

Continuing education and certification renewal are crucial pillars that keep fitness professionals at the top of their game. If you're a certified personal trainer or group fitness instructor wondering about the **2-year renewal** myth, especially regarding popular certifying bodies such as *NASM*, *ACE*, and *AFAA*, you're not alone. These certifying bodies each have their nuances when it comes to **certification cycle length** and **recertification schedules**. Understanding these details is key for ensuring your credentials remain valid and respected in the fitness industry.

Why Does Continuing Education Exist?

Continuing education is designed to ensure that fitness professionals:

- Stay informed of the latest exercise science research and safety protocols
- Refine and expand their skill sets and specialties
- Maintain ethical and professional standards
- Keep up with changes in industry standards and client demographics

The ultimate goal is to safeguard client safety and deliver effective, evidence-based programming. This is why certifying bodies like *NASM*, *ACE*, and *AFAA* require periodic recertification, typically through the accumulation of Continuing Education Units (CEUs).

Understanding the Renewal Cycle Differences

One of the most frequent questions I encounter is whether the **certification cycle length** for *NASM*, *ACE*, and *AFAA* is always 2 years. The short answer: *not necessarily*. Though many trainers assume a 2-year renewal cycle is set in stone, the reality includes some important variations.

NASM Renewal Cycle

The National Academy of Sports Medicine (*NASM*) traditionally operates on a **2-year renewal cycle**. Certified professionals must renew every two years by submitting proof of completed CEUs and paying a renewal fee through the **NASM certifying body renewal portal**. *NASM* requires:

- 2.0 Continuing Education Credits (CECs) equal to 20 hours of continuing education activity
- Collection of CECs can include both *NASM*-approved courses and other recognized providers
- Renewal fee submission via their online portal

While 2 years is the standard, *NASM* may offer extensions or grace periods in extenuating circumstances, but these are not guaranteed and should be verified early.



ACE Renewal Cycle

The American Council on Exercise (ACE) also generally uses a **2-year certification cycle** for most certifications, including Personal Trainer, Group Fitness Instructor, and Health Coach credentials. The requirements include:

- 20 continuing education hours (20 ACE CECs) every two years
- Courses must be ACE-approved, logged through the **ACE recertification portal**
- Payment of the recertification fee

ACE is known for transparency but still, trainers should double-check the certification expiration date inside their member account. Some specialized certifications may differ, so don't assume the two-year timeline if switching credential types.

AFAA Renewal Cycle

The Athletics and Fitness Association of America (AFAA) is slightly more varied. While the most common renewal cycle is also **2 years**, it offers some flexibility depending on the certification type.

- Many AFAA certifications require 20 continuing education credits every two years
- AFAA-approved courses can be submitted through the **AFAA renewals portal**
- Some specialty or older certifications might require annual renewal or have alternative requirements

Be cautious: Don't assume the cycle length is identical for every certification or every professional. Always verify your specific certification's expiration date and renewal window inside your AFAA member portal.

What Counts As a Continuing Education Unit (CEU)?

CEUs are the currency to get recertified, but not every course or educational experience counts equally. Here's what you need to know:

Acceptable CEU Activities

- **CEU Courses from Approved Providers:** Online or in-person workshops, webinars, or seminars approved by your certifying body (NASM, ACE, or AFAA).
- **Higher Education Credits:** College or university courses relevant to exercise science, kinesiology, nutrition, or related fields.
- **First Aid/CPR Certifications:** Most certifying bodies require or accept current CPR/AED certification for renewal.
- **Self-Study or Independent Learning:** Some organizations allow structured self-study courses, but only if they're pre-approved.

What Does NOT Count as CEUs?

- Fitness instructor courses not approved by your certifying body—this is the #1 reason trainers stress out during renewal.
- Non-educational activities such as conferences without CEU accreditation
- Courses lacking certificate documentation or failing to submit proof on time
- Certificates that are screenshots or poor-quality images rather than official PDFs or downloads

I can't emphasize this enough: Always save digital certificates as **PDFs** from the course provider immediately after completion. Relying on screenshots or emails can cause headaches when uploading to the certifying body renewal portal [mobility training ceus](#) or in case of audits.



Approval Status and Provider Eligibility

Perhaps the most common source of confusion and frustration is approving or rejecting CEUs due to course provider eligibility. Here's the practical advice I always share:

- **Verify Course Approval Status Before Enrolling:** Every major certifying body offers a searchable database or list of approved providers and courses.
- **Use Only Approved Providers:** Your CEUs won't count if they're from an unapproved or questionable source, no matter how well-reviewed the course might be.

- **Check for Expiration Dates:** Some CEUs must be completed within a certain timeframe—courses from several years ago might not count.
- **Contact Customer Support for Clarification:** Certifying bodies' support teams can clarify if you're unsure whether a course applies to your certification renewal.

Also, delays in the issuance of certificates from providers are common, so don't wait until the last minute with renewal submissions. Again: have a dedicated *CEU folder* on your computer where you save every certificate PDF as soon as you receive them.

Summary Table: NASM, ACE, AFAA Renewal Cycles and CEU Requirements

Certifying Body	Certification Cycle Length	CEUs Required	Renewal Method	Special Notes
NASM	2 years	2.0 CECs (20 hours)	Online via NASM renewal portal	Extensions possible but not guaranteed; verify expiration date
ACE	2 years	20 ACE CECs	Online via ACE recertification portal	Specialty certifications may differ
AFAA	Usually 2 years	20 CE credits	Online via AFAA renewal portal	Some certifications may require annual renewal

Final Thoughts on Certification Cycle Length and Renewal Planning

The common refrain "just get your credits done" is too vague and leads to many missteps. The **certification cycle length** is usually 2 years with NASM, ACE, and AFAA, but it's not an ironclad rule for every credential or specialty. The smartest approach is to:

1. Log into your certifying body renewal portal as soon as you pass your exam and verify the exact expiration date.
2. Plan your CEU courses well in advance and save the course provider certificates as PDFs immediately after completion.
3. Only enroll in courses that are explicitly approved by your certifying body—search their official databases.
4. Keep your CEU documentation well-organized in a dedicated folder to streamline renewals and audits.
5. Don't wait until the final month before renewing — processing times can vary and missing deadlines might require retaking the certification.

For trainers handling multiple renewal cycles or juggling NASM, ACE, and AFAA certifications, efficient organization and verification are your best tools. Embrace your certifying body's renewal portals and stay proactive to keep your credentials active and your knowledge fresh.

Remember: Continuing education isn't just a bureaucratic hoop—it's the foundation for your professional growth and lifelong success in this dynamic industry.