

NATIONAL BOARD EXAMS FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT GENERAL SCORING

How many questions do I need to answer correctly to pass the board examination?

The Joint Commission does not release the total number of questions that must be answered correctly to pass each examination. This number will vary based on the specific examination form that is administered. For retest and test security purposes, multiple forms of each examination are available for administration.

If there are different examination forms, wouldn't that mean that some forms might be easier than others? How does this impact scoring?

Each examination form contains a separate set of questions which can differ in difficulty. Differences in test form difficulty are addressed via sophisticated psychometric procedures that take question difficulty into account when estimating candidate skill levels. Each of these examination forms is designed to be psychometrically equivalent, such that candidates would receive the same test result (pass or fail) regardless of which particular test form they completed.

Is the board examination graded on a curve?

No. The cut score that determines whether a candidate passes or fails is based on the recommendations of a subject matter expert panel, the members of which have had an opportunity to view actual test content. Panel members consider test content and the level of skill required to enter the profession and safely practice. Panel recommendations are then carefully reviewed and considered by members of the Joint Commission. The Joint Commission's tests are **not** designed to pass or fail a given percentage of candidates. If a test taker answers enough questions correctly—thereby demonstrating that he or she possesses the necessary minimum skill level—he or she will pass regardless of how others perform on the examination.

I know I need to earn a scale score of 75 to pass the board examination. Does that mean I need to get 75 percent of the test questions correct?

No. A test-taker does not need to answer 75 percent of the test questions correctly to earn a scale score of 75. Scale scores do not indicate the percentage of test questions a test taker answered correctly.

I know I need to earn a scale score of 75 in order to pass the board examination. I received a score of 74. Does that mean I was only one test question away from passing?

No. The Joint Commission's examinations contain several hundred questions. The overall scale score does not indicate the number of questions answered correctly on the examination. Each scale score (e.g., a score of 74) represents a narrow range of examinee skills, and similarly a range of number correct scores are associated with that narrow skill range. A test taker who earned a scale score of 74 could be very close or a significant number of questions away from passing the examination (e.g., 10 questions), depending upon whether he or she falls within the lower or upper area of the skill range.

I got more questions correct on this test attempt than on a previous test attempt, but got a lower scale score. How is that possible?"

A test-taker is administered a different form of the examination at each attempt. Because each examination form contains a separate set of questions which can differ in difficulty, number correct scores

cannot be meaningfully compared across attempts, as they do not account for potential differences in the difficulty of the questions. Only scale scores, which account for differences in the difficulty of the test questions, can be meaningfully compared across examination attempts.

I failed the board examination? What do the “national averages” on my score report represent?

The national average for a given subject area represents the average number of test questions that were answered correctly by test-takers in CODA accredited dental schools who took the examination for the first time in the previous year.