National Cosmetology Theory Examination CIB

National-Interstate Council of State Boards of Cosmetology (NIC)

Effective Date: January 1, 2027

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CANDIDATE INFORMATION BULLETIN (CIB)

EXAMINATION CONTENT AND IMPORTANT INSTRUCTIONS

Please visit your official examination provider website OR www.nictesting.org for the most current bulletin prior to testing.

The National Cosmetology Theory Examination is a licensure examination for Cosmetology, developed by the National-Interstate Council of State Boards of Cosmetology (NIC).

This bulletin contains IMPORTANT INFORMATION regarding National Cosmetology Theory Examination content and references.

The time allowed for this examination is 90 minutes.

PLEASE REVIEW ALL INFORMATION CAREFULLY.

For each NIC National Theory Examination, there are multiple parts to every Candidate Information Bulletin (CIB):

- **Important Instructions and Examination Content Domain Sections** – This provides information and guidelines related to administration of the Theory examination and information about the scope of content covered in the examination.
- **References** – This provides a list of references used to develop and support the content covered in NIC examinations. References will be the same for Theory, Practical, Written Practical, and Additional Sections for each exam.

BE CERTAIN TO REVIEW ALL PARTS OF THIS NIC EXAMINATION CIB CAREFULLY!

IMPORTANT INSTRUCTIONS

General

- Do not leave the examination area without permission. Permission must be obtained to leave the examination area for any reason, including restroom usage or at the completion of the examination. *Picture ID is required for re-entry into the examination.*
- All examinations are administered in a testing environment.

Standardized Administration

Due to standardization of the NIC National Examinations, proctors and examiners are required to adhere to the following standards:

- With the exception of verbal instructions, proctors and examination administration personnel are NOT allowed to speak with candidates.
- If a candidate experiences an emergency situation, they may notify the proctor by raising their hand.

Prohibited Items

- The following provides examples of materials and actions that are prohibited in the examination room during the examination administration:
  - Possession of cellular phones, watches (of any kind), pagers, tablets, computers, projectors, cameras, or any other electronic or recording devices, printed materials, or handwritten notes.

  - Purses, bags, coats, hats, and any other personal items not directly needed to complete the examination, are not allowed.

- Communicating to other candidates or any examiner.
- Exhibiting disruptive behavior. The above referenced items or actions are not an exhaustive list.

Failure to comply with any of these conditions or exhibiting ANY behavior that suggests an effort to cheat will result in immediate dismissal from the examination and the candidates' actions reported to the proper authorities.

COSMETOLOGY THEORY EXAMINATION CONTENT OUTLINE

Domain Details

The following outlines the scope of content covered by the NIC National Cosmetology Theory Examination. The percentages represent the percentage of items from each domain. The examination contains 110 items, of which 100 items are weighted and contribute to the candidate's final score.

I. Scientific Concepts (35%)
   A. Infection control and safety practices
      1. Identify cause/transmission of diseases and infections
      2. Identify the purpose and differentiate among the categories of infection control
         a. Sanitation
         b. Disinfection
         c. Sterilization
      3. Recognize how cross-contamination occurs and how it can be prevented (e.g., single use and multi-use items)
      4. Apply blood exposure procedures
      5. Identify requirements of government agencies
         a. OSHA
         b. EPA
   B. Human anatomy and physiology
      1. Identify function and structure of the:
         a. Hair and scalp
         b. Skin
         c. Nails

2. Recognize signs and symptoms of conditions, disorders, and diseases related to:
   a. Hair and scalp
   b. Skin
   c. Nails
3. Identify muscles and joints and their functions related to:
   a. Head and face
   b. Arms and hands
   c. Legs and feet
4. Identify functions of:
   a. Nervous system
   b. Circulatory system

C. Basic chemistry used in Cosmetology
1. Recognize purpose and effects of ingredients
2. Recognize interactions between chemicals
3. Recognize chemical reactions (e.g., overexposure, chemical burn)
4. Recognize the values of the pH scale

II. Hair Care and Services (45%)

A. Client consultation, analysis, and documentation
1. Evaluate condition of client's hair and scalp
2. Recognize conditions that would prohibit service (i.e., contraindications)
3. Utilize preliminary tests (e.g., predisposition and strand tests)
4. Recommend services or products based on client needs
5. Establish/Maintain client records (e.g., service history, client card, medical history)

B. Hair care and services- Tools used in hair care services

1. Identify purpose, function, and infection control procedures of items
    a. Equipment (e.g., chair, workstation)
    b. Implements (e.g., razors, shears, combs/brushes)
    c. Supplies and materials (e.g., towels, drapes, neck strips)
    d. Electrical tools (e.g., irons, blow dryers, clippers)
2. Demonstrate safe practices
    a. Tools/Implements
    b. Ergonomics

C. Hair care principles and procedures
1. Demonstrate shampooing and conditioning
2. Demonstrate scalp treatments and scalp massage
3. Demonstrate draping (e.g., chemical, shampoo, cutting, styling)
4. Recognize differences in hair care principles and procedures based on various hair types and textures

D. Hair design principles and procedures
1. Demonstrate hair cutting and shaping
2. Demonstrate hair styling
    a. Wet styling
    b. Thermal styling
    c. Natural hair styling (e.g., braiding)
3. Apply, maintain, and remove hair enhancements
    a. Wigs and hairpieces
    b. Hair additions (e.g., taping, bonding, fusion, linking)
4. Apply principles of balance and hair design (e.g., facial shape, physical structure)

5. Recognize differences in hair design principles and procedures based on various hair types and textures

E. Chemical services principles and procedures
   1. Perform hair color services (e.g., virgin, retouch, lightening, foiling, balayage, color formulation, color correction)
   2. Perform chemical hair relaxer/restructurizer and curl reduction (e.g., hydroxide, thio, keratin) service
   3. Perform chemical waving/texturizing (e.g., alkaline, acid, non-thio) services
   4. Understand the chemical products used for the various hair texture types

III. Skin Care and Services (10%)

A. Client consultation, analysis, and documentation
   1. Evaluate client's skin
      a. Type
      b. Condition
   2. Recognize conditions that would prohibit service (i.e., contraindications)
   3. Recommend services or products based on client needs
   4. Establish/Maintain client records (e.g., service history, client card, medical history)

B. Tools used for skin care services
   1. Identify purpose, function, and infection control procedures of items
      a. Equipment (e.g., chair, steamer)
      b. Implements (e.g., tweezers, brushes, extractors)
      c. Supplies, products, and materials (e.g., creams, masks, towels, wax, head coverings)
   2. Demonstrates safe practices
      a. Tools/Implements

b. Ergonomics

C. Skin care principles and procedures
1. Apply knowledge of a basic facial

2. Apply knowledge of hair removal

3. Apply knowledge of makeup application

4. Apply knowledge of electrical equipment

IV. Nail Care and Services (10%)

A. Client consultation, analysis, and documentation
1. Evaluate condition of client's nails

2. Recognize conditions that would prohibit service (i.e., contraindications)

3. Recommend services or products based on client needs

4. Establish/Maintain client records (e.g., service history, client card, medical history)

B. Tools used for nail care services
1. Identify purpose, function, and infection control procedures of items
a. Equipment (e.g., workstation, pedicure basin)

b. Implements (e.g., nippers, file)

c. Supplies, products, and materials (e.g., towels, creams, polish)

2. Demonstrates safe practices
a. Tools/Implements

b. Ergonomics

C. Nail care service principles and procedures
1. Apply knowledge of a basic manicure and pedicure

2. Apply, maintain, and remove nail enhancements

NATIONAL COSMETOLOGY THEORY EXAMINATION SAMPLE QUESTIONS

The following sample questions are similar to those on the NIC National Cosmetology Theory Examination. Each question is followed by four answer options. Only one option is correct. Correct answers (keys) are listed along with the sample questions.

1. Which of the following will reinforce and reconstruct the hair shaft?
   A. Scalp treatment
   B. Balancing shampoo
   C. Hair brushing
   D. Protein conditioner
2. When damaged, which of the following will cause the hair growth to be inhibited?
   A. Papilla
   B. Shaft
   C. Cuticle
   D. Arrector pili
3. A condition caused by an infestation of head lice is
   A. tinea barbae.
   B. scabies.
   C. pediculosis capitis.
   D. tinea capitis.
4. Debris is removed from tools and implements using which of the following procedures?
   A. Cleaning
   B. Disinfection
   C. Sterilization
   D. Decontamination
5. What implement adds shine and smooths wavy ridges on the natural nail during a manicure?
   A. Coarse file
   B. Metal file

C. Nail brush

D. Nail buffer

6. What is another name for the dermis layer of the skin?

   A. Spiny layer

   B. Horny layer

   C. True skin

   D. Basal cell

7. The massage movement intended to soothe muscles is

   A. petrissage.

   B. tapotement.

   C. friction.

   D. effleurage.

8. What product can be used to equalize the porosity of the hair?

   A. Shampoo

   B. Fillers

   C. Lightener

   D. Developer

Table 1: Answer Key

Item	Key
1	D
2	A
3	C
4	A
5	D
6	C
7	D
8	B

NATIONAL-INTERSTATE COUNCIL OF STATE BOARDS OF COSMETOLOGY (NIC) REFERENCES

This list provides the references used to develop and support the content covered in the NIC National Cosmetology examinations. References will be the same across exam types for each exam. Candidates are responsible for using these most updated versions of references, as these editions were used to reference test material.

Reference Date: January 01, 2026

Standard

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Supplemental

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