



Frequently Asked Questions

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, validity and fairness of the NCCAOM certifications as meaningful measure of entry level competency in order to protect the public. This commitment cannot be overstated; it is a requirement of our mission, which is *to assure the safety and well-being of the public and to advance the professional practice of acupuncture and Oriental medicine by establishing and promoting national evidence-based standards of competence and credentialing.*

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

Answer: NCCAOM provides year-round, adaptive testing for four of our English language certification exams, which means that “Approved to Test” candidates (those who have received an Authorization to Test (ATT) letter in the mail from NCCAOM) can register for the Foundations of Oriental Medicine (FOM), Biomedicine (BIO), Acupuncture with Point Location (ACPL), and Chinese Herbology (CH) NCCAOM examination(s) throughout the year, pending availability at their desired Pearson VUE Professional Test Center locations.

During the second half of 2017, the Foundations of Oriental Medicine exam will be offered in linear format for two (2), two-week administration periods during August 14-26 and November 6-18, 2017. The adaptive, year-round FOM exam will conclude after June 30, 2017 (view the [2017 Examination Administration Changes Section of the NCCAOM website](#)).

For foreign language exam administrations, view Foreign Language certification exam administration and registration deadlines on the [General Examination Information](#) section of the NCCAOM website.

Candidates can register for all NCCAOM examination(s) by calling Pearson VUE directly or registering online (the ATT letter provides detailed registration information and instructions). Candidates can register for their exams according to their own schedule and at their own convenience within the four-year open application period. NCCAOM exams are administered at over 250 Pearson VUE 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 submission or registration deadline announcement?

Answer: Open registration means that candidates will not have to wait for the NCCAOM adaptive exams in English for Foundations of Oriental Medicine (concludes after June 30, 2017), Biomedicine, Acupuncture with Point Location, and Chinese Herbology examinations to be announced [the exception: foreign language examinations and the Foundations of Oriental Medicine (linear) exam module]. Once candidates are approved to test, they can register and schedule their exam for any time that is available at a Pearson VUE Professional Test Center. This means that candidates can test and be finished with the examination cycles quicker and test at a time more convenient for them.

Please remember that candidates must still allow 6-8 weeks for the 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 calendar 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 diagnostic report and review before the exam is repeated.

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

Answer: The NCCAOM offers the following adaptive examinations in English throughout the year for 2017:

- Acupuncture with Point Location
- Biomedicine
- Chinese Herbology
- Foundations of Oriental Medicine (until June 30, 2017)

The Foundations of Oriental Medicine (FOM) exam module will be offered in a computer-based fixed form (linear) format during two (2), two-week administration periods:

- August 14-26, 2017
- November 6-18, 2017

Question #4: What about those who want to take the exam(s) in Chinese or Korean?

Answer: The foreign language examination administration will be offered:

Chinese Exams:

- June 14-24, 2017
- September 25 – October 7, 2017

Korean* Exams:

- June 14-24, 2017



***Note:** The Korean language examination modules that do not have sufficient number of candidates registered to take the exams over the two-week examination administration period will be canceled and the testers will be refunded by Pearson VUE to the credit card on file.

Each exam consists of 100 multiple-choice questions with a 2 ½ hour time limit. Expanded content outlines are available in Chinese or Korean on the [Examination Preparation](#) section of the NCCAOM website.

Question #5: Are there plans to combine any other exams or make any changes with any of the exams?

Answer: In the interest of getting more questions to increase the number of updated exam items to be used for scoring on the exams, the Foundations of Oriental Medicine (FOM) exam module will be administered in a computer-based, fixed form (linear) format for two (2), two-week administration periods consisting of 130 multiple-choice items with an allotted time of 3.25 hours.

Foundations of Oriental Medicine Exam Module		
2017 Exam Dates	Registration Opens	Registration Closes
August 14-26, 2017	4/1/2017	8/25/2017
November 6-18, 2017	8/25/2017	11/17/2017

Question #6: What does year-round testing mean for scoring? Does this mean that exam results will be received 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 candidates 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 VUE Professional Test Center.

The **official results will be mailed within 20-30 business days** from completion of the examination. Candidates can request that their examination results be sent to the state licensing boards at a much quicker rate, which means that the time passed before receiving the state license will be greatly reduced.

Preliminary Pass or Fail status will not be provided for any linear exams (foreign languages and August and November 2017 Foundations of Oriental Medicine exams). The official results for the Foreign Language Exams and Foundations of Oriental Medicine (linear format) will be mailed approximately 45 business days after the last date of the examination administration period.



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

Answer: The adaptive Foundations of Oriental Medicine, Biomedicine, Acupuncture with Point Location, and Chinese Herbology examinations each have 100 multiple-choice questions with a 2 ½ hour time limit.

Adaptive Exams		
Examinations	Number of Multiple-Choice Questions	Allotted Time
Foundations of Oriental Medicine <i>(last administration June 30, 2017)</i>	100	2.5 hours
Biomedicine	100	2.5 hours
Acupuncture with Point Location	100	2.5 hours
Chinese Herbology	100	2.5 hours

In order for NCCAOM to be able to provide candidates 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 a question has been answered. 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 20 years and offers one of the most reliable measures of competency.

During 2017, the Foundations of Oriental Medicine exam module will be offered in a computer-based fixed form (linear) format, to increase the number of updated exam items to be used for scoring on the exam. The exam content will not change only the administration of the exam. In the linear format, once all items have been answered, candidates can review and change answers within the remaining allotted time. *Preliminary pass or fail status will not be provided after the completion of the exam at the test center.* Official notification letters will be mailed 30-45 business days after the completion of the examination administration period.



Linear Exam		
Examinations	Number of Multiple-Choice Questions	Allotted Time
Foundations of Oriental Medicine (August and November 2017)	130	3.25 hours

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 of 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. From the examinee's perspective, the difficulty of the exam seems to tailor itself to their level of ability. In trying to determine the candidate's ability, the exam will continue to get more and more difficult, which can provide uniformly precise scores for most test-takers.

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, year-round testing as outlined above. These include no eligibility deadlines; application materials can be submitted at any time (allow 6-8 weeks for processing); candidates can schedule examinations at their convenience at over 250 Pearson VUE Professional Test Centers around the world; preliminary pass or fail status are available at the conclusion of the exam while at the test center, and official results can be sent, at the candidates' request, to the state licensing boards much more quickly. The most obvious benefits are that of shorter examinations and lowest possible overall costs to candidates.

Question #10: Is it true that the screen turns off after five minutes, from the time the computer is started by the proctor, if the first question is not answered?

Answer: Yes. The first question is a legal agreement that says you will treat everything you read on the examination with the utmost and absolute confidentiality. If you do not agree to this agreement presented on screen within the allotted **5 minutes**, you will be logged out of the test



program. In addition, you will not be allowed to continue the test and **your fees for that exam will not be refunded**. If you agree, just press **“I agree”** to start the examination. To ensure you are prepared, read the full text of the *Non-Disclosure Agreement and Full Terms of Use for the NCCAOM Exam* below:

Non-Disclosure Agreement and General Terms of Use for NCCAOM Exams

“I have read and understand the Examination Instructions. I have agreed to abide by the NCCAOM® Grounds for Professional Discipline and acknowledge that if I am caught cheating on this examination, including the sharing of information after the examination is complete; I will be subject to review by the Professional Ethics and Disciplinary Committee of NCCAOM. If I am found to have violated the Grounds for Professional Discipline, I understand that my scores will be cancelled and I may not have the opportunity to test again.

Additionally, I understand that this exam is confidential and is protected by trade secret law. It is made available solely for the purpose of becoming certified by NCCAOM. I am expressly prohibited from disclosing, publishing, reproducing, or transmitting this exam, in whole or in part, in any form or by any means, verbal or written, electronic or mechanical, for any purpose.

I am the candidate whose name appears on the initial screen and as an affirmation to the Statement of Acknowledgement I signed when submitting my application. I acknowledge that I am prohibited from transmitting information about NCCAOM examination questions or content in any form to any person or entity. I also acknowledge that if I suspect a violation on the part of others, it is my responsibility to report these actions to the NCCAOM.”

Question #11: How do I prepare for an exam?

Answer: NCCAOM provides a comprehensive [Study Guide](#) for each certification program and Suggested Study Tips and Strategies for candidates preparing to take the NCCAOM exam(s). In addition, each content outline is offered separately for those who would like to go directly to the individual exam content outline.

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

Answer: Yes. A list of herbal formulas is made available with the Chinese Herbology content outline on the NCCAOM website. *A list of single herbs is not available.*

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. This nomenclature list is available in each of the [NCCAOM® Study Guides](#).



Question #14: I am not certain what is covered in the Foundations of Oriental Medicine Examination compared to the Acupuncture with Point Location Examination, is there something I can review?

Answer: Please refer to the NCCAOM® *Study Guides* or *Content Outlines*, which can be accessed through the NCCAOM website, www.nccaom.org under the [Examination Preparation section](#). Each exam module has an expanded and abbreviated content outline in English, Chinese, or Korean.

Question #15: Do all the questions have to be answered on the exam or can some answers be blank?

Answer: You must answer all the questions on the exam for your examination to be scored. Adaptive testing does not allow the tester **to go back** to a question once they have moved onto the next question. Linear format testing allows the tester to go back and review the test questions once all questions are completed.

Question #16: How many questions must be answered correctly to pass an examination?

Answer: There is **NO predetermined** correct number of questions that must 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. For additional information, read [General Considerations for Setting a Passing Standard](#), and [Equating and Scaling: Assuring the Highest Level of Fairness for Examination Programs](#) under the Examination Results tab and under the Exam Scoring Information section of the NCCAOM website.

Question #17: 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 calendar 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. NCCAOM strongly encourages any candidate who fails an examination to seek additional study help. Speak with your school program director or faculty member, or research reputable test preparation services or publications that can assist you. The [NCCAOM® Study Guides](#) which contain the expanded content outlines are valuable resources available for your use and can be found on the NCCAOM website www.nccaom.org. Also, you are only allowed a total of five (5) opportunities to take an examination.



Question #18: I failed the exam and received my results report, what areas do I need to focus on for the next examination?

Answer: Using the results report, areas where the scaled score is below 70 units (not percentages) are the areas to focus your studies as well as take into consideration the content percentage of that section on the content outline. Please remember the scores are scaled scores, **not** percentages.

Question # 19: I failed the exam and added all the content areas together and it was higher than 70. How is the exam scored?

Answer: The scores are scaled scores; they **are not** percentages. Thereby, by adding the total scores of each section and dividing by the total number **is not** how the scores are calculated. An explanation of the scoring procedure performed by our psychometric vendor is included on the web site to help you understand the scoring procedure.

Please refer to the NCCAOM website under the Applicant Resources, [Exam Preparation Center](#) section, click on the Examination Results bar on the left, scroll to bottom of the Exam Scoring Information to the following document links for [General Considerations for Setting a Passing Standard](#), and [Equating and Scaling: Assuring the Highest Level of Fairness for Examination Programs](#).

Question #20: I failed the exam for the first time, how many candidates pass the exam during their first attempt?

Answer: Please refer to the pass rate comparison report for 2011-2016 below.

Exam Modules	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
AC/APLA**	86.5	85.5	85.7	82.5	79.7	75.9
BIO	79.6	86.6	91.9	74.1	72.3	73.5
CH	81.2	78.2	79.8	80.0	80.2	78.0
FOM	92.8	92.7	91.8	83.8	78.1	78.0

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

Question #21: Is there a limit as to how many times an exam can be taken?

Answer: Yes. Candidates are only allowed a total of five (5) opportunities to take an examination. After the fifth unsuccessful attempt to pass an NCCAOM examination (all formats and/or languages inclusive), the candidate has no subsequent opportunities to test in the particular exam.



Question #22: During my exam, I think one of the questions could have more than one correct answer, what is the procedure to have this question reviewed?

Answer: At the test center, a candidate can file an incident report regarding exam content concerns with the test proctor while the item is still fresh in one's mind. Be sure to obtain a copy of the incident report number. The incident report will be forwarded onto NCCAOM's testing staff upon request.

Also, please refer to the Examination Content Complaint section of the [NCCAOM® Certification Handbook](#). Candidates may submit concerns, believed errors in particular questions, or comments about specific aspects of the examination content, in writing to NCCAOM (examcontent@thenccaom.org) within 30 days of taking the examination. Please be as specific as possible when challenging a question(s) for the committee to review.

No content of a specific question will be discussed with candidates. **The NCCAOM never releases copies of examinations or individual examination questions**. It is important to refrain from discussing content of the examination questions with anyone other than the NCCAOM Testing Department otherwise there would be a violation of the non-disclosure agreement.

Question #23: I passed an exam; can I find out what is my numeric score?

Answer: For candidates that pass an examination, NCCAOM **does not** provide the total score of the exam nor a breakdown of the performance in each section since NCCAOM exams are designed to test entry level competence to practice, not to measure excellence.

A diagnostic report of each exam section is only provided for candidates that do not pass an examination, in order to assist them in focusing their studies.

Question #24: I passed all the required exams, what are the next steps?

Answer: Candidates who have fulfilled all requirements can expect to receive an email from NCCAOM confirming certification within 6-8 weeks. Feel free to contact the NCCAOM at info@thenccaom.org with questions regarding your certification status.

It is the candidate's responsibility to submit a request to the NCCAOM for their results to be sent to any regulatory agencies.

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