

Examination Administration Frequently Asked Questions and Answers (Q&A)

In an effort to assist our candidates and school representatives to better understand our examination processes, we have created a list of questions and answers that explain in detail our examination administration policies and procedures. NCCAOM has a high level of commitment to upholding the integrity of the NCCAOM certifications as a meaningful measure of entry-level competency in order to protect the public safety. This commitment cannot be overstated; it is a requirement of our mission, which is *to establish, assess, and promote recognized standards of competence and safety in acupuncture and Oriental medicine for the protection and benefit of the public.*

A majority of the questions and answers listed below relate to the Acupuncture with Point Location, Biomedicine, Chinese Herbology, and Foundations of Oriental Medicine examinations. A separate Asian Bodywork Therapy Frequently Asked Questions and Answers document is available on the NCCAOM website.

Question #1: When can I take the next examination as I do not see a schedule of exams on the website?

Answer: NCCAOM is pleased to be providing year-round testing for all our certification exams except for Asian Bodywork Therapy (See [ABT FAQ's](#)) and foreign language exams, which means that "Approved to Test" candidates (who have received an approval letter in the mail from NCCAOM) can now register for the NCCAOM examination(s) throughout the year, pending availability at their desired Pearson VUE test center locations.

Please note: the Biomedicine exam will be administered during three, two-week time periods in 2010:

- February 15-27
- June 14-30
- October 18-30

Candidates can register for the examination(s) by calling Pearson VUE directly or registering online (The "Approved to Test" letter will have detailed registration information and instructions). Candidates can now register for their exams according to their own schedule and at their own convenience. Pearson VUE offers more than 230 Pearson Professional Test Centers around the world. When candidates register, they pay Pearson VUE directly for their exams using Visa, MasterCard or American Express credit cards.

Question #2: What does open registration mean and why is there no application or registration deadlines announcement?

Answer: Open registration means that candidates no longer have to wait for the NCCAOM examinations to be announced (*except Asian Bodywork Therapy and foreign language examinations*). Once candidates are approved to test, they can register and schedule their exam for any time that is available at a Pearson VUE Professional testing center. This means that candidates can test and be finished with the examination cycles quicker and test at a time more convenient for them.

Year-round examinations will allow candidates to become certified and licensed to practice much faster than in the years past. One of the great benefits of year-round testing is that there

is no need to for the NCCAOM to enforce application or registration deadlines. Candidates can send in their application when they have completed their education and will be able to test after they receive an “Approval to Test” letter from NCCAOM. This also means that candidates no longer have to wait for the next examination cycle to register and test. Thus, candidates do not need to wait for the next application cycle if they have missed an application deadline, or to rush to send in their application for the upcoming examination administration. With year-round testing, candidates can test at their own pace.

Please remember that candidates must still allow 10-12 weeks for processing of their application before they are approved to test. It is also important to remember that candidates have four years from the date that NCCAOM receives their application to test and become certified. Candidates who need to retake an examination must wait **45 days** from the previous recorded test. Candidates will not be allowed to re-schedule their previously failed examination prior to the 45 day waiting period for any reason. The 45-day waiting period allows for the candidate to receive their score report (diagnostic) and review before the exam is repeated.

Question #3: Which exams are offered year-round?

Answer: The NCCAOM offers the following examinations throughout the year for 2009:

- Acupuncture with Point Location
- *Biomedicine
- Chinese Herbology
- Foundations of Oriental Medicine

** Due to the increase in the Biomedicine exam questions, the Biomedicine Examination will only be offered in linear format during three (3) test administration periods that will each be two (2) weeks in duration in 2010. These dates are **February 15-27, June 14-30, and October 18-30, 2010.** It will not be offered throughout the year in 2010.*

Question #4: What about those who want to take the test in Chinese or Korean?

Answer: The foreign language examinations are typically offered every **other** year usually in the fall.

The 2009 foreign language examination administration will be **Oct 5 – 17, 2009**. The number of questions and allotted time will be the same as the 2009 year-round English examinations. The foreign language exams can be taken at any of the Pearson VUE test centers listed on the NCCAOM web site for “Exam Sites” link found under Site Map.

Question #5: Are you planning on combining any other exams or making any changes with any of the exams?

Answer: At this time, the NCCAOM is not planning to combine any exams. Effective in 2010, the number of exam questions for the Biomedicine Examination will increase from 50 to 100 multiple-choice questions in an allotted time of 2 ½ hours for completion, similar to the other exams. Due to this change, the Biomedicine Examination will only be offered in linear format during three (3) test administration periods that will each be two (2) weeks in duration. *These dates are **February 15-27, June 14-30, and October 18-30, 2010.***

Question #6: What does year-round testing mean for scoring? Does this mean that I will receive my exam results faster?

Answer: Yes! Year-round testing made possible by adaptive testing (see Questions 7 and 8 for information about adaptive testing) will enable NCCAOM to provide you with immediate on screen “Preliminary Pass or Fail” status. This means that candidates will receive a **preliminary** pass/fail screen immediately after they submit their answers, while at the Pearson Professional Test Center. *This does not apply for the Asian Bodywork Therapy or foreign language examinations.*

The **official score report will be mailed within 20 business days** from completion of the examination. The state licensing boards will also receive your examination results at a much quicker rate, which means that the time passed before receiving your license will be greatly reduced.

Question #7: What is the format of the examinations?

Answer: The Acupuncture with Point Location, Chinese Herbology and Foundations of Oriental Medicine examinations each have 100 multiple-choice questions with a 2 ½ hour time limit. The Biomedicine examination consists of 50 multiple-choice questions with one hour allotted for completion of the exam. *NOTE: The 50 multiple-choice Biomedicine examinations will be effective until December 31, 2009. **Beginning in 2010**, the Biomedicine examination will consist of 100 multiple-choice questions.*

| Adaptive Exams | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|---------------|
| Examinations | Number of Multiple-Choice Questions | Allotted Time |
| Acupuncture with Point Location | 100 | 2.5 hours |
| Chinese Herbology | 100 | 2.5 hours |
| Foundations of Oriental Medicine | 100 | 2.5 hours |
| *Biomedicine *valid until 12/31/2009 | 50 | 1 hour |
| Linear Exams | | |
| Examinations | Number of Multiple-Choice Questions | Allotted Time |
| Biomedicine (<i>effective in 2010 only</i>) | 100 | 2.5 hours |

In order for NCCAOM to be able to provide you with year-round testing and to provide an immediate preliminary pass/fail screen, we are offering candidates a form of testing called **adaptive testing**. What this means to the candidates is that each examination is different and is geared towards the ability of the candidate. If a question is answered correctly, the next question is slightly more difficult. If a question is answered incorrectly, the next question will be slightly easier. One feature that is required for this format is the inability to review exam questions once you have finished answering the questions. As adaptive testing measures your content knowledge with each question, you will be **unable to go back** to a question once you have moved onto the next question. Adaptive testing has been used for certification testing in other healthcare areas for more than 18 years and offers one of the most reliable measures of competency.

Question #8: Can you explain adaptive testing in more detail and what this means to us as candidates?

Answer: An internet search will help you to find many different descriptions Computer Adaptive Testing (CAT). The easiest explanation we have is that it is a computerized test in which the computer selects the examination questions based on the individual candidate's ability. Some have compared it to jumping a high bar – if you get over the bar, the next time the bar is higher, but if you miss, the bar is lowered. Of course, in this example, if the bar is too low you cannot pass the examination. Another analogy is to that of an interview. When someone is being interviewed, the interviewer will adjust the difficulty of the questions based on previous responses.

The objective of adaptive testing is to determine the candidate's ability with the least amount of measurement error. It is not the number of correct or incorrect questions, but the overall score based on the difficulty of the questions, the overall examination and the ability of the candidate. One aspect of adaptive testing that is difficult to explain is that the best candidates feel as if they have just taken the most challenging exam of their academic career. This is, unfortunately, the nature of this exam type. In trying to determine the candidate's ability, the exam will continue to get more and more difficult. The candidate should not panic as this is a direct result of doing very well on the exam.

Question #9: What are the benefits of taking the CAT or adaptive format of the exam?

Answer: There are many benefits that candidates will enjoy with adaptive and year-round testing as outlined above. These include no eligibility deadlines and a preliminary pass/fail screen immediately following the exam. Your examination can be scheduled at your convenience at over 230 Pearson Professional Test Centers around the world; your application materials can be submitted at any time (please allow 10-12 weeks for processing); and, finally, at the end of the examination you will be able to see your preliminary pass/fail status. Final score reports also go to the state licensing boards much more quickly. The other most obvious positive changes are that of shorter examinations and lowest possible overall costs to candidates.

Question #10: If I fail the exam, can I immediately sign up for the exam again?

Answer: No. Candidates who need to retake an NCCAOM examination must wait 45 days from the previous recorded test. Candidates will not be allowed to reschedule their examination prior to the 45 day waiting period for any reason.

NCCAOM recommends that you give yourself sufficient time to prepare for the retake of the examination that you failed. Remember that after three attempts, you must submit 15 Professional Development Activity points in the content area of weakness in order to sit a fourth time. Also, you are only allowed a total of five (5) opportunities to take an examination.

Question #11: Do I have to answer all of the questions on the exam or can I leave some answers blank?

Answer: You must answer all of the questions on the exam in order for your examination to be scored. **Note: If you do not answer all of the questions, you will not receive a preliminary pass or fail status while at the test center. You must wait until you receive the official score report via mail.**

Question #12: Does the NCCAOM publish a list of single herbs and formulas that will be tested in the Chinese Herbology Examination?

Answer: Yes. In May 2009, a list of formulas will be made available with the new Chinese Herbology content outline on the NCCAOM website.

Question #13: Does the NCCAOM publish a list of the terminology for the channels and other terms?

Answer: Yes. The NCCAOM currently provides a nomenclature list, which is a cross-reference of terms that are frequently used in the English language literature.

Question #14: I am not certain what is covered in the Foundations of Oriental Medicine Examination compared to the Acupuncture with Point Location Examination.

Answer: Please refer to Site Map on the NCCAOM website, and enter the “Exam Content Outlines” link. Based on the results of the job task analysis, a condensed and expanded version of the 2010 exam content outlines will be available on the website in May 2009.

Question #15: How many questions do I have to answer correctly in order to pass an examination?

Answer: With the examinations being adaptive (see Questions 7 and 8 for information about adaptive testing); there is **NO predetermined** correct number of questions that have to be answered correctly in order for a candidate to pass. It is not the number of correct or incorrect questions, but the **overall score** based on the difficulty of the questions, the overall examination and the ability of the candidate.

Question #16: I failed the exam and received my score report, what areas do I need to focus on for the next examination?

Answer: Using your score report, areas where you scored below 70 units are areas to focus your studies as well as taking into consideration the content percentage of that section on the content outline.

Question #17: I failed the exam for the first time, how many candidates pass the exam during their first attempt?

Answer: The pass rate for first time test takers (FTTT) is actually high. Please refer to the pass rate comparison report for 2006-2008 below.

Pass Rate: First Time Test Takes for 2006 to 2008

| Exam Modules | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 |
|--------------|------|------|------|
| AC/APLA** | 77.8 | 82.7 | 84.1 |
| BIO | 81.8 | 84.8 | 92.0 |
| CH | 76.5 | 75.2 | 82.3 |
| FOM | 88.1 | 92.9 | 95.5 |
| PL | 81.8 | 75.0 | |

** Acupuncture and Point Location were combined into one examination in 2008

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