



NCCAOM[®] Examination 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 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 four of our certification exams except for Asian Bodywork Therapy exam and the foreign language exams, which means that “Approved to Test” candidates (who have received an authorization 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 Asian Bodywork Therapy exam will be administered in English during four, two-week time periods in 2012:

- **March 5 – 17, 2012**
- **June 4 – 16, 2012**
- **August 13 – 25, 2012**
- **October 29 – November 10, 2012**

The Foreign Language exams will be administered in Chinese and Korean during two, two-week time periods in 2012:

- **August 13 – 25, 2012**
- **October 29 – November 10, 2012**

Candidates can register for the examination(s) by calling Pearson VUE directly or registering online (the “Authorization to Test” letter will have detailed registration information and instructions). Candidates can 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 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 2012:

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

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

Answer: The Foreign Language exams will be administered during two, two-week time periods in 2012:

- **August 13 – 25, 2012**
- **October 29 – November 10, 2012**



The following exams are offered in Chinese and Korean:

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

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. The Asian Bodywork Therapy exam will no longer be offered as of January 1, 2013 but will be administered during four, two-week time periods in 2012:

- **March 5 – 17, 2012**
- **June 4 – 16, 2012**
- **August 13 – 25, 2012**
- **October 29 – November 10, 2012**

The Asian Bodywork Therapy exam is not offered in a foreign language.

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.

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.

This does not apply for linear exams - Asian Bodywork Therapy and foreign language examinations. Candidates taking a linear exam must wait 30-40 business days after the close of the test administration window to receive their score.

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

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



Adaptive Exams		
Examinations	Number of Multiple-Choice Questions	Allotted Time
Acupuncture with Point Location	100	2.5 hours
Biomedicine	100	2.5 hours
Chinese Herbology	100	2.5 hours
Foundations of Oriental Medicine	100	2.5 hours
Linear Exams		
Examinations	Number of Multiple-Choice Questions	Allotted Time
Asian Bodywork Therapy	100	2.5 hours
Foreign Language Exams	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 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. 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: 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. NCCAOM also offers online practice tests for a small fee, which are designed to demonstrate the format of the questions included on the exam but do not reflect the current exam content outlines. The practice tests are a great opportunity for candidates to become familiar with the NCCAOM examination format and to adjust to computerized testing. Performance on the practice tests is not an indicator for performance on the actual exam.

Question #11: 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. Another available option of remedial education is to collaborate with an ACAOM instructor or a state-licensed practitioner as a mentor in the area(s) of weakness. Work with the mentor to complete the *NCCAOM® Application for Remedial Education*. More information can be found on the NCCAOM website listed under *Professional Development Activity (PDA) - Continuing Education* or by contacting the NCCAOM Professional Development Activity (PDA) department from the 'Contact Us' page on the NCCAOM website. Also, you are only allowed a total of five (5) opportunities to take an examination.



Question #12: 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.

Question #13: Does the NCCAOM publish a list of formulas that will be tested in the Chinese Herbology Examination?

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

Question #14: 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 #15: 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 Exam Content section. Each exam module has an expanded and abbreviated content outline.

Question #16: 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 #17: 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 (not percentages) are the areas to focus your studies as well as taking into consideration the content percentage of



that section on the content outline. Please remember the scores are scaled scores, not percentages.

Question # 18: I failed the exam and added all my content areas together and it was higher than 70. How is the exam scored?

Answer: The scores provided in the score reports (diagnostics) 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 Approved Candidate section <http://www.nccaom.org/applicants/approved-candidate>, click on the Examination Information - General section, scroll to bottom of this section to Exam Scoring Information (document A - General Consideration for Standard Setting and document B - Equating and Scaling for Examination Programs).

Question #19: 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 2007-2011 below.

Pass Rate: First Time Test Takes for 2007 to 2011

Exam Modules	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
AC/APLA**	82.7	86.0	86.2	85.7	86.5
BIO	84.8	91.5	91.1	75.2	79.6
CH	75.2	81.6	80.1	80.6	81.2
FOM	92.9	96.2	95.0	94.8	92.7
PL	75.0				

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

Question #20: If I failed an exam more than three times, can I retake the exam again?

Answer: Candidates who have failed any exam group (e.g., Biomedicine: adaptive or linear, English or foreign language), more than three times must complete 15 hours of professional development activities and submit it to NCCAOM prior to the fourth attempt of the exam. Another available option of remedial education is to collaborate with an ACAOM instructor or a state-licensed practitioner as a mentor in the area(s) of weakness. Work with the mentor to complete the *NCCAOM® Application for Remedial Education*. More information can be found on the NCCAOM website listed under *Professional Development Activity (PDA) - Continuing Education* or by contacting the NCCAOM Professional Development Activity (PDA) department from the 'Contact Us' page on the NCCAOM website. Also, candidates who have failed an examination module five times can no longer retake that exam.



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