How to Prepare for the Certification Examination for Nutrition Specialists

The Certification Examination for Nutrition Specialists is designed to test the knowledge and skills acquired by those who have successfully completed both the academic and experiential criteria of the CNS and CNS-S. While those who have not yet completed the CNS supervised practice experience may be approved to sit for the examination, historically, those with experience perform better than those without.

The examination contains 200 multiple-choice, single answer questions, and covers a broad spectrum of basic and applied nutritional science, based on an explicit set of competencies. These competencies have been determined through a job analysis study conducted on practitioners. They are grouped into domains, subdomains and tasks, which together form the Examination Content Outline for the examination.

The Examination Content Outline is the key tool for preparing for the examination. It should be used to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses. Due to the breadth of topics covered, it is likely most candidates will require preparation in one or more content areas. The reference list below is intended to assist candidates in addressing those areas. The Board for Certification of Nutrition Specialists (BCNS) does not endorse any specific study preparation method, course, or reference as being relevant, correct or complete. The following list has been assembled based on reports previous candidates have found these references helpful for preparation.

The method used by the BCNS to determine the passing score for the examination is known as the Angoff technique, and is in accordance with the standards set by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA), which has fully accredited the CNS certifying program. The Angoff technique requires the Examination Development Council’s analysis on an item-by-item basis. If an item is considered by the council to be more difficult, the expectation of candidate performance is lower than if an item is considered by the council to be less difficult. These council judgments of item difficulty are expressed as numeric performance indices. The pass-fail cut score reflects these item performance indices, and is expressed as a percentage equivalent.

For each examination, the pass-fail cut score will vary somewhat based on that exam’s difficulty level, but the cut scores are equated such that an equivalence of difficulty is maintained. Historically, cut scores have ranged between 60 and 69%. This historic range represents outcomes to date, but should not be considered policy; it is possible for a future cut score to fall outside of this range.

Reference List

Domain I: Fundamental Principles of Nutrition


**Domain II: Nutrients and Human Health**


**Domain III: Nutrition Assessment**


**Domain IV: Clinical Intervention and Monitoring**

• Bauer K, Liou D, Sokolik CA. *Nutritional Counseling and Educational Skill Development*, Cengage Learning, 2011

**Domain V: Professional Issues**

• Bauer K, Liou D, Sokolik CA. *Nutritional Counseling and Educational Skill Development*, Cengage Learning, 2011