



Association of Social Work Boards
ACE Resource
Distance Learning

Distance education

Distance education is a method for delivering continuing education to social workers. Instructors and students remain at different locations and are linked by a communications medium. Includes home study through studying an article or book, audio or video tape; course work completed using the internet; study and interaction telephonically, and interactive webinar. The acquisition of knowledge and skills through mediated information and instruction, encompassing all technologies. ACE standards require all distance learning courses to be accompanied by a post test. All ACE approval criteria apply. Not all jurisdictions currently approve distance-learning courses.

1) Program content and delivery validity

- Field/pilot-testing: ACE requires providers to field test courses to determine time, CE credit and content validity.
- Participant access: Provider describes how scheduled access time to a contact person will be determined and provided for each participant in the course (see definition below).
- Scheduled interaction: Provider describes if and how scheduled interaction time with a course instructor will be provided for each participant in the course (see definition below).
- Course Structure: Provider describes online course structure related to web based technology and communication of the course content, as well as any interactive aspects of course structure, in addition to subject matter.

2) Security and protection of participants

- Provider describes the security of the course website, participant registration and purchasing procedures.
- Provider must demonstrate reliable technology.
- Provider describes procedures for the participant course assignments to be turned-in by fax, email or mail and returned to the participant in a timely manner.
- Provider describes procedures and timetables for receiving, grading and returning course assignments, evaluations and certificates of completion to course participants.

3) Verification of participant ID

- Provider describes the process of verifying the identity of an individual participating in a continuing education course, and that all course work was completed by the person receiving the credit.

Distance Education (excerpt: ACE Guidelines for Provider Approval)

In addition to meeting ACE approval requirements, distance education providers must:

- Provide a field-tested * method of determining credit hours (See ACE Resource, Course Development Checklist)
 - Provide scheduled access * to a contact person (*see definition below)
 - Provide scheduled interaction * between instructor and participant (*see definition below)
 - Have the capacity for completed assignments to be faxed, mailed, or e-mailed to qualified instructors for correction, grading, comment, and subject matter guidance
 - Return corrected assignments to participants in a timely manner
 - Provide a method for verifying that the individual participated in the continuing education activity, and that all work was done by the person awarded the credit
 - Employ electronic security measures, and reliable technology
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- Post-tests, containing questions appropriate to content and credits are required in distance learning courses.
- Provide e-mail and website address information on ACE application
- The course delivery format must be established before the customer takes the course and must be clearly communicated in promotional materials as well as the certificate of completion
- Course “interactivity” must be established before the customer takes the course and must be clearly communicated in promotional materials as well as the certificate of completion

Web site security: Access to participant files must be protected by password or some other secure method. Credit card transactions must be processed on a secure payment site. “HTTPS” (instead of “http”) in the web address indicates that the site is being processed on a secure server to protect confidential credit card information submitted over the Internet. “HTTPS” incorporates a Secure Socket Layer to handle secure internet transactions. Information may be stored on in https format or in a virtual private network.

Distance education standards

Based on the U.S. Department of Education standards for adult learners, 240 words per minute is the average rate of reading for most college level adults. Depending on factors such as font size, learning environment, and the level of technical complexity of the content, the reading rate for adult learners may vary from 120-250 words per minute. Typically, credentialing bodies use a 50-minute training hour.

To determine course credit and the appropriate number of test questions

1. Printed materials offering 1 CE credit **must** contain a minimum of 10,000 words

AND/OR

The CE provider must complete a record (written pilot test-see below) of participation, and verify that the length of time to complete the course is equal to the number of CE credits offered for the course.

2. Use the following chart to apply the number of questions to the course or article based on the number of words.

NUMBER OF WORDS	NUMBER OF POSTTEST QUESTIONS	AMOUNT OF CREDIT
10,000 words minimum	Apply 10 questions Multiple-choice T/F	Approve for 1 hour of credit
10,000 to 20,000 words	Apply 15 questions Multiple-choice T/F	Approve for 2 hours of credit
20,000 to 30,000 words	Apply 20 questions Multiple-choice T/F	Approve for 3 hours of credit
Every additional 10,000 words	Add 5 additional questions	Add one additional hour of credit

In addition to word-count, the following information should be taken into account to determine course length and the number of continuing education credits:

- Feedback from the pilot testers (written and/or oral)
- Input from social workers involved in the development process
- The volume of the subject matter
- The complexity of the subject matter
- The course level
- The difficulty of the post-test questions

Regulatory boards may have a specific formula for determining credit. Social workers should contact their individual regulatory board for the board’s definition of credit and how it is determined. Credit hours earned from an ACE Provider can then be converted or interpreted according to the board’s determination.

ACE Required Interaction in Distance Learning

Asynchronous distance learning instruction must meet ACE requirements for scheduled access, which is the availability of communication between an instructor (or knowledgeable staff) and student(s), for the purpose of subject matter guidance, correction, grading, comment, or problem resolution. Communication may be scheduled or unscheduled. The hours and means of availability must be published by the ACE provider and easily found in promotional materials.

Synchronous distance learning instruction may also include scheduled interaction, which is written or verbal interaction between an instructor (or knowledgeable staff) and student(s), for the purpose of subject matter guidance, correction, grading, comment, or problem resolution and which is scheduled by appointment or a course requirement. This form of interaction may include online discussion, telephonic office hours or other means of interacting. Asynchronous instruction may also include these forms of interaction.

Scheduled access in distance learning refers to availability of communication between an instructor (or knowledgeable staff) and student(s), for the purpose of subject matter guidance, correction, grading, comment, or problem resolution. Communication may be scheduled or unscheduled. The hours and means of availability must be published by the ACE provider and easily found in promotional materials.

Scheduled interaction in distance learning refers to written or verbal interaction between an instructor (or knowledgeable staff) and student(s), for the purpose of subject matter guidance, correction, grading, comment, or problem resolution which is scheduled by appointment or a course requirement. The interaction may include online discussion, telephonic office hours or other means of interacting. Asynchronous instruction and synchronous instruction may both include these forms of interaction.

PILOT TESTING A DISTANCE LEARNING COURSE

PILOT TEST

What is a pilot test?

When conducting a pilot test, the course is presented on a trial basis to a sample of the course's intended audience. The course is presented in its entirety and under the conditions in which it will be delivered to licensed social workers (and other mental health professionals) for continuing education.

What is the purpose of pilot testing a course?

A pilot test is used by a continuing education provider to assess the suitability/ effectiveness/clarity of the course content and structure, as well as to determine the length of time it takes a participant to complete a workshop or course, and to assign an accurate number of continuing education credits based on the number of hours required to complete the course (fifty instructional minutes per sixty-minute hour is the standard for assigning continuing education credits). A pilot test is used to establish and verify factors listed below.

Course design and structure (instructional design) are appropriate for the intended audience

- The course design is effective in real-world conditions
- The course structure is effective in presenting the course material
- Operational aspects of the course are used effectively in presenting the course
- Interactive aspects of the course are effective
- The course content and structure are suitable, useful and clear

Course technology

- The course technology supports participant learning
- The technology is user-friendly
- The technology is responsive to participants (if applicable)

Course content

- The content is presented at an appropriate level for the course target audience

- The course content must focus on one or more of the following social work educational areas
 - Theories and concepts of human behavior in the social environment
 - Social work practice, knowledge and skills
 - Social work ethics
 - Diversity and social justice
 - Social work clinical practice
 - Social work generalist practice
 - Development, evaluation and/or implementation of social policy
 - Social work agency management or administration
 - Social work research, programs or practice evaluations
 - Other (describe)

Educational objectives (educational outcomes)-They must

- Be behavioral, measurable and/or observable
- Communicate something the participant will be able to demonstrate after completing the course
- Relate to the course content

Accuracy of the number of continuing education credits vs the length of time spent learning

- How long it takes each pilot tester to complete the course (discard outliers and determine the average)
- Establish the number of words to be read, if applicable
- Difficulty and effectiveness of the post-test questions
 - Questions must reflect course content
 - Questions must reflect course objectives
 - Questions must be appropriate for the course level
- Complexity and level of the subject matter
- Volume of the subject matter
- Input from social workers involved in the development process

Supporting materials (references and/or bibliography)

Instructor effectiveness (if applicable)

Effectiveness of participant evaluation (testers complete the evaluation)

Effectiveness of pre and/or post testing (testers complete the post test)

Accommodations for disability (ADA in US)

- Issues identified during pilot testing
- How the identified issues were (or will be) addressed

PILOT TEST INSTRUCTIONS TO THE CE PROVIDER

1. A /pilot test must be completed for every new course (or existing course if not completed previously)

2. Use this checklist as a guide for the pilot test.

3. Identify a group of individuals who will serve as field/pilot testers (prefer 5-7 individuals of varying professions including social work and other mental health fields)

4. Each pilot tester completes the course and notes their comments in the checklist

5. The checklists containing all comments are summarized (prefer by the social worker consultant)

6. The CE Provider adds comments to the checklist, indicating areas of concern or areas needing changes

7. The summary and a copy of all checklists are submitted along with the application (new, renewal, or additional course delivery format) to ACE.

STEPS IN A PILOT TEST

Complete a pilot test of every distance learning course using the following steps as a guide

1. The CE provider identifies a pilot group of participants from the course's target audience (5-7 testers is ideal)
2. The CE provider gives the Course Development Checklist to the pilot group
3. The CE provider presents the course in its entirety to the pilot group
4. The pilot group completes the Course Development Checklist after completing the course
5. The CE provider collects the completed Course Development Checklists
6. The CE provider collates, summarizes and analyzes information gathered from the questionnaires
7. The CE provider makes adjustments to the course content and/or course structure based on the pilot test questionnaire results
8. The CE provider submits the results of the pilot test to ACE

EXPLANATION OF TERMS USED ABOVE

Field/pilot test

The process of presenting a course in its entirety to a sample group of participants (5-7 field/pilot testers is ideal) under the conditions in which it will be offered to an audience. This method is used by a continuing education provider to assess the suitability/utility/clarity of the course content and structure, as well as to determine the length of time it takes a participant to complete a workshop or course, and to assign an accurate number of continuing education credits based on the number of hours required to complete the course (fifty instructional minutes per sixty-minute hour is the standard for assigning continuing education credits).

***Scheduled access**

Scheduled time periods for communication between an instructor (or knowledgeable staff) and student(s) in writing or verbally, for subject matter guidance, correction, grading, comment, or administrative problem resolution, i.e. "Staff is available to help you between 9 am – 5 pm".

***Scheduled interaction**

Written or verbal interaction at an appointed time between an instructor (or knowledgeable staff) and student(s), for subject matter guidance, correction, grading, comment, or course problem resolution, i.e. list serve discussions, scheduled telephone interaction, access to an instructor's website or online "office hours".