

DR. ARTHUR'S STUDY GUIDE

for the

NCE

NATIONAL COUNSELOR EXAMINATION

CACREP 2016 STANDARDS UPDATED



GARY L. ARTHUR, Ed.D.

Providing NCE Preparation Program Since 1985

Dr. Arthur's Study Guide for the National Counselor Examination

To secure the
National Counselors Certification (NCC)
and
Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC)

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Gary L. Arthur, Ed.D. retired as a Professor Emeritus in the Counseling and Psychological Services Department at Georgia State University. He has taught counseling courses at the graduate level for forty-two years. He served as the past Coordinator for the Professional Counseling Program and as clinical coordinator for the internship program. He has conducted over 158 two-day training workshops for participants taking the NCE. He has taught all of the courses in the content areas being tested for the NCE. His research interests include clinical supervision, therapist safety, spirituality and health, geriatrics, and assessment.

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Introduction to the NCE Study Guide

Be sure this is the preparation guide for the examination for which you have made an application. Several mental health disciplines require an examination other than the National Counselor Examination (NCE). Other mental health disciplines include psychologists, family counselors, social workers, and many with specific titles such as Licensed Clinical Professional Counselors (LCPC). The NCE is not for all of these disciplines. The National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC) administers the NCE for certifying counselors as a National Certified Counselor (NCC). Frequently the NCE is the same examination many states use for their state license. These licensed counselors are frequently called Licensed Professional Counselors (LPC) however some states may use a different title. Be sure you check with your license board for your state. A ready source to begin your search will be the NBCC (www.nbcc.org) website for the state board directory and state licensure home.

Presently those seeking to take the National Counselor Examination may make application for the examination at different stages in their professional development. The first groups are those individuals who have attained a master's degree or beyond in a helping field and meet the curriculum requirements set forth by the National Board for Certifying Counselors. Many students take the NCE during the last semester of an accredited master level program in counseling. The second group is composed of individuals from those states which legislate a license for counseling and who meet the specific requirements set forth by that state. Many states contract with NBCC to utilize the NCE as their cognitive evaluation instrument to establish a minimum competency assessment. Be sure to check with your state licensing board to determine if the NCE is the examination for your state. Some states use an independent examination developer other than the NBCC. In most states, you should call the secretary of state's office to inquire about an application and the state law specific to the title or practice of

counseling. The 2002 spring issue of the Journal of Counseling and Development (Archival Features: 2001-2002, 2003) listed those states that have contacts for a state license.

Both groups, at a particular site, are very likely to be taking the NCE at the same time, may even be using the same location, same examination questions (in the past), and scoring procedures. It is possible that results may be received at different times for the two groups. An independent company frequently administers the NCE.

Since 1994, some aspects of the test have been altered. The 200 items are no longer divided in the test by individual content sections such as 25 in research, followed by 25 in counseling theory, etc. The 200 questions are integrated with one another throughout the test with no divisions.

A second alteration has been the inclusion of questions about family foundations. There have always been family content questions in the examination; however, they were not identified as such. These questions are scored in one of the five counselor work behaviors. No doubt new and additional questions are constantly being added to the testing pool.

A third change has been in the score reporting. In the past, raw scores were recorded for the eight (8) content areas with respective group means and standard deviations. A final raw score with a sum is reported as pass or fail. This passing score has ranged from 87-107 of the 160 scored items and has varied for different times of testing. According to Loesch and Vacc (1994), the NBCC pass score (minimum criterion score) for some states issuing a license may be set higher than the NBCC national cutoff score.

Be sure you check with your state for specifics, as some states permit your pass score to be retrieved at the time of your application for state licensure, which may be three or four years after you have passed the NCE. The delay is often due to requirements for years of postgraduate clinical work and experience and supervision in the field.

The 200 questions are grouped into five counselor work behaviors, and into the eight Council for Accrediting Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) content areas.

A fourth change has been in question formatting. Many questions are testing for the application of knowledge. These questions are presented in the form of a scenario, and the examinee is to answer how the counselor is to respond. However, the question is still seeking applied knowledge.

A fifth change appearing in the 2002 testing has been a design change in the number of items within each unit of the objectives. Along with the changes in the number of items has been a name change for the Research and Evaluation chapter. Presently, it reads Research and Program Evaluation. Thus, appearing in the examinations are questions about program and therapist effectiveness.

A sixth change appeared when NBCC announced during 2012 a change in categories for the Work Behavior area as a result of a completed survey. The Work Behavior areas and a number of items per work behavior are Fundamental Counseling Issues (32), Counseling Process (45), Diagnostic and Assessment Services (25), Professional Practice (38) and Professional Development, Supervision and Consultation (20).

A seventh change came about with the recent survey conducted in 2012. The major change has been to rename four units of the eight study areas. These unit changes are Assessment, Social and Cultural Diversity, Career Development and Professional Orientation and Ethical Practice (www.nbcc.org/nce).

The most recent change has been the adoption of the 2016 CACREP Standards implemented July 1, 2016. Three content areas contain new 2016 standards. New content objectives include knowledge areas of technology, disaster, inflicted self-harm, outcome evidence for treatment, specialty areas, community outreach and emergency teams, self-care, counselor evaluation, diagnosis, conceptualizing clients, and biological, neurological, and physiological facts.

Please note that the organization of the material in this manual for the 2016 standards, at times, overlap from one unit to another. To illustrate this overlap, note that in:

Unit 1: Professional Counseling Orientation and Ethical Practice

Objective 1j: technology's impact on the counseling profession

Unit 5: Counseling and Helping Relationships

Objective 5e: the impact of technology on the counseling process

Objective 5d: ethical and culturally relevant strategies for establishing and maintaining in-person and technology on the counseling process

For a more overall approach and understanding of the implication and impact of technology for the field of counseling, it will be important to utilize content from all units of study. The reader will observe some degree of overlap for other constructs related to prevention, evidence-based strategies, techniques for prevention and intervention and ethics.

Numerous research studies and literature support with limited information will be evident in all units of study. Often the number of participants in the study, procedures, and analyses will not be delineated. The findings add to the knowledge and support the context of the CACREP objective. The references will be included for retrieval if the reader desires the complete coverage.

An eighth observation has to do with family, a change from the CACREP 2009 to the new 2016 standards. Read the objectives carefully to make a determination as to the amount of time and the depth of study required for this preparation. The wording is as follows:

CACREP 2009 Standard Unit 2: Social and Cultural Diversity

2c. individual, couple, family, group, and community strategies for working with and advocating for diverse populations, including multicultural competencies

CACREP 2016 Standards Unit 2: Social and Cultural Diversity

The word family does not exist

CACREP 2009 Standard Unit 3: Human Growth and Development

3d: theories and models of individual, cultural, couple, family, and community resilience

CACREP 2016 Standard Unit 3: Human Growth and Development

3a. theories of individual and family development across the lifespan

CACREP 2009 Standard: Unit 4: Career Development

4d. interrelationships among and between work, family, and other life roles and factors, including the role of multicultural issues in career

CACREP 2016 Standard: Unit 4: Career Development

The word family does not exist

CACREP 2009 Standard Unit 5: Helping Relationships

5 e. A systems perspective that provides an understanding of family and other system theories and major models of family and related interventions

CACREP 2016 Standard Unit 5: Counseling and Helping Relationships

The word family does not exist. CACREP programs require a family course thus terms associated with family theories could be in the test.

NCE Score Reporting

The National Board for Certifying Counselors did not grant permission to reproduce a sample of the format for the standard score report. The number of questions for each of the eight content areas is subject to change. If you should desire the exact number, you should contact the National Board for Certifying Counselors for this release of information.

The following test item information should be considered but not taken as an exact figure. The number of test questions for each study does not appear to be equal. Human Growth and Development, Social and Cultural Diversity, Counseling and Helping Relationships, Group Counseling and Group Work, Career Development, Assessment and Testing, Research and Program Evaluation, and Professional Counseling and Orientation and Ethical Practice are the eight chapters for study. From recent score reports the percentage or number of questions for each content area often changes with each survey NBCC undertakes. The number of questions per content area appears to be as follows: 8.5% (17) Human Growth and Development, 8% (16) Social and Cultural Diversity, 20.5% (41) Counseling and Helping Relationships, 10.5% (21) Group Counseling and Group Work, 13% (25) Career Development, 12.5% (25) Assessment and Testing, 10.5% (21) Research and Program Evaluation, and 17% (34) Professional Orientation and Ethical Practice. Therefore, in prioritizing study time, it is advisable to rank the percentages. Also, one can multiply the percentage by 200 for an actual number as reflected in the parentheses. Included in the percentage and for each raw score will be five practice questions under review for future testing. The five work behaviors scores will be included in the final score report. Those areas include Counseling Process, Professional Practice, Fundamental Counseling issues, Diagnostic and assessment services, and Professional development, supervision and consultation (NBCC, 2014; www.nbcc.org/nce).

In 2001 NBCC included work behaviors to the scoring format to represent counselor work areas. Job analysis surveys are conducted periodically to determine if job tasks are different from past data. The same 200 questions designated for the eight content areas are grouped or sorted into the counselor work

behaviors and yield percentages of 16%, 22.5%, 12.5%, 19%, and 10% respectively in the 2012 reported survey.

The National Board for Certifying Counselors releases for publication only past testing results in range scores. Although this is not very helpful for the individual content area, means and study allotment goals, you will have to secure this information from those who have taken the examination. The Minimum Criterion Score (MCS) has been in the range of 87-107 with a mean range of 101.38-116.28, and a standard deviation range of 11.40-17.38.

The NBCC application packet secured from the NBCC's website includes the curriculum and degree requirements for NBCC approval to take the NCE. The following address and telephone number will assist you in securing this information.

NBCC
3-D Terrace Way
Greensboro, NC 27403-3660
Telephone: 336-547-0607

Information about the NCE Examination and Testing

NBCC schedules the NCE, and it is administered in every state, many university programs, and in other locations upon approval. Be cautious about waiting to apply, as there are deadlines with a limited time span for approval. Some of the following suggestions may be helpful when studying for and taking the examination.

1. Data are being gathered regarding success from individuals who have purchased this manual. Also, a questionnaire has been designed to request information from users of this manual. Information that would be helpful will focus on how many years exist between one's graduate degree and taking the examination, whether the individual used a study guide, studied alone or with someone, attended a seminar, used a study guide plus a seminar, and whether the study guide was helpful and in what way.
2. I have made the following suggestions based upon 43 years teaching counseling courses and 30 years teaching in a CACREP program and experiences in conducting in excess of 158 2-day preparation seminars and having interacted with many NCE participants throughout the United States. If you are a recent graduate of a CACREP program, an NCE preparation guide or workshop may be extremely helpful. If you graduated from a program that did not require some of the content courses, or you are two or more years away from your graduate study, a preparation guide and workshop are usually helpful. In all cases, many participants recommend a study partner.
3. The examination is composed of 200 multiple-choice questions each with four options. The exact numbers of items for each of the eight content areas and five counselor work behavior areas are not equal. There is no penalty for guessing, so do not leave any questions unanswered. Remember, you do not have to pass each subtest area but must receive a total correct number to pass. The particular group under testing and the NBCC board establish the "pass" score number. Reviewing past testing, this score has varied from 83 (1985) to as high as 107 of the 160 items scored. It is not known how many forms of the NCE exist and the passing score may be different for each form. However, they are to be equal in difficulty.

4. NBCC indicates that some items on the test are being reviewed as future test items. This number is stated as 40 or possibly five from each of the eight areas. Therefore your score will be based upon 160 rather than 200.
5. The individual total score (raw) may be a part of the corresponding group scores for each content area, and counselor work behavior along with a group mean and standard deviation. The score will be highlighted as pass or fail. Some states do not return individual or summed content scores but do indicate pass or fail. Taking the NCE through NBCC, information will be provided along with your newly acquired credential, the National Certified Counselor (NCC).
6. Should you not be successful, it is recommended to continue your study and retake the examination as soon as possible. There is a tendency to delay retaking of the examination, but to do so is to run the risk of having to regenerate energy for relearning at a much later time. Be mindful of your test taking and test results and seek material for those areas in which you can gain the most points and use concentrated study and tutoring. Should you not be successful, revisit the standard error of measurement to help you determine your chances of success on retaking the NCE. Remember, you do not have to pass each section.
7. Be sure you are aware of the location of the test site where the examination is to be administered. One can be unnerved upon arriving in the area the morning of the test and feel pressured by time and newness to surroundings. Give yourself adequate time to debrief and relax, and not feel pressed.
8. The examination rules allow for three hours and 45 minutes to complete the examination (Center for Credentialing & Education, 2016-2017), so an adequate amount of time is available. Be mindful that someone will get up and leave in a shorter amount of time than you think is possible. Do not allow that to affect your composure. There always seems to be an examinee who is a rapid test taker; the rest will be like you. Take your time but do not linger on the more difficult items too long. If you are nervous or tense use some of your stress-coping strategies such as breath inhalation or muscle relaxation. Previous test takers comment that they did not use their test time wisely. The questions are longer than in earlier examinations, therefore it takes more time to read and reread questions. If you are unable to determine an answer in a couple of minutes and you find a need to reread, mark it as one of those questions to return. Make it easy to locate those items so mark the number on the piece of paper provided at the test site. The question may look different when you return, plus you may read a future question that will assist your memory and recall. For those program students taking the NCE at a university or a large group of examinees the paper form has been the procedure. Writing on the test booklet has been allowed but troublesome turning pages to find those left unanswered. So for those left undone, at the time, write the number down on the piece of paper so that it is easier to locate it on return. For the computer application of the NCE use the electronic scratch pad. Some states do not contract with NBCC for the NCE. When this is the situation individuals in those states contract with NBCC directly to take the NCE and likely will be administered the paper form of the NCE.
9. There will be an established procedure for taking leave of the examination for necessary breaks. You are not likely to have time for going over each question a second time. Before the examination, consider a method to return to those items you want to review a second time. A special type of marking is recommended, as you will be able to write on the examination. Pressure mounts when there are five or six items you want to revisit but are unable to locate them. If computer testing is the test format it is possible NBCC has established for the examinee a bubble next to the question as a reminder for those items where the examinee did not submit an answer.

10. It is advisable to know how you take examinations. Take a practice examination of four hours and determine fatigue points. Four on-line 200-item practice exams are available through Career Training Concepts, and two are a part of the purchase. Three of the 200-item practice tests are similar in construction to the NCE. First, take the pre-assessment exam to assess strengths and determine areas where the study will be helpful. The pre-assessment examination is more difficult than the NCE according to past users of the on-line practice exams.
11. How should I prioritize my study? Remember each unit of the test has five questions under review that will not count. If you will add five questions to each number, you can rank the test units of most questions. This would indicate that Helping Relationships with 36 + 5 questions and Professional Orientation and Ethical Practice with 29 + 5 questions contain the most questions per section. The fewest questions are found in Social and Cultural Diversity with 11 + 5 and Human Growth with 12 + 5. This type of sorting has been the situation since the change in test format in 1994 and most recently in 2012.
12. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) has implemented the 2016 Standards as of July 1, 2016 (CACREP, 2015). In each of the eight units of study some of the 2009 CACREP standards were separated and developed into two or more standards, and some objectives were added. These changes and new standards will be highlighted in each of the study units.

Style and Format of Questions

This examination covers a broad area of study. It has not been steeped in psychoanalytic material or heavy in the specifics of the DSM-5™. That does not mean one should not know the structure of those theories or the framework for the diagnostic process. Training at this difficulty level for this examination is not testing for detailed diagnostic information. New terms or changes from the DSM-IV-TR to the DSM-5 should be noted. CACREP presently stipulates all CACREP programs to require at the master level programs a course in psychopathology (e.g., DSM-5™) and in addictions. New material for both areas will appear in this revision of the NCE Manual.

1. This examination covers material across the life span. It appears that the test writers and developers are interested in testing an awareness of the many concepts across the eight content areas of this examination. Also, the application of these constructs in the form of scenarios will test a working knowledge of field experiences (counselor work behaviors). Changes in the lifespan of an individual for any of the human growth theories require knowing the stages, functions, and definitions.
2. You may come across questions for which you have not had content exposure in your program of study or a study course guide. Do not allow that to affect you, as this is a broad examination. It is even possible that the question may be one under review and will not affect your score. It is only one question. The pre-assessment exam online has a few questions for which the content is not covered in the manual. When you take these questions, attend to your personal reactions and recognize how best not to allow this to affect your overall performance.
3. Study terms, definitions, purposes, functions and how to process through theories whether developmental or otherwise, how to apply knowledge, and how ethics will impact each section. Some names (theory developers, etc.) may be found on the examination; however, it seems to be very few. No dates have appeared in the examination.

4. Some questions may confuse the examinee to what is being requested. Do the very best to break the question down into parts and re-link the meanings. Search for clue words such as initial, ending, concluding, or significant for an approach to the question. If it becomes a struggle, do not spend too much time and become frustrated; leave it and return later during the examination. It may look different the second time you read it.
5. For ethical questions in the form of a scenario that requires a counselor action or decision, adhere to the basics. The overriding principle of do no harm should be foremost in your mind. In addition, do not act in isolation or take the dilemma to supervision are good choices. Keep in mind a decision should be based upon the greater good and basic fundamentals. It is difficult to write a question for intervention or midway into a dilemma as all of us could add or interject conditions such as "but also," "if it were this way I would," etc. Sometimes field experiences do not fit nicely into a multiple-choice format. Some practice examples will be provided in the next few pages.
6. Answer only the question as it is worded. Do not read into the question or assume what is behind the question.
7. These are straightforward questions. When answering questions, first think of the basics, how one should begin counseling and proceed from there.
8. Questions may also reflect the cognitive domain, thus becoming increasingly more difficult. Some questions will require more than simple recall, and two or more chunks of facts or inferences will be necessary.
9. The questions that follow (1-10) are intended to reflect spiraling omnibus in difficulty in applying the cognitive taxonomy and are phrased in a variety of depth levels. The difficulty level will begin with recall.

Recall:

Recall questions can be in the form of straightforward identification. Who is considered the father of vocational guidance (Frank Parsons)? Also, arranging certain theories and stages in order, such as the GAS syndrome (Hans Selye), and the purpose or function of theory (career, counseling, group, learning, family, and consultation, developmental theories.) Recall can be names of authors, founders, and matching author with theory, authors who share similar theoretical formulations, definitions, concepts, and constructs. Memorization is important because facts will be important to solve the more difficult questions. Recall questions within the NCE may be few. However, the recall of facts and process will be necessary for advanced levels of the cognitive domain.

Question I-1:

Transference is:

- a. the attributes of unwanted emotions.
- b. returning to an earlier phase of development.
- c. incorporating the qualities of another.
- d. a client's projection of past feelings and attitudes onto the counselor.

Answer: d. a client's projection of past feelings and attitudes onto the counselor. Transference is when the client projects onto the therapist characteristics of another person such as a parent and then responds or reacts as though the counselor possesses those characteristics (Seligman & Reichenberg, 2010).