



NATIONAL BOARD FOR  
**CERTIFIED COUNSELORS**<sup>®</sup>  
AND AFFILIATES

# **Candidate Handbook for National Certified Counselor Certification**

National Counselor Examination<sup>™</sup>  
**(NCE<sup>®</sup>)**

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# For More Information

All questions and requests for information about the **NCE** should be directed to:

**National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC)  
Certification and Credentialing Services Department**

3 Terrace Way  
Greensboro, NC 27403  
Tel: +336-547-0607  
Fax: +336-547-0017  
Website: [nbcc.org](http://nbcc.org)

All questions and requests for information about examination scheduling should be directed to:

**Pearson VUE**  
5601 Green Valley Dr.  
Bloomington, MN 55437  
Voice: 866-904-4432  
Website: [pearsonvue.com](http://pearsonvue.com)

# Introduction

The National Counselor Examination (NCE) is designed to assess the knowledge, skills, and abilities determined to be important for providing effective counseling services. The NCE is a requirement for counselor licensure in many states. It is also one of two examination options for the National Certified Counselor (NCC) certification.

The NCE was first used in 1983 as part of the NCC application process and continues to undergo regular review and development to ensure it represents the current reality of practice and research in the counseling profession.

You have two options when it comes to registering for the NCE:

1. You can register as part of the National Certified Counselor (NCC) application, which will be covered in this handbook. The benefit of taking the examination via this method is that it allows you to get a head start on earning your professional credentials.
2. You can register for the examination on its own, independent of a certification application. For more information on that process, review the candidate handbook at [nbcc.org/assets/exam/handbooks/nce.pdf](https://nbcc.org/assets/exam/handbooks/nce.pdf).

## About NBCC

The National Board for Certified Counselors, Inc. and Affiliates (NBCC) is internationally recognized as a leading provider of national counselor credentialing examinations. All 50 states; the U.S. territories of Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands; and the District of Columbia use NBCC examinations as part of their counselor licensure requirements. NBCC administers its examinations through the Center for Credentialing & Education (CCE), its test administration services provider.

## About Pearson VUE

Pearson VUE is NBCC's computer-based testing partner for the administration and scoring of the NCE. As an independent testing agency, Pearson VUE has test centers across the globe and is headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Pearson VUE provides two test delivery options for the NCE:

- In-person administration, at a Pearson VUE test center.
- Internet-based (online) administration through Pearson VUE's OnVUE platform. The examination may be taken on a computer at home or in a private setting with a strong internet connection and webcam. Strict security protocols are in place to ensure the integrity and security of the testing process and examination content. For more information about the OnVUE process and system requirements, visit [nbcc.org/exams/administration](https://nbcc.org/exams/administration).

## **Nondiscrimination Policy**

NBCC does not discriminate against any candidate based on gender, race, creed, age, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, or any other basis prohibited by law.

## **Examination Administration**

When taking the NCE as part of the NCC application, the examination is administered throughout the year. Candidates will have a 6-month window to sit for the examination during an administration. As noted, candidates have the choice to take the NCE in-person at a Pearson VUE test center or online through Pearson VUE's OnVUE platform.

## **Holidays**

Examinations are not offered on the following holidays:

- New Year's Day
- Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
- Memorial Day
- Juneteenth National Independence Day
- Independence Day
- Labor Day
- Thanksgiving Day and the following Friday
- Christmas Eve Day (Limited hours)
- Christmas Day

# Examination Purpose, Content, and Form

## Examination Purpose and Content

The NCE represents each of the original eight Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) content areas, with question content also emerging from the six work behaviors determined by NBCC's national job analysis of more than 16,000 credentialed counselors. The NCE measures an examinee's knowledge and understanding of theoretical and skill-based tenets necessary to practice safely and competently as an entry-level counselor.

Thus, the content validity of the NCE is anchored on the six empirically validated work behaviors determined to be most relevant for competent counseling practice and the eight CACREP curriculum educational standards. The minimally qualified candidate for the NCE has graduated from or is a well-advanced graduate student in a counseling program that has been accredited by CACREP or is housed within an institutionally accredited college or university.

A different form (version) of the NCE is compiled for each administration of the examination. Each form's questions, which are drawn from the item pool for the NCE, have undergone extensive review and field-testing. Although each form of the NCE contains different questions, the content areas and the respective numbers of questions representing those areas are consistent. Within the set of 200 questions on each form of the NCE, 160 of the questions are counted for the purpose of determining whether a minimally qualified candidate surpasses the minimum criterion (i.e., "passing") score for that form. Each of these 160 questions comprise one score point; thus, the maximum possible score a candidate can achieve is 160. The remaining 40 items are unscored field-test items. Field-test items are included on the examination to gather item statistics to evaluate their performance for use on future examinations. See Appendix B for NCE sample examination questions.

The following is an outline of the eight CACREP domains on which the examination questions are aligned:

1. Professional Counseling Orientation and Ethical Practice — Studies that provide an understanding of all aspects of professional functioning, including history, roles, organizational structures, ethics, standards, and credentialing.
2. Social and Cultural Diversity — Studies that provide an understanding of issues and trends in a multicultural and diverse society.
3. Human Growth and Development — Studies that provide an understanding of the nature and needs of individuals at all developmental levels.
4. Career Development — Studies that provide an understanding of career development.
5. Counseling and Helping Relationships — Studies that provide an understanding of counseling and consultation processes.
6. Group Counseling and Group Work — Studies that provide an understanding of group development, dynamics, counseling theories, group counseling methods and skills, and other group work approaches.
7. Assessment and Testing — Studies that provide an understanding of individual and group approaches to assessment and evaluation.
8. Research and Program Evaluation — Studies that provide an understanding of types of research methods, basic statistics, and ethical and legal considerations in research.

\*States may choose to allow candidates of comparable education levels from other related helping degrees to sit for the exam for licensure

## Measurement Focus and Target Population

See Appendix A for the NCE Content Outline.

## Minimally Qualified Candidate

The minimally qualified candidate for the NCE must have a graduate-level degree or higher from a counseling program that has been accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) or is administered by an institutionally accredited college or university.

**The counseling degree program must contain courses in the following eight (8) requirement areas:**

1. Human Growth and Development Theories in Counseling
2. Social and Cultural Foundations in Counseling
3. Helping Relationships in Counseling
4. Group Counseling Theories and Processes
5. Career Counseling and Lifestyle Development
6. Assessment in Counseling
7. Research and Program Evaluation
8. Professional Orientation to Counseling

## Examination Format

The NCE is a 200-question, multiple-choice, non-sectioned examination. Candidates will have a total test session of **255 minutes** (4 hours and 15 minutes), as follows:

- Time to complete the Test Administration and Confidentiality Agreement: **5 minutes**
- Time to complete the testing tutorial (including sample case study): **10 minutes**
- Time to complete the examination: **225 minutes**
- One scheduled break (after question #100): **15 minutes**

Total Test Session Time: **255 minutes**



# Eligibility Requirements

Candidates can view the National Certified Counselor (NCC) Certification Eligibility Policy on our website at [nbcc.org/assets/certification/ncc\\_certification\\_eligibility\\_policy.pdf](https://nbcc.org/assets/certification/ncc_certification_eligibility_policy.pdf).

## Registering for the Examination

### Registration Process

Candidates must register online using their Credentialing Gateway account as part of the NCC application. Candidates should navigate to [nbcc.org](https://nbcc.org) and choose “Login,” located in the top right corner of the screen. This will take them to a log-in screen where they can either log in or create a Credentialing Gateway account. The Credentialing Gateway can also be accessed directly at [my.nbcc.org](https://my.nbcc.org).

### Test Authorization Window and Application Expiration

After a candidate has successfully registered with NBCC via the NCC application in their Credentialing Gateway account and has been approved to schedule their examination appointment, they will receive an Authorization to Test email from NBCC. This email will arrive 2 to 3 weeks prior to the opening of the examination window. Candidates may either schedule an appointment for the examination online or by telephone. Candidates failing to schedule and take the examination within the approved authorization window will forfeit all registration fees paid to take the examination. A separate registration fee will be required to reregister for an examination.

Any request to extend the test authorization time period window should be made in writing to [certification@nbcc.org](mailto:certification@nbcc.org) and must be requested a minimum of 7 days prior to the last day of the test authorization window.

Candidates may be authorized to take the examination a maximum of three times over a period of 2 years within a single NCC application. After the third failed attempt, the application will automatically close. If a candidate cannot successfully pass the NCE within three attempts, or a period of 2 years has passed since the application was submitted, the application will automatically close.

### Failing to Report for an Examination

Candidates who fail to report for an examination appointment will forfeit all registration fees paid within the application to take the examination. A separate registration fee will be required to reregister for an examination.

## Examination Reregistration

If a candidate does not sit for the examination within the allotted 6-month window or is unsuccessful in their examination attempt, they may retake the examination during the next available examination administration cycle by reregistering in their Credentialing Gateway account. Those candidates who do not pass the NCE must wait a minimum of 30 days to retake the examination. If they are taking the examination as part of their NCC application, they are allowed three examination attempts in a 2-year period. If the candidate is unable to pass the examination within the 2-year period, their NCC application will automatically close. A separate reregistration fee will be required for each examination reregistration.

Candidates also have the option to retake the examination through the “State Counselor Licensure” process through NBCC’s affiliate, the Center for Credentialing & Education (CCE). A candidate’s passing score through this process can be used to complete the examination requirement for their NCC application. Please note that additional fees will apply when choosing this administration option.

For assistance with reregistration, please contact (336) 547-0607 or [certification@nbcc.org](mailto:certification@nbcc.org).

## Fees and Refund Policy

Online payments for the NCC application, including examination fees, must be made by credit card (VISA, MasterCard, or American Express) and are not refundable or transferable.

## Scheduling an Examination

After successfully registering for the examination, candidates will receive an Authorization to Test email from NBCC. Upon receipt of the Authorization to Test email, the candidate may then schedule an examination appointment through the Credentialing Gateway or by telephone.

If a candidate is taking the examination with approved special examination accommodations, they must schedule their examination appointment by phone at 800-466-0450, option 3.

See [Accommodations for Candidates with Disabilities on page 11](#) for more information.

## To Schedule Online

- Log into your [my.nbcc.org](http://my.nbcc.org) account.
- Click your NCC Application Button.
- Under NCC Options, click Go To Pearson.
- Use the Pearson Vue website to select a test date.

## To Schedule by Telephone

- Contact Pearson VUE at (866) 904-4432 to schedule an examination appointment.
- Pearson VUE is available from 7 am through 7 pm Central Time, Mondays through Fridays, for scheduling purposes.

### **Candidates may only schedule an examination appointment with Pearson VUE upon receiving the Authorization to Test email.**

When scheduling an examination appointment, candidates should be prepared to confirm a location (for in-person testing), communicate a preferred date and time for testing, and provide their Candidate ID number. Pearson VUE uses this ID number only for identification purposes for maintaining candidate records. When a candidate contacts Pearson VUE to schedule an examination appointment, the candidate will be notified of the time to report for the in-person administration at the test center, or the online administration via OnVUE. After scheduling the examination appointment, candidates will receive a Confirmation of Examination Registration email from Pearson VUE to confirm the scheduled appointment. The Confirmation of Examination Registration will include the registration ID, date, time, appointment length, test center location (if applicable), and approved accommodation(s) (if applicable).

## Accommodations for Candidates With Disabilities

NBCC and Pearson VUE provide reasonable and appropriate special examination accommodations for individuals with disabilities. The existence of a disability does not automatically necessitate an accommodation. Consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a disability is a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity or bodily function. All accommodation requests are reviewed under the Special Examination Accommodations Policy located on the NBCC website at [nbcc.org/Assets/Policies/NBCC-CCE Special Examination Accommodations Policy.pdf](https://www.nbcc.org/Assets/Policies/NBCC-CCE_Special_Examination_Accommodations_Policy.pdf).

Only specific, limited accommodations may be available for those candidates opting for the OnVUE online administration of the NCE.

Special examination accommodations (SEAs) must be requested for each examination registration. A candidate may use the Accommodation Request form at [nbcc.org/assets/exam/SEA-NBCC-Certification-and-CCE-Credentialing-Candidates-active.pdf](https://www.nbcc.org/assets/exam/SEA-NBCC-Certification-and-CCE-Credentialing-Candidates-active.pdf), or submit substantially similar documentation in accordance with the requirements set forth in the [Special Examination Accommodations Policy](#).

**Accommodations must be pre-approved by NBCC before scheduling the examination. If an examination is scheduled prior to receipt of written confirmation of SEA approval, the candidate may forfeit their accommodation request and/or their scheduled examination appointment time.**

Candidates who receive written confirmation of SEA approval must schedule their examination appointment by calling Pearson VUE's toll-free number (800) 466-0450 and selecting Option 3.

For any questions related to accommodations, please feel free to contact:  
[accommodations@cce-global.org](mailto:accommodations@cce-global.org).

## Examination Appointment Changes

Candidates may reschedule their test up to 24 hours before the currently scheduled examination appointment by contacting Pearson VUE at (866) 904-4432. Candidates with approved accommodations must call (800) 466-0450, and select Option 3, to reschedule their examination.

## Circumstances Resulting in Forfeiture of Examination Registration Fees

Examination registration fees and all fees paid to take the examination are forfeited when a candidate:

- misses an appointment and does not reschedule at least 24 hours before the examination appointment.
- arrives more than 15 minutes late for an examination.
- violates any NBCC/CCE or Pearson VUE policy, rule, procedure, or instruction from a proctor or examination administrator.
- engages in any prohibited conduct during the examination administration, such as conduct related to cheating or a test security breach.

## Examination Deferrals

Candidates may postpone or defer their examination registration to the next available administration without penalty if they contact NBCC at [certification@nbcc.org](mailto:certification@nbcc.org) more than 30 days prior to the opening of their examination cycle. If the request is less than 30 days prior to the opening of the examination cycle or if the candidate does not take the examination on their scheduled date, the candidate will be required to pay a \$150 reregistration fee to take it during the next examination cycle.

## Personal Emergency, Inclement Weather, or Power Failure

In the event of a personal emergency or other circumstance that prevents the candidate from taking the examination at the scheduled appointment time, the candidate is required to: promptly contact NBCC at (336)547-0607 or [certification@nbcc.org](mailto:certification@nbcc.org); explain the circumstances resulting in the inability to test; submit specific information and related documentation, if applicable, supporting the reason(s) and circumstance(s) identified to NBCC; and identify when the candidate is available to reschedule the examination. NBCC, in its sole discretion, will determine whether the candidate is permitted to cancel the current test appointment and reschedule the examination, or is required to reregister to take the NCE.

In the event of inclement weather, Pearson VUE will determine whether circumstances warrant the cancellation and rescheduling of an examination appointment. An examination will usually be rescheduled if the test center personnel are unable to open the facility. Every attempt is made to administer an examination as scheduled; however, should an examination be canceled at a test center, all scheduled candidates will receive notification by email or telephone regarding rescheduling or reregistration procedures.

During an OnVUE online NCE administration, if the candidate experiences a power outage that temporarily interrupts the administration of the examination, the NCE will restart at the last question completed. The candidate will need to log back in to restart the examination. Details about this process and the steps a candidate must follow, including conducting a system test for software compatibility prior to testing, are provided at [home.pearsonvue.com/nbcc](http://home.pearsonvue.com/nbcc). Important FAQs and instructions are provided under the “Learn More” tab of the Pearson VUE/CCE webpage.

# Taking the Examination

## In-Person Examination Administration (Pearson VUE Test Center)

The examination will be delivered in-person, via computer-based testing, at a physical Pearson VUE test center. Advanced computer experience or typing skills are not required to take the examination. On the day of the NCE appointment, the candidate can check in up to 30 minutes before the examination and up to 15 minutes after the scheduled appointment time. **If the candidate checks in more than 15 minutes after the scheduled testing time, the candidate will not be allowed to test and will forfeit their registration fee.**

**Note:** The candidate must provide two forms of proper identification as part of the check-in process at the test center, and at least one form of identification must be one of the following: driver's license, state ID, military ID, or passport. Failure to provide appropriate identification at the time of the examination is considered a missed test appointment, and the candidate will forfeit their examination fee.

Prior to testing at a Pearson VUE test center, the candidate is required to review and sign the Pearson VUE Candidate Agreement before being allowed into the test center. The document explains what candidates must do if they need help during the examination and identifies other test administration policies.

### Test Center Locations

Pearson VUE test centers have been selected to provide reasonable accessibility to candidates in all states and U.S. territories. A current listing of Pearson VUE test centers, including addresses and driving directions, is available at [home.pearsonvue.com/nbcc](https://home.pearsonvue.com/nbcc) under "Find a Test Center."

### Security Requirements

NBCC/CCE and Pearson VUE maintain the highest degree of test administration and security standards. All test centers are monitored by audio and video surveillance equipment for security purposes.

The following security requirements apply during the in-person test administration:

- No cameras, notes, tape recorders, personal digital assistants (PDAs), pagers, cell phones, or smart watches are allowed in the testing room.
- No calculators are permitted.
- No guests, visitors, or family members are allowed in the testing room or reception areas.
- No personal items, valuables, or weapons should be brought to the test center.
- A locker is provided for storing keys, wallets, and cell phones. Pearson VUE is not responsible for items left in the reception areas.

NBCC/CCE or Pearson VUE may modify these security requirements as needed.

## Additional Test Administration Restrictions

- Writing materials will be provided during check in.
- All writing materials must be returned to the proctor at the completion of testing, or a score report will not be given.
- There will be a 15-minute break in the middle of the examination. Voluntary breaks may be taken during the examination; however, the examination clock will not stop during any voluntary breaks. Candidates must follow all Pearson VUE rules and procedures when requesting and taking a break.

## Examination Process

Upon arrival at the test center, and following the check-in process, each candidate will be directed to a testing carrel. All candidate testing sessions will be monitored by video throughout the entirety of the test administration.

Candidates will have a total test session of 255 minutes (4 hours and 15 minutes), as follows:

- Time to complete the Test Administration and Confidentiality Agreement: **5 minutes**
- Time to complete the testing tutorial (including sample case study): **10 minutes**

Following acceptance of the Agreement, each candidate will be provided with a 10-minute examination tutorial that reviews how to navigate and respond to the test items. Upon completion of the tutorial, candidates will begin the timed examination.

- Time to complete the examination: **225 minutes**
- One scheduled break (after question #100): **15 minutes**

Total Test Session Time: **255 minutes**

The clock does not stop and will continue to run during any unscheduled break taken by the candidate during the test administration. Once the time has expired, the examination will terminate. A digital clock appearing on the computer screen indicates the time remaining to complete the examination.

Only one examination question is presented at a time. The question number appears in the upper right portion of the screen. Answer choices are identified as A, B, C, or D. The candidate chooses an answer by clicking the option for the best response. To change an answer, the candidate simply clicks on the alternate option. The candidate will have the opportunity to review their responses in the first half of the examination prior to the scheduled break after question #100. Once the candidate has completed the scheduled break and continued to the last half of the examination, they will neither be able to review nor change responses to the first half of the examination. The candidate should therefore be sure to address any flagged or skipped questions before initiating the scheduled break and moving on to questions 101–200. There is no limit on the number of times the candidate may change their answer before moving on to the next question. The candidate is encouraged to provide an answer for every examination question, as there is no penalty for guessing.

# Online Examination Administration (OnVUE)

The examination will be delivered via internet-based, online-proctored testing administered by Pearson VUE, at an appropriate location selected by the candidate. Advanced computer experience or typing skills are not required to take the examination. On the day of the NCE appointment, the candidate can check in up to 30 minutes before the examination and up to 15 minutes after the scheduled appointment time. **If the candidate checks in more than 15 minutes after the scheduled testing time, the candidate will not be allowed to test and will forfeit their registration fee.**

Prior to testing, the candidate is required to review and sign the [Pearson VUE Candidate Rules Agreement](#). The document explains what candidates must do if they need help during the examination and identifies other test administration policies.

## Identification Requirements

- On examination day, candidates will be prompted to take a photo of their government-issued ID and a real-time photo of themselves. Candidates will be required to show that same photo ID to the proctor via the webcam.
- The following options satisfy this identification requirement:
  - Driver's license
  - State ID
  - Military ID
  - Passport

The first and last name used by the candidate to register for the examination must exactly match the first and last name on the government-issued ID that is presented on the day of the examination.

**Note:** The candidate must have proper identification to test via internet-based, online-proctored testing. Failure to provide appropriate identification at the time of the examination is considered a missed test appointment, and the candidate will forfeit their examination fee.

Candidates with questions or concerns about the ID requirements should contact Pearson VUE customer service at [home.pearsonvue.com/Contact-Us.aspx](http://home.pearsonvue.com/Contact-Us.aspx).

# OnVUE Test Administration Requirements

The candidate will be required to adhere to the following NBCC/Pearson VUE test administration policies and rules with respect to internet-based testing:

## Security Requirements

- Immediately prior to the start of their testing session, each candidate must run a computer system check to ensure that the computer being used to complete the examination meets all Pearson VUE computer system and technical requirements. Information concerning the systems check is available at [home.pearsonvue.com/nbcc/onvue](http://home.pearsonvue.com/nbcc/onvue). Failure to perform the system check may result in technical deficiencies that could adversely affect a candidate's test administration or ability to complete the examination.
- Prior to accessing the examination, candidates will be required to show their testing space to the online proctor via the computer webcam and capture four photos of their testing environment.
- Constant online proctoring/monitoring will be conducted by both artificial intelligence and a Pearson VUE-certified proctor by webcam and microphone throughout the test administration.

## Testing Space Requirements

During the test administration, the candidate MUST:

- **Be alone in the room.** Other individuals (including children) and pets (except service animals) are not allowed in the testing environment. It is recommended that candidates use a room with a locking door to reduce the likelihood that an interruption will occur.
- **Have a clear desk and testing area.** The candidate is not permitted to have textbooks, cell phones, smart watches, or other materials that may have test content or exam-related information in their testing location, including bulletin boards, white boards, or other items.
- **Be connected to a power source and the internet.**
- **Keep their webcam, speakers, and microphone on for the duration of the test.** The proctor must be able to see and hear the candidate throughout the test.

The candidate CANNOT:

- use a phone or headphones.
- use dual computer monitors.
- leave their seat or get up for any reason, unless specifically instructed by the proctor. A 15-minute break will be offered to all candidates at the halfway point of the examination.
- talk or read the test questions aloud.

Any interruption, including contact with any person other than the examination proctor, or any violation of these test administration rules will result in termination of the online administration of the NCE.



The proctor may provide other directives regarding the examination environment. Failure to follow any instructions or directives from the proctor will result in termination of the examination and forfeiture of the test appointment and NCE registration fee.

## Additional Examination Administration Restrictions

- Like the examination in the test centers, a 15-minute break will be offered to all candidates at the halfway point of the examination. No additional test time will be given to candidates.
- Candidates may not eat or drink during the test administration, unless specifically approved by the state licensing agency and/or NBCC/CCE. Candidates may have water in a clear container during the examination.

## Examination Process

Candidates are encouraged to review the OnVUE test administration rules and procedures, which are explained on the Pearson VUE website, located at [home.pearsonvue.com/cce/onvue](http://home.pearsonvue.com/cce/onvue).

Upon accessing the secure examination, the candidate will be instructed to show the proctor a full view of the testing area after the candidate's identification has been confirmed. Candidates will be monitored by video and audio throughout the examination session.

The candidate will review their candidate information to confirm that the information is accurate.

Candidates will have a total test session of 255 minutes (4 hours and 15 minutes), as follows:

- Time to complete the Test Administration and Confidentiality Agreement: **5 minutes**
- Time to complete the testing tutorial (including sample case study): **10 minutes**  
Following acceptance of the Agreement, each candidate will be provided with a 10-minute examination tutorial that reviews how to navigate and respond to the test items. Upon completion of the tutorial, candidates will begin the timed examination.
- Time to complete the examination: **225 minutes**
- One scheduled break (after question #100): **15 minutes**

Total Test Session Time: **255 minutes**

The examination will terminate if the time allowed is exceeded. A digital clock indicates the time remaining to complete the examination.

Only one examination question is presented at a time. The question number appears in the upper right portion of the screen. Answer choices are identified as A, B, C, or D. The candidate chooses an answer by clicking the option for the best response. To change an answer, the candidate simply clicks on the alternate option. The candidate will have the opportunity to review their responses in the first half of the examination prior to the scheduled break after question #100. Once the candidate has completed the scheduled break and continued to the last half of the examination, they will neither be able to review nor change responses to the first half of the examination. The candidate should therefore be sure to address any flagged or skipped questions before initiating the scheduled break and moving on to questions 101–200. There is no limit on the number of times the candidate may change their answer before moving on to the next question. The candidate is encouraged to provide an answer for every examination question, as there is no penalty for guessing.

For security reasons, no unscheduled breaks will be permitted during the OnVUE test administration. If a candidate anticipates needing additional breaks outside of the scheduled 15-minute break, the candidate is strongly encouraged to test in-person at a testing center.

## Examination Rules and Requirements

Regardless of test delivery format selected by the candidate (i.e., in-person or online test administrations), candidates will be required to comply with all NBCC/CCE and Pearson VUE test administration policies, rules, instructions, and security requirements, including the Pearson VUE Candidate Rules Agreement, which can be reviewed on the following website: [home.pearsonvue.com/Clients/CCE/Rules-Agreements.aspx](https://home.pearsonvue.com/Clients/CCE/Rules-Agreements.aspx).

### Misconduct

Candidates must not engage in any prohibited conduct during the examination, including, but not limited to:

- Cheating
- Using any unauthorized materials or communication devices, such as cell phones, PDAs, smart watches, or pagers
- Accessing other computer programs, applications, or content during the examination
- Communicating with other candidates or other persons during the test administration
- Being abusive to, or otherwise uncooperative with, the proctor and/or test administrator
- Interruptions where others enter or walk through the testing room
- Copying, or attempting to make copies of, any examination materials, including, without limitation, any questions, answers, or screen images; this includes taking photos or videos of computer screens, even if attempting to document a technical problem or other issue
- Attempting to take the examination for someone else
- Being observed with notes, books, or other aids
- Participating in any data dump activities (e.g., sharing specific test questions and content with others)
- Reading aloud or mouthing the questions and answer choices
- Looking around the room
- Taking an unauthorized break in test centers
- Taking an unscheduled break in the OnVUE examination
- Eating, chewing gum, smoking, or having a drink, other than water in a clear container

- Asking the proctor or examination administrator questions about the examination content
- Any other behavior deemed as misconduct or suspicious activity as reported by examination administrators or proctors

If NBCC/CCE or Pearson VUE determines that a candidate has acted contrary to any applicable NBCC/CCE or Pearson VUE test administration policy, rule, procedure, or instruction, or the terms of the Test Administration and Confidentiality Agreement, the candidate's examination may be terminated and/or their scores may be invalidated by NBCC. Additionally, a candidate may be subject to appropriate corrective actions and/or sanctions, including, but not limited to, ineligibility for any future NBCC tests.

## **Examination Materials Ownership**

The NCE, including all test questions and answers, is confidential and cannot be provided to any other person(s). NBCC owns all rights, titles, and interests related to the NCE and all examination-related materials, including trademark and copyright interests and rights.

Candidates are prohibited from: copying, or attempting to make copies of any examination materials, including, without limitation, any questions, answers, or screen images; disclosing, reproducing, using, or transmitting any examination material, in whole or in part, in any form or by any means, verbal or written, electronic or mechanical, for any purpose; and, reconstructing, or attempting to reconstruct, any NCE questions or answers from memory in any form, or discussing any of the content of the NCE with any other person(s). Candidates are strictly prohibited from taking photos or videos of any examination materials, including but not limited to the content of the examination, even if attempting to provide documentation of a technical problem or other issue.

# Following the Examination

Upon completion of the examination, candidates will be asked to complete a short evaluation of their examination experience. Test center candidates will then be instructed to report to the examination proctor to receive an unofficial score report, which includes the candidate's photograph. Candidates taking the examination through OnVUE will be able to access their score report information from their dashboard. They will log in to their Pearson account and select the View/Print Score Report option at the top right of the login page. If this option is not available, they should contact Pearson's customer service at 866-904-4432 to request a copy.

Within 8 weeks after the examination, candidates will receive notification that their examination pass/fail status has been updated within their Credentialing Gateway account. The length of time between a candidate completing the examination and receiving their result is dependent on the version of the examination they completed. Candidates can order an official score verification report to be sent to third parties (such as licensure boards) through their Credentialing Gateway account. Passing the examination does not guarantee certification.

NBCC reserves the right to withdraw or void official scores if NBCC determines that a candidate engaged in any prohibited conduct during the examination, including any violation of a NBCC/CCE or Pearson VUE policy, rule, procedure, or instruction.

Those candidates who do not pass the NCE must wait a minimum of 30 days to retake the examination and cannot test more than once within the same certification examination cycle. A separate certification examination registration and fee must be submitted by each candidate applying for a retest.

## Pass/Fail Score Determination

The examination score is determined only by the candidate's performance on the test. It is important to note that a candidate's ability to pass the NCE depends on the knowledge and skills of the candidate and not on the performance of other candidates.

Within the 200 questions on each form of the NCE, 160 of the questions are scored for the purpose of determining whether the candidate meets the minimum criterion (passing) score for that test form. Each of these 160 questions count for one score point; thus, the maximum possible score a candidate can achieve is 160. The cut score (minimum passing score) for the NCE is calculated through a standard-setting process, which requires a committee of subject matter experts to review and evaluate each question on the examination in order to determine the passing score that would be expected from a minimally qualified candidate.

A process of statistical equating is used to determine the cut score for each version of the examination. Statistical equating ensures fairness to all candidates by associating the cut score on a test form with the difficulty level of the items within the form. To ensure fairness, the cut score of each examination version will vary slightly.

## Score Verification Requests

Candidates can order an official score report by submitting a Score Verification Request Form, with payment, through their Credentialing Gateway account.

## Appealing Examination Results

In the event that a candidate wishes to appeal a failing test result, the candidate must satisfy the requirements in the NBCC/CCE Examination Appeals Policy located on the NBCC website at [nbcc.org/Assets/Policies/NBCC CCE Examination Appeals Policy.pdf](https://nbcc.org/Assets/Policies/NBCC_CCE_Examination_Appeals_Policy.pdf) and complete all appeal submission requirements. Failure to follow the appeal instructions identified in this Policy will result in rejection of the appeal.

A free retake of the examination is the only remedy for an accepted and approved appeal. The candidate's test score will not be changed or modified.

# Appendix A

## Content Outline: The National Counselor Examination (NCE)

### Exam Purpose

The National Counselor Examination (NCE) measures an examinee's knowledge and understanding of theoretical and skill-based tenets necessary to practice safely and competently as an entry-level counselor. The exam's development is based upon a national job analysis of more than 16,000 credentialed counselors identifying empirically validated work behaviors determined to be most relevant for competent counseling practice.

### Measurement Focus and Target Population

The examination is aligned with the eight Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) content areas. Thus, the content validity of the NCE is anchored on the six empirically validated work behaviors determined to be most relevant for competent counseling practice and the eight CACREP curriculum educational standards. The examinee target population is entry-level counselors with appropriate counseling training as determined by the minimally qualified candidate requirements.

### Minimally Qualified Candidate

The minimally qualified candidate (MQC) for the NCE has graduated from or is a well-advanced graduate student in a counseling program\* that has been accredited by CACREP or housed within an institutionally accredited college or university.

**The counseling program must contain courses in the following content areas:**

- Professional Counseling Orientation and Ethical Practice
- Social and Cultural Diversity
- Human Growth and Development
- Career Development
- Counseling and Helping Relationships
- Group Counseling and Group Work
- Assessment and Testing
- Research and Program Evaluation

\*States may choose to allow candidates of comparable education levels from other related helping degrees to sit for the exam for licensure.

### Exam Form

The NCE test comprises 200 multiple choice questions (MCQs), of which 160 are scored and 40 are unscored. These 40 MCQs provide statistical information for the items to be used in future examinations. Both scored and unscored items are of the same structure, and they appear in jumbled order in the examination.

You will have 3 hours and 45 minutes to complete the test.

# Job Analysis and Content Outline

The exam’s development is based upon a national job analysis of more than 16,000 credentialed counselors identifying empirically validated work behaviors determined to be most relevant for competent counseling practice. The most recent job analysis was finalized in June 2019, with the content outline drafted and approved by the NCE Exam Committee, which is comprised of Subject Matter Experts (SMEs).

The committee’s responsibilities included, but were not limited to, identifying components of the profession and related job tasks and crafting survey items and reviewing the format of the instrument to measure those components and tasks. Development of the job analysis survey was completed at the Center for Credentialing & Education (CCE) over the course of one calendar year (May 2016–July 2017).

The committee also evaluates the examination content for alignment with the eight CACREP content areas following the creation of the content outline to provide valuable information to examinees.

Table 1 presents the six domains and the percent and number of scored items in an NCE examination on each of these domains.

**Table 1.** *The weight for each domain*

	Domain	Percent of items	Number of scored items
1	Professional Practice and Ethics	12	19
2	Intake, Assessment, and Diagnosis	12	19
3	Areas of Clinical Focus	29	47
4	Treatment Planning	9	14
5	Counseling Skills and Interventions	30	48
6	Core Counseling Attributes	8	13
	<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>160</i>

Table 2 presents the knowledge, skills, and tasks under each domain of the Content Outline.

**Table 2.** *Knowledge, skills, and tasks related to the domains.*

## 1. Professional Practice and Ethics

This section encompasses counselors’ knowledge, skills, and abilities related to maintaining proper administrative and clinical protocols.

- A. Assess your (the counselor) competency to work with a specific client
- B. Understand statistical concepts and methods in research
- C. Practice legal and ethical counseling
- D. Clarify counselor–client roles
- E. Discuss client’s rights and responsibilities
- F. Discuss limits of confidentiality
- G. Explain counselor agency policies

- H. Review payment, fees, and insurance benefits
- I. Explain counseling processes, procedures, risks, and benefits
- J. Explain uses and limits of social media
- K. Inform clients about the legal aspects of counseling
- L. Obtain informed consent
- M. Discuss confidentiality as it applies to electronic communication
- N. Establish group rules, expectations, and termination criteria
- O. Assess competency to provide informed consent
- P. Monitor the therapeutic relationship and build trust as needed
- Q. Review client records
- R. Provide adequate accommodations for clients with disabilities
- S. Provide information to third parties
- T. Provide referral sources if counseling services are inadequate/ inappropriate
- U. Advocate for professional and client issues
- V. Seek supervision/consultation
- W. Create and maintain documentation appropriate for each aspect of the counseling process
- X. Awareness and practice of self-care

## **2. Intake, Assessment, and Diagnosis**

This section encompasses counselors' knowledge, skills, and abilities to effectively conduct client intake, assessment, and diagnosis.

- A. Conduct a biopsychosocial interview
- B. Conduct a diagnostic interview
- C. Conduct cultural formulation interview
- D. Conduct an initial interview
- E. Determine diagnosis
- F. Perform a Mental Status Exam (MSE)
- G. Consider co-occurring diagnoses
- H. Determine level of care needed
- I. Determine the appropriate modality of treatment
- J. Assess the presenting problem and level of distress
- K. Evaluate an individual's level of mental health functioning
- L. Screen clients for appropriate services



- M. Select, use, and interpret appropriate assessment instruments
- N. Use formal and informal observations
- O. Assess for trauma
- P. Assess substance use
- Q. Obtain client self-reports
- R. Evaluate interactional dynamics
- S. Conduct ongoing assessment for at-risk behaviors (i.e., suicide, homicide, self/other injury, and relationship violence)
- T. Use pre-test and post-test measures to assess outcomes
- U. Evaluate counseling effectiveness

### **3. Areas of Clinical Focus**

This section encompasses counselors' knowledge and skills related to areas of clients' concern(s).

- A. Adjustment related to physical loss/injury/medical condition
- B. Aging/geriatric concerns
- C. Behavioral problems
- D. Bullying
- E. Caregiving concerns
- F. Cultural adjustments
- G. End-of-life issues
- H. Fear and panic
- I. Financial issues
- J. Gender identity development
- K. Grief/loss
- L. Hopelessness/depression
- M. Loneliness/attachment
- N. Hyper/hypo mental focus
- O. Intellectual functioning issues
- P. Insomnia/sleep issues
- Q. Maladaptive eating behaviors
- R. Remarriage/recommitment
- S. Developmental processes/tasks/issues
- T. Obsessive thoughts/behaviors

- U. Occupation and career development
- V. Physical issues related to anxiety
- W. Physical issues related to depression
- X. Physical/emotional issues related to trauma
- Y. Process addictions (pornography, gambling)
- Z. Racism/discrimination/oppression
- AA. Religious values conflict
- AB. Retirement concerns
- AC. Ruminating and/or intrusive thoughts
- AD. Separation from primary care givers
- AE. Sexual functioning concerns
- AF. Sleeping habits
- AG. Spiritual/existential concerns
- AH. Stress management
- AI. Substance use/addiction issues
- AJ. Suicidal thoughts/behaviors
- AK. Terminal illness issues
- AL. Visual/auditory hallucinations
- AM. Worry and anxiety
- AN. Adoption issues
- AO. Blended family issues
- AP. Child abuse-related concerns
- AQ. Child development issues
- AR. Dating/relationship problems
- AS. Divorce
- AT. Family abuse/violence (e.g., physical, sexual, emotional)
- AU. Interpersonal partner violence concerns
- AV. Marital/partner communication problems
- AW. Parenting/co-parenting conflicts
- AX. Emotional dysregulation

#### **4. Treatment Planning**

This section encompasses counselors' knowledge, skills, and abilities to develop an effective course of treatment.

- A. Collaborate with client to establish treatment goals and objectives
- B. Establish short- and long-term counseling goals consistent with clients' diagnoses
- C. Identify barriers affecting client goal attainment
- D. Identify strengths that improve the likelihood of goal attainment
- E. Refer to different levels of treatment (e.g., outpatient, inpatient, residential, etc.)
- F. Refer to others for concurrent treatment
- G. Guide treatment planning
- H. Discuss termination process and issues
- I. Discuss transitions in group membership
- J. Follow-up after discharge
- K. Use assessment instrument results to facilitate client decision making
- L. Review and revise the treatment plan
- M. Engage clients in review of progress toward treatment goals
- N. Collaborate with other providers and client support systems (documentation and report writing)
- O. Discuss with clients the integration and maintenance of therapeutic progress
- P. Educate client to the value of treatment plan compliance

#### **5. Counseling Skills and Interventions**

This section encompasses counselors' knowledge, skills, and abilities to conduct effective counseling.

- A. Align intervention with client's developmental level
- B. Align intervention with counseling modality (individual, couple, family, or group)
- C. Align intervention with client population (e.g., veterans, minorities, disenfranchised, disabled)
- D. Implement individual counseling in relation to a plan of treatment
- E. Establish therapeutic alliance
- F. Apply theory-based counseling intervention(s)
- G. Address addiction issues
- H. Address cultural considerations
- I. Address family composition and cultural considerations
- J. Evaluate and explain systemic patterns of interaction
- K. Explore family member interaction
- L. Explore religious and spiritual values

- M. Guide clients in the development of skills or strategies for dealing with their problems
- N. Help clients develop support systems
- O. Help facilitate clients' motivation to make the changes they desire
- P. Improve interactional patterns
- Q. Provide crisis intervention
- R. Educate client about transference and defense mechanisms
- S. Facilitate trust and safety
- T. Build communication skills
- U. Develop conflict resolution strategies
- V. Develop safety plans
- W. Facilitate systemic change
- X. Provide distance counseling or telemental health
- Y. Provide education resources (e.g., stress management, assertiveness training, divorce adjustment)
- Z. Provide psychoeducation for client
- AA. Summarize
- AB. Reframe/redirect
- AC. Facilitate empathic responses
- AD. Use self-disclosure
- AE. Use constructive confrontation
- AF. Facilitate awareness of here-and-now interactions
- AG. Facilitate resolution of interpersonal conflict
- AH. Use linking and blocking in a group context
- AI. Management of leader–member dynamics
- AJ. Model giving and receiving of feedback
- AK. Address impact of extended families
- AL. Contain and manage intense feelings
- AM. Explore the influence of family of origin patterns and themes
- AN. Address the impact of social support network
- AO. Use “structured” activities
- AP. Promote and encourage interactions among group members
- AQ. Promote and encourage interactions with the group leader
- AR. Use psychoeducation as a part of the group process
- AS. Explain phases in the group process
- AT. Identify and discuss group themes and patterns

- AU. Create intervention based on the stage of group development
- AV. Challenge harmful group member behaviors
- AW. Address the potential interaction of members outside of the group

## 6. Core Counseling Attributes

This section encompasses behaviors, traits, and dispositions of effective counselors.

- A. Awareness of self and impact on clients
- B. Genuineness
- C. Congruence
- D. Demonstrate knowledge of and sensitivity to gender orientation and gender issues
- E. Demonstrate knowledge of and sensitivity to multicultural issues
- F. Demonstrate conflict tolerance and resolution
- G. Empathic attunement
- H. Empathic responding
- I. Foster the emergence of group therapeutic factors
- J. Non-judgmental stance
- K. Positive regard
- L. Respect and acceptance for diversity
- M. Use foundational listening, attending, and reflecting skills

Table 3 presents the list of the eight common core areas by CACREP with which the examination questions of the NCE are aligned.

### **Table 3.** *CACREP Common Core Areas*

1. Professional counseling orientation and ethical practice
2. Social and cultural diversity
3. Human growth and development
4. Career development
5. Counseling and helping relationships
6. Group counseling and group work
7. Assessment and testing
8. Research and program evaluation

# Appendix B

## NCE Sample Examination Questions

Following are six sample questions in the same style and with similar content as will be on the examination. Use the sample questions to verify your understanding of the topics on the examination. Answers are provided for the sample questions.

1. How would a counselor apply cognitive behavioral theory?
  - A. Challenge irrational thoughts.
  - B. Identify repressed feelings.
  - C. Establish defense mechanisms.
  - D. Identify stages of change.
  
2. How would a counselor build a therapeutic alliance with a client?
  - A. Offer solutions for client problems.
  - B. Determine treatment goals.
  - C. Provide a release of information.
  - D. Give an empathetic response.
  
3. What is the purpose of using basic attending skills?
  - A. to gain the trust of the client
  - B. to reinforce the client behavior change
  - C. to decrease the client's irrational thoughts
  - D. to link client experiences in a group session
  
4. When do group counselors expect members to express genuine thoughts and feelings?
  - A. the initial stage
  - B. the transition stage
  - C. the contemplation stage
  - D. the working stage

5. Which of the following work behaviors are counselors ethically required to follow?
- A. Give free counseling services to 25% of minority clients.
  - B. Provide 10% off of services for clients with children.
  - C. Devote a portion of services for which there is little or no payment.
  - D. Charge clients with higher income more and those with lower income less.
6. What term represents the process in which a counselor and client create a plan to help the client change?
- A. screening
  - B. informed consent
  - C. free association
  - D. goal setting

## **ANSWER KEY**

1. A
2. D
3. A
4. D
5. C
6. D