

TEST-TAKING TIPS for the NCE

The National Counselor Exam (NCE) is a very comprehensive examination and can be very overwhelming, especially when you are not prepared for how the instrument is constructed and administered.

Test Administration

The test is now administered on a monthly basis in Columbia, Georgetown and Spartanburg at a testing facility on a computer; the test is time limited (i.e. you have up to 4 hours to complete the exam). Be sure to bring a photo id with you, as this is required. You are allowed short bathroom breaks, but (of course) you cannot take anything out or bring anything back with you. Currently the test scores still don't come back for up to 6 weeks, which can seem an eternity.

Test Construction

It is crucial that you become familiar with the eight major content areas (see below) and the five domains/contexts (fundamentals of counseling, assessment & career counseling, group counseling, programmatic and clinical interventions, and professional practice issues).

The test is comprised of 200 multiple-choice questions (choice of 4 answers), however only 160 of them count! The other 40 are 'developmental test' questions and answers to these questions do not count for or against you, and these questions can be in any area, or all in one area (i.e. it may make it look like the test has a lot more questions on a certain content area than you think it should. Therefore, you are only scored on the 160 questions that are not developmental in nature.

The questions are also all intermixed and not separated into different sections on the test.

The questions appear on the NCE as follows:

Human Growth & Development	12 items	7.5%
Social/Cultural Foundations	11	7.0
Helping Relationships	36	22.5
Group Work	16	10.0
Career/Lifestyle Development	20	12.5
Appraisal	20	12.5
Research/Evaluation	16	10.0
Professional Orientation	29	18.0
TOTAL:	160 items	100%
 Fundamentals of Counseling	 64 items	 40%
Assessment/Career Counseling	23 items	14

Group Counseling	19 items	12%
Programmatic & Clinical Interventions	26 items	16
Professional Practice Issues	28 items	18
TOTAL:	160 items	100%

A passing score is usually between 98-105 and fluctuates with each test administration. This is determined by NBCC. Only the overall score counts, so if you bombed out in one area but excelled in another, you can make up for it! NOTE: In recent years the fail rate for the first time administration of this exam is close to 60%. Yes, this is a hard test.

If you end up needing another option, SC allows you to take the National Clinical Mental Health Counselor Exam (NCMHCE) instead. The only problem is that if you move, you may move to a state that does not accept it as an alternate exam, as only about 15 states currently give that option. The NCMHCE is very different from the NCE and focuses on assessment and diagnosis, using the DSMIV. One thing you may want to take into consideration, however, is that the NCMHCE may eventually be required in the future to be a Tricare provider, and a few states have gone to requiring *both exams* in order to be qualified to treat serious mental illnesses.

Free sampler exams for both of these instruments can be accessed at www.nbcc.org

There are lots of good exam prep materials out there; they range from \$20 upwards of \$300. One particularly good one that is medium-priced (about \$80) is a manual for LPC exam prep printed by Andrew Helwig. You can check out details and ordering information by visiting his website at www.counselor-exam-prep.com/studyguide.htm If you need prep materials for the NCMHCE, the *Clinical Mental Health Counselor Handbook & Study Guide 2nd Edition* is excellent (but expensive -- \$240) and it can be ordered at www.psychotherapiststraininginst.com

More Tips

1. Eat well the night before, try to get as much sleep that night as possible. Get up in time for a light breakfast without having to rush around. Get to the exam site at least 15 minutes early for good measure.
2. As soon as you get to your computer station:
Draw the bell curve and scores that relate to it (z-scores, t-scores, SD, etc.)
Write down information you might forget
3. The exam is 200 questions long and you have 4 hours to complete it. Pace yourself. You may want to be sure that at the halfway mark (2 hrs.) you are at least halfway through the exam.
4. Answer all the questions. Questions left unanswered are counted wrong, so guessing is better than not answering.

5. **Your first answer is probably right.**
6. **When a question asks for the “best” answer, that means there is most likely more than *one* correct choice, so be sure to read *all* answers before you choose one!**
7. **If you know that more than one of the choices is probably correct, consider choosing “all of the above”**
8. **The choice has a good probability of being right if it contains “sometimes”, “probably” or “some”.**
9. **If two choices are similar, the correct answer is probably neither of them!**
10. **If you have eliminated more one or more choices and are stuck:
If two choices sound alike, choose neither.
If two quantities are very close, choose one of them.
If 2 numbers differ only by a decimal point, choose one of them
If 2 choices look alike & are formulas or shapes, choose 1 of them**
11. **Don’t beat yourself up if you feel you have bombed out; many people think this and find they actually passed with flying colors!**
12. **Remember it is not the end of the world if you did not pass this time around. If this is the case, you are better prepared for the next time, and you are in good company. It is a very hard test.**

Remember that most people (even those who have done VERY well on the exam) feel that they may have failed the exam. If you feel this way, you are in good company. You can also take the exam again if you do not pass. You can take it up to three times in a row; if you still have not passed after the 3rd attempt, they usually require you to show proof of taking a prep course of some type. The SC Board of Examiners for LPCs also give the choice of taking the National Clinical Mental Health Counselor Exam (NCMHCE) or the National Counselor Exam (NCE). The former is more clinical-based and examines for clinical assessment/diagnostic skills and therapeutic competencies.