



## Certification vs. Certificate – What’s the Difference?

Earning a *professional credential*, such as BCEN’s [CEN®](#), [CPEN®](#), [CFRN®](#), [CTRN®](#), [TCRN®](#) or [CBRN national board certifications](#), and completing *certificate programs* such as ACLS, PALS, ENPC, TNCC, and [BCEN EDvantage](#) (designed by BCEN to prepare and accelerate nurse entry into the ED workplace), are critical to the work emergency nurses do. However, there are significant differences between the two.

	National Specialty Certification Programs	Certificate Programs
<b>Purpose</b>	Validate knowledge, skills, and expertise across entire specialty practice area.	Learn, practice or demonstrate knowledge or proficiency in a focused topic, subject or skill set.
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Professional credential</b> signifying the individual is board certified in a specialty.	<b>Certificate or proof of completion</b> card and/or CE hours.
<b>Essential to Safe and Professional Practice</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Awarding Organization</b>	Independent credentialing bodies	Varies
<b>Nationally Recognized</b>	<b>Yes</b>	Most
<b>Portable</b>	<b>Yes</b>	Varies. Nurses may be required to take employer-sponsored or employer-approved offering.
<b>Eligibility Requirements</b>	<b>Strict and nationally standardized.</b> Most require RN licensure, as well as relevant direct or indirect clinical experience. <sup>1</sup>	Varies. Clinical experience or RN licensure may or may not be required.
<b>Preparation/Course of Study</b>	Independently designed. Spans weeks or months. Prep materials and review courses developed by professional organizations and dedicated certification prep providers.	Class or course offered over several hours to several days, in person or online. Content can vary by instructor and/or provider.
<b>Culminates in Exam or Practicum</b>	<b>Yes</b> Rigorous, comprehensive, nationally standardized exam, offered in a secure testing facility. Based on national role delineation studies to ensure relevance to clinical practice specialty area. Psychometrically sound and legally defensible.	Sometimes Content can vary. Test or practicum hosted by sponsoring organization and/or offered online.
<b>Renewal/Recertification Frequency &amp; Requirements</b>	Every 4 years, on average. <sup>1</sup> Retake certification exam or accrue required continuing education (CE)/contact hours.	Renewal frequency varies. May be used toward certification program CE requirements.
<b>Eligible for Accreditation by ABSNC<sup>2</sup> or NCCA<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>Yes</b> Accreditation by these independent, third parties validates the certification program has met recognized national and international credentialing industry standards.	No Certificate program/CE providers may be accredited or sanctioned by industry organizations or certificate program sponsor organizations.

<sup>1</sup>American Board of Nursing Specialties (ABNS) Member Organization Annual Survey Data, 2019.

<sup>2</sup>Accreditation Board for Specialty Nursing Certifications. <sup>3</sup>National Commission for Certifying Agencies.