
Policy is defined as a “course of action to be followed by a government, business, or institution to obtain a desired effect” (Nies and McEwen, 2011, p. 200).

portfolio
“Material documenting the professional development, career planning, and demonstration of learning and maintenance of continuing professional nursing competence of the individual nurse” (Nursing Professional Development: Scope and Standards of Practice, ANA, 2010).

position description
Description of the functions specific to the role of the Lead Nurse Planner, Nurse Planner, Nurse Peer Review Leader, Nurse Peer Reviewers, Primary Nurse Planner, and key personnel that relate to the Provider or Approver Unit.

primary nurse planner
A currently licensed RN with a baccalaureate degree or higher in nursing who is designated as the Primary Nurse Planner and serves as the liaison between the ANC Accredited Approver Unit and the Approved Provider Unit.

procedure
A written statement defining how a particular policy is implemented.

process
For Accredited and Approved Providers, process is the development, delivery, and evaluation of CNE activities. For Accredited Approvers, process is the evaluation of providers of CNE and/or individual CNE activities.

professional development
See “nursing professional development” above.
**provider**
An individual, institution, organization, or agency responsible for the development, implementation, evaluation, financing, record keeping, and quality of continuing nursing education activities.

**provider unit**
Comprises the members of an organization who support the delivery of continuing nursing education activities.

**provider-directed, learner-paced activity**
An educational activity in which the provider controls the content of the learning activity, including the learning objectives based on needs assessment, the content of the learning activity, the method by which it is presented, and the evaluation methods. The learner determines the pace at which the learning activity is engaged (examples include print article, self-learning module/independent study).

**provider-directed, provider-paced activity**
An educational activity in which the provider controls all aspects of the learning activity. The provider determines the learning objectives based on a needs assessment, the content of the learning activity, the method by which it is presented, and evaluation methods (examples include live activities, live Webinars).

**purpose**
Written outcome statement related to what the learner will be able to do at the conclusion of the activity (i.e. “The purpose of this activity is to enable the learner to...”).

**reconsideration**
A process that allows an applicant to obtain a review of and adverse decision on an application for accreditation or approval by submission of clarifying materials to the original decision-making body. This is also a process that allows for a review of a revocation decision.

**relevant relationship**
A relationship with a commercial interest is considered relevant if the products or services of the commercial interest are related to the content of the educational activity. Financial relationships with any commercial interest of the individual’s spouse/partner are considered to be financial relations.

**resources**
Available human, material, and financial assets used to support and promote an environment focused on quality CNE and outcome measures.

**resubmission**
A process that provides for review and action on applications that had been previously submitted and withdrawn prior to action.

**retroactive approval**
Peer review and approval of an activity that has already taken place; not authorized in the ANCC Commission on Accreditation system.

**revoke**
To rescind approved/accredited status.

**single focused organization**
An organization that exists for the sole purpose of providing CNE.
specialty
A concentration in an area of nursing that has standards and that reflects a well-defined base of knowledge within the overall discipline of nursing.

specialty nursing organization (SNO)
A national nursing body that has a majority of voting members who are RNs practicing in a specialized nursing area, as so defined in the organization’s governing documents.

sponsor
An organization providing financial or in-kind contributions that does not meet the definition of a commercial interest.

sponsorship
Financial or in-kind contribution(s) from an organization that does not fit the category of a commercial interest.

staff development
“The systematic process of assessment, development, and evaluation that enhances the performance or professional development of health care providers and their continuing competence (National Nursing Staff Development Organization, 1999)” (Nursing Professional Development: Scope and Standards of Practice, ANA, 2010).

standards of nursing practice
“Authoritative statements that describe a level of care or performance common to the profession of nursing by which the quality of nursing practice can be judged and measured” (Nursing Professional Development: Scope and Standards of Practice, ANA, 2010).

standards of professional performance
“Authoritative statements that describe a competent level of behavior in the professional role, including activities related to quality of care, performance appraisal, education, collegiality, ethics, collaboration, research, and resource utilization” (Nursing Professional Development: Scope and Standards of Practice, ANA, 2010).

structure
Characteristics of an organization, including commitment, accountability, leadership, and resources that are required to support the delivery of quality CNE.

target audience
The group for which an educational activity has been designed.

teaching strategies
Instructional methods and techniques that are in accord with the principles of adult learning.

unique identifier
Something used to match an individual with a recordkeeping list for an individual educational activity. The unique identifier may be a home address, employee number, email address, last 4 digits of SSN#, birthdate, phone number, nursing license number, and some organizations utilize a system that automatically generates a unique identifier number for each new learner. Unique identifiers allow for differentiation between learners of the same name, or may be used to conceal the identity of a participant from office staff or other participants, in which case only the Nurse Planner or designee will have the ‘key’.
**virtual visit**  
A conference between the applicant and the approver team via teleconference, telephone, or other electronic means to validate application findings. The approver team may request additional supporting evidence to seek clarification and verify compliance with accreditation criteria.

**withdrawal**  
Termination of an application, without prejudice to any future applications, prior to the date on which an official decision is made.