



# Displaying Your Credentials Proudly and Properly

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One thing for certain about the acupuncture and Oriental medicine (AOM) community is the number of impressive credentials that many AOM practitioners hold. Judging from the variety of ways these credentials are displayed on business cards, publications, and everywhere else, there is much confusion about how to use and list credentials correctly. AOM practitioners who devote years to earning their credentials should proudly display them; however, it is equally important to list them correctly.

Before we can start using credentials correctly, we need to understand the definition of each credential, how it is categorized and, subsequently, how it should be displayed after a practitioner's name. The following is a brief description of the different types of credentials used by professionals, along with the correct manner in which they should be used:

## *Academic Degree (e.g., M.S., J.D., Ph.D., Ed.D., OMD, etc.)*

Academic credentials are awarded based on the completion of a particular educational program earned at an accredited college or university. The choice of whether to use all of your degree

credentials is a personal one. In most cases, one should list the lowest to the highest degree earned, such as "Mary Smith, M.S., Ph.D.". The preferred method is to list only the highest academic degree, for example, only the Ph.D. even though you may have earned a Masters degree as well. If you have also earned a Masters (M.S., MOM, MBA, etc.); however, you may want to highlight it if the degree is important to your career at the current time. For example, you may have a D.O.M. degree, but you may wish to highlight that you earned an MBA, if, for instance, you are running a clinic or another type of business. Your degrees would then be designated, Joe Smith, M.S., OMD.

## *State Licensure Titles for Acupuncturists (e.g., L.Ac., AP, DOM)*

A state licensure credential is generally awarded based on the completion of a specified educational program, and the successful passing of a national licensure or certification exam along with other requirements specified by the state issuing the credential. There needs to be documentation of meeting predetermined educational training and/or a competency assessment standard. The licensure credential allows the person to practice

in the issuing state. Using the case above, if Joe Smith is a licensed acupuncturist, typically his designations would be displayed as Joe Smith, D.O.M., MBA, L.Ac. (or other similar designation).

Some states have also protected the titles they use in their regulations or statutes, such as doctor of Oriental medicine (D.O.M.). Although these titles are recognized for licensure, you cannot use a protected credential in that state unless authorized to do so by the board or commission that governs practice of acupuncture. To do so would be violating law in that state. This is not an academic title.

## *Professional Certification*

These credentials are awarded by a nationally recognized, usually accredited, certifying body, such as the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM)<sup>®</sup>. These professional certification credentials are linked to the knowledge, skills and abilities competencies for a particular profession which must be validated through a national role delineation or job task analysis. Certifications like the CAE (Certified Association Executive) from the American Society of Association Executive's certification commission would

also be included here as a professional credential. National certifications can be entry-level or advanced certifications such as nurse practitioner. For practitioners in the AOM community who have earned an entry-level certification from the NCCAOM, the designations are: Dipl. O.M. (NCCAOM)<sup>®</sup>, Dipl. Ac. (NCCAOM)<sup>®</sup>, Dipl. C.H. (NCCAOM)<sup>®</sup> and Dipl. ABT (NCCAOM)<sup>®</sup>. Most national certification organizations have their certification designation registered by the United States Patent and Trade Office. Multiple NCCAOM credentials should be listed as Dipl. Ac. & ABT (NCCAOM)<sup>®</sup>, Dipl. Ac. & C.H. (NCCAOM)<sup>®</sup>, and Dipl. Ac., C.H. & ABT (NCCAOM)<sup>®</sup>.

### *Other Credentials*

These can include a variety of things like achieving a certificate for computer skills, for instance, those who earn a certificate through Microsoft. These credentials may or may not be associated with the profession or license, but they do indicate additional skill sets a person has acquired through education or testing. Typically these are awarded after a specified course content has been completed or mastered. An example is the clean needle technique course. Another type of credential is one to qualify for membership or a membership status. Examples of these designations would be a “Fellow” designation. These may be earned on the basis of earning professional credentials through an assessment process or professional service criteria. A recent example in the AOM community is the Fellow of the American Board of Oriental Reproductive Medicine (FABORM).

### *Awards or Honors*

These awards are given to individuals who are selected for their outstanding



service or accomplishments in a particular area. Generally these are not listed as designations after the individual's name, but instead are listed on a resume or curriculum vitae. Examples of these designations are the Fulbright Distinguished Senior Fellowship or a Distinguished Scholar or Teacher Award from a university.

### *The NCCAOM Certification Credentials*

It is puzzling to see the number of certified NCCAOM Diplomates who do not list their national certification credentials. One of the benefits of becoming certified by the NCCAOM is the distinction of using your Diplomate credential. It is a considerable professional achievement to earn the designation “NCCAOM Diplomate of Oriental Medicine, Diplomate of Acupuncture, Diplomate of Chinese Herbology or Diplomate of Asian Bodywork Therapy” from the NCCAOM.

NCCAOM certification indicates to employers, patients, and peers that one has met national standards for the safe and competent practice of acupuncture and Oriental medicine as defined by the profession. National board certification in acupuncture, Chinese herbology, Asian bodywork therapy and Oriental medicine has been the mark of excellence in AOM since the inception of each certification program. It is for this reason that the NCCAOM encourages all NCCAOM Diplomates to correctly and uniformly utilize their credentials after their name along with the initials of NCCAOM in parenthesis followed by the registration symbol ® (e.g., (NCCAOM)<sup>®</sup>).

NCCAOM received registration for all of its trademarks from the United States Patent and Trademark Office in 2008. These trademarks include the **NCCAOM acronym, NCCAOM logo, NCCAOM tagline, “Public Service Through Quality Credentials”, and service marks for Acupuncture, Chinese Herbology, Asian Bodywork Therapy and Oriental Medicine.** The registration mark ® must also follow these trademarks as they are registered marks with the United States Patent and Trademark Office.

The NCCAOM service marks, which were introduced in 2005, were designed to brand the four NCCAOM Certification Programs; Acupuncture, Chinese Herbology, Oriental Medicine and Asian Bodywork Therapy. As each service mark has now been registered with the USPTO, Diplomates can promote or identify their certification through the use of their distinct service marks. For example, a Diplomate of Acupuncture can use the NCCAOM acupuncture service mark to promote their credential on a website, brochure, etc. Active Diplomates can contact Mina Larson at [publicrelations@thenccaom.org](mailto:publicrelations@thenccaom.org) to receive an electronic

version of the service marks with the registration symbol ®.

### *Proper Display of Credentials*

Below is a chart that displays the accurate designations for each NCCAOM certification, as well as academic credentials and other designations. Also included in the chart are examples of how to designate more than one NCCAOM certification, along with other credentials and how to list your credentials in the proper order. It is important to remember that your academic degree is listed first, directly after your name, then your certification and finally your licensure title. The general rule of thumb is “Follow your name with the credential that is least likely to be taken away, in descending order, with awards or fellowship designations last”. If multiple certifications are earned, the most recently earned one is usually placed

last. It is the hope that all practitioners will use this chart as a guide. See the chart below for examples of properly displayed credentials:

### *Proper Display of Designations for NCCAOM Certifications with Other Credentials and Designations*

Please remember that educating the public about what your credentials mean is your responsibility. If you are applying for a particular job, giving an important presentation or promoting your practice, you can be assured that displaying your degrees and credentials properly will provide an essential professional touch to all of your documents and communications. You worked hard to get your credentials, so by all means use them correctly – and have them pay off for you.

### *References:*

For additional information on the different types of acronyms, please go to <http://acronyms.thefreedictionary.com/>

For more information on state designated titles for acupuncturists, please go to the NCCAOM website at <http://www.nccaom.org/regulation-affairs/state-licensure-map>

For more information on NCCAOM professional certifications, go to [www.nccaom.org](http://www.nccaom.org)

## *Proper Usage of Credentials and Service Marks*

ACUPUNCTURE	CHINESE HERBOLOGY	ASIAN BODYWORK THERAPY	ORIENTAL MEDICINE	MULTIPLE NCCAOM CREDENTIALS
				
John Smith, Dipl. Ac. (NCCAOM)®	John Smith, Dipl. C.H. (NCCAOM)®	John Smith, Dipl. ABT (NCCAOM)®	John Smith, Dipl. O.M. (NCCAOM)®	John Smith, Dipl. Ac. & C.H. (NCCAOM)®
John Smith, M.A., Dipl. Ac. (NCCAOM)®, AP	John Smith, MBA, J.D., Dipl. C.H. (NCCAOM)®, L.Ac., RD	John Smith, M.O.M., Dipl. ABT (NCCAOM)®, CP., AOBTA®	John Smith, Ph.D., Dipl. O.M. (NCCAOM)®, L.Ac., FABORM	John Smith, Dipl. Ac., C.H. & ABT (NCCAOM)®