

Comps Study Skills Tips

How Much Study Time?

For many individuals, a plan to review and study for two months before the exam may be sufficient. Anxiety about taking examinations in general, or the NCE and CPCE in particular, may also motivate review and study activities that may begin several months before the exam date. Other uniquely personal issues or circumstances may argue for longer or shorter study periods.

Do prepare a plan of study. If you are on a two-month schedule, you will want to review at least one content area per week. Designate hours each week for study activities; put them on your calendar and stay with them. In planning your study, include day hours, not just evening and weekend hours when you would rather be doing anything else but studying. Each week as you study new content material, don't forget to review 'old' material you studied in previous weeks. Remember also, different sections on the NCE have a different number of questions. That should influence your study time.

The SQ3R Method

In studying textbooks, research articles, papers or other documents, you may want to use the SQ3R method. SQ3R stands for **Survey, Question, Read, Recite** and **Review**.

S = Survey

Gives you an idea of what you are getting into. Helps determine how long it will take.
Helps determine how what you already know is related.

For a book:

Read the preface and introduction

Read the Table of Contents

Look at the visual aids-pictures, graphs, etc. Review reference lists or glossaries

Read summaries of chapters

For a chapter:

Try to understand the chapter title

Read the headings and subheadings

Read the summary

Read the captions under pictures, graphs, etc.

Scan the reference/bibliography list

Q = Question

Ask yourself questions about what you are going to read.

Questions help you study by focusing attention on the subject matter.

Questions provide a personal purpose for reading.

Questions encourage you to look for answers.

For example: What does the chapter title mean? Heading? Subheading?

What do I want to learn from this chapter? How is the material related to what I already know?

R1 = Read

You will read with more understanding/comprehension if you do the SQ activities first. As you read: Answer the questions you raised in **SQ**, or the chapter's/book's own questions. That gives a purpose and a sense of direction. Read all of the added attractions such as graphs, tables, pictures, etc. Read carefully the individual, italicized or bold printed words or phrases. The author thinks these are important.

R2 = Recite

Go over what you read in **R1** by either orally summarizing what you have just read or by making notes of some kind. We tend to forget 80% of what we read in two weeks; after recitation we forget only 20%. Reciting reinforces what you read; it helps identify mistakes you may have made in your reading. Recite as needed-probably more often than once at the end of a chapter. You may want to recite after each section, and perhaps after each subsection. Mark and underline selectively, not everything. Read the entire section first, then underline when you recite after you have an overview and know what is important. Write an outline if you wish but remember that it is very time consuming. Oral summarizing may be especially helpful if you study with someone.

R3 = Review

First of all, review the entire chapter/article when you finish reading. Read your markings, margin notes or outline and put all the material together. Review periodically. Plan a final review before taking the exam. Give yourself time to make it a thorough, useful review

Other Suggestions

A number of suggestions for studying have been offered by exam takers. Completing practice exams and studying questions is recommended. These exam questions may be from graduate courses, NBCC's exam questions from the Preparation Guide for the National Counselor Examination, and questions from other study materials. Remember that short, simple-recognition questions and answers are in the minority on the NCE - application questions are emphasized. The CPCE has more questions focused on detail and thus you are likely to see fewer application questions and more recognition-recall questions.

A website you might find useful during your exam preparation is:

www.counselingexam.com . It provides information and resources about the NCE (and the NCMHCE), and includes exam questions which you can purchase and practice on.

One examinee took several practice exams as part of her study efforts. However, she never took 200 questions at one sitting. She feels she should have, i.e., run the entire marathon at least once before she took the official 200-item NCE. Endurance and stamina were issues for her.

In her study of test questions, another counselor studied each wrong answer as well by 'looking up' and determining why the answer was wrong. She wrote out her findings.

Some counselors audiotape the material from study guides and then listen to it. This may be especially helpful to auditory learners and may take advantage of driving time.

Some counselors prefer small learning groups. These 'study buddy' arrangements can serve other purposes as well such as commiseration and stress reduction. If not managed well, however, small group study meetings can become counterproductive.

A final suggestion which ought to encourage review and study, or make it less onerous, is to reframe the process from "preparing for that damn exam through these study activities to helping my clients by becoming a more effective counselor."

Comps Test Taking Tips

Preparation for Exams

Being prepared for the examination through review and study will minimize anxiety. Do not expect to be anxiety-free, and some anxiety may be beneficial.

The only issue for you on the day of the exam should be the exam itself -- not finding the ex.am location, parking, finding the testing room, forgetting pencils and the admission letter, etc. Do a 'dry run' to the exam site some Saturday (or other day of the week for which you are scheduled) before the exam to get a feel for traffic, parking and other variables.

Be rested; get a good night's sleep. Don't wake up at 5:00 am and drive 150 miles across me state to begin the exam at 9:00 am. If you stay with family or friends in the exam site city the night before the exam, do not visit with them into the night before going to sleep. In fact, It is suggested that you check into a motel room the day before the exam-alone, away from a noisy, demanding environment if that is what is typical on nights where you live. At the motel, do a leisurely review of material, take a long bubble bath, have a nice meal and go to bed early.

On the day of the exam, you should be well rested and everything that you can control should be under control. Do no more than an hour of review the morning of the exam. Save your focus and energy for the exam.

After being admitted to the examination room, seat yourself in a comfortable part of the room where there is minimal noise and foot traffic if you have the option to sit where you like. Take water, juice, or other nourishment to the exam site. Some testing sites may allow these, or you may have to leave them at the back of the room and take advantage of them when you take a break, use the restroom, etc.

During the Exam

In taking any exam, there are some rules of thumb to remember. One way to help you remember these rules is by using a mnemonic device. The word **SCORER** can help you in this process.

S = Schedule your time. (Scorer)

The CPCE has 160 multiple-choice questions. This equates to 1.5 minutes per question if you use all four hours allotted. The NCE consists of 200 multiple-choice questions and you are allowed four hours. You can estimate how much time to devote to each question (1.2 minutes per each of 200 items = 4 hours if you use all of the time). On each exam, all questions carry the same value.

C = Clue words. (sCorer)

Pay attention to clue words or qualifying phrases. They can change the meaning of a statement tremendously.

Some clue words to watch for are:

all	always	best
every	usually	worst
most	never	more
some	invariably	less

Underline these words as you read the question. Remember, these clue words might also appear in one of the four alternatives.

O = Omit the difficult questions. (scOrer)

The O rule suggests that you answer the easiest items on the exam first and skip the difficult ones. The plan is to return later to the difficult ones you skipped.

However, because you have read the difficult items, solution generation may be going on while you continue answering the easier items. Later questions might present material that helps with earlier, difficult questions. Make a mark in the test booklet by the questions you skipped so you can find them easily later. If the exam is on computer, the computer program will highlight skipped items to return to them later. Or, make a list of skipped items on your "scratch" sheet. If you skip items in the test booklet, be sure you also skip the same spaces on the answer sheet.

R = Read carefully. (scoRer)

Read the instructions for the test and then read each item carefully. Read the entire question and stop. Do you understand it? If not, read it again. Do not read any of the four answers until you understand the question. You are apt to confuse yourself and the meaning of the question by reading the alternatives before understanding the question. Read the question as it is, watching for clue words. Do not read more into the question than is there.

You may like True-False questions better than multiple-choice ones. You can treat a multiple-choice question as four True-False items. Read the question and the first alternative Is it true or false? Then go on to the second alternative and so on. After going through the four alternatives, you should end with one "True" answer If you have more than one, you need to narrow your choices to one and mark that one.

You may want to try the true-false technique on some of the practice questions you work on before the 'real' exam. See how it works for you. Because it takes longer to work through a question using this approach, plan to use it for only some of the questions, perhaps the long, complex ones.

E = Estimate. (scorEr)

Estimate here means guessing. There is no penalty for guessing on the NCE or CPCE so do not leave any questions unanswered. You are encouraged to use the Omit rule for the difficult questions. When you go back to a difficult item, eliminate as many of the distractors (alternatives) as you can, and then guess if you still need to. Some guessing strategies have been proposed. These include:

- a. 'Go for the flow.' Pick the answer that seems to 'flow' the most smoothly from the question.
- b. Go for 'content.' Select content in the answer that fits the content (concepts) mentioned in the question.
- c. Pay attention to 'general' versus 'specific.' Choose the answer that deals with the concepts/material at the same level of 'generality' or 'specificity ' as found in the question.

R = Review (scoreR)

Use all the time you are allotted by reviewing your answers. You may be sick of the exam by then, but review the items, especially those you may have had questions about. Most counselors complete the NCE with about forty-five minutes to spare. You may have an hour or more left of your four hours when taking the CPCE.

Do not change your answers too quickly. Many individuals have a regular pattern of changing a correct answer.

Other Suggestions during the Exams

You can write or draw on the test booklet if you have the paper-and-pencil version. Do so when it is helpful. For example, draw a normal (bell-shaped) curve with its dimensions when a test question first reminds you of the curve. For the long test questions, underline what the issue is - what is critical? Make notes or lists - whatever helps you understand the question content. Not everything written in a question (especially the long ones) will be critical. Do your best to determine the most important concepts and focus on those.

You will find questions that are phrased negatively. In other words, you are looking for the wrong answer. For example, "Which of the following is NOT true concerning ...?" In such a question, three of the responses are correct and one is wrong. To remember that you are looking for the Negative (incorrect) answer, write a large N in front of the four answers if you are working from a paper exam booklet. This will continue to remind you of your goal to find the negative answer.

Often, you may be looking for the 'best' answer, not necessarily the 'correct' one. In fact, the absolute 'correct' answer may not be listed. For example, in some ethical dilemma cases, you may need to choose the 'best' of four inaccurate answers (or less desirable counselor behaviors) because the most desirable course of action is not listed.

Many examinees report that for many questions, narrowing the four alternatives to two is fairly easy. Then it gets tough; be prepared to guess.

Here is some wisdom from a recent NCE test taker: "It wasn't until after the exam that I realized how much of the exam measures judgment as well as content. Approximately 50 questions seemed purely content-related (you either know this or you don't) questions. The remaining 150 questions seemed purposely ambiguous, requiring content knowledge to eliminate two distractors, and then content plus judgment to decide between the other two." This examinee goes on to say that when she came across these ambiguous questions, she should have thought more about how clever the exam developers were in wording the questions instead of wasting energy wishing she had studied more!

A student who recently completed both the NCE and the CPCE provided this feedback: "The NCE had more than one correct answer on most questions and you had to pick the better one ...which to me is VERY difficult and very subjective. The CPCE seemed a lot more straightforward. Either you knew the answer or you didn't. It was much more detailed..."

Some counselors prefer to mark their answers on the test booklet if they are not working on a computer. This saves the time and energy it takes to look back and forth between the booklet and answer sheet as they are concentrating on the exam questions. After

they have finished all the questions, they transfer the answers from the test booklet to the 'bubble' answer sheet. If you do this, you must be comfortable in the knowledge that you will have 20 minutes or so when you are finished to transfer your answers (without error) from the test booklet to the answer sheet.

Psychologically, during the exam, stay in touch with your stress level and body reactions. If you feel your stress level rising, stop after 50 questions (or 25), put your pencil down and relax, or push your chair back from the computer. Close your eyes, breathe deeply, center yourself. Take a minute or two to cleanse yourself. Get up and walk around (go to the bathroom) to stop any stress that may be escalating in your body. After these activities or other relaxation exercises that you may use, begin anew, refreshed. Most counselors have more than enough time for these short, care-taking activities.

After the Exam

The range of responses of examinees upon completion of the exam is extremely varied. One very common response is "I have no idea how I did." This response is even common from exam writers who did very well in their graduate studies and "aced" all their exams in their classes.

Other comments I have heard over the years include: "It was a fair test." "It doesn't measure anything counselors need to know." "How can counselors do this to counselors?"

If your exam is administered on a computer, the test proctor will score it for you. You will receive your results at that time. There will be no six-week wait to see how you performed. Thus, since the vast majority of counselors pass on their first attempt, you will get your instant reward and leave the test center with a smile and a very well-deserved feeling of satisfaction.

Special Accommodations

If you require special assistance, you should request such. For example, if you have been diagnosed with AD/HD, you may be allowed to have a 'reader' assist you and be given more than four hours. If English is not your primary language, you may also receive more time. A large-print version of the NCE is available. Testing on days other than a Saturday for religious reasons is also possible. To be granted any special considerations, you must apply for such when you complete the application to take the test. If you are taking the NCE or CPCE, contact NBCC. For other exams, check with the entity that is administering the exam.

Computerized Assessment

With computerized testing, the schedule for taking the NCE has changed for many counselors. Rather than completing the exam only on a few fixed dates during the year,

it is offered much more frequently. For example, many states offer testing any time during two weeks each month. The counselor can schedule the exam for any day of those weeks (morning or afternoon). State licensure testing is administered by Applied Measurement Professionals, Inc. (AMP). Check with them or your state licensure office about the possibilities.

In your preparation for taking the exam on computer, you are encouraged to practice on test items on computer to get a feel for the process and the constraints, especially if you have never taken an exam on computer. Locate items on computer (websites) to practice on. One possibility is at: www.counselingexam.com. In addition to some free practice items, there are other items at this site for purchase to practice on.

If you are taking the exam on computer, it is likely the computer will take a photo of you for identification purposes. You will be given a sample section of items to practice on which will not be part of the four hours allocated for the exam.

The computer will mark those exam items you skipped to make it easy to return to them. Also, you may see a four-hour timer on your screen. You can shut it off if you choose.