

As a dedicated personal trainer or fitness professional, keeping your certification current is not only a requirement but a vital part of staying informed and effective in your career. Among the well-known certifying bodies such as NASM, ACE, and AFAA, each has its unique recertification processes and expectations. Pretty simple.. In this post, I'll break down the ACE recertification system with practical guidance you can follow, including how the ACE renewal portal functions, understanding which ACE CEU courses qualify, and managing your ACE renewal timeline.



Why Continuing Education Exists in Fitness Certification

Continuing Education Units (CEUs) are the foundation of the renewal process across major certifying bodies like ACE, NASM, and AFAA. They exist for several reasons:

- **Maintaining professional standards:** The fitness industry is always evolving with new research, trends, and methodologies. CEUs help ensure trainers stay current and knowledgeable.

- **Enhancing safety and effectiveness:** Keeping up-to-date reduces the risk of injury and improves client outcomes.
- **Supporting career growth:** CEUs encourage professionals to explore specialized areas, such as nutrition or corrective exercise.
- **Meeting legal and ethical requirements:** Many employers and insurance policies require valid certification.

Ignoring continuing education leads to expired credentials, which can harm your reputation and limit professional opportunities.

Understanding Renewal Cycles: ACE vs NASM vs AFAA

Before diving into the ACE-specific steps, it's useful to note differences in renewal cycles across popular certifying bodies you might be familiar with:

Certifying Body	Renewal Cycle	Typical CEU Hours Required
ACE (American Council on Exercise)	2 years	20 CEUs
NASM (National Academy of Sports Medicine)	2 years	20 CEUs
AFAA (Athletics and Fitness Association of America)	1 year	15 CEUs per year

ACE and NASM both use a 2-year renewal cycle, giving you a bit longer period to accumulate continuing education credits. AFAA demands annual renewal, which is more frequent but requires fewer CEUs per cycle. This difference impacts how you plan your education schedule.

What Counts as a CEU for ACE Recertification?

This is where most trainers misunderstand or get tripped up. Not every educational activity qualifies toward your ACE CEUs.

Recognized CEU Sources

- **ACE-Approved Courses:** These are programs, workshops, and conferences that ACE has reviewed and approved. They include both online and live courses.
- **Other Recognized Providers:** Some programs accredited by other reputable bodies (for example, NASM or AFAA training counted only if ACE lists them as approved).
- **Self-Study and Online Courses:** Provided they are ACE-approved and issue a certificate.
- **College Courses Relevant to Fitness:** Human anatomy, exercise physiology, nutrition, etc., accepted if official transcripts or documentation are provided.

What Does NOT Count?

- Courses without ACE approval status — ignoring this wastes your time.
- Generic fitness workshops or unpaid webinars with no certification issued.
- Workshops offered by unverified providers or where no proof of completion is recorded.
- Fitness trade shows or sales demonstrations without educational content.
- Simply “attending” a conference without completing associated coursework or exams.

Hint: I keep a *dedicated CEU folder* on my hard drive and cloud storage where I save all PDF certificates immediately—screenshots or blurry <https://learnmuscles.com/blog/2026/08/05/how-ceus-actually-work-a-personal-trainers-guide-to-nasm-ace-afaa-nfpt-renewal-requirements/> phone images won't cut it if you need to verify at audit time.

Step-by-Step ACE Recertification Process

Here is the detailed, actionable workflow I personally follow each recertification cycle:

1. **Check Your ACE Certification Expiration Date:** Log in to the ACE renewal portal to confirm your certification expiration date. Set calendar reminders 3-6 months before.
2. **Review ACE CEU Requirements:** Confirm you need 20 CEUs within your 2-year period. Note any changes in policy or required credits on ACE's site.
3. **Verify CEU Course Approval Status:** Before purchasing or enrolling, double-check the course provider's approval status on the ACE CEU listings page—avoid assuming a course counts just because it looks fitness-related.
4. **Complete ACE-Approved CEU Courses:** Enroll in courses through established providers. Upon completion, download the official certificates—usually PDFs—which you should save in your CEU folder immediately.
5. **Document Everything:** Maintain a running spreadsheet or checklist of courses completed, CEU credits earned, course dates, and certificate file names.
6. **Submit Proof via ACE Renewal Portal:** When ready, submit your CEU certificates, renewal fee, and updated CPR/AED certification (if required) through the ACE renewal portal.
7. **Confirm Renewal Processing:** Processing can take up to 2-4 weeks. Check your portal for status updates and avoid last-minute submissions.
8. **Print/Download Confirmation:** Once approved, save or print your renewed credential documentation.

Managing the ACE Renewal Timeline Efficiently

To avoid the late renewal scramble, here's how I strategically manage the **ACE renewal timeline**:

- **Start Early:** Begin accumulating CEUs immediately after certification. Don't wait until the last year.
- **Track Hours Quarterly:** Every 3-4 months, review your CEU progress and adjust plans accordingly.
- **Save Certificates Right Away:** Course providers typically issue certificates in PDF format; save them directly rather than taking screenshots. Accurate documentation is critical.
- **Allow Processing Time:** Plan to submit your renewal paperwork and fees at least 6 weeks before expiration to handle delays.
- **Keep CPR/AED Certification Current:** Most renewals require valid CPR/AED; align this expiration to match your ACE cycle to simplify scheduling.

Why Approval Status and Provider Eligibility Matter

I remember a project where I was shocked by the final bill. With the abundance of online courses and certifications, many trainers mistakenly count CEUs from unapproved sources. This is frustrating because the certifying body will reject those credits, sometimes after you've paid or completed the course.

Ask yourself this: here's what I always do:

- Visit the ACE website or ACE CEU course database for a list of approved providers.
- Check that course providers explicitly mention *ACE approval* for the course you want.
- Never buy courses blindly based on marketing—hidden sales pages or vague approval claims raise red flags.
- If in doubt, contact ACE customer service or your renewal portal support to clarify eligibility.

Integrating Lessons Learned From NASM and AFAA

Many trainers hold multiple certifications and I'm often asked how practices compare to NASM and AFAA. From my experience, these tips help across all your certifying bodies:

- Keep a single organized system—an Excel spreadsheet or digital tool—tracking all CEUs and expiration dates per certifying body.
- Focus on certifying body portals to avoid headaches. NASM and ACE's portals allow you to upload certificates directly; AFAA can require mailed documentation.
- Confirm which courses cross-apply for multiple certifications, but always verify with each body's approval status before counting credits.
- Never rely on screenshots or informal proof of completion. Always ensure your certificates come directly from the course provider, usually in PDF.

Summary: Your Takeaway Steps for ACE Recertification

1. Check your certification expiration and mark it in your calendar.
2. Understand and meet the 20 CEU requirement over 2 years.
3. Purchase and complete only ACE-approved CEU courses.
4. Save official certificates as PDFs immediately upon course completion.
5. Submit all renewal materials through the ACE renewal portal well before deadline.
6. Keep your CPR/AED certification current and synced with ACE certification timing.
7. Verify approval status for all courses and providers to prevent wasted effort and expense.

Following this clear and organized approach not only ensures smoother ACE recertification but improves your professional credibility and keeps you sharp as a trainer. Don't fall into the trap of vague advice like "just get your credits done"—plan smart, track your progress, and always verify before investing in courses.

Your future self and clients will thank you!