

# DR. ARTHUR'S

# NCE

NATIONAL COUNSELOR EXAMINATION

# STUDY GUIDE

**25+**  
YEARS

Gary L. Arthur, Ed.D., LPC, NCC

Providing NCE Preparation Program Since 1985

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

To secure the  
National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC)  
and  
Licensed Professional Counselor Certification (LPCC)

## **Gary L. Arthur, Ed.D., LPC, NCC**

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# Introduction to the NCE Study Guide

## I.1 INTRODUCTION

Be sure this is the preparation guide for the examination for which you have made 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 administers the NCE for certifying counselors (NBCC). 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.

Presently those seeking to take the National Counselor Examination are able to 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. 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 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, exact same examination questions (in the past), and scoring procedures. It is possible that results may be received at different times for the two groups. 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 relative to **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 pass 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.

Recently, the questions have been grouped according to five (5) counselor work behaviors. The same 200 questions are grouped into five (5) counselor work behaviors, as well as the eight (8) 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 relative to program and therapist effectiveness.

## I.2 NCE SCORE REPORTING

The National Board for Certifying Counselors did not grant permission to reproduce a sample of the standard format in reporting scores. From reports provided to a number of test participants, a few helpful suggestions can be provided. A word of caution is to be exercised. The number of questions for each of the eight content areas has recently been different than in the past few years. If you should desire the exact number, you should contact the National Board for Certifying Counselors for this release of information.

Based upon past examination reports, the following information should be considered but not taken as an exact figure. The number of test questions for each study area does not appear to be equal.

Human Growth and Development, Social and Cultural Foundations, Helping Relationships, Group Work, Career and Lifestyle Development, Appraisal, Research and Program Evaluation, Professional Orientation, and Ethics are the chapters for study. Originally, the NCE contained 25 questions per section. From recent score reports the percentage or number of questions for each content area often change 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 Foundations, 20.5% (41) Helping Relationships, 10.5% (21) Group Work, 13% (25) Career and Lifestyle Development, 12.5% (25) Appraisal, 10.5% (21) Research and Program Evaluation, and 17% (34) Professional Orientation and Ethics. Therefore, in prioritizing study time, it is advisable to rank the percentages. In addition, 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. Your scores will also be reported in counselor work behaviors. Those areas are: Fundamentals of Counseling, Assessment and Career Counseling, Group Counseling, Programmatic and Clinical Interventions, and Professional Practice Issues

In 2001 NBCC included work behaviors to the scoring format to represent counselor work areas and behaviors. The same 200 questions designated for the eight content areas are grouped or sorted into the counselor work behaviors and yield percentages of 36%, 15%, 13.5%, 17%, and 18.5% respectively. One only need be concerned with the percentages for the eight content areas.

The National Board for Certifying Counselors releases for publication only past testing results in range scores. Although this is not very helpful for 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 curriculum and degree requirements for NBCC approval in order to take the NCE are contained within the NBCC application packet that can be downloaded from NBCC's Web site. 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

## I.2.1 INFORMATION ABOUT THE NCE EXAMINATION AND TESTING

NBCC schedules the NCE and it is administered in every state 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/or taking the examination.

- A. Data are being gathered regarding success from individuals who have purchased this manual. In addition, the 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.

- B. I have made the following suggestions based upon my 25 years teaching in a CACREP program and experiences in conducting in excess of 100 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 seminar 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/or seminar are usually necessary. In all cases, many participants recommend a study partner.
- C. The examination is composed of 200 multiple-choice items. 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 "pass" score number is established by the particular group under testing and the NBCC board. Reviewing past testing, this score has varied from 87 (1985) to as high as 107 of the 160 items scored.
- D. 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.
- E. Your individual score (raw) will be returned with 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. If you took the NCE through NBCC, information will be provided along with your newly acquired credential, the National Certified Counselor (NCC).
- F. 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/or tutoring. Should you not be successful, revisit the Standard Error of Measurement to help you determine your chances of success upon retaking the NCE. Remember, you do not have to pass each section.
- G. 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.
- H. The examination rules allow for four hours, 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 someone who is a rapid test taker; the rest will be like you. Take your time but do not linger on difficult items too long. If you are nervous or tense use some of your own 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. The question may look different when you return, plus you may read a future question that will assist your memory and recall. In the past examinees have been able to write on the test booklet so for those left undone write the number down so that it is easier to locate it upon return.

- I. There will be an established process 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 definitely want to review a second time. Your own special type of marking is recommended, as you will be able to write on the examination. Pressure mounts when you know there are five or six items you want to revisit but are unable to locate them.
- J. It is advisable to know how you take examinations. Take a practice examination of four hours and determine your fatigue points. "The Practice Exams online are more like the actual test and the Pre-Assessment online is similar in format to the pre-1994 examination. The Pre-Assessment Exam is designed to be a content and knowledge assessment test. It is recommended that you first take the Pre-Assessment Exam online so that you can assess your strengths and determine areas where study will be helpful. This assessment will also help prioritize your study along with an estimate of how many items are on the actual test for each unit of study. Past users of the manual indicate that this examination is more difficult than the actual test so do not be discouraged if you did not do well. An answer page accompanies each of the examinations along with brief reasons for the answers.
- K. 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 areas of most questions. This would indicate that helping relations with 36 + five or 41 contains the most questions per section followed by professional orientations with 29 + five or 34 second. The fewest questions are found in social and cultural foundations (12 + five) and human growth and development (11 + five). The manual is arranged so that these two chapters are at the end. This type of sorting has been the situation since the change in format in 1994 and most recently in 2002.

## I.2.2 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-IV. That does not mean one should not know the structure of those theories or the framework for the diagnostic process. For the most part, training at this level and for this examination has not been testing for diagnostic work. This may change, as CACREP presently stipulates all CACREP programs to require at the master level programs a course in psychopathology (e.g., DSM-IV) and in addictions. New material for both areas will appear in this revision of the NCE Manual.

- A. 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. In addition, the application of these constructs in the form of scenarios will test a working knowledge of field experiences (counselor work behaviors). This is one area in which the number of test questions has increased.



- B. You may come across questions to which you have not had content exposure in your program of study or in 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.
- C. Study definitions, purposes, 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 on the examination.
- D. Some questions will be such you may wonder what is being requested. Do the very best to break the question down into parts and re-link the meanings. 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.
- E. 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.
- F. Answer only the question posed. Do not read into the question or assume what is behind the question.
- G. These are straightforward questions. When answering questions, first think of the basics, how one should begin counseling and proceed from there.
- H. 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.
- I. Questions 1-4 are intended to reflect spiraling questions and the different ways in which a question may be phrased. The difficulty level will begin with recall.

#### **RECALL:**

Recall questions can be in the form of simple identification, such as who is the father of guidance (Frank Parsons), arranging certain theories and stages in order, such as the GAS Syndrome (Hans Selye), and purposes of career, counseling, group, learning, and developmental theories. Recall can be names of authors, founders, matching author with theory, authors who share similar theoretical formulations, definitions, concepts, and constructs. Memorization is important because facts will be important to solve more difficult questions.

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**Question 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.

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**Question 2:**

The counselor's projected emotional reaction to or behavior toward the client is described as:

- a. projection.
- b. catharsis.
- c. quoid and yavis.
- d. countertransference.

---

Answer: d.

---

- a. projection is a psychoanalytical defense mechanism
  - b. catharsis is emotional release
  - c. (quiet, ugly, old, indigent, and dissimilar) (young, attractive, vivacious, intelligent, single)
  - d. countertransference is the counselor's emotional reaction toward the client
- 

**Question 3:**

The overriding client welfare term when resolving an ethical dilemma is:

- a. nonmaleficence.
- b. fidelity.
- c. beneficence.
- d. honesty.

---

Answer: a. Nonmaleficence refers to doing no harm. For definitions to letters b, c, and d, see Chapter One in the manual.

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**INFORMATION and ANALYSIS**

Resolving information and analysis questions requires the selection of one or more facts. Creating the confidence band in question four will require the selection of appropriate facts to establish the predicted score range for a client.

**Question 4:**

A student requests assistance in understanding his SAT score that was 950. The data sheet indicated that the group mean was 1000, median of 1050, standard deviation of 100, standard error of measurement equal to 25, and test-retest reliability equal to .94. The student wanted to know if it was feasible to retake the examination, as a score of 1000 was required to enter the school of his choice. The counselor could make one of the following statements:

- a. two out of three times the score is likely to fall between 950-1000.
- b. 19 out of 20 times the score is likely to fall between 900-1000.
- c. 1 out of 100 times the score is likely to fall between 900-1000.
- d. 2 out of 3 times the score is likely to fall between 850-1050.

---

Answer: b. The two pieces of information required to answer this question are the obtained score (950), which becomes the personalized mean, and the standard error of measurement (25), which becomes the individualized variance for the student. What the student is requesting is two confidence band(s) or limit(s) and what is the probability the score of 1000 can be attained. This score of 1000 is two standard units ( $25 + 25$ ) or 50 points to the right and 50 points to the left of the obtained score (950). Thus, the range of scores for two confidence bands is 900-1000 and consumes a probability statement of 95 times out of 100 or is reduced to 19 out of 20 times.

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**THEORY QUESTIONS**

These questions range from how to process or progress from one stage or phase to the next, understanding the stages, arranging stages in order, and applying concepts of a theory (analysis). Theory questions can be in the form of contrasting two theories. Another format for theory questions might be to determine in what way are two theories similar or dissimilar. Theory questions may request the technique associated with that theory or what does the author consider a healthy person. Finally, the question may be formatted to appear as though the counselor is working in a field setting with a client (work behavior questions). Be mindful the question is still requesting content.

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**Question 5:**

Arrange in order Erikson's Stages:

1. industry vs. inferiority
  2. initiative vs. guilt
  3. generativity vs. stagnation
  4. autonomy vs. shame
- 
- a. 1, 2, 3, 4
  - b. 4, 3, 2, 1
  - c. 3, 4, 1, 2

- d. 4, 2, 1, 3

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Answer: d.

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**Question 6:**

An adolescent counselor is counseling a 15-year-old youth who is experiencing difficulty in peer relationships, both male and female. In addition, this student vacillates between wanting to do well in school and not caring about grades. Using the Erikson psychosocial model, the counselor would expect this person to be experiencing conflict at which stage of development?

1. industry vs. inferiority
2. autonomy vs. shame
3. initiative vs. guilt
4. identity vs. role confusion

---

Answer: d. This stage usually encompasses those individuals in the age range of 12-18 who, in the process of finding out who one is, can experience the failure side of a false sense of self.

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**Question 7:**

Successful progression through Erikson's Stages requires:

- a. resolution of the conflict at each stage.
- b. meeting the tasks presented by society at each stage.
- c. completing differentiation and integration of one's ego.
- d. displaying age-appropriate cognitive learning per stage.

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Answer: a. Erikson's model is a conflict model and one is to resolve conflicts at each stage before successfully moving to the next. This entails the positive and negative affirmations.

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**Question 8:**

Donald Super, a vocational theorist, believes a maxicycle is completed during one's lifetime. A minicycle occurs at each stage in his theory and is essential for vocational maturity. At each stage what must happen in this minicycle for a person to be mature at that stage? The person will:

- a. acquire and implement a skill.
- b. integrate self-concept into an occupation.
- c. complete tasks society presents at each stage.
- d. continue the sequence of ego differentiation.

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Answer: c. Super is best known as a stage-and-task theorist. Super believed completion of age-appropriate tasks was essential for maturity at each age. Answer b. is a viable answer in that maturity also called for moving a

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person along the lines of maturity and integrating the many self role concepts into one's self-concept role. The maxicycle is a step-by-step task and stage development.

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## SYNTHESIS-INFERENCE

These appear to be difficult questions because it is assumed one knows the material thoroughly—terminology, component parts, and application. If you know what is requested and how to solve the question the question is not difficult. If not, attempt to break this type of question down and work from the answers to the terms.

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### Question 9:

Criterion-related validity described as empirical validity and assumed to be separate will differ in:

- a. size of a group of examinees.
  - b. distribution of scores.
  - c. statistics used to derive meaning.
  - d. time sequence.
- 

Answer: d. Criterion validity includes both concurrent and predictive. Concurrent is for the present and predictive is for the future, so time is the critical variable. The question is inferred from the "differ in." To develop this into a question, one has to recognize that criterion validity has two parts, concurrent and predictive.

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