



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 its 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 questions remain unanswered concerning exam content after reviewing this document, please email examcontent@thenccaom.org. For questions regarding the application status or approval to take an exam, please email info@thenccaom.org. For questions regarding the retake policy or the number of attempts after five unsuccessful attempts, please email examattempts@thenccaom.org.



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About the Exams

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

At this time, the NCCAOM exams are only offered in English. The NCCAOM has canceled the administration of the 2022 Chinese and Korean language exams due to the low number of candidates interested in taking these exams, which affects the psychometric reliability of the exams. Due to the complexity of the foreign language examinations, they are scheduled only when an ascertained number of candidates are registered per examination. When these exams are offered, they are computer-based, fixed form (linear) that consist of 100 multiple-choice questions.

2. What is the format of the exam?

The exams are offered in adaptive format which allows the NCCAOM to provide year-round testing and *preliminary* exam results are generated at the test center. Computer adaptive testing has long been used by other healthcare testing organizations and has been proven to be an efficient and reliable testing method.

In a computer adaptive exam, questions are selected for candidates according to the assigned domain percentages indicated from the [exam content outline \(opens in new tab\)](#). 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 computer adaptive testing such as 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, computer 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.

3. How do I prepare for an exam?

The NCCAOM provides a comprehensive [NCCAOM® Candidate Preparation Handbook \(opens in new tab\)](#) for each certification program. Each Handbook 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 Handbooks are free to download from the [Exam Preparation Center \(opens in new tab\)](#) section of the NCCAOM website. Individual exam content outlines can be downloaded directly (free) 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 Handbooks \(opens in new tab\)](#).

5. For the Acupuncture with Point Location exam, are the acupuncture point number and pinyin provided?

Yes. The acupuncture point number and pinyin are provided for the points [e.g., CV (Ren) 6 (Qihai), Erbai (Extra), etc.].

6. Does the NCCAOM publish a list of single herbs and herbal formulas that will be tested on the Chinese Herbology exam?

Yes. A list of single herbs and herbal formulas are included with the Chinese Herbology (CH) content outline. Based on the results of the 2017 Job Analysis, the list of single herbs has been implemented as of January 2020. Content outlines can be accessed from the [Exam Preparation Center \(opens in new tab\)](#) section of the NCCAOM website.

7. What is covered in the Foundations of Oriental Medicine exam compared to the Acupuncture with Point Location exam?

Please refer to the [NCCAOM® Candidate Preparation Handbook \(opens in new tab\)](#) or the [content outlines \(opens in new tab\)](#), which can be accessed through the NCCAOM website under the [Exam Preparation Center \(opens in new tab\)](#) section. Each NCCAOM certification program has an *NCCAOM® Candidate Preparation Handbook* which contains all available examination preparation materials in one document along with the related content outlines.

Content outlines are available for each exam module in English, Chinese, and Korean.



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

No, there are no immediate plans. As determined by the 2017 Job Analysis, the [content outlines \(opens in new tab\)](#) are currently posted on the NCCAOM website and are effective as of January 1, 2020. The current content outlines are effective until the next Job Analysis. The Foundations of Oriental Medicine, Biomedicine, Acupuncture with Point Location, and Chinese Herbology exams are administered in English in the adaptive format.

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 authorization to test (ATT) letter is in their online account located in the ready to print. It is imperative that the candidate keep their physical address, email address, and name changes current with the NCCAOM. The ATT letter is especially 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 via telephone or online.

Note: Any questions regarding a candidate's ATT letter or whether a candidate is an Approved Candidate, please email info@thenciaom.org.

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

Candidates must allow 1 - 2 weeks, from the date their transcript and Clean Needle Technique (CNT) Certificate of Completion are received, for processing of their application, and for approval to take an exam. It is also important to remember that candidates must take and pass all required exams within four (4) years from the date that the NCCAOM processed their application payment.

Candidates taking an NCCAOM exam can schedule at any time. Open registration means that once candidates are approved to test [receive an ATT letter via their online account located in the NCCAOM portal], they can register and schedule their exam for any available time at their desired Pearson VUE test center. Candidates can register to take their exams at their convenience.



Candidates who are unsuccessful in passing an exam 1 - 4 times 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. For information concerning additional attempts view the “[Re-taking an Examination \(opens in new tab\)](#)” on the *When Taking Board Exams* page from the NCCAOM website.

10. How do I schedule an exam?

Candidates can schedule an 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 \(opens in new tab\)](#). 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. Due to the constant changing of events regarding COVID-19, please check the [Pearson VUE website \(opens in new tab\)](#) for the latest update.

Taking the Exam

11. Is it true that the computer 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 on the computer screen is a legal agreement that says the candidate will treat everything seen on the exam with the utmost and absolute confidentiality. **The candidate will have 5 minutes to review the Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) and select “I agree” to begin the exam.** To ensure that candidates 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 the candidate does not accept this NDA presented on-screen within the allotted 5 minutes, the exam will terminate, and the candidate will be locked out of the computer. In addition, the candidate will not be allowed to continue with the exam and **fees for that exam will not be refunded.** According to Pearson VUE rules, candidates may not begin writing on the note board until the test has begun. **Therefore, candidates should not use their note boards until after they have agreed to the NDA.** If the exam terminates because the candidate was writing on their note board during the NDA,



Pearson VUE will not be able to start the exam again, the candidate will forfeit all the fees paid for the exam, and the candidate will have to reregister and pay full fees for the exam if they wish to take it again. For more information, please contact info@thenccaom.org.

Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) 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 canceled, 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.”

The NCCAOM is committed to the integrity and security of its examinations. Candidates have a duty to maintain strict confidentiality with respect to the content of the examinations and comply with all examination security policies and procedures. Any breach of confidentiality that may compromise the security of the examination content (e.g., sharing or receiving information about the examination from another person including teachers/professors, before, during, or after the examination) will be grounds for disciplinary action, including but not limited to denial or revocation of certification by the NCCAOM.

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

Candidates must answer all the questions for the examination to be scored. Computer adaptive testing is offered year-round and **does not allow the test-taker to go back to**



review a question once they have moved onto the next question. See the answer to Question #2 for additional information.

13. What happens if there are computer technical difficulties or a power outage at the test center?

On rare occasions, technical difficulties at the test center may be encountered. If the test center experiences an unexpected, temporary power outage during an administration, back-up systems are in place, so every reasonable effort will be made to retrieve testing data. The candidate's examination will restart from the point where it was interrupted, and the candidate continues the examination. Every attempt is made to administer the examination as scheduled; however, should an examination be canceled at a testing center, all scheduled candidates will receive notification by e-mail or telephone regarding rescheduling.

14. I have a concern with one of the questions on the exam, what is the procedure to have this question reviewed?

Candidates may submit questions or comments about specific aspects of the exam content in writing to NCCAOM (examcontent@thenccaom.org) within 30 days of taking the exam as indicated in the [Examination Content Review Process \(opens in new tab\)](#) section of the NCCAOM website and in the [NCCAOM® Certification Handbook \(opens in new tab\)](#). Only individual items will be reviewed, and reviews are not conducted on a candidate's entire exam. The written inquiry must include the candidate's name, NCCAOM ID, email address, test date and location, examination taken (FOM, ACPL, BIO, CH) and a description of the specific item (e.g., an item with a pregnant patient could have more than one correct answer). Failing an examination alone is not sufficient grounds to submit a request. At the test center, candidates can also file an incident report regarding exam content concerns with the test proctor while the item is still fresh in their mind. The test proctor is only allowed to record the question (item) number as they are not allowed to record any exam content specifics or description of the exam items. Be sure to obtain a copy of the incident report number.

The request will first be reviewed by the NCCAOM Testing Department to determine if question or comment is to be presented to the NCCAOM® Examination Review Committee for a final determination. Please note that submission of a request does not automatically lead to a rescoring of the exam or Committee review. If the question under review is found to have a discrepancy, the candidate's examination will be rescored. The candidate will be notified in writing within 45 business days of any resulting action of



the inquiry. All determinations of the NCCAOM® Examination Review Committee are final.

Please note that no information regarding the specific question will be discussed with candidates, including whether a candidate's answers were correct or incorrect. The NCCAOM never releases copies of examinations or individual examination 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 imperative the candidate refrain from discussing the content of the examination question with anyone other than the NCCAOM Testing Department. Doing so is a violation of the *NCCAOM® Non-Disclosure Agreement*. The NCCAOM is committed to the integrity and security of its examinations. Candidates have a duty to maintain strict confidentiality with respect to the content of the examinations and comply with all examination security policies and procedures. Any breach of confidentiality that may compromise the security of the examination content (e.g., sharing or receiving information about the examination from another person including teachers/professors, before, during, or after the examination) will be grounds for disciplinary action, including but not limited to denial or revocation of certification by the NCCAOM.

15. There were several questions on my exam that were not taught at my school, can you explain?

Please remember that the NCCAOM offers **national** certification examinations. NCCAOM conducts a Job Analysis (JA) every five to seven years to validate and ensure that our certification examinations are reflective of current practice in all regions of the United States and not just one geographical region. NCCAOM exams are derived from the JA survey and do not match school curriculum as that is not the job of a national certification exam. It measures competency of current practice and not what schools are teaching. It would be very difficult to match the curriculum of 60 plus schools. For more information, please read an article from [Acupuncture Today \(opens in new tab\)](#).



Exam Attempts

16. I was unsuccessful in passing the exam, when can I retake the exam?

Candidates who were unsuccessful in passing an exam 1 - 4 times must wait 45 calendar days from their previous attempt before they can take it again. The NCCAOM recommends that candidates give themselves sufficient time to prepare to retake the exam that they were unsuccessful in passing. NCCAOM has changed the number of exam attempts, for additional information view [“Re-taking an Examination \(opens in new tab\)”](#) on the *When Taking Board Exams* page from the NCCAOM website.

17. Is there a limit as to how many times an exam can be taken?

Candidates have five (5) opportunities to successfully pass an examination once their graduate transcript and Clean Needle Technique (CNT) Certificate of Completion are received at NCCAOM. After the fifth unsuccessful attempt to pass an NCCAOM examination (all formats and/or languages inclusive), the candidate must satisfy additional educational requirements based on multiple factors like certification application validity, etc. to receive additional exam attempts. For additional information refer to [“Re-taking an Examination \(opens in new tab\)”](#) on the *When Taking Board Exams* page on the NCCAOM website. NCCAOM has initiated a new attempt policy after the fifth unsuccessful attempt. Please email examattempts@thenccaom.org for further information.

Exam Scoring and Results

18. 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 \(PDF\)](#), and [Equating and Scaling: Assuring the Highest Level of Fairness for Examination Programs \(PDF\)](#), accessible on the “Examination Results” section from the [Examination Process \(opens in new tab\)](#) page on the NCCAOM website.

19. 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. For additional information, read [General Considerations for Setting a Passing Standard \(PDF\)](#), and [Equating and Scaling: Assuring the Highest Level of Fairness for Examination Programs \(PDF\)](#), accessible on the “Examination Results” section from the [Examination Process \(opens in new tab\)](#) page on the NCCAOM website.

The 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.

20. When will I receive my exam results?

Immediately after completing an adaptive format exam at a Pearson VUE test center, candidates receive **preliminary** notification on-screen regarding whether they passed or failed the exam. As stated, 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.

21. What areas do I need to focus on for the next exam when I was unsuccessful in passing?

The NCCAOM recommends that candidates use the scaled scores in the Examination Content Area Diagnostic Report in their 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 the candidate can generalize performance to a strength or weakness in a content area. Regardless of the content area scaled scores, the NCCAOM suggests that the candidate study the entire [NCCAOM Content Outlines \(opens in new tab\)](#) in preparation for their next exam, which are free to download from 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 was unsuccessful in passing to seek guidance on how to prepare for the exam. Speak with a school program director, a faculty member, or a mentor, or research reputable test preparation services or publications that can provide assistance. The *NCCAOM® Candidate Preparation Handbook*, which contain the Content Outlines and a bibliography of study references, are valuable resources and can be downloaded for free from the NCCAOM website under the [Exam Preparation Center \(opens in new tab\)](#) section.

22. I was unsuccessful in passing the exam; how do I request verification of my exam results and overall scaled score?

Candidates may request that their exam score be verified within 30 days of receiving initial notification that a candidate was unsuccessful in passing the exam. The score verification process is simply a manual check of the computer's scoring, conducted by NCCAOM Testing staff, to ensure that the candidate's responses were accurately recorded. **Score verification does not include a review of examination content or reconsideration of the correct answer to any item. Individual items and exam content will not be discussed or considered during the score verification process.** To request a score verification, the candidate should complete and submit the [NCCAOM® Score Verification Request form \(opens in new tab\)](#). An invoice will be issued on the candidate's online account located in the NCCAOM portal for payment. There is a \$100 exam score verification fee per exam.

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.

23. The average of my content area scaled scores was 70 (or higher), why did I receive an unsuccessful status?

The overall **scaled score** cannot be calculated from the content area scaled scores provided on the candidate's Examination Content Area Diagnostic Report. The content areas contain varying numbers of questions, so an average of the content areas scores is



not the same as the overall scaled score. The overall scaled score is based solely on the candidate’s performance on the entire exam.

For additional information, read [General Considerations for Setting a Passing Standard \(PDF\)](#), and [Equating and Scaling: Assuring the Highest Level of Fairness for Examination Programs \(PDF\)](#), accessible on the “Examination Results” section from the [Examination Process \(opens in new tab\)](#) page on the NCCAOM website.

24. 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 were unsuccessful in passing the exam, understand the strengths and weaknesses of their performance and to help focus study efforts.

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

Please refer to the chart below for 2017-2021 exam pass rates for first-time takers from Certification Route 1: Formal Education: United States Applicants.

Exam Module	2017	2018	2019	2020*	2021
Acupuncture with Point Location	79.4	77.8	75.9	74.2	70.6
Biomedicine	74.5	75.5	75.8	72.3	73.2
Chinese Herbology	83.9	78.4	72.2	63.0	69.5
Foundations of Oriental Medicine	79.1	78.6	79.2	95.4	96.1

*Implementation of new content outlines in 2020

Obtaining Certification

26. I passed all the required exams. Does this mean I am now certified?

Passing all required NCCAOM exams does not automatically result in certification. Candidates are certified and become a Diplomate of NCCAOM, after all required documents are accepted. Then their name appears on the [NCCAOM Registry \(opens in new tab\)](#). See the [NCCAOM® Certification Handbook \(opens in new tab\)](#) 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 \(opens in new tab\)](#). Certified active Diplomates will receive the official NCCAOM congratulatory letter, the wallet-size identification card, and a wall certificate suitable for framing approximately six (6) weeks after certification (active Diplomate status) is achieved. USPS maintains tracking information for only 90 days. Candidates who have not received their certificate and ID card at ten (10) weeks after certification, please email the NCCAOM at info@thenccaom.org

It is the candidate’s responsibility to submit a request to the NCCAOM via their online account located in the NCCAOM portal for their results to be sent to any regulatory agencies.

27. How long are my exam results valid?

Continued Active Diplomate status through initial certification and continued recertification ensures that exam results do not expire.

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 12 years for first time candidate exam validity.

<u>Status:</u>	<u>Exam Score Validity for Achieving Initial Certification:</u>
Diplomate - Certified, Active	No expiration date
Former Diplomate - Inactive	No expiration date [for up to 2 years]
Former Diplomate - Lapsed	3 years from active certification expiration date
Former Diplomate - Terminated	All exam results expired
Candidate - Application in Process	12 years from exam date
Candidate - Reapply Application in Process	12 years from exam date
Candidate - Application Expired	12 years from exam date



Updated: February 2022

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