

PSI NATIONAL COS/BAR EXAM CONTENT FACT SHEET

Complete Q&A

How to Use This Fact Sheet

Use the categories to locate a topic quickly. Each bold question is followed by a consolidated answer. This guide organizes questions about the national exam content; it does not replace the current state Test Taker Guide, Candidate Information Bulletin, or licensing-board requirements.

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1. Quick Reference:

- The exam emphasizes workplace safety and infection control. Exam is no longer technique based.
- Disinfect at initial setup and final workstation preparation, and whenever contamination occurs.
- Wear gloves whenever using disinfectant.
- Universal supplies may remain on the workstation; bags left out must remain closed.
- One manikin is sufficient; applicable services may use separate sections of the same manikin.
- Chemical wave: four-quadrant setup, three rods, and one-on-one saturation/test-curl observation.
- Manicure may be wet or dry; no polish is required; a full hand is required.
- Waxing/tweezing focuses on safe physical demonstration, bracing, and sanitation.
- Barber shave uses a live blade on a manikin; no live model is permitted.
- First aid kit remains required even though blood exposure is no longer a separate portion.

Reminder

For laws and rules, age eligibility, identification, exact supplies, and current exam instructions, use the most current Test Taker Guide/Candidate Information Bulletin.

2. Workstation Preparation, Disinfectant, and Safety

Can the general-supplies container touch the table before the table is disinfected?

Answer: Items coming from the supply kit are considered disinfected unless visibly dirty. Supplies may remain in the kit while the table is first disinfected with a qualifying disinfectant wipe.

When must the workstation be disinfected?

Answer: Disinfect with gloved hands during the initial workstation preparation and the final workstation preparation for the next client/end of day. Disinfection is also required whenever the station becomes soiled or contaminated. It is not required between every topic area if the workstation remains clean.

What disinfectant is acceptable?

Answer: Use a manufacturer-labeled disinfectant whose legible label lists virucidal, bactericidal, and fungicidal properties.

Are gloves required when cleaning the table?

Answer: Yes. Gloves are required whenever a test taker uses disinfectant. If the test taker voluntarily disinfects between services, gloves are still required and must be disposed of appropriately.

Must test takers wash their hands at the beginning?

Answer: For testing purposes, test takers sanitize their hands instead of washing them.

When are gloves required during services?

Answer: Gloves are required when disinfecting or encountering blood, during waxing and tweezing, and during chemical services as necessary.

What happens if an item drops on the floor?

Answer: A disinfectable item, such as shears, is picked up and disinfected, followed by hand sanitation. Other dropped items are placed in the appropriate single-use or multi-use receptacle, followed by hand sanitation.

What if a test taker cuts themselves?

Answer: The incident must be handled according to the reference-book procedure. After bandaging, a finger cot or glove must cover the bandaged area.

Is blood exposure still a scored service?

Answer: No. It is no longer a separate service, but the test taker must correctly handle an actual incident. A first aid kit remains required and accessible as a universal supply.

Are red bags or double bags required for an actual blood incident?

Answer: Do not use red bags. They are for blood spills and cannot be disposed of in ordinary trash. A double bag is not required. Used incident items may be placed in the single-use receptacle.

What are hair and skin analyses intended to demonstrate?

Answer: Hair Analysis and Skin Analysis are to be performed on all applicable tests. (Example there is no need to perform a Hair analysis during a Manicure) This is a gesture from the test taker that shows that they are aware that for the health and safety aspect of the service they would part the hair to inspect the scalp for abrasions or contraindications that would prevent service. For Esthetic and Nail services, gesturing from the test taker that shows that they are aware that for the health and safety aspect of the service that they would inspect the treatment area Example (face; hand) for abrasions or contraindications that would prevent service.

Are towels required on the table before setup?

Answer: No. Towels are not required and may become contaminated if reused or soiled.

Why are pressing comb, blow-drying, curling iron, and thermal curling not included?

Answer: The pressing-comb use was not deemed by the subject-matter experts to present a sufficient health-and-safety concern for testing. Blow-drying and curling iron were considered hazardous, but scored lower than waxing and nail procedures. Thermal curling is not on the National Test and is being discontinued in several states.

Please explain "Products that are not grouped as "dangerous chemicals" by OSHA and are required to be listed on an actual business SDS sheet, may be fictitious with a self-created or actual label attached. Some other substance may be used inside the container to simulate a product." What does the SDS sheet need?

Answer: Test takers do not need to bring SDS Sheets with them to the practical test. A product that would normally be a dangerous chemical and included on an SDS sheet -like a chemical relaxer can be a simulated product with just a handwritten label on the application bowl that states the content. Ex. Chemical Relaxer. Other products like disinfectants, alcohol, hand, sanitizer, and nail products must have the actual manufacturers label.

3. Kits, Bags, Supplies, and Product Labels

Is 24 x 24 x 24 inches a mandatory kit size?

Answer: No. It is a suggested size. Test takers are not turned away because of kit size, although they are encouraged to use a reasonable kit no larger than necessary.

Are there required sizes for single-use and multi-use bags?

Answer: No. There are no formal measurements. We suggest a larger multi-use bag and a smaller lined bag for single-use items, sized reasonably for placement around the workstation.

Do single-use and multi-use containers replace older terms?

Answer: The terms trash and soiled items are now replaced with "single use" and "multi use containers" or bags.

Can a box of gloves remain on the station?

Answer: Yes. A box of gloves is a universal supply and may remain on the station. Test takers are allowed to bring a box of gloves as a part of the universal supplies, or they can be in a Ziploc bag. Please remember that any bag that has universal supplies in it if left on the station must be closed since it is considered an extension of the kit. Any topic area bags that are taken out and all supplies are removed from them; those bags should go into the single use receptacle as trash.

Can bags be labeled by client or topic area?

Answer: Yes, but **no list** of service steps may be on or inside the bags.

Does the large supply container/kit require a label?

Answer: No. Please see kit packing tutorial on our dedicated national page.

Are there official exhaustive supply lists?

Answer: No. Test takers should bring the equipment and supplies needed to perform each topic as they would in a professional environment, following school, apprenticeship, or manufacturer training. The kit tutorial outlines basic requirements.

Can unused esthetics dry goods be stored between paper towels?

Answer: Yes, this is acceptable and your preference. Used items must be visibly deposited into the correct single-use or multi-use container as the service proceeds.

What may remain on the station throughout the exam?

Answer: Universal supplies are set out during Topic Area 1 and may remain for the duration. Any universal-supply bag left on the station must remain closed because it is an extension of the kit.

What happens to empty topic-area bags?

Answer: Once all supplies are removed, the empty topic-area bag should be placed in the single-use receptacle as trash.

Can items be returned to the kit during the test?

Answer: No. Once removed, items may not return to the kit during testing. Hands and manikins may be placed on the floor if needed. Final instructions later direct packing for departure.

Are all products simulated?

Answer: Color, permanent-wave product, lightener, relaxer, and similar products may be simulated. Hand sanitizer, EPA disinfectant, and applicable nail products must be the actual properly labeled products described in the Test Taker Guides.

Are SDS sheets required at the practical exam?

Answer: No. A simulated hazardous product may have a handwritten label on its application bowl, such as 'Chemical Relaxer.' Disinfectant, alcohol, hand sanitizer, and nail products must retain actual manufacturer labels.

Can personal items be stored in the kit?

Answer: No. Personal items may be placed in a site locker bag. Placing personal items in the disinfected dry-storage kit contaminates the kit. A phone or smartwatch that sounds may result in immediate dismissal.

4. Exam Flow, Timing, and Administration

What is the proctor-to-test-taker ratio?

Answer: The source states 1:8 at a testing site and 1:3 for online testing.

Are instructions repeated?

Answer: No. Instructions are read once in real time through the recording. Redbooks are available for test takers to re-read instructions as needed.

Can evaluators answer procedural questions?

Answer: Evaluators must remain unbiased and use only approved scripted statements, including 'Do the best with what you have' and 'Demonstrate as you learned.'

Does failure to finish a section result in a zero?

Answer: No. Not finishing a section does not automatically result in a zero for the entire section.

Can a test taker resume after stepping back to indicate completion?

Answer: Yes, if time remains and the test taker's hands are sanitized.

Does each topic area include setup and cleanup time?

Answer: Yes. Each topic area's directions provide time for setup/client preparation and cleanup. Topic Area 1 establishes the station and universal supplies.

Are all topic areas treated as the same client?

Answer: Each topic area is treated separately, but the same manikin may be used throughout the exam.

What happens during final workstation preparation?

Answer: The final Workstation preparation– The test taker disinfecting the workstation and preparing the space for a New Client for the next day with the daily supplies or universal supplies that should remain on the station to be used. All items that are trash or single use should be placed in the single use item. Nothing should be placed inside of the kit.

The next set of instructions are the Final Instructions with the test. Test takers are directed to pack up everything and leave the testing area. There is no timing or scoring for this section, and this is the time when the test takers remove all their supplies and equipment from the entire test and pack up that can go back into the kit for removal as they exit the building.

Where are updated Test Taker Guides and Candidate Information Bulletins posted?

Answer: Before an update or transition, TTGs/CIBs are posted in advance on the applicable state landing page on PSI's website. Please see tutorial on how to locate most current TTGs on our dedicated national page.

Where should state laws-and-rules questions be directed?

Answer: Consult the applicable state licensing website or licensing agency.

Who determines minimum testing age?

Answer: The licensing agency or state board, not PSI as the test vendor.

How are eligibility notices delivered?

Answer: PSI communications are sent by email. The account should use the correct personal email address rather than a school email.

What payment types are accepted?

Answer: PSI accepts online credit-card payments for tests and bulk vouchers, as well as online ACH payments. Purchase-order submission is completed through the accounting department.

What forms of secondary ID are listed?

Answer: Social Security card, an unexpired bank card, or a credit card with a signature. A government-issued temporary paper ID is acceptable when presented with the expired ID. Test takers should check their Test Taker Guide for exact requirements.

How does a test taker leave and re-enter the room?

Answer: The ID is placed face down on the table, used to sign out, and left at the monitored sign-out station. On return, the test taker retrieves the ID and signs back in.

Are smart glasses permitted online?

Answer: No. Online recording software identifies their use and that a wearer will be banned from online testing and reported to the State Board for review.

Where should concerns about repeated failure at a location be sent?

Answer: Send the information to cosmetology@psionline.com for investigation by the appropriate team members.

5. Manikins and Draping

How many manikins are required?

Answer: One manikin is sufficient for the entire practical exam.

Are there hair-length or hair-color restrictions for manikins?

Answer: There is no length requirement and no color restriction. Manikins may not have derogatory/offensive markings or coloring that assists application placement.

May the same manikin and drape be used for all chemical services?

Answer: Yes. Chemical wave, relaxer, color lift, and permanent color may be demonstrated on separate sections of the same manikin. A multipurpose cape may be reused if unsoiled.

Must towels and capes be changed for every new topic/client?

Answer: No. Change them if soiled, drenched, or otherwise contaminated. Chemical draping requires two cloth towels; carrying backups is recommended.

6. Haircutting

What is required during haircutting?

Answer: The test taker cuts for the full five-minute shear portion and the full five-minute razor portion. The same section may be used for both.

Must the haircut be finished or follow a specific design?

Answer: No. There is no required finished cut, uniform layer pattern, elevation, or complete haircut. Safe tool use for the entire allotted time is the focus. Please have test taker's follow instructions given.

Why was setup time shortened?

Answer: The setup must be completed in a timely manner and the allotted time was approved by industry subject-matter experts.

Who provides brooms and dustpans?

Answer: The site will have brooms and dustpans. Test takers may bring a small broom and dustpan to clean their own cuttings efficiently.

What remains during haircut cleanup?

Answer: Universal supplies remain on the table and are disinfected if covered with hair or debris. Contaminated items must be placed in the proper containers.

7. Chemical Services

How is the manikin sectioned for chemical services?

Answer: The head is divided into four quadrants, with separate quadrants used for chemical wave, sodium hydroxide relaxer, color lift, and permanent hair-color deposit.

How many rods are wrapped for the chemical wave?

Answer: Three permanent-wave rods are wrapped in one chosen quadrant. The three rods may be wrapped in any quadrant.

Why is the chemical-wave allowance 45 minutes?

Answer: The topic includes 25 minutes for the section plus 20 minutes so evaluators can observe each test taker one-on-one demonstrating saturation and a test curl.

Is a specific rod size, end-wrap method, or base placement required?

Answer: No rod size is specified, and wrapping/base placement is not scored. Rod placement should be consistent. The exam focuses on safety and infection control rather than a particular technique.

Must rods be removed?

Answer: They may be removed during cleanup after saturation and test-curl demonstration, but removal is optional.

What is required for smoothing in a chemical application?

Answer: When required by the textbook procedural steps, the test taker must clearly demonstrate smoothing on one of the three subsections.

Can relaxer, color lift, and permanent color be virgin or retouch applications?

Answer: Yes, where applicable the test taker may choose virgin or retouch. Color lift is a lightener application. Permanent color deposit may also be virgin or retouch.

Are foils required for color lift?

Answer: No specific foil technique is required. Technique is not the focus. The test taker must follow safe-handling, infection-control, scalp-analysis, glove, protective-cream, and labeling requirements as applicable. Example- Basic Scalp analysis, gloves worn, protective cream applied; Application bowl labeled lighter. Application bowls must be labeled as permanent hair color, Lightner, etc.

Must simulated relaxer or color be applied to both sides of the hair?

Answer: There is no change to how you are teaching the applications, as the procedures are listed in the textbooks, and there is no scoring for the application outside of infection control and workplace safety requirements.

How much of each chemical service is demonstrated?

Answer: The test taker demonstrates three subsection partings for each topic area rather than the entire quadrant. Containers must be correctly labeled; no specific brush or bowl is required.

Are predisposition and strand tests included in the color demonstration?

Answer: No. They were not included based on the subject-matter experts' recommendation. Educators should continue teaching their importance as outlined in the reference books.

Are anatomy or chemistry included in the cosmetology theory exam?

Answer: If anatomy or chemistry questions appear, they are related to health and safety, such as chemical-storage (What types of chemicals cannot be stored in the same space?)

8. Facial Services

Is a steam towel required?

Answer: Yes. A damp towel may be packed in a ziploc bag. The test taker demonstrates wringing/removing excess water and testing the temperature on the wrist before use.

What steps are required for the basic facial?

Answer: Cleanse, mask, massage, and moisturize. No specific massage manipulations are required, and massage and moisturizer may be combined. No specific order.

Is the ten-minute facial time sufficient?

Answer: The service time begins after workstation setup and that the allotted time was approved by industry subject-matter experts.

9. Waxing and Tweezing

Is eyebrow waxing/tweezing the same for cosmetology and esthetics?

Answer: Yes. The topic is the same for both. Evaluation focuses on safe bracing and safety and infection control procedures.

Must the manikin have brow hair?

Answer: No. Wax may be simulated with products such as petroleum jelly, cold cream, or cholesterol. Tweezing is physically demonstrated without actual hair removal.

What waxing sequence is specified?

Answer: Cleanse and dry the area; test wax temperature on the wrist; apply a thin layer in the direction of hair growth; place the fabric strip; hold skin taut and remove opposite hair growth; then cleanse with a post-epilation product.

How should waxing supplies be handled?

Answer: A clean paper towel may be placed on the workstation. Porous spatulas remain in a closed zipper bag until needed, with proper hand sanitation. Used multi-use products go into the multi-use bag.

Can facial supplies carry over to waxing?

Answer: Each topic area should have a separate supply bag. Universal supplies may remain on the workstation and be disinfected when needed.

10. Manicure

May the test taker perform a wet or dry manicure?

Answer: Yes. A finger bowl and water are optional. If water is used, a small closed bottle may remain at the station, and the test taker is responsible for cleanup.

What procedure governs the manicure?

Answer: Follow the basic-manicure procedure in the listed reference materials.

Is polish required?

Answer: No. Nail polish, base coat, and top coat **are not required** for the National Test.

Must all five fingers be used?

Answer: A full hand is required; individual practice fingers are not allowed.

Are nippers required and how are they used?

Answer: Yes. Demonstrate nipper use at the correct 45-degree angle as taught in the reference materials.

How are nippers stored?

Answer: In a zipper bag included with the supplies and treated as disinfected.

May the test taker sit during nail services?

Answer: Yes, during manicure and sculptured-nail demonstration.

11. Nail Enhancement

What enhancement products may be used with a form?

Answer: Builder gel, factory-sealed odorless acrylic/monomer, or free-flow, etc product may be used. If a curing lamp is required, the test taker must bring it. PSI does not specify a brand.

Is tip blending required in cosmetology?

Answer: No. The cosmetology exam includes nail enhancement with a form

Is a pink-and-white sculptured nail required?

Answer: No, not required.

How many hands are used?

Answer: One manikin hand is used for the manicure and nail-enhancement demonstrations. Tips must be applied before arrival to provide a free edge.

When are nail enhancement supplies set up?

Answer: All products, equipment, and supplies for the section must be set up during workstation preparation for that section, before demonstration time begins.

Were acrylic soak-off and a second client setup removed?

Answer: Yes. These services are no longer included. A first aid kit remains required.

12. Barber Shaving

Is a sharps container required for the blade?

Answer: No.

How are the steam towel and lather demonstrated?

Answer: The towel may be pre-moistened and stored in a ziploc bag. The evaluator must see shaving cream applied and removed. Small cans of shaving cream are allowed.

Which shaving strokes are required?

Answer: Free hand, back hand, and reverse free hand. The reverse-free-hand area may be lathered on the back of the neck. These are listed in TTGs.

Must the razor have a live edge?

Answer: Yes. A live razor blade or dermaplaner is acceptable.

Is a live model used?

Answer: No. All services are performed on the manikin; live models are not allowed.

Must the shave be fully finished?

Answer: No. The test taker demonstrates only the directed steps and then cleans up as instructed.

13. Instructor Practical Exam

Is the candidate's name placed on a lesson plan?

Answer: There is no lesson plan required. A Safety Manual is used, but name would not be on the document.

Must the candidate rearrange classroom furniture?

Answer: No.

Must the seating chart be drawn?

Answer: Yes. The candidate draws and labels a classroom seating chart. Information located in TTGs.

May the classroom safety manual be printed with mock items (SDS) or with the actual items they are only using for testing??

Answer: The document is to be an actual live manual.

How are lecture and demonstration topics selected?

Answer: Topic for national instructor exams are all the same now : Public Health and Safety Lecture & Demo. Information on what is required can be found in TTGs.

14. Reference Materials and Language Support

Which reference books are identified?

Answer: Pivot Point Fundamentals: Cosmetology, 2nd Edition, 1st Printing, December 2023, ISBN 978-1-957642-57-4; and Milady's Standard Cosmetology, 14th Edition, 2023, ISBN 978-0-357378-90-8.

What is the Red Book?

Answer: A written document containing Test Taker Guide instructions translated into the requested language. A test taker will have access it during testing to review the instructions.

Are instructor demonstration videos available?

Answer: PDF Tutorials are available on our national dedicated page.