



NATIONAL BOARD FOR
CERTIFIED COUNSELORS®

Applicant Handbook for National Certification

with the National Clinical Mental Health Counseling Examination (NCMHCE)

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CENTER FOR
CREDENTIALING
& EDUCATION™

NBCC and CCE value diversity.
There are no barriers to credentialing on the basis of gender, race, creed, age, sexual orientation or national origin.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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INTRODUCTION

This handbook provides information about the examination process for the National Clinical Mental Health Counseling Examination (NCMHCE) when taken for the purposes of national certification. It outlines the design and content of the examination and guides applicants through the examination process, from registration through test-taking. For your convenience, this handbook may be downloaded from www.nbcc.org.

ABOUT NBCC

The National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC) is internationally recognized as a leading provider of counselor certification. Additionally, fifty states, Puerto Rico, Guam and the District of Columbia administer NBCC examinations as part of their counselor credentialing requirements. Based on its reputation for excellence in the examination field, NBCC has provided consultation services for examination and credential development to many other organizations in the United States and abroad, including NBCC's affiliate the Center for Credentialing & Education (CCE). NBCC has contracted with CCE to oversee the examination process.

INDEPENDENT TESTING AGENCY

NBCC has contracted with Pearson VUE to assist in the administration and scoring of the NCMHCE. Pearson VUE is headquartered in suburban Minneapolis, Minnesota, with regional offices in Australia, China, Dubai, India, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States.

NONDISCRIMINATION POLICY

NBCC and Pearson VUE do not discriminate against applicants on the basis of gender, race, creed, age, sexual orientation or national origin.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Applicants for national certification through NBCC may be registered for the NCMHCE based on established eligibility review policies and procedures. Please refer to the NBCC web site for detailed information regarding certification eligibility requirements.

EXAMINATION ADMINISTRATION

For purposes of certification, the NCMHCE is administered twice a year, in April and October. It is delivered by computer at more than 900 Pearson VUE testing centers located throughout the United States.

The examination is administered by appointment only on dates authorized by NBCC, Monday through Saturday, beginning at 8 a.m. with the last appointment starting at 5:30 p.m. Applicants will be contacted by Pearson VUE to schedule their examination date, time and location.

REGISTERING FOR AN EXAMINATION

The registration process is one element of the national certification application. Applicants cannot schedule an examination appointment with Pearson VUE until the application has been submitted and approved by NBCC. Pearson VUE will then send e-mail notification to registered applicants with examination scheduling procedures.

FEES AND REFUND POLICY

Applicants must submit the appropriate fee with the application. Payment may be made by credit card (VISA, MasterCard or American Express). **Application fees are not refundable or transferable.**

SCHEDULING AN EXAMINATION

After you have submitted your application and are approved to schedule your examination, you will receive an e-mail from Pearson VUE with instructions on how to schedule your exam. There are two ways to schedule an examination appointment:

1. Online scheduling is the **preferred** method. To use this service:

- Retrieve your applicant ID number from the e-mail you received from Pearson VUE.
- Go to www.pearsonvue.com/cce and select "Create Account."
- Follow the simple, step-by-step instructions to select your examination program and register for an examination.

OR

2. Telephone:

- Retrieve your applicant ID number from the e-mail you received from Pearson VUE.
- Call Pearson VUE at 866-904- 4432 to schedule an examination appointment. This toll-free number is answered from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Central time Monday through Friday. You may experience extended hold times.

When scheduling an examination, be prepared to confirm a location and a preferred date and time for testing, and to provide your applicant ID number. Pearson VUE will use this number as an identification number in maintaining your record. When you contact Pearson VUE to schedule an examination appointment, you will be notified of the time to report to the testing center. Please make a note of it, because you will **not** receive an admission letter.

TESTING CENTER LOCATIONS

Pearson VUE testing centers have been selected to provide accessibility to most applicants in all states and major metropolitan areas. A current listing of Pearson VUE testing centers, including addresses and driving directions, is available at Pearson VUE's website (www.pearsonvue.com). Specific address information will also be provided when an applicant schedules an examination appointment.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR APPLICANTS WITH DISABILITIES

NBCC and Pearson VUE comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act and strive to ensure that no individual with a disability is deprived of the opportunity to take an examination solely by reason of that disability. With supporting documentation, CCE and Pearson VUE will provide reasonable accommodations for applicants with disabilities, applicants who have temporary conditions that may prevent them from testing under standard conditions and applicants for whom English is a second language.

Applicants testing with approved special accommodations must schedule their examination via Pearson VUE's toll-free number and inform Pearson VUE of the need for special accommodations. Please note, in order for an accommodation to be approved, the applicant must contact CCE's special examination coordinator at accommodations@cce-global.org to submit supporting documentation for an accommodation request. Applicants should not schedule the exam without confirmation of the approved special accommodations. Applicants who schedule their examination date prior to confirmation of the approved special accommodations will forfeit the scheduled exam and the exam date will be rescheduled.

MISSED APPOINTMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS

An applicant forfeits the examination registration and all fees paid to take the examination when he or she:

- Intends to reschedule an examination but fails to contact Pearson VUE at least 24 hours before the examination appointment.
- Arrives more than 15 minutes late for an examination.
- Fails to report for an examination appointment for any reason.

Applicants who need to reregister will do so through their ProCounselor account.

EXAMINATION DEFERRALS

You may postpone or defer your examination date to the next available administration without penalty as long as you contact NBCC more than 30 days prior to the exam date. If your request is less than 30 days prior to the exam or if you do not take the exam on your scheduled date, you will pay a reregistration fee to take it on the next administration date. If an emergency (illness, accident, death in the family, etc.) prevents you from taking the exam on your scheduled date, you may be eligible for a waiver of the reregistration fee, depending on your specific circumstances.

INCLEMENT WEATHER, POWER FAILURE OR EMERGENCY

In the event of inclement weather or unforeseen emergencies on the day of an examination, Pearson VUE will determine whether circumstances warrant the cancellation and subsequent rescheduling of an examination.

The examination will usually be rescheduled if the testing center personnel are unable to open the facility. If power to a testing center is temporarily interrupted during an administration, your examination will restart where you left off and you may continue the examination.

Every attempt is made to administer the examination as scheduled; however, should an examination be cancelled at a testing center, all scheduled applicants will receive notification by e-mail or telephone regarding rescheduling or reregistration procedures.

EXAMINATION CONTENT

The simulations on the NCMHCE are designed to sample a broad area of competencies, not the recall of isolated facts. Therefore, these simulations assess clinical problem-solving ability, including identifying, analyzing, diagnosing and treating clinical problems.

The examination consists of 10 clinical mental health counseling cases. Each case is divided into five to 10 sections classified as either Information Gathering (IG) or Decision Making (DM). The examination covers the following areas:

ASSESSMENT AND DIAGNOSIS

Example assessment and diagnosis work behaviors include the following:

- Integrate client assessment and observational data;
- Identify precipitating problems or symptoms;
- Identify individual and/or relationship functioning; and
- Identify relevant family issues.

COUNSELING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

Example counseling and psychotherapy work behaviors include the following:

- Inform client about ethical standards and practice;
- Clarify counselor/client roles;
- Implement individual counseling in relation to a plan of treatment; and
- Evaluate referral information.

ADMINISTRATION, CONSULTATION AND SUPERVISION

Example administration, consultation and supervision work behaviors include the following:

- Maintain case notes, records and/or files;
- Determine if services meet clients' needs;
- Communicate orally with others to maintain professional communications; and
- Assist clients with obtaining services.

EXAMINATION FORMAT

A clinical mental health counselor is required to make important clinical decisions regarding the well-being of clients. Therefore, a clinical simulation examination is used to more realistically assess knowledge in such decision-making.

The NCMHCE is a clinical simulation examination. Each simulation consists of three components: scenario, Information Gathering (IG) sections and Decision Making (DM) sections. Each simulation begins with a scenario. The scenario provides the setting and introductory client information (e.g., age, gender, presenting problem(s)).

In Information Gathering (IG) sections, you are expected to gather all relevant information for answering the questions. This might include family background, status of physical health, previous experience in counseling, etc. Read all information items before choosing the responses you consider necessary for responding to the simulation item. When making a selection, click the circle next to a response and then click the corresponding “submit” button to obtain feedback.

You should select all options that are appropriate. If you select more or fewer options than are appropriate, this will adversely impact your Information Gathering score.

Decision Making (DM) sections provide opportunities for making clinical judgments or decisions. IG and DM sections may be formatted in one of two ways:

1. **Single Best Option**—There may be more than one acceptable option, but one option is generally regarded as most acceptable.
2. **Multiple Options**—Several options are considered appropriate. These sections address decisions in which a combination of actions is required.

In the Decision Making section described as “Single Best Option,” the instructions are to “CHOOSE ONLY ONE” option. You should not assume that your response is incorrect if you are directed to make another selection. The simulation examination format sometimes uses this direction. The “Multiple Options” type of Decision Making section will have instructions to “SELECT AS MANY.” When making a selection, click the circle next to a response and then click the corresponding “submit” button to obtain feedback. If you fail to click the circle and submit button, you will not receive information to determine whether to proceed to the next section.

The procedure for taking the NCMHCE is different from that of the more common multiple-choice examinations. Each simulation is identified by a number and the client’s name, and each section is identified by a letter.

SAMPLE CLINICAL SIMULATION

The following is an example of an IG and DM section as it might appear in a problem on the NCMHCE. Remember that in an actual simulation, there will be five to 10 sections and four to 14 selections per section (depending on the nature of the section). The responses in the shaded right-hand column are uncovered here. In the actual examination, you will not be able to see the response unless you select and submit the corresponding option.

Simulation 1 - Ms. Wagner: You are a clinical mental health counselor in a small group private practice. Ms. Wagner is a 37-year-old female who has scheduled an appointment with you. She states, "My primary care physician said you probably could help me." For the past three months, Ms. Wagner has been feeling stressed, had problems sleeping, and has not been able to focus on her work.

Section A - Ms. Wagner

During the first session, which of the following would be most important to assess in order to formulate a DSM diagnosis? (**SELECT AS MANY** as you consider indicated in this section.)

A-1.	Mental status	A-1.	Unremarkable **
A-2.	Stressors	A-2.	Single parent of a 10-year-old girl, elementary teacher at a new school, and father had a heart attack three months ago**
A-3.	Previous counseling	A-3.	None**
A-4.	Recreation activities	A-4.	Not relevant at this time**
A-5.	Family history of mental illness	A-5.	None**

Seven to nine more choices would appear here on a complete simulation.

Section D - Ms. Wagner

Based on the information obtained about Ms. Wagner, what is the *DSM* diagnosis?

(**CHOOSE ONLY ONE** unless you are directed to “Make another selection in this section.”)

D-1. Generalized anxiety disorder D-1.

Not indicated.
Make another selection in this section.**

D-2. Major depressive disorder, D-2. single episode

Not indicated.
Make another selection in this section.**

D-3. Adjustment disorder with D-3. depressed mood

Go to Section _____.**

D-4. Persistent depressive disorder D-4. (Dysthymia)

Not indicated.
Make another selection in this section.**

This section might have one to two more alternatives on a complete simulation.

PREPARING FOR THE EXAMINATION

Your primary objective in preparing for the examination is to pass. Other objectives such as learning new material and reviewing old material are critical toward this objective. Begin by developing your strategy for success.

A good study strategy includes preparation. To prepare, determine first what you need to learn, choose your study materials, and select a quiet, comfortable place that allows you to focus. Before you begin, check to make sure you have everything you need. Try to avoid interruptions. NBCC has several study guides available that can be accessed through the online store.

TAKING THE EXAMINATION

Your examination will be delivered by computer at a Pearson VUE testing center. You do not need computer experience or typing skills to take the examination. On the day of your examination appointment, please plan to arrive at the testing center early. For your convenience, signs indicating Pearson VUE testing center check-in will be posted at the testing center.

An applicant who arrives more than 15 minutes after the scheduled testing time will not be admitted.

IDENTIFICATION

To gain admission to the testing center, you must present two forms of identification, one with a photograph. The name on your registration and on your photo ID **must** be identical. Both forms of identification must be current and include your current name and signature. You will be required to sign a roster for verification of identity.

Acceptable forms of photo identification include a current driver's license, a current state identification card, a current passport or a current military identification card. Employment ID cards, student ID cards and any type of temporary identification are **not** acceptable.

You must have proper identification to gain admission to the testing center. Failure to provide appropriate identification at the time of the examination is considered a missed appointment, and a refund of your examination fee will not be granted.

SECURITY

NBCC and Pearson VUE maintain examination administration and security standards so that all applicants have the same opportunity to demonstrate their abilities. The testing center is continuously monitored by audio and video surveillance equipment for security purposes.

The following security procedures apply during the examination:

- No cameras, notes, taperecorders, personal digital assistants (PDAs), pagers or cellphones are allowed in the testing room.
- No calculators are permitted.
- No guests, visitors or family members are allowed in the testing room or reception areas.
- No personal items, valuables or weapons should be brought to the testing center. Only keys and wallets may be taken into the testing room. Pearson VUE is not responsible for items left in the reception areas.

EXAMINATION RESTRICTIONS

- A dry-erase board will be provided during check-in. You must return all writing materials to the proctor at the completion of testing, or you will not receive a score report. No documents or notes of any kind may be removed from the examination room.
- No questions concerning the content of the exam may be asked during the examination.
- Eating, drinking or smoking is not permitted in the testing center.
- You may take a break whenever you wish, but you will not be given additional time to test.

MISCONDUCT

Individuals who engage in any of the following conduct will be dismissed from the examination and will forfeit their scores and fees:

- Creating a disturbance or being abusive or otherwise uncooperative;
- Displaying and/or using electronic communications equipment such as pagers, cellphones or PDAs;
- Giving or receiving help or being suspected of doing so;
- Attempting to record examination questions or make notes;
- Attempting to take the examination for someone else; or
- Being observed with notes, books or other aids.

COPYRIGHTED EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

All examination questions are the copyrighted property of NBCC. It is forbidden under federal copyright law to copy, reproduce, record, distribute or display these examination questions by any means, in whole or in part. Those who do so may be subject to severe civil and criminal penalties.

BEGINNING THE EXAMINATION

After your identification has been confirmed, you will be directed to a testing carrel. The system will monitor you via video throughout your examination session.

Following the examination instructions, you will begin the timed examination. When you begin the exam, the first page displayed is the nondisclosure agreement (NDA). Applicants must agree to the terms of the agreement to proceed with the exam. Please read carefully and click “Yes” if you agree to the terms of the NCMHCE. You will have five minutes to agree to the NDA, or the examination will terminate.

INSTRUCTIONS

After you agree to the terms of the NDA, you will click the “Next” button and arrive at the tutorial for the examination. This section is timed. You have 10 minutes to review how to navigate and respond to the examination items. Please make sure to read each question carefully and to select items for feedback that will help either form a better clinical impression or make an accurate clinical decision. When you finish the tutorial, you may begin the exam. You will have three hours to complete this examination.

EXAMINATION SCREEN

Two windows appear on the screen, the simulation and options windows. A scroll bar is available when necessary to view all text in either window. The scenario **window** displays the current scenario on the left-side of your screen. Scenarios are brief paragraphs that provide preliminary information about a client. The **options window** on the right-side of your screen displays the current IG or DM section, which is composed of an item and four to 14 selections (options). Each options window will also provide the applicant with specific instructions about whether to “CHOOSE ONLY ONE” response in the section or to “SELECT AS MANY” responses as appropriate to gather information about the client.

The **case progress review screen** is located in the top right-hand part of the screen. Placing the cursor on this box and clicking with the mouse opens a window to review previous sections and feedback provided for previously selected options.

After an applicant selects and submits an option, he or she cannot reconsider and “unselect” it, since the information from that option has been revealed.

In sections where an applicant is instructed to “SELECT AS MANY,” the applicant should select each of the options believed appropriate at the time, click the corresponding “Submit” button, read the feedback for each of the submitted options, then click “Next” at the bottom right of the screen to continue to the next section. A dialog box will appear requesting that the applicant confirm he or she wishes to continue to the next section and warning that returning to this section to make additional submissions will not be possible.

Selecting “Yes” takes the applicant to the next section of the client simulation.

In sections where an applicant is instructed to “CHOOSE ONLY ONE unless directed to make another selection,” the applicant should carefully review each option and then choose the best option following the procedure described above. A dialog box will then appear presenting the results for the choice or requesting that the applicant select another response.

FOLLOWING THE EXAMINATION

After completing the examination, applicants are asked to complete a short evaluation of their examination experience. Then, applicants are instructed to report to the examination proctor to receive their score report. Your score report will indicate “pass” or “fail.”

The score report you will receive is an unofficial score report. This unofficial score report will have your photograph on it. To order an official score verification report that can be sent to third parties, such as licensure boards, NBCC must have a copy of your final, official transcript showing degree conferral. After the transcript has been reviewed and verified, a score report can be requested through the ProCounselor online store. Passing the examination does **not** guarantee certification. NBCC reserves the right to withdraw or void official scores if it is found an applicant engaged in misconduct, wrongfully sat for the examination, or violated the regulations of the respective organizations. Scores are reported in written form only and are not reported by telephone, e-mail or fax.

PASS/FAIL SCORE DETERMINATION

The examination score is determined only by your performance on the NCMHCE. Work history, quality of work, or other personal or professional variables do not substitute exam performance.

The passing score for the version of the examination you were administered and the score you received will only be provided as a printed score report. The IG and DM passing scores for each form of the NCMHCE was set by subject matter experts using a criterion-referenced method (Angoff method). The exact passing score may vary from one form of the examination to another, depending on the scored problems included. The examination committee follows strict guidelines in selecting the problems for each examination form and uses linear equating to ensure that version of the examination are comparable.

To assist applicants in evaluating their performance on the examination, scores are provided for both IG and DM sections. It is the total raw score for IG and DM on the entire examination that determines whether you pass or fail the examination. Applicants must achieve total raw passing scores in both IG and DM to successfully complete the NCMHCE.

The total raw score is based on the nine scored simulations on your examination. The examination includes one unscored simulation that is being field-tested for future use.

EXAMINATION REREGISTRATION

If you were unsuccessful in your examination attempt, you may retake the exam on the next available date by and reregistering through ProCounselor. Your application provides for three attempts in a two year period to pass the exam before the application closes. There is a fee for reregistration.

SCORES CANCELLED BY NBCC, CCE OR PEARSON VUE

NBCC is responsible for the validity and integrity of the scores it reports. On occasion, occurrences such as computer malfunction or misconduct by an applicant may cause a score to be suspect. NBCC reserves the right to void or withhold examination results if, upon investigation, violation of its regulations is discovered.

APPEALING EXAMINATION RESULTS

Examinees may appeal exam score results. To be considered, appeals must follow the guidelines below.

Administration Appeals

Applicants may base their appeal on:

- Proctoring errors (e.g., proctor failed to check in applicants properly, improper materials in the testing area).
- Site conditions (e.g., distractions, lighting failures).
- Computer failure (e.g., error messages, screen failures).

In order to submit an administration-based appeal, the applicant must immediately report the issue to the exam administrator or proctor and file an incident report while on site. Before considering the appeal, CCE must be able to confirm the issue was filed in a report through the exam administration staff. If properly submitted, examinees should expect to receive a decision regarding administration errors within 60 days.

Special Examination Accommodation Appeals

An individual can only submit an appeal of accommodations if initially approved for them. For the appeal to be considered, the applicant must file a detailed incident report while at the testing location, showing that the approved accommodations were not provided. If properly submitted, examinees should expect to receive a decision regarding special exam accommodations within 60 days.

Content Appeals

In order for the appeal to be considered, the applicant must provide a summary of the item in question and complete primary or secondary references (citations are not sufficient) to support the appeal. Primary or secondary source data comes from the pool of knowledge generally acknowledged by counseling professionals (e.g., commonly referenced research or textbooks). All content appeals must be reviewed by subject matter experts during secure committee meetings; therefore, content appeal decisions may take up to eight months.

Filing an Appeal

To be considered, an exam score appeal must:

- Be submitted within one week of the exam
- Be e-mailed to appeal@cce-global.org. (Appeals are not accepted by telephone or other e-mail addresses.)

- Include the applicant's full legal name, NBCC ID number, Pearson applicant ID number (if applicable), test date, and test location.

In addition, administration appeals must be accompanied by an Exam Incident Report submitted by the exam administrator or proctor. Administration appeals will not be considered without a properly filed report.

Issues Not Valid for Appeal

Examinees are not eligible to appeal exam results based on the following:

- Testing errors on the part of the applicant;
- Test anxiety;
- Late arrival for the testing appointment;
- Failure to follow examination instructions as provided;
- Cut score determination; and
- The construction or criterion-related validity of the examination.

FAILING TO REPORT FOR AN EXAMINATION

An applicant who fails to report for an examination forfeits the registration and all fees paid to take the examination. A completed registration form with examination fee is required to reregister for the examination.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Information about applicants for testing and their examination results are considered confidential. Studies and reports concerning applicants will contain no personally identifiable information, unless authorized by the applicant.