

# Introduction to Ceus

## AAPC CEU Mission

*All members and business associates of AAPC must Uphold a Higher Standard in education. Certified Professional Coders must choose continuing education that stretches their skill levels. Vendors and local chapters must provide quality in curriculum. And AAPC's national office must develop a comprehensive list of CEU opportunities, and provide vendors and local chapters with timely and consistent CEU approvals.*

Through AAPC, medical coders undergo a rigorous examination to ensure they are qualified to become Certified Professional Coders and those who succeed are expected to update their skills throughout their careers. To verify the continuation of their education, AAPC requires Certified Professional Coders to obtain continuing education units (CEUs) and submit them to AAPC every two years. The CEUs must come from a large pool of CEUs that have received prior approval by AAPC. This document outlines the standards and processes for obtaining AAPC CEUs. All CEU applications, whether for a national AAPC event, a local chapter, an in-service presentation, or vendor education, are equal under this policy.

The principal focus of curriculum being considered for CEUs is its educational value and a time element. In keeping with the accepted standard for CEU determination, one hour of live education (workshop, audioseminar, conference) is the equivalent of 1 CEU. Further in this document, we will discuss how this translates into written or online CEU opportunities.

AAPC has been strengthening its members' credentials by strengthening its CEU approval process over the years, and therefore, AAPC's CEU policies are evolving. CEU rules for members are applied according to the year in which the CEUs are earned, not the year in which they are submitted. Because CEUs can be earned over the course of two years, multiple CEU policies may need to be followed. All materials in this booklet will be based on current 2009 CEU standards; however, an appendix provides a list of "grandfathered" CEU opportunities, and their expirations.

Remember, CEUs will only be issued to the owner of the copyright on original materials, or to the sponsoring organization. CEUs would not be calculated, for example, to a government policy that a private vendor has attached to its online curriculum. CEUs would be issued to an organization that is sponsoring a speaker who will present original copyright materials.

## Exclusions

### Coding Books and References

The AAPC will not award CEUs for publications or software considered to be tools that coders use at their desks to perform their responsibilities. Examples include CPT®, ICD-9-CM, HCPCS Level II, and desk reference books, medical dictionaries, and software containing code look-ups and coverage data. Also, curriculum designed specifically to be text for an instructor teaching coding/billing courses will not be awarded CEUs. The instructor must apply for CEUs for the course.

### Presentations from Nonqualified Speakers

The AAPC will not award CEUs to presentations by speakers who are not qualified by AAPC standards. AAPC requires speakers to be Certified Professional Coders or to hold other certifications (i.e., MD, JD, RN, MBA) appropriate to the subject matter. Exceptions will be made for experts who submit a qualifying resume with the CEU application. Typically, a qualifying resume describes a presenter who is a payer representative responsible for coding education or coding compliance, or an employee of a government entity like CMS or the OIG.

While similar requirements are not enforced for print or online curriculum, AAPC strongly recommends that Certified Professional Coders be engaged for the development of all coding curriculum being considered for CEUs.

### Ceus Earned Prior to Certification

The AAPC will not accept as valid any CEUs earned prior to obtaining certification. Many coding certification courses will offer CEUs because certified coders may choose to brush up on their skills because they have been away from coding, or because they want specific information on other specialties. Certified coders are permitted to submit CEUs from these classes. Students who graduate to sit for their certification are ineligible for these CEUs.

## Inclusions

### AHIMA CEUs

We offer 1-for-1 equivalent CEUs for any audio conferences and workshops published by the AHIMA national office. We also honor CEUs from AHIMA for online self assessments. A certificate of attendance or completion is necessary to show participation. One hour of instruction is worth 1 CEU. AHIMA CEUs are accepted from programs sponsored by AHIMA national offices and the state AHIMA branches. The AAPC does not accept CEUs from other entities that offer “AHIMA approved” CEUs, unless these organizations have separately issued AAPC CEU approvals, AAPC index numbers and CEU values.

### CMS CEUs

CEUs for CMS-sponsored audio conferences and workshops are accepted by AAPC at a rate of 1 CEU per hour. These CEUs may come from CMS national or MAC offices. A certificate of attendance or completion with the CMS logo is necessary to show participation. More than 15 free CEUs are offered through the Medicare Learning Network online. The CEU value of each module is based on time.

### Post Secondary Education

If a student has an AAPC certification, the AAPC will accept as CEUs time spent in post secondary education programs, including diploma-degree-granting programs that relate to health care, health care business, health care finance and health care management. Each CEU is earned based on transcripts showing the “clock hours” or “credit hours.” Clock hour CEUs are earned at the rate of 1 CEU per clock hour. Credit hours are earned at a rate of 10 CEUs per credit hour. In either case, the maximum number of CEUs that can be earned in this manner is 40 hours per year.

### Types of CEUs

Two types of CEUs are awarded at AAPC: Curriculum A and Curriculum B. During each 24-month CEU accrual period, a member must earn two-thirds of total CEUs from Curriculum A. The typical member with a single credential would therefore be eligible to apply 12 Curriculum B CEUs during the two-year period in which she must earn 36 total CEUs.

Simply put, Curriculum A focuses on the technical side of professional medical coding, while Curriculum B focuses on general business skills. Vendors will be asked to categorize their curriculum at the time of their CEU application, and members need to be aware of what type of CEU they are earning, to ensure they have enough qualifying A CEUs at renewal time.

Member Core Educational Content Professional Medical Coding Curriculum A		Related Core Educational Content General Business Skills Curriculum B	
Coding/Billing	CPT®	Professional Self Improvement	Communication Skills
	ICD-9-CM (Vol. 1-3)		Management Skills
	ICD-10		Time Management
	HCPCS Level II		Stress Management
	Coding & Billing Policy & Procedure		Employee Issues
			OSHA
Clinical	Anatomy		Workers Compensation Benefits
	Physiology		Product Management
	Medical Terminology		Software Training
	Pharmacy		JCAHO
	Pathophysiology		
Compliance	Compliance Auditing		
	Compliance Planning		
	Self Reporting		
	Compliance Training		
Regulatory	Medicare Regulations		
	Medicaid Regulations		
	OIG Work Plan		
	MS Transmittals		
	Teaching Regulations		
	NCDs/LCDs		
	Workers Compensation		
Data/Claims	Data Management		
	A/R Management		
	Appeals		
	Revenue Cycle		
Insurer	Payer Contract Negotiations		

## Calculating CEUs

Quality of curriculum is the responsibility of the vendor, in-service presenter, or local chapter. The curriculum is evaluated by AAPC CEU analysts for tone and complexity, but AAPC does not validate or endorse the accuracy of the materials presented. AAPC requires all materials to be based on the current year's codes, and will perform a very superficial review of content quality. AAPC reserves the right to reject content based on quality issues, and will disclose these issues to the vendor. Being awarded CEUs by AAPC, however, does not guarantee accuracy or quality of curriculum.

AAPC's principal metric for awarding CEUs is time element. In keeping with the accepted standard for CEU determination, one hour of live education (workshop, audioseminar, and conference) is the equivalent of 1 CEU.

## Timed Sessions

Sessions that are live or pre-recorded are assigned CEUs based on time. One hour of live or recorded education is awarded 1 CEU. This time equivalency is the basis of all CEU assignments, but is a simple metric to follow for live or recorded curriculum. Any time expended during a live session that is not active curriculum (i.e., a luncheon, networking session, taking a test) is omitted from the time calculation upon which the CEU allocation is based.

All live or recorded events requesting two or more CEUs must submit a time-lined agenda. A detailed program goal is sufficient for 1.5 CEUs or less

AAPC also allows for limited CEUs for testing as a supplement to curriculum. Live or recorded presentations may receive up to 1 CEU for a pretest and up to 1 CEU for a post test. Each test must be corrected by the sponsoring organization and passed with a score of 70 percent or greater. The tests must be submitted at the time the curriculum is submitted and must follow AAPC guidelines for tests.

## Print Publications

Time considerations are translated into word count when AAPC awards CEUs for print publications. Qualifying curriculum within print publications includes narrative, illustrations, and graphs or charts. Excluded from word/page count are indexes and educational exercises (puzzles, quizzes, or other work). A final test is required for printed publications, to ensure that the coder has read and absorbed the materials within. The final test must be corrected by the sponsoring organization prior to the member receiving a CEU certificate of completion. The test must be passed by the participant with a score of 70 percent or higher to be awarded the CEUs. Because this test is a verification that the material was read, no CEUs are awarded for print publication tests.

CEUs are based on education provided. Products containing exercises without curriculum are not eligible for CEUs (for example, a series of worksheets with scenarios or coding questions). Rationales provided with individual questions and answers qualify as curriculum. See below for more information on rationales as curriculum.

The following guideline is used to calculate publication CEUs, although the publication's font size and layout design may result in more or less CEUs being applied:

- 50 pages of curriculum plus a final test of 10 questions equals 1 CEU
- 100 pages of curriculum plus a final test of 20 questions equals 2 CEUs
- 150 pages of curriculum plus a final test of 30 questions equals 3 CEUs
- 200 pages of curriculum plus a final test of 40 questions equals 4 CEUs

There is a limit to the number of CEUs that will be awarded to any publication, regardless of its size. Four CEUs is the maximum. More pages and more questions will not result in a higher CEU value. A copy of the publication and test is required for CEU assignment.

## Newsletters and Magazines

Newsletters and magazines can be a great source of education for the coder. The AAPC offers 0.5 CEUs for reading and completing the EdgeBlast test twice a month, and 1 CEU for completing Coding Edge magazine test each month. Other magazines are assigned CEUs similarly. In electronic formats, Web links are a consideration in CEU assignment, if the Web link content is included in the test questions. Typically, the calculation is as follows:

- 8–24 pages of education with a final 5 question test will receive 0.5 CEUs.
- 25 pages or greater of education with a final 10 question test will receive 1 CEU.

The final test for newsletters and magazines must be corrected by the sponsoring organization, prior to the member receiving a CEU certificate of completion. The test must be passed by the participant with a 70 percent score or higher to be awarded the CEUs.

Each publication has a ceiling of 1 CEU per month. This means that weekly newsletters worth 0.5 CEUs would be approved only twice monthly. The vendor will be requested to submit issue numbers or the dates of the issues for which they request CEUs.

While most educators use a baseline of 16,000 words per hour as a standard for education among adult students, AAPC instead bases its print publication requirements on the number of words spoken in the average coding education session. Our research shows that an average of 7,000 words is spoken in a one-hour session. Therefore, our calculation for written CEUs is 7,000 words for 1 CEU. This information may help vendors in their CEU application calculations. Keep in mind, AAPC reserves the right to exclude any material from the word calculation (for example, lengthy operative notes, while contributing to the curriculum, may not qualify as curriculum).

### Online Education

Sometimes, the best education uses a multi-platform approach, combining reading assignments with lectures and quizzes. Online education is perfectly suited for multiple platforms, and is becoming an increasingly popular method for obtaining CEUs.

Components of eLearning or Web-based training are valued by AAPC CEU analysts in the same fashion they would be if they were not Web-based. For example, if an hour-long lecture is included in a Web-based training, it would receive 1 CEU. A 50-page document that qualifies as curriculum and that is attached to the online training would be valued at an additional 1 CEU when accompanied by a 10-question test. A Web-based “screen” is not the equivalent of a page in a document. To ensure the appropriate CEU assignment is made for this type curriculum, the number of words in the curriculum is determined, and 1 CEU is awarded for every 7,000 words. CEU analysts will consider additional weight for any illustrations or graphics included in the training, as they would for print product. A small consideration will also be given for hyperlinks to documents referenced in the Web-based training. For example, training on compliance might include a link to the OIG 2009 Work plan. But keep in mind, the Work plan contains 89 pages, but only a few will address issues affecting coders, and the Work plan is, essentially, a workplace “tool,” and not curriculum. It also is not curriculum originating with the vendor seeking the CEU. Even so, a significant number of hyperlinks combined with rich, relevant text regarding the links, may boost a CEU count if it is on the border between two numbers. Remember, the CEUs are for the vendor’s own curriculum, not for links to source documents the coders can access on their own.

As with publications, Web-based curriculum requires a final test to ensure materials were actually read and digested. The test should be based on the curriculum word count: 10 questions for each 7,000 words. Consideration will be given for any information-rich rationales that accompany the test questions or any quizzes along the way. These rationales must qualify as curriculum in order to be considered part of the word count. The final test must be corrected by the sponsoring organization. The participant must pass with a score of 70 percent or greater to be awarded the CEUs.

### Rationales as Curriculum

We learn best by doing. Usually, a teacher is there to provide feedback as we learn. In the absence of this type of interaction, some other sort of feedback is necessary. Because learning by doing is so effective, many print and Web-based curricula rely on coding scenarios to teach their students. A scenario is provided, and the reader is asked to code it or to answer the questions regarding the scenario. AAPC supports this mechanism for teaching, with one caveat. Feedback has to be part of this process. Questions must be followed by rationales. It does the student no good to simply be told that she chose the wrong answer; it’s important to understand how to find the right answer. Therefore, any quiz, test or coding scenario that is a candidate for CEUs, either alone or as a component of curriculum, must contain rationales.

Rationales should be enriching curriculum. What follows are examples of acceptable rationales:

- Shortness of breath is documented. However, SOB is a common symptom associated with pneumothorax, and ICD-9-CM Official Coding Guidelines state, “Signs and symptoms that are integral to the disease process should not be assigned as additional codes, unless otherwise instructed by the classification.” ([www.aapc.com/documents/2009-OCT-ICD-9-Official-Guidelines.pdf](http://www.aapc.com/documents/2009-OCT-ICD-9-Official-Guidelines.pdf) section 1.B.7.)
- When the cardiologist schedules an angioplasty, atherectomy, or stent procedure, it is usually based on a prior diagnostic cardiac catheterization. In these situations, it is not appropriate to code for a repeat diagnostic test. To be clear, it would not be appropriate to separately report catheter placement (93508 or 93510) or diagnostic coronary angiography (93545 and 93556) at the time of an elective coronary intervention.

- The first-listed diagnosis when treating complications of diabetes is the code for the diabetes itself. Because this patient has ophthalmic complications, a fourth digit 5 (ophthalmic manifestations) is used. Although insulin-dependence is usually associated with Type I diabetes, the documentation provided is not sufficient to assume this patient is a Type I diabetic. Because Type II diabetics are sometimes insulin dependent, insulin usage is not a good determination of whether the patient is Type I (producing no insulin) or Type II (with hampered insulin production or uptake). The Official ICD-9-CM Coding Guidelines tell us to default to Type II diabetes when the type is not specified in documentation. The guidelines also tell us that unless specifically noted as “uncontrolled” or “not controlled,” the fifth-digit for uncontrolled diabetes should not be used. Therefore, correct primary diagnosis is 250.50 – identifying Type II diabetes with ophthalmic manifestations, not stated as uncontrolled. NOS is an acronym meaning not otherwise specified. Since the severity of the retinopathy was not documented, 362.03 is the correct code to report. The macular edema code is reported secondary to the retinopathy code with 362.07. Finally, to identify that a Type II diabetic patient is insulin dependent, coders should report V58.67.

Unacceptable rationales:

- B is the right answer.
- The patient received has sarcoidosis, reported with ICD-9-CM code 135.
- ([www.aapc.com/documents/2009-OCT-ICD-9-Official-Guidelines.pdf](http://www.aapc.com/documents/2009-OCT-ICD-9-Official-Guidelines.pdf) section 1.B.7.)

Proper rationales will be a detailed narrative, telling the story of how to come to the correct answer.

Print publications include tests to ensure the written curriculum has been completed; no CEUs are awarded for these tests and no rationales are required.

### CEU Tracker

The CEU Tracker has been developed to simplify the CEU reporting and verification process. Vendors play an important role in CEU Tracker success. The Index number assigned for an event and the date for the event must match in the CEU Tracker in order for the CEUs to be validated. Each Index number is assigned specialty status as well. Never alter any of the information on the CEU certificates and ensure your customers understand the importance of the Index number and date when they are entering items in the Tracker system.

Twenty-five percent of all CEU submissions are randomly selected for verification of CEUs submitted on the CEU Tracker. Members should maintain their CEU certificates on file for at least six months beyond their renewal date so the evidence is on hand should he or she be selected for CEU verification.

### Original PDF Certificates

A copy of the original PDF sent to you upon approval is the only certificate the AAPC will accept if a member is selected for verification. Exceptions include the name of the participant, the date of the event, and the index or catalog number if these items are not printed on the certificate in advance. Please do not alter these certificates in any other way.

It is acceptable for you to make a personalized certificate for your events. However it is not permissible to use the approved index number, CEU value, the AAPC Logo, or the statement: *“This program has the prior approval of the American Academy of Professional Coders (AAPC) for \_\_\_\_\_ continuing education hours. Granting of prior approval in no way constitutes endorsement by AAPC of the program content or the program sponsor.”*

### Promoting Your Program Online

Guidelines for promoting your educational programs both online and offline can be found at [www.aapc.com/vendor-resources/](http://www.aapc.com/vendor-resources/) These guidelines ensure your customers, and potential customers, are educated as to the continuing education you have been approved by the AAPC to offer.

### Vendor Advisory Committee

The AAPC has established a Vendor Advisory Committee.

The AAPC has the following goals, to be completed by fourth quarter, 2009.

- Index all CEU opportunities according to geographic location, platform, specialty, and level of difficulty.
- Provide simple-to-use search screen for members seeking specific CEUs.
- Publish a complete instruction and policy guide to the CEU vendor process.

## The CEU Vendor Application Process

The American Academy of Professional Coders (AAPC) grants prior approval for continuing education programs based on the relevance of the program content to the medical coding, reimbursement, compliance, and billing profession.

- Prior approval is requested by submitting the AAPC form entitled "Application for Prior CEU Approval." Choose the application specific to the media you will be using.
- Submit the completed application form and all materials requested on the application form to the AAPC 30 days prior to your marketing needs or first event date. Incomplete applications will be returned to the vendor.
- An approved title cannot be changed. Submit the exact title as it will appear in all marketing materials.
- Provide the names of all presenters, along with their current credential, professional license or other acceptable proof of expertise in the subject matter. Presenters without a credential or professional license relevant to the subject matter should provide a resume.
- Application materials will be reviewed by a CEU analyst for worthy educational content according to the 2009 policies for CEU approval.
- A unique index number and CEU value will be assigned to the product
- A letter of approval, a pdf certificate, and an evaluation form will be emailed to the Vendor
- Vendor will provide each attendee a copy of the original pdf certificate provided by the AAPC. The approved certificate cannot be changed other than adding a name, a date, or an index number when one is not recorded
- The evaluation form is as much for the sponsoring organization as it is for the AAPC. Please return to the AAPC only those forms with a rating of 2 or less supported by a qualifying statement.
- A single approval is valid for a 12 month period, beginning with the date of the approval, allowing the approved program to be presented an unlimited number of times at any location during the approved period.
- All vendors are ask to provide their tax ID number.
- For profit companies are required to pay a yearly vendor registration fee.
- If an application fee has been paid, the approved product will be advertised on the AAPC Web site during the approval period
- Refer to [www.aapc.com/vendor-resources/](http://www.aapc.com/vendor-resources/) for guidelines for promoting your educational program offline and on the internet
- Members of the AAPC will have access to an online search screen to locate products that have been approved with an application fee based on specialty, on level of difficulty/expertise (pre-certification, novice, intermediate, professional), geo-specific location, face to face opportunities (workshops, conferences), publications, online learning.
- The AAPC offers fee free approvals for inservice events where there is no monies exchanged on any hand. The vendor must provide the AAPC with materials according to the media of training
- The AAPC offers instructors at post secondary schools fee free approvals for the instructor only. The instructor must provide a copy of the course syllabus and names of all textbooks and workbooks used for the course.

## Archived CEU Policies

The guidelines for each year are explained below and will be honored for CEUs earned in that year.

### CEUs Earned Under Previous CEU Policies

#### 2008

- Members may submit up to three scenarios with written summaries to earn up to three CEUs.

#### 2007

- Students attending courses with approved CEUs, who subsequently received their coding credential, are able to count those CEUs toward their CEU requirement, even though they were earned before a credential was obtained.
- To qualify as continuing education, CEU events must have prior approval from the AAPC and receive a unique Index number that has been assigned a specific CEU value. Unapproved CEUs for events, workshops, seminars, inservices, teaching, publications or online learning after January 2007 are not accepted.
- For CEUs earned in 2007, members may submit an unlimited number of CEUs earned for writing summaries or scenarios. Coding scenarios and article summaries have not been assigned index numbers. When entering scenarios or summaries into the CEU Tracker, submit the information using the option indicating you do not have an index number.
- One index number is sufficient to report multiple sessions from national AAPC conference. (Beginning in 2008, each session has a unique number).