

CEs, CEHs and CEUs: What's the Difference?

By Thomas Durham, PhD, LADC, NAADAC Director of Training

The terminology for continuing education credits can be confusing, misunderstood, and often (and innocently) misused. Each state credentialing or licensing board may have its own unique terminology and guidelines for continuing education (CE) credit. In most cases, hour-for-hour educational credit is referred to as either a “contact hour” or a “continuing education hour.” This type of credit is typically known as one of the following acronyms: CEHs, CE hours, or simply CEs. At NAADAC, we typically refer to the credit hours we offer as CEs, but to be clear, when we use the term CE we mean hour-for-hour credit (1 CE equals 1 continuing education hour). Training programs that provide continuing education are sometimes referred to as continuing education or CE programs and, in most cases, provide hour-for-hour credit. In fact, most certification or licensing boards that credential addiction professionals require a certain number of direct contact hours (CEs or CEHs) for certification and recertification.

The acronym that is most often misused when referring to contact hours is CEUs, which stands for Continuing Education Units. However, a single CEU is not the same as a single contact hour. A Continuing Education Unit is most often used with a structured educational experience (such as a class, seminar or retreat) and is based on a formula that equates to 10 contact hours for each CEU. According to The College Board, “one CEU equals ten contact hours of participation in organized continuing education classes and/or training conducted by a qualified instructor” (Source: <https://professionals.collegeboard.org/prof-dev/workshops/ceu-credits>).

To confuse things further, some credentialing boards use the term CEUs on their website when they are actually referring to contact hours and I am aware of at least one training organization that includes the acronym CEU in their name (but looking at their website, it appears that they provide contact hours).

NAADAC offers continuing education hours (referred to as CEs) calculated as direct contact hours, to professionals who participate in our national conferences, affiliate conferences, workshops, webinars, self-study guides and any other form of education that would qualify for education hours toward an addiction professional credential. Those who attend NAADAC's conferences can also receive business hours (BHs) for attending NAADAC business meetings, such as Board of Directors meetings, regional caucuses and general membership meetings. Business hours are not typically recognized by credentialing boards, so we carve these out as separate hours of attendance and keep them separate from continuing education hours in the certificates provided to participants. Although these hours may not count toward credentialing, they might be worth something to a participant's employer in recognition of overall time spent in conference attendance.

So, which is it – CE, CEH or CEU? Technically, contact hours are continuing education hours (CEs or CEHs). However, many in our field use these terms interchangeably with CEUs. So, when you hear someone talk about CEUs, make sure you find out what they are referring to. They may, in fact, be referring to contact hours, even though (technically) a CEU means something quite different.



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