

Glossary of Credentialing Terminology

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The Connecting Credentials Common Language Work Group is pleased to offer this glossary as a first step toward an increased agreement on the meaning and use of key terminology associated with credentialing. It is a base upon which additions and contextual adaptations can and will be made. This glossary is a living document and is part of ongoing work and development: your thoughts and comments will help to create the best possible version of it as we move toward an expanded and improved concept of credentialing. We invite immediate use of these terms and definitions and welcome all feedback on them. Contact: khall@skilledwork.org.

Competency Terms

Competency	A learnable, measurable and/or observable, role-relevant, and behavior-based characteristic or capability of an individual.
Learning outcome	What a learner is expected to know, understand, or be able to do after successful completion of a planned process of learning.
Knowledge	What a person knows, understands, and can demonstrate in terms of a body of facts, principles, theories and practices related to broad general and/or specialized fields of study or work.
Skills	What an individual can do in applying knowledge, completing tasks and solving problems (involving the use of logical, intuitive, and creative thinking). Skills can be described in terms of types and complexity and include cognitive, technical, communication, interpersonal, and practical skills (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).
Cross-Cutting Competencies	Knowledge and skills that are not specific to a particular field or discipline – competencies which are generally valuable across most if not all educational programs and employment environments.

Credential Terms

Credential	A documented award by a responsible and authorized body that attests that an individual has achieved specific learning outcomes or attained a defined level of knowledge or skill relative to a given standard. Credential, in this context, is an umbrella term that includes degrees, diplomas, licenses, certificates, badges, and professional/industry certifications.
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Badge Badges use digital technologies to represent learning achievements. Open badges use open standards that support interoperability and connections among systems and contexts. Badges can be created and awarded by institutions, organizations, groups, or individuals. Badges are flexible with regard to how issuers create them, define their use, and develop their criteria (which are publicly viewable, embedded in the badge, and verifiable). Therefore, badges are used to represent granular competencies as well as deeply linked, rich experiences and complex learning. Badges are being used in conjunction with and/or as modular components of traditional credentials such as degrees. Badges can link to evidence and can be used as representations of credentials. Badges can expire or be revoked, making them useful for credentials that are not continuously valid. Given their flexibility, badges bridge traditional, accredited credentials, professional and industry-recognized credentials, and non-traditional, experimental credentials.

Certificate Certificates are awarded upon the successful completion of a brief course of study, usually one year or less but at times longer, primarily in institutions of higher education, university extension programs or non-degree granting postsecondary institutions like area career and technical education schools. Certificates are sometimes issued for participation or completion, other times for attainment of competencies. Certificates are used at many levels of knowledge and skills, ranging from foundational skills to learning at the post-graduate level.

Certification Certifications indicate mastery of or competency in specific knowledge, skills or processes that can be measured against a set of accepted standards. These are not tied to a specific educational program, but are typically awarded through assessment and validation of skills in cooperation with a business, trade association or other industry group. After attaining a certification, individuals often must meet ongoing requirements to maintain the currency of the certification.

Degree A degree is a title given by an institution (usually a college or university) that has been granted the authority by a state, a recognized Native American tribe, or the federal government to confer such degrees. Generally, degrees are provided for accomplishment in academic, vocationally related, or religious studies, and the degree requirements differ within each of these three realms, but are presumed to be comparable in accomplishment. A degree is granted by an institution to individuals who are presumed or who have been attested to have satisfactorily completed a course of study from which the individual can demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and ability commensurate with the degree requirements within the specific field of study. Degrees vary in the level of knowledge and skills that holders of the degree are presumed to have.

License A license is legal permission, typically granted by a government agency, to allow an individual to perform certain regulated tasks or occupations. Licenses are based on some pre-determined and standardized criteria, involving educational programs of study, assessments, and/or work experience. They are time-limited and must be renewed periodically and often carry a continuing education requirement. Practice in a licensed occupation is restricted to those possessing a license.

Qualification A qualification is the formal outcome of an assessment and validation

process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards.

Credential Connectivity Terms

Connected Credentials	Connected Credentials are those that can be linked meaningfully with other credentials. The term reflects connections and relationships among credentials, connections to purpose and value for multiple stakeholders in multiple contexts, and connections to opportunities for credential earners. Connectedness includes several key dimensions, including transparency, modularity, portability, relevance, validity and equity. Connected credentials is a broader term than stackable credentials, also including other forms of connectivity, including lateral, latticed, nested, and other connections.
Stackable Credential	A credential that is part of a sequence of credentials that can be accumulated over time to build up an individual's qualifications and help that individual move along a career pathway to further education, different responsibilities, and potentially higher paying jobs.
Nested Credential	A credential that is a subset of or embedded in other credentials, such as a badge or a certification as part of a degree.
Latticed Credentials	Credentials that are interwoven with each other in mutually supporting ways, such as educational progress toward a license and a degree simultaneously.
Lateral Credentials	Credentials that enable earners to move laterally across or between fields of study, such as a certification that is designed in relation to another certification.
Modularity	Modularity means that the credential includes units that carry independent value, which can be combined in multiple ways with other units and credentials and across multiple industries to create pathways. Modular credentials can be combined to demonstrate attainment of broader, more complex, and/or more specialized knowledge and skills over time.
Interoperability	The ability of systems, units, or forces to provide services to and accept services from other systems, units, or forces, and to use the services so exchanged to enable them to operate effectively together. Four types of interoperability are strategic, operational, tactical and technological.
Portability	Portability means the credential has value locally, nationally and perhaps internationally in labor markets, education systems, and/or other contexts. The earner is able to use the credential in a variety of environments, and the context and competencies the credential represents remain intact and are accessible by credential consumers. A portable credential enables earners to move vertically and horizontally within and across the credentialing ecosystem for attainment of other credentials.
Transparency	Transparency means credentials are easy to understand and compare. Competencies represented by the credential are clearly defined, and information about the credential and its value is clearly provided to earners, issuers, endorsers and consumers of credentials.

Career Pathways

The career pathway approach connects progressive levels of education, training, support services, and credentials for specific occupations in a way that optimizes the progress and success of individuals with varying levels of abilities and needs. This approach helps individuals earn marketable credentials, engage in further education and employment, and achieve economic success. Career pathways deeply engage employers and help meet their workforce needs; they also help states and communities strengthen their workforces and economies.

Assessment Terms

Assessment

The process of evaluating and documenting a person's level of competency mastery

Authentic Assessment

Authentic assessment is the assessment of knowledge, skills, and abilities in a manner that as closely as possible approximates the way in which they will be demonstrated in the individual's professional and/or civic life.

Formative Assessment

Formative assessment is diagnostic in nature and refers to the use of assessment results to improve learning. Also sometimes referred to as "assessment for learning" as distinct from summative assessment, which is "assessment of learning."

Summative Assessment

Summative assessment is judgmental in nature and refers to the use of assessment results to determine whether and how well a learner achieved a learning objective or competency. Another definition for summative is assessment occurring at the end of a defined milestone.