NCCAOM® Examination

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

The NCCAOM, a national certification organization, has compiled the following questions and answers to assist candidates and school representatives in understanding exam administration policies and procedures. The NCCAOM is committed to maintaining the integrity and fairness of the NCCAOM exams, in order that they serve as meaningful measures of entry-level competence to practice acupuncture and herbal medicine. This commitment to public safety cannot be overstated; it is a requirement of our mission, which is to ensure 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.

Click on any of the questions on the next page to be taken to the answer. Otherwise, keep reading this document for the answers to all questions. If your questions remain unanswered after reviewing this document, please email examcontent@thenccaom.org. If your questions are about the status of your application, or whether you are approved to take an exam, please email info@thenccaom.org.
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About the Exams

1. Are the exams offered in other languages besides English?

Yes. The Foundations of Oriental Medicine, Biomedicine, Acupuncture with Point Location, and Chinese Herbology exams are offered in Chinese and Korean languages.

**English language exams:**

The English language versions of the NCCAOM exams are offered year-round on computer at Pearson VUE test centers. “Approved to Test” candidates (those who have been notified by email that an Authorization to Test (ATT) letter is in their NCCAOM online portal ready to print) can take the Foundations of Oriental Medicine, Biomedicine, Acupuncture with Point Location, and Chinese Herbology exams throughout the year, pending availability at their desired test center location.

**Foreign language exams:**

There are currently Chinese and Korean language versions of the NCCAOM exams, which are also offered on computer at Pearson VUE test centers in linear format. Foreign language exams are not offered year-round, and in 2019 will be available during these time periods: March 4-16 (Chinese language only), August 5-17* and November 4-16*. For more information, such as the exam format and content outlines, click on the link for Foreign Language Exams from the General Examination Information page on the NCCAOM website.

*Please note that there must be a sufficient number of candidates registered to take a Korean language exam during an administration period, otherwise NCCAOM will cancel the exam. All candidates registered for the canceled exam will be refunded their entire payment to the credit card that was originally charged.

2. What is the format of the exam?

**English language exams:**

The Foundations of Oriental Medicine, Biomedicine, Acupuncture with Point Location, and Chinese Herbology examinations are administered in computer adaptive format, commonly referred to as computerized adaptive testing (CAT). Each exam consists of 100 multiple-choice questions with a 2.5-hour time limit. Adaptive testing allows the NCCAOM to provide year-round testing and preliminary exam results at the test center. However, during 2019 the last administration of adaptive testing will be October 31, 2019. Adaptive exams have long been used by other healthcare testing organizations and has been proven to be an efficient and reliable testing method.

In an adaptive exam, questions are selected for candidates according to the assigned domain percentages indicated from the exam content outline. Within each domain, questions are selected
to match candidate ability. What this means is that a candidate’s correct or incorrect answer to a question determines the next question they receive. If a question is answered correctly, the next question selected is more difficult. If a question is answered incorrectly, the next question selected is easier. Because the correct or incorrect answer to each question is used to select the next question, candidates are not able to change their answers to previous questions.

There are many benefits offered by adaptive testing. These include access to year-round testing, no exam registration deadlines, preliminary results provided at the test center, and expedited exam results delivery to state licensing Boards (upon candidate request). In addition, adaptive testing allows for more precise measurement of candidate ability using fewer questions than traditional linear exams. This feature allows adaptive exams to be shorter and therefore less expensive for candidates.

**Foreign language exams:**

Exams in Chinese and Korean are administered in computer-based, linear format. Questions are preselected for candidates according to the assigned domain percentages from the exam content outline. Once all items have been answered, candidates can review and change any of their answers within the remaining allotted time. However, preliminary results are not provided at the test center. Official result notification letters will be mailed approximately 45 business days after conclusion of the exam administration period.

3. **How do I prepare for an exam?**

The NCCAOM provides a comprehensive [NCCAOM® Candidate Preparation Guide](#) for each certification program. Each Guide includes an overview of the examination process, the examination content outlines, test specifications, bibliographies, a cross-reference of terms that are frequently used in English language literature, sample questions for the exams, and this NCCAOM® Examination: Frequently Asked Questions and Answers document. The Guides are free to download from the Examination Preparation section of the NCCAOM website, but a paper copy may be requested for a fee. Individual exam content outlines can be downloaded directly from this page as well.

4. **Does the NCCAOM publish a list of commonly used terms that may appear on the exam?**

Yes. The NCCAOM currently provides a nomenclature list, which is a cross-reference of terms that are frequently used in English language literature. This nomenclature list is available within each of the NCCAOM® Candidate Preparation Guides.
5. Does the NCCAOM publish a list of formulas that will be tested on the Chinese Herbology exam?

Yes. A list of herbal formulas is included with the 2019 Chinese Herbology (CH) content outline. A list of single herbs is not available within the 2019 CH content outline. Content outlines can be accessed from the Examination Preparation section of the NCCAOM website.

6. What’s covered in the Foundations of Oriental Medicine exam compared to the Acupuncture with Point Location exam?

Please refer to the NCCAOM® Candidate Preparation Guide or the Content Outlines, which can be accessed through the NCCAOM website under the Examination Preparation section. Each NCCAOM certification program has a NCCAOM® Candidate Preparation Guide which contains all available examination preparation materials in one document along with the related content outlines.

Each exam module has an expanded content outline in English, Chinese, and Korean. There are also abbreviated content outlines available in English.

7. How many candidates pass the exams on their first attempt?

Please refer to the chart below for 2015-2018 exam pass rates for first-time takers from Certification Route 1: Formal Education: United States Applicants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exam Module</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acupuncture with Point Location</td>
<td>79.7</td>
<td>75.9</td>
<td>79.4</td>
<td>77.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biomedicine</td>
<td>72.3</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>74.5</td>
<td>75.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Herbology</td>
<td>80.2</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td>83.9</td>
<td>78.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundations of Oriental Medicine</td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td>79.1</td>
<td>78.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. If I fail the exam, when can I take it again?

Candidates who fail an exam must wait 45 calendar days from their previous attempt before they can take it again. The NCCAOM recommends that you give yourself sufficient time to prepare to retake the exam that you failed, as each exam can only be taken 5 times. Please refer to question #11 for additional information.
9. **Is there a limit as to how many times an exam can be taken?**

Yes. Candidates are only allowed five (5) opportunities to take each exam module. After the fifth unsuccessful attempt (all formats and/or languages inclusive), the candidate will not be allowed to take the exam again. Please refer to question #11 for additional information.

10. **Are there plans to combine any other exams or make changes with any of the exams?**

The current 2019 adaptive format testing of the exams will conclude on **October 31, 2019**. New content outlines, as determined by the 2017 Job Analysis, will be effective in 2020. The **2020 content outlines** are currently posted on the NCCAOM website. All exam modules, Foundations of Oriental Medicine, Biomedicine, Acupuncture with Point Location, and Chinese Herbology, will be administered in linear format during the early part of 2020.

### English Language Exam Administration Schedule for 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2020 Linear Exams (All Modules) Administration Periods</th>
<th>Registration Opens</th>
<th>Registration Closes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 13 – February 1, 2020</td>
<td>11/7/2019</td>
<td>1/31/2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 27 – May 16, 2020</td>
<td>2/3/2020</td>
<td>5/15/2020</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Foreign Language Exam Administration Schedule for 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2020 Chinese and Korean* Language Exams Administration Period</th>
<th>Registration Opens</th>
<th>Registration Closes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 5-17, 2020</td>
<td>12/1/2019</td>
<td>7/31/2020</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Korean language exams may be canceled if not enough candidates registered.*
Approved Candidates Scheduling an Exam

Approved Candidate:

An Approved Candidate is one who has met the NCCAOM eligibility requirements and has been authorized to register for the NCCAOM exams. Approved Candidates will receive notification by email that an approved to test letter is in their NCCAOM online portal ready to print. It is imperative that the candidate keep their physical address up-to-date with the NCCAOM. The ATT letter is very important because it contains the information needed to schedule examinations and gain access to the Pearson VUE testing center. The candidate has the flexibility to select their own schedule and can register for an exam by telephone or over the internet.

Note: If you have any questions regarding your ATT letter or whether you are an Approved Candidate, please contact info@thenccaom.org.

11. When can I schedule an exam? Are there exam registration deadlines?

Candidates must allow 1-2 weeks, from the date their transcript and CNT are received, for the processing of their application for approval to take an exam. It is also important to remember that candidates must take and pass all required exams within four years from the date that the NCCAOM processed their application payment.

English language exams:

Candidates taking an NCCAOM exam in English can schedule at any time. Open registration means that once candidates are approved to test [receive an Authorization to Test (ATT) letter via their NCCAOM online portal], they can register and schedule their exam for any available time at their desired Pearson VUE test center. Candidates can register for their exams at their convenience and there a deadline of October 30, 2019 for registration. **October 31, 2019 will be the last day that the English exam modules will be offered in adaptive format.**

Candidates who fail an exam must wait **45 calendar days** before they can retake the same exam. The 45-day waiting period allows candidates to receive their diagnostic report and review any areas of weakness before repeating the exam. The NCCAOM strongly encourages candidates to study before retaking an exam, as candidates are only granted five opportunities to take any one exam. For more information click on the link to “**Re-taking an Examination**” from the NCCAOM website.
Foreign language exams:

Foreign language exams do have registration deadlines, shown in the following table. For the most up-to-date information about these exams, click on the link for Foreign Language Exams from the General Examination Information page on the NCCAOM website.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Foreign Language Exam Administration Periods</th>
<th>Registration Open</th>
<th>Registration Closes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>March 4-16, 2019</td>
<td>November 1, 2018</td>
<td>March 15, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>August 5-17, 2019</td>
<td></td>
<td>August 16, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>November 4-16, 2019</td>
<td></td>
<td>November 15, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean*</td>
<td>August 5-17, 2019</td>
<td>November 1, 2018</td>
<td>May 31, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>November 4-16, 2019</td>
<td></td>
<td>September 15, 2019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Please note that there must be a sufficient number of candidates registered to take a Korean language exam during an administration period, otherwise NCCAOM will cancel the exam. All candidates registered for the canceled exam will be refunded their entire payment to the credit card that was originally charged.

12. How do I schedule an exam?

Candidates can schedule any NCCAOM exam by calling Pearson VUE directly at (888) 235-7649, Monday through Friday, 7am-7pm CT, or by scheduling online at the Pearson VUE NCCAOM Certification Testing page. The candidate’s ATT letter provides registration information and detailed instructions on how to schedule an exam. Candidates can schedule their exams within the four-year period after their application has been approved. NCCAOM exams are administered at over 250 Pearson VUE Professional Test Centers around the world. When candidates schedule an exam, they pay Pearson VUE directly using Visa, MasterCard, or American Express credit cards.
Taking the Exam

13. Is it true that the screen turns off after 5 minutes, from the time the computer is started by the proctor, if the first question is not answered?

Yes. The first question is a legal agreement that says you will treat everything you see on the exam with the utmost and absolute confidentiality. You will have 5 minutes to review the agreement and select “I agree” to begin your exam. To ensure you are prepared for this step, please read the full text of the Non-Disclosure Agreement and Full Terms of Use for the NCCAOM Exam below.

If you do not accept this agreement presented on-screen within the allotted 5 minutes, your exam will terminate, and you will be locked out of the computer. In addition, you will not be allowed to continue with your exam and your fees for that exam will not be refunded. According to Pearson VUE rules, you may not begin writing on your note board until your test has been started. Therefore, candidates should not use their note boards until after they have agreed to the Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA). If your exam terminates because you were writing on your note board during the NDA, Pearson VUE will not be able to start your exam again, you will forfeit all the fees paid for the exam, and you will have to reregister and pay full fees for the exam if you wish to take it again.

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.”
14. Do all the questions have to be answered on the exam or can some answers be blank?

English language exams:

You must answer all 100 questions for your adaptive administered 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. See the answer to Question #2 for additional information.

Foreign language exams:

Exams in Chinese and Korean are administered in computer-based, linear format. The linear administered format allows candidates to go back and review their answers once all questions are completed. See the answer to Question #2 for additional information.

15. I think one of the questions I received could have more than one correct answer. What is the procedure to have this question reviewed?

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, and the concerns will be reviewed by multiple subject matter experts (licensed Acupuncturists who are considered experts in the exam content).

Also, please refer to the Examination Content Complaint section of the NCCAOM® Certification Handbook. Candidates may submit concerns, suspected errors in particular questions, or comments about specific aspects of the examination content by emailing the NCCAOM Testing staff at examcontent@thenccaom.org. All concerns must be in writing and received within 30 days of your exam. Please be as specific as possible when challenging a question(s) for the subject matter experts to review.

Please note that no specific exam content will be discussed with candidates, including whether your answers were correct or incorrect. The NCCAOM never releases copies of examinations or individual questions. This is considered best practice within the licensure/certification testing industry and the NCCAOM must protect the integrity of the exam – most especially its content. As the NCCAOM’s mission is to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the public, we take the security of our exam content very seriously and therefore never share any specific information about questions with candidates. It is important to refrain from discussing content of the exam with anyone other than the NCCAOM Testing staff, otherwise you will be in violation of the Non-Disclosure Agreement you accepted at the test center.
Exam Scoring & Results

16. How many questions must be answered correctly to pass an exam?

There is **NO predetermined** number of questions that must be answered correctly to pass an exam. It is not the number of correct answers that determines whether a candidate passes, but their **overall score** based on the difficulty of the questions answered correctly. For additional information, read **General Considerations for Setting a Passing Standard**, and **Equate and Scaling: Assuring the Highest Level of Fairness for Examination Programs**, accessible by clicking on the “Examination Results” link from the Examination Process page on the NCCAOM website.

17. What is a scaled score?

Scaled scores are measures of candidate performance, and the higher the score, the better the performance. Scaled scores range from 1 to 99, with 70 designated as the passing score. Scaled scores **DO NOT** represent the percentage of questions answered correctly on the exam.

**English language exams:**

A candidate’s raw score (the total number of questions answered correctly), taking into consideration question difficulty, is transformed into a scaled score. Because each candidate answers a unique set of questions on an adaptive exam, scaled scores are reported to provide a direct comparison of performance across candidates and exams. This allows candidates to be held to the same passing standard regardless of which questions they receive.

**Foreign language exams:**

A candidate’s raw score (the total number of questions answered correctly) is transformed into a scaled score for reporting purposes. This transformation is necessary because multiple forms are administered for each of our exams. Candidates are held to the same passing standard regardless of which form they take, so scaled scores are reported instead of raw scores to provide a direct comparison of performance across forms and administrations.

18. When will I receive my exam results?

**English language exams:**

Immediately after completing an adaptive format exam at a Pearson VUE test center, candidates receive notification on-screen regarding whether they passed or failed the exam. These results are **preliminary** and are verified by a third-party testing company before becoming **official**. An official results letter will be mailed to the candidate within 20 business days after completion of the exam. Until the official results letter is received, exam results are **considered preliminary**. Candidates can
request that their exam results be sent directly to their state licensing Board, which may expedite the state licensure process.

**Foreign language exams:**

Preliminary results are not provided for foreign language exams. Official results letter will be mailed to candidates approximately 45 business days after the last day of the exam administration period.

19. I failed the exam. What areas do I need to focus on for the next exam?

The NCCAOM recommends that you use the scaled scores in the Examination Content Area Diagnostic Report in your official results letter to provide guidance regarding the area(s) in which remediation is needed, starting in the area with the lowest scaled score. However, keep in mind that each content area consists of a small number of questions, making this information less reliable than the total scaled score that measures overall exam performance. In other words, the small number of questions in each content area limits the degree to which you can generalize performance to a strength or weakness in a content area. Regardless of your content area scaled scores, the NCCAOM suggests that you study the entire Expanded Content Outline in preparation for your next exam, which are free to download from the Examination Preparation section of the NCCAOM website. The NCCAOM Testing staff are not subject matter experts and cannot provide any guidance on how to study for the exam.

The NCCAOM strongly encourages any candidate who fails to seek guidance on how to prepare for the exam. Speak with your school program director, a faculty member, or a mentor, or research reputable test preparation services or publications that can assist you. The NCCAOM Candidate Preparation Guides, which contain the Expanded Content outlines and a bibliography of study references, are valuable resources and can be downloaded for free from the NCCAOM website under the Examination Preparation section.

20. I failed the exam. How do I request verification of my exam results and overall scaled score?

You may request that your exam be rescored within 30 days of receiving initial notification that you failed the exam. The score verification process is simply a manual check of the computer’s scoring, conducted by NCCAOM Testing staff, to ensure that your responses were accurately recorded. Score verification does not include a review of examination content or reconsideration of the correct answer to any item. If you would like to submit a score verification request, please complete the NCCAOM Score Verification Request form and email to info@thenccaom.org. An invoice will be issued on your NCCAOM online portal where you will apply payment. There is a $100 score verification fee per exam. Individual items and exam content will not be discussed or considered during the score verification process.
Please note that the NCCAOM does not encourage score verification requests. We enforce strict quality control procedures to ensure exam results are accurate before they are released to candidates. Every exam is scored independently by two professional testing companies to ensure each item is scored accurately and the overall score is correct. In addition, both testing companies have multiple checks in place to flag anomalies in test data that require investigation. Due to the thoroughness of the NCCAOM’s examination scoring procedures, no errors have ever been identified from a score verification request.

21. **How did I fail the exam when the average of my content area scaled scores was 70 (or higher)?**

Your overall scaled score cannot be calculated from the content area scaled scores provided on your Examination Content Area Diagnostic Report. The content areas contain varying numbers of questions, so an average of your content areas scores is not the same as your overall scaled score. Your overall scaled score is based solely on your performance on the entire exam.

22. **I passed the exam. What was my score?**

Candidates who pass the exam will not receive their total score or a breakdown of their performance in each content area. NCCAOM exams are designed to test entry-level competence to practice, not to measure excellence.

The purpose of the Examination Content Area Diagnostic Report is to assist candidates who fail the exam in understanding the strengths and weaknesses of their performance and to help focus study efforts.

23. **I passed all the required exams. Does this mean I’m now certified?**

Passing all required NCCAOM exams does not automatically result in certification. Candidates are certified, become a Diplomate of NCCAOM, after all required documents are accepted and their name appears on the NCCAOM Registry. See the NCCAOM® Certification Handbook for information about the documents required to become certified.

Diplomates may represent or advertise their NCCAOM certification to employers, insurance companies and the public by directing them to the NCCAOM Registry. Certified active Diplomates will receive the official NCCAOM congratulatory letter, the wallet-size identification card and a certificate suitable for framing approximately six (6) weeks after certification (active Diplomate status) is achieved.

It is the candidate’s responsibility to submit a request to the NCCAOM via their online portal for their results to be sent to any regulatory agencies.
24. How long are my exam results valid?

Continued Active Diplomate status through initial certification and continued recertification ensures that exam results remain valid.

A limit is placed on the number of years an exam result is valid for the purpose of NCCAOM certification. The NCCAOM grants up to eight (8) years for first time candidate exam validity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status:</th>
<th>Exam Score Validity for Achieving Initial Certification:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diplomate – Certified, Active</td>
<td>No expiration date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Diplomate – Inactive</td>
<td>No expiration date [for up to 2 years]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Diplomate – Lapsed</td>
<td>3 years from active certification expiration date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Diplomate – Terminated</td>
<td>All exam results expired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate - Application In Process</td>
<td>8 years from exam date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate - Reapply Application In Process</td>
<td>8 years from exam date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate – Application Expired</td>
<td>8 years from exam date</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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