



American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology, Inc.

A Member Board of the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS)

Instructions for the Combined Continuing Certification Examinations

Examination Format

The Combined Continuing Certification Examinations are comprised of either two or three modules, each module consisting of either a specialty or subspecialty, with 100 multiple-choice questions per module. For two-module examinations, there are five-and-one-quarter hours of examination time, including a non-disclosure agreement and unscored survey questions. For three-module examinations, there are eight- and-one-half hours of examination time, also including a non-disclosure agreement and unscored survey questions. Please review the Combined Continuing Certification Examinations Content Specifications [on the website](#) for detailed topic specifications.

Both two- and three-module Combined Continuing Certification Examinations will be delivered in sections comprised of 50 questions each. You can review questions only within sections. Once you finish the section, you cannot go back into it. There is no review of all questions at the end of the exam. There will be optional breaks following each 50-question section. Examination time continues to run during optional breaks, so candidates must manage their own time. The optional breaks will be offered after one section is completed and before the next section begins. The Combined Continuing Certification Examination Format tables below demonstrate the two and three modular examination delivery structures.

Combined Continuing Certification Examination Format – Two Modules

	Section	No. of Questions	Format
5 min	Nondisclosure Agreement		
	On-Screen Instructions		
305 Minutes (5 hrs, 5 min)	1	50	Stand-alone
	Optional Break*		
	2	50	Stand-alone
	Optional Break*		
	3	50	Stand-alone
	Optional Break*		
5 min	End-of-Examination Survey		

*A proctor must log examinees in after breaks. Examinees must be signed in and out each time they enter and leave the testing room.

Combined Continuing Certification Examination Format – Three Modules

	Section	No. of Questions	Format
5 min	Nondisclosure Agreement		
	On-Screen Instructions		
500 Minutes (8 hrs, 20 min)	1	50	Stand-alone
	Optional Break*		
	2	50	Stand-alone
	Optional Break*		
	3	50	Stand-alone
	Optional Break*		
	4	50	Stand-alone
	Optional Break*		
	5	50	Stand-alone
	Optional Break*		
6	50	Stand-alone	
5 min	End-of-Examination Survey		

*A proctor must log examinees in after breaks. Examinees must be signed in and out each time they enter and leave the testing room.

Question Type and Review

The Combined Continuing Certification Examinations are comprised entirely of one-best-answer multiple-choice questions that can be skipped or flagged for review, but after leaving a section an examinee cannot review questions in that section again.

Patient Characteristics in Test Questions

The ABPN certification examination questions are carefully designed to measure meaningful and plausible testing points (e.g., diagnosis, management, etc.), without the influence of assumptions, bias, or stereotypes. When examinees select the correct (keyed) response, they are given credit because they are demonstrating what the examination question is designed to measure. ABPN examination committees encourage thoughtful consideration of patient characteristics, while at the same time strive to promote diversity and present patients who reflect the populations served by the examinees.

Many test questions in this examination contain descriptions of patients. Characteristics of a patient such as age, sex, gender identity, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, native language, country of origin, and/or occupation are sometimes mentioned within case vignettes in test questions. Some patient characteristics may be important inputs into the diagnostic reasoning process. Inclusion of some characteristics may increase the clinical verisimilitude of the patient cases. Their inclusion, however, as in actual clinical practice, may lead to incorrect conclusions and misdiagnoses. Among the latter are characteristics that could potentially be associated with harmful patient stereotypes.

In the context of question creation, race is considered a social construct not linked to biology or susceptibility to disease. This is similarly true of ethnicity and culture, heritage, or even country of origin. Ancestry, if known, may be biologically important, and thus may be relevant to factors relating to health and disease. In addition, when and if these characteristics are included in questions, they should be considered based on patient self-report, not the assumption of the physician.

Based on the thinking above, some question stems can be brief, the reference to a patient can be general, and patient characteristics could be omitted unless directly relevant to the question at hand. On the other hand, if the question stem includes a portrayal of a specific patient (including vignettes for linked-item sets), it is reasonable that, at the least, the patient's age and sex is included.

Additional patient characteristics may be included for any of several reasons, including if they:

- are clinically relevant or could aid in distractor quality
- are necessary for the examinee to better understand the context in which the patient is being seen (i.e., the question would be unreasonably difficult if excluded)
- add to the overall exam-level representativeness of the referenced patient population
- increase the probability of detection, diagnosis, or recognition of an otherwise rare condition
- do not contain negative stereotypes

Scoring

Examinees will receive percent correct scores (percentage of questions answered correctly) for overall performance, each specialty or subspecialty, and the subtests within each specialty or subspecialty. An acceptable level of performance must be achieved on the overall score to pass the examination.

Combined CC subspecialties are not passed or failed individually. The standards are not norm-referenced; there is no predefined passing rate for any group of examinees.

No examinee is expected to obtain a perfect score. However, in the opinion of the ABPN, each examinee should have some degree of familiarity with the subject matter of each question. Even though the examinee may be in doubt about the correct answer to a particular question, she or he should answer every question. This will increase the likelihood that the examinee's examination score will reflect the breadth of her or his knowledge of the field. There is no penalty for guessing.

Examination Functions

To familiarize examinees with the examination functions, several examination screenshots with explanations are provided [here](#). In addition to the general functions, such as Time Remaining and Number of Questions, please pay special attention to the functions for Comment, Scratch Pad, Highlight, Strikethrough, Flag for Review, Section Map/Drug List/Tutorial, Navigator, and other functions related to examination questions.