American Nurses Credentialing Center

ANCC Certification Handbook

FOUNDATIONS OF ANCC CERTIFICATION: YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE

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The Power of Nurses™

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INTRODUCTION

About the American Nurses Credentialing Center

The American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) partners with the nation's largest group of healthcare professionals to uphold the highest standards of nursing excellence. With a comprehensive suite of individual certifications and organizational accreditation programs designed to foster research, innovation, career growth, and leadership development, the credentialing center equips nurses to achieve safer, patient-centric outcomes both nationally and internationally. Committed to harnessing **The Power of Nurses™** to elevate care standards worldwide, the credentialing center continuously sets the benchmarks that support excellence in every facet of nursing practice.

ANCC promotes excellence in nursing and healthcare globally by serving nurses, organizations, and our stakeholders with a commitment to continual improvement. ANCC is the only nurse credentialing organization to successfully achieve ISO 9001:2015 certification.



About This Handbook

This handbook, previously titled *General Testing and Renewal Handbook*, provides an overview of ANCC Certification Program policies and procedures for those interested in applying for certification, taking a certification examination, and provides general information on maintaining certification. A separate handbook is available for certification renewal ("recertification") and can be accessed at **https://www.nursingworld.org/globalassets/certification/renewals/ancc-certrenewalrequirements.pdf**.

More detailed certification information, including information related to specific exams — such as test content outline, references, and sample practice questions — can be obtained online at **https://www.nursingworld.org/our-certifications/**.

ABOUT ANCC CERTIFICATION

ANCC's Certification Program enables nurses to demonstrate their specialty expertise and validate their knowledge to employers and patients. Through targeted exams that incorporate the latest nursing-practice standards and a commitment to lifelong learning, ANCC certification empowers nurses with pride and professional satisfaction.

Accreditation

ANCC certifications with active examinations are accredited by the Accreditation Board for Specialty Nursing Certification (ABSNC). ANCC APRN certifications and some RN certifications are accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) in addition to ABSNC.





Acceptance of Credentials

The U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) and health insurance companies recognize ANCC certifications. ANCC APRN certifications are accepted by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) and state boards of nursing.

Non-Discrimination Policy

All ANCC certification programs are administered without discrimination on the basis of age, sex, color, creed, disability, gender identity, ethnicity, race, religion, marital status, sexual orientation, national origin, citizenship, Veteran or military status, or other statutory or otherwise legally protected category.

WHAT IS CERTIFICATION?

Certification is the process by which a nongovernmental agency or an association grants recognition to an individual who has met certain predetermined qualifications. Certification can be used for entry into practice, validation of competence, recognition of excellence, and/or for regulation. It can be mandatory or voluntary. Certification validates an individual's knowledge and skills in a defined role and clinical area of practice, based on predetermined standards.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS FOR INITIAL CERTIFICATION

Eligibility requirements must be met before ANCC will permit you to sit for the examination for your selected certification. All applications are reviewed by ANCC to confirm requirements have been met. The specific eligibility requirements for your certification are available at **https://www.nursingworld.org/our-certifications/**.

General requirements are outlined below:

	Active RN License	RN Experience	Practice Hours	Continuing Education Contact Hours	Nursing Degree Required (Official Transcript)	APRN Education Requirements	Accredited Program	APRN Core Coursework & Content	APRN Supervised Clinical Hours
APRN Certifications	X				X		Z	X	X
RN Specialty Certifications (Nursing Degree Required)	X	X	X	X	X				
RN Specialty Certifications (Nursing Degree Not Required)	X	X	X	X					

Z = APRN applicants must have completed a master's, post-graduate certificate, or DNP from an institution with a program accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE), the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN), or the National League for Nursing (NLN) Commission for Nursing Education Accreditation (CNEA). ***Starting January 1, 2026***, ***for post-graduate certificate (PGC) applicants***, only PGC APRN program accreditation will be accepted for eligibility. Accreditation for APRN master's or DNP programs will not be considered in lieu of PGC accreditation, even if those programs contain parallel tracks to an institution's PGC program. Applicants must demonstrate their program held/holds an active PGC accreditation at the time of graduation.

Rationale For Eligibility Requirements

Eligibility Requirement	Rationale
Active RN License: A current, active RN license, in a state or territory of the United States or the professional, legally recognized equivalent in another country.	Active licensure is required because it is mandated as a prerequisite to practice by the regulatory body of each state/territory. This is intended to ensure that only nurses who are authorized to practice can hold the nursing certification.
RN Experience: Have practiced the equivalent of 2 years full-time as a registered nurse.	It takes one year for new nurses to adjust to their positions and an additional year to feel comfortable in the specialty area of practice and gain sufficient working knowledge in the specialty to succeed on the certification examination.
Practice Hours: Have a minimum of 2,000 hours of clinical practice in the specialty in the last 3 years.	2,000 hours in recent practice (within 3 years) is sufficient time for candidates to gain a depth and breadth of knowledge and experience in the specialty nursing practice to be competent at the entry level. These hours must be completed in three years, so that the knowledge and experience is current. In addition, three years provides enough time for candidates in part-time practice to obtain the necessary practice hours to sit for the exam, thereby increasing access to this certification.
Continuing Education Contact Hours: Have completed 30 hours of continuing education in the specialty within the last 3 years.	30 continuing education hours provides evidence that the candidate has recent knowledge in the nursing specialty and has knowledge of current practice. Currency is necessary to successfully complete the certification examination, which is based on current practice.
Nursing Degree Required: Hold a bachelor's or higher degree in nursing.	A bachelor's degree in nursing provides the foundation to practice competently at the entry level. This requirement is consistent with the movement toward requiring a bachelor's degree for entry to nursing practice recommended by the Institute of Medicine and other independent experts. A bachelor's or higher degree in nursing provides the foundation to practice. Typical employment at the advanced level requires a graduate degree. For certifications that require a graduate degree, it was determined that an undergraduate education does not provide sufficient knowledge to practice competently at this level.

Eligibility Requirement	Rationale
APRN Program Accreditation: Hold a master's, postgraduate, or doctoral degree from an APRN program accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) or the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN) or the National League for Nursing (NLN) Commission for Nursing Education Accreditation	The requirement for the graduate program to hold national nursing accreditation is part of the *Consensus Model for APRN Regulation: Licensure, Accreditation, Certification & Education*, 2008, page 11.
APRN Core Coursework and Content: Three separate, comprehensive graduate-level APRN core courses in • Advanced physiology/pathophysiology, including general principles that apply across the life span. • Advanced health assessment, which includes assessment of all human systems, advanced assessment techniques, concepts, and approaches. • Advanced pharmacology, which includes pharmacodynamics, pharmacokinetics, and pharma	The requirement for 3 separate comprehensive graduate-level courses (the APRN core) is part of the *Consensus Model for APRN Regulation: Licensure, Accreditation, Certification & Education,* 2008, page 11.
APRN Core Content in: • Health promotion and/or maintenance • Differential diagnosis and disease management, including the use and prescription of pharmacologic and nonpharmacologic interventions	The requirement for this content is found in the *Consensus Model for APRN Regulation: Licensure, Accreditation, Certification & Education,* 2008, page 11.
Faculty-Supervised Clinical Hours: A minimum of 500 faculty–supervised clinical hours must be included in the specific practitioner role and population.	The minimum number of clinical hours is set forth in these national standards *Criteria for the Evaluation of Nurse Practitioner Program*s, 5th Edition Criterion III.E, page 12.

APPLYING FOR CERTIFICATION

Applicants should submit their application only after all eligibility requirements for the selected certification have been met. All applicants should create an online account prior to submitting their application and supporting documents for faster processing.

Applicants must provide evidence that all eligibility requirements have been met for ANCC to authorize you to test and to award certification. All certification applications are subject to the same review and must meet all ANCC eligibility requirements. No eligibility criteria will be waived.

Support materials may include academic transcripts, ANCC verification of education forms, and source documents from coursework (APRN certification) or continuing education (RN Specialty certification) as needed for the specific certification. Applicants are encouraged to compile all of the documentation to support their certification application and maintain those materials for reference and submission. Details on which materials are required, when to submit, and how to

provide the required materials to support your application is found on the webpage for your specific certification at **https://www.nursingworld.org/our-certifications/**. Further clarifications may be found in the FAQs at **https://www.nursingworld.org/certification/faqs/**.

If an application is received with missing documentation including signatures, the review of your application for eligibility will be delayed, which will delay your ability to schedule and take a certification examination. ANCC reserves the right to request additional information or clarification prior to continuation of application review. Requests may include, but are not limited to, the requirement to produce source documents such as course descriptions/syllabi from the time you completed coursework. ANCC reserves the right to close applications where source documents are not provided.

ANCC certifications are developed based on US practice. Examinations contain test questions that reflect US law and US nursing practice. They are not intended to assess the knowledge, skills and abilities of nurses who live and practice outside of the United States. Additional steps may be required if you hold a license to practice or were educated outside of the US or its territories. [See the **International License and Education** section of this handbook.]

Application Fees

All fees must be paid at the time your application is submitted to ANCC. If insufficient funds are received, your application will not be reviewed, which will delay your ability to schedule and take a certification examination. If a chargeback is received, i.e. your credit card company reverses payment in response to a fraudulent charge claim, your application will be closed, and any existing testing windows will be cancelled.

Expedited Processing of Certification Applications

Expedited review of an application is available for an additional non-refundable fee. If an application is incomplete or ANCC requires additional information to determine eligibility for initial certification or renewal, the review of the application may not be completed within three business days, and an additional delay may result.

To reduce application processing time to three business days from the date payment is received, submit the **Certification Expedite Review Request Form** **along with payment**. Do not mail the form—fax it to 301.628.5233. Mailing the form will delay processing, and submitting it by both fax and mail may result in duplicate charges.

Withdrawal of a Certification Application

ANCC has a policy that allows candidates to withdraw an application for initial certification or certification renewal. An applicant or candidate may withdraw their application for initial certification. ANCC must receive a written request to withdraw the application before you have taken the examination and before the end of your testing window to receive a refund, less the administrative fee. The administrative fee and any special fees are nonrefundable. If you decide to apply for certification again, you must complete a new application, pay fees, and meet all eligibility requirements in effect at the time at which you reapply.

Certificants may withdraw their application to renew certification. The ANCC must receive a written request before the certification renewal is issued for you to receive a refund, less the administrative fee. If you are taking the examination for renewal, the written withdrawal request must be received before you have taken the examination and before the end of the testing window.

Follow the steps online for Certification Application Withdrawal at **https://www.nursingworld.org/certification/certification-policies/certification-exam-withdrawal/**. All withdrawal requests must be made in writing to customerservice@ana.org.

Financial Hardship Requests

ANCC policy allows certificants to request hardship relief for financial relief of fees. As applicants, candidates, or certificants may occasionally experience financial hardship, certification fees may be deferred, reduced, or waived based on individual circumstances with validation of supporting evidence. Applicants, candidates, and certificants may request one (1) fee modification from the Certification Program every ten (10) years. All hardship requests must be made in writing to customerservice@ana.org. Complete and attach the relief request form available online at https://www.nursingworld.org/certification/certification-policies/hardship-relief-request.

International License or Education

If you are licensed or were educated outside of the US, you must validate international credentials (license and education) and present verification from TruMerit, formerly CGFNS International, Inc., with your application. See the International Application webpage at **https://www.nursingworld.org/certification/certification-policies/international-applicants/**.

If you are licensed outside the US: Please have the RN or interprofessional license verified for comparability by TruMerit prior to application.

If you were educated outside the US and applying for a non-APRN certification that requires a degree: Please have degrees verified for comparability by TruMerit prior to application. This applies to nurses licensed inside and outside of the US.

If you are an international applicant interested in APRN certification (Clinical Nurse Specialist and Nurse Practitioner), please contact ANCC at customerservice@ana.org or toll free at 1-800-284-2378. Do not contact TruMerit.

Certification Not Valid for Proving Eligibility Requirements

ANCC has a policy that prohibits exemptions from eligibility requirements using a past certification. Applicants seeking a new certification are evaluated based on current eligibility criteria in effect at the time of application submission. ANCC does not waive eligibility requirements for an applicant holding a current or past ANCC certification. The fact that an individual holds or has held ANCC certification cannot be used as or be construed as evidence that the individual has completed the required educational and clinical requirements for the new certification. Please refer to the full policy at https://www.nursingworld.org/certification/certification-policies/previous-certification/

Information for APRN Certification Applicants

If you are applying for an APRN certification, you may submit your application before your degree is officially conferred. However, all required coursework and faculty-supervised clinical hours must be completed at the time of application and reflected in the submitted documentation. Applicants applying ahead of graduation may be granted Authorized to Test (ATT) candidate status.

APRN Application Abandonment

ANCC has a policy that defines when an APRN certification application is considered abandoned. For applicants in an authorized to test (ATT) status, ANCC considers an application for APRN certification abandoned if the final official transcript showing degree conferral is not received within two (2) years after passing the certification examination. Abandoned applications will be closed, examination scores will not carry over for any future applications, and the applicant is not awarded certification. ANCC will not refund any fees for abandoned applications. Applicants must reapply for consideration. Please refer to the full policy at **https://www.nursingworld.org/certification/certification-policies/abandonment/**.

Time Limit to Apply for APRN Certification

ANCC has a policy that requires APRN certification candidates to apply for certification within five (5) years of degree conferral. Effective January 1, 2026, candidates for an ANCC APRN certification must apply for certification within five (5) years of degree conferral from their applicable APRN degree or post-graduate certificate program. ANCC's time limit policy for APRNs is noted on **APRN**

certification webpages. Please refer to the full policy at https://www.nursingworld.org/certification/certification-policies/aprn-time-limit-to-apply/

AUDITS

ANCC conducts random audits of certification applications.

When ANCC audits initial certification applications for an RN specialty, you would be asked to produce documentation of the continuing education activities listed in your application and a letter of attestation to support your practice hours. Please maintain supporting documentation for all activities used to meet eligibility requirements for your certification.

> **Continuing Education Contact Hours:** If your record is audited, you will be required to submit supporting documents, such as a copy of the completion certificate(s) for the continuing education activity showing the dates, title, number of contact hours, sponsoring organization, etc. In addition, you may be required to provide evidence of the applicability of the course to your certification.
>
> **Practice Hours[1]:** Submit a letter from your immediate supervisor, on organizational letterhead, stating that you have practiced a minimum of 2,000 practice hours in your certification role and specialty over the three-year period prior to applying for initial certification. You may submit multiple letters if you have changed jobs. If you are self-employed, please submit a statement attesting that you have practiced a minimum of 2,000 practice hours in your role and specialty; this statement must be notarized prior to submission.

If selected for audit, certificants are notified by email. Certificants who fail to reply to audit requests or do not fully document compliance with initial certification eligibility requirements may be subject to disciplinary action against your certification. [See ANCC policy in this handbook **Complaints and Grounds for Action Policy**].

ANCC also conducts random audits of certification renewal applications. See **ANCC Certification Renewal Handbook** for information on documentation required.

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[1] Eligibility requirements for **Informatics Nursing (NI-BC)** allow flexibility in meeting the practice hours requirement for initial certification. Please see the certification webpage for additional information (https://www.nursingworld.org/our-certifications/informatics-nurse/).

ABOUT CERTIFICATION EXAMINATIONS

Once eligibility requirements are verified, an applicant for ANCC certification must pass the affiliated certification examination to achieve certification. All ANCC certification examinations are copyrighted proprietary examinations.

ANCC certification examinations are in a multiple-choice format. They are designed to objectively assess entry-level competency in advanced practice registered nursing (APRN) and validate nursing practice specialties, as well as interprofessional practice in specialty fields. ANCC certification examinations are developed based on US practice. Examinations contain test questions that reflect US law and US nursing practice. They are not intended to assess the knowledge, skills and abilities of nurses who live and practice outside of the United States. Examinations are offered at domestic and international test centers.

How Are Exams Developed?

The ANCC certification examinations are developed consistent with the technical guidelines recommended by the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education (AERA, APA, NCME; 2014). Additionally, the ANCC certification examinations meet accreditation standards of the Accreditation Board for Specialty Nursing Certification (ABSNC) and the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA).

Each examination is developed by ANCC in collaboration with a content expert panel (CEP) composed of carefully selected experts in the field. CEPs review and revise the professional skills and knowledge required to perform a job satisfactorily, as determined through a role delineation study. These statements provide the rationale for the updated test content outline (also called the test blueprint).

Test questions or "items" are written by certified nurses and interprofessional content experts in their discipline who have received training by ANCC staff in writing items. The items are then reviewed by the CEP with ANCC staff and pilot tested to ensure validity and psychometric quality before being used as scored items on examinations. ANCC adheres to strenuous guidelines during the development of items to ensure that the items are appropriate for the specialty and certification level (e.g., APRN vs. RN). This includes editing and coding items, referencing items to the approved test content outlines and reference books, and screening items for bias and stereotypes.

Items selected for the examinations adhere to the test content outline and defined item distribution counts. The validity and reliability statistics are monitored by ANCC staff to ensure that examinations remain relevant, correct, and in line with practice. Certification examinations are updated approximately every three to five years.

How Are Exams Scored?

ANCC reports its examinees' test score results as pass or fail. If an examinee fails, the score report includes **diagnostic feedback** (high, medium, or low performance) for each of the major content areas covered on the examination.

ANCC examinations are criterion-referenced tests, which means that an examinee's performance on the examination is not compared to that of other examinees in determining the examinee's pass/fail status. In a criterion-referenced test, an examinee must achieve a score equal to or greater than the minimum passing score for the examination. The minimum passing score represents the absolute minimum standards that the examinee must achieve to demonstrate the ability to practice the profession safely and competently. With the guidance of a measurement expert (e.g., a psychometrician), a panel of subject matter experts in the nursing specialty sets the minimum passing score for each ANCC examination. In setting the minimum passing score, ANCC uses the Modified Angoff Method, which is well-recognized within the measurement field.

Each exam contains either 125 or 150 scored test items plus 25 pilot test items that do not count towards the final score. For specific information on the number of items each exam contains, please refer to the test content outline associated with that exam available at **https://www.nursingworld.org/our-certifications/**.

Scores on ANCC examinations are reported on a scale with a maximum possible score of 500. To pass the ANCC examination, an examinee must achieve a scaled score of 350 or higher. Prior to conversion of an examinee's score to this scale, the examinee's raw score on the examination is determined, which is simply the number of test items that the examinee answered correctly (e.g., 105 out of 150). The raw score is then converted to a scaled score, using a conversion formula.

For examinees who do not achieve a scaled score of at least 350, the score report will show the scaled score achieved, "fail" status, and diagnostic feedback for each of the content areas covered by the examination.

The **diagnostic feedback** categories are:

LOW The score you obtained for this content area is below an acceptable level. Substantial study of this content area is recommended prior to retaking the examination.

MEDIUM The score you obtained for this content area is marginally acceptable; however, further study of this content area is recommended, prior to retaking the examination.

HIGH The score you obtained for this content area is well above average; however, a review of this content area may be helpful to you prior to retaking the examination.

The diagnostic feedback is intended to identify content areas that contributed to a failing score. The purpose of the diagnostic feedback is to help failing candidates tailor their areas of study prior to future attempts.

Please note, reporting the score in scale format does not affect the pass/fail status of a candidate. The pass/fail status is determined based on whether the candidate has correctly responded to the required number of items.

[See also the **Examination Results** section of this handbook for information about accessing your score report.]

Preparing For the Certification Examination

Each certification exam has a test content outline, reference list, and sample questions available for free to prepare you for the examination available online on the certification's webpage.

Study Plan: Approximately 6 months before you plan to take your exam, develop a study plan. This could include self-study, finding a study buddy or group, taking a review course, taking an online narrated review course, reviewing current textbooks and articles, or other methods. The key is to have a study plan and follow through with it.

Test Content Outlines: You can find the most up-to-date test content outline on the ANCC website. The test content outline includes the number of questions for each domain of practice and identifies the areas that are included on the examination.

Sample Questions: To practice, you can answer sample questions that are similar to those on the actual examination but do not represent the full range of content or levels of difficulty. There is no time limit associated with reviewing the sample questions, and you can review them as many times as you wish, for free.

References: For additional reading, you might want to look over the list of approved authoritative texts, which are used by nurse volunteers to author examination items. While the list is not all-inclusive, it may act as a guide to help you prepare.

Candidates are not required to use practice examinations and/or examination preparation materials offered by the certifying organization (ANCC) to sit for a certification examination. The use of practice examinations and/or examination preparation materials does not imply or ensure successful performance on the exam or give an advantage over candidates who do not choose to use them. Further, the use of practice examinations or other preparation materials is not the only or preferred route to adequate preparation for the certification examination. Candidates are encouraged to develop a study plan, gather materials, and commit to a system that works best for them in preparing to take a certification exam.

SCHEDULING YOUR EXAMINATION DATE AND TESTING SITES

ANCC delivers its certification examinations via computer-based testing at a test center year-round. All ANCC examinations are computer-based and offered through the Prometric™ testing system. The testing system is an international network of testing centers. You can locate examination test sites and addresses, including international test center locations, and information to schedule an exam at a test site at **www.prometric.com/ANCC .**

Authorized to Test Notices will be delivered via email to the address on file with ANCC. After you receive an Authorization to Test Notice, you will have 120 days to make an appointment with Prometric to take the examination at a test center. You cannot schedule an appointment prior to receiving your Authorization to Test Notice or after the expiration date on your Authorization to Test Notice. If you are **requesting an accommodation**, you must wait for the accommodation confirmation before making an appointment for your exam at a testing center. Schedule as soon as possible for your preferred date and time, which provides you with the flexibility to schedule your examination based on your religious, personal, or other needs. If you wait until near the end of the eligibility period, you may have to accept any appointment available.

You can schedule an appointment online at a test center at the Prometric Registration at **www.prometric.com/ANCC** or by calling the Prometric Registration Center at 1.800.350.7076. Prometric may charge a fee to reschedule or cancel your appointment.

Please reference the Prometric reschedule and cancelation information at **https://www.prometric.com/ANCC** for additional information. Candidates cancelling less than 2 days before a test date, forfeit their testing fee.

Extending the Testing Window

In the event that you are unable to test during the 120-day testing window, you may, **one time only**, request a new 120-day testing window. The exam re-assignment fee is $100. This new testing window must begin less than 6 months from the last day of the initial testing window. If you do not test during your new testing period, you will need to reapply as a new applicant, meet any new eligibility requirements, and pay all applicable fees. To make this request, please complete the **Testing Window Re-Assignment Request Form** at **https://www.nursingworld.org/certification/certification-policies/**.

Special Testing Accommodations

ANCC and its testing vendor make every effort to reasonably accommodate candidates with documented disabilities as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). You may **request special accommodation** for taking your certification examination. If you have a disability as defined under the ADA, you must notify ANCC by submitting a report regarding

your request from your physician or a qualified healthcare professional, after submitting your certification application. The information must be on the physician's or other qualified healthcare professional's letterhead, typed, dated, and signed by the healthcare professional.

The report must document the following information in order to be considered:

- ❑ A specific diagnosis and date of your diagnosis
- ❑ Specific and current findings that support your diagnosis (relevant medical history, tests administered, date of the most current evaluation, within the last 3 years)
- ❑ A description of your substantial day-to-day functional limitations resulting from your stated disabilities
- ❑ Specific recommendations for your testing accommodation(s), including a detailed explanation of why the accommodation is needed. If the accommodation includes extra time, please indicate the amount of time requested.

Important Note: *Additional information may be requested after a review of your information.*

You will receive an email informing you of the outcome of your special accommodations request. Please wait for confirmation of any special accommodation BEFORE scheduling a testing appointment as any special accommodation cannot be added to an existing testing appointment.

Information about the process to submit a special accommodation request is available at **https://www.nursingworld.org/certification/certification-policies/special-accommodations/.**

THE DAY OF THE EXAM

ANCC and its testing partner Prometric enforce protocols that have been established to ensure the security of the examinations and to provide a standardized testing environment and experience for test-takers. Prometric Test Center Associates (TCA) are required to report any incident in which there is evidence of irregular behavior. Failure to follow testing instructions can result in your dismissal from the testing center, your examination score being invalidated, being prohibited from retesting or taking other ANCC certification examinations, or other sanctions by ANCC.

Time of Arrival

You must arrive at the test center at least 15 minutes before your scheduled appointment time. If your arrival is so late that your session would interfere with the test center schedule, you will be considered a "no show" and your testing window will automatically expire. You will be required to submit additional documentation and fees to schedule a new testing date. Please see **Extending the Testing Window** section of this handbook and contact ANCC for details.

What To Expect at Check-In/Before Entering the Examination Room

At the test center, Prometric Test Center Associates (TCA) will have you follow security protocols when you check-in and upon return from breaks, before being admitted to the examination room, which include:

- ❑ Presenting identification
- ❑ Signing into the test center logbook
- ❑ Visual inspection of, including but not limited to, eyeglasses, hearing aids, jewelry, neckwear, hair, and other accessories worn by the candidate
- ❑ Assignment of a locker key tag - you are required to place all personal possessions including cell phones or paper or electronic resources, in a designated area for which you will be issued a locker and key.
- ❑ Issuance of dry-erase board for note taking that must be turned in at the end of the test session.
- ❑ Scanning with metal detector
- ❑ Electronic Biometric capture (fingerprint) -- for APRN candidates only

No food or drink, except for water, may be taken into the testing room. You may leave the testing room to use the restroom or get a drink of water, but you will need to sign out according to the instructions that will be explained at the test site. Your testing time will not be increased to accommodate a break. If you have a medical condition and cannot comply with this rule, you must apply for a **special testing accommodation** in advance of scheduling your test.

Acceptable Forms of ID

When you arrive at the test center, you must present one form of acceptable identification from the list below (no photocopies will be accepted):

- ❑ Driver's license issued by the Department of Motor Vehicles in one of the 50 states in the United States, the District of Columbia, or one of the US territories
- ❑ State identification issued by the Department of Motor Vehicles in one of the 50 states in the United States, the District of Columbia, or one of the US territories
- ❑ Passport
- ❑ U.S. military identification

Your identification must be valid (unexpired) and contain both your signature and a recent (no more than 10 years old) photograph. All identification must be in English and signed in English. If you do not bring one form of acceptable identification (possibly two forms of acceptable identification, if testing outside of the United States) listed above, you can substitute an official ID that does not contain a signature plus a secondary ID that does contain a signature.

Acceptable documentation if you are testing outside the United States, the District of Columbia, and the US territories:

- If you are currently serving in the US military, then you are required to provide valid US military identification. If your valid military identification does not have both your signature and a recent photograph, you will need to provide additional identification that meets the aforementioned requirements.
- For all others testing abroad, the only identification acceptable is a valid passport for candidates who cannot provide valid US military identification.

If you do not bring acceptable identification, you will not be admitted to the test and your eligibility window will end. You will be required to submit additional documentation and fees in order to schedule a new testing date. Please contact **customerservice@ana.org** for details.

It is not necessary for you to bring the ANCC Authorization to Test Notice to the test center and it will not be counted as an acceptable form of identification. ANCC partners with Prometric to deliver its certification examinations and endorses and supports the Prometric procedures in the administration (security and standardized testing) of ANCC examinations at a test center.

Length of Time for Examination

Total time for most exams is 4 hours, which includes time set aside for check-in, instructions, and a practice session on the computer. The actual time allotted for most examinations is 3.5 hours. Please refer to the individual certification at **https://www.nursingworld.org/our-certifications/** for the total time allotted for your exam. Before starting the actual examination, you may take a practice session that allows you to become familiar with the computer system.

- Sufficient time has been provided for you to respond to all questions. You are advised not to spend an inordinate amount of time on individual questions until you have had an opportunity to respond to every question. Time is not intended to be a factor in the examination.
- There is no penalty for guessing; you are encouraged to respond to every examination question. Computer-based exams allow you to mark questions you are unsure about and go back to them later. All instructions given by the Test Center Associate (TCA) must be followed in order to ensure proper processing of your examination results.

Any issues that occur at the test site that affect examination performance must be reported to the TCA before leaving the test center. Please also call the Prometric Customer Care hotline at 1.800.350.7076 and send an email to **certification@ana.org** to discuss concerns that affected your examination experience.

After the examination testing date, you will receive a link to a brief survey. Completing this survey provides feedback to ANCC for quality improvement initiatives.

Security and Confidentiality of the Examination

To protect the integrity of the examination and to ensure the validity of the scores that are reported, candidates must adhere to strict guidelines regarding proper conduct in handling this copyrighted proprietary examination. Any attempt to reproduce all or part of the examination, including, but not limited to, removing materials from the examination room, aiding others by any means in reconstructing any portion of this examination, selling, distributing, receiving or having unauthorized possession of any portion of this examination, is strictly prohibited by law. Alleged copyright violations will be investigated and, if warranted, prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

All examination scores may be invalidated in the event of this type of suspected breach. You can be disqualified from taking or continuing to sit for an examination or from receiving examination results, or your scores may be canceled if ANCC and Prometric determine through Test Center Associate (TCA) observation, statistical analysis, and/or other evidence that your score may not be valid or that you engaged in collaborative, disruptive, or other unacceptable behavior during the administration of this examination.

To ensure you follow ANCC's guidelines for the certification examination, you are expected to comply with the following rules:

- **Confidentiality**: You will be required to sign a *Statement of Understanding* at the beginning of the exam. By signing it you agree not to release any details regarding the examination, including giving written or verbal information about the examination questions to colleagues, faculty, social media, etc. during or after the exam. Violation of that agreement can result in loss of certification and liability for civil penalties and damages.
- Please verify that you have been given the correct examination that you are eligible to take. Check the title and examination code on the cover/screen of the examination to make sure they match the information the testing agency sent you. If they do not match, notify the TCA immediately. If you request to switch the examination you have previously applied for, you must contact ANCC to confirm eligibility for the correct examination; depending on the circumstances there may be a $100 administrative fee required to facilitate the change.
- All ANCC exams are "closed book." Books, papers, tissues, calculators, cell phones, electronic or other devices or resources are not allowed. You will be issued a locker at check-in and are expected to place any such materials in the locker if brought into the test center. Use of a cell phone or other electronic or other devices is strictly prohibited and will result in dismissal from the examination and additional actions by ANCC.
- No test materials, documents, or memoranda of any sort may be removed from the examination room or retained. You may not copy or take a picture or reproduce any test questions or make any notes regarding the content of the examination. If you attempt to do so, your results will be invalidated, and you may be prohibited from retesting or taking any other ANCC certification.

- You may not ask questions concerning examination content during the examination period.
- During the examination, you must not give help to or receive help from others. TCAs are required to report any incident in which there is evidence of irregular behavior. Any such reports could result in the invalidation of your examination score and/or other sanctions.
- Additional testing center regulations are published on the Prometric at **https://www.prometric.com/exams/ancc**.

AFTER THE EXAMINATION

Examination Results

The candidates testing at a Prometric Test Center (PTC) can view their examination results online via the Prometric Report Validation Portal at **https://scorereports.prometric.com/**. The candidate will receive an email with instructions on accessing their results after the examination has concluded.

To protect candidates' privacy and ensure no misinterpretations occur, examination results are not released by telephone, fax, or email for any reason.

Examination results are provided to ANCC within 24-48 hours after the candidate takes an exam. For questions related to examination results, please email customerservice@ana.org.

Examination results are pass or fail. If you fail, your score report will include diagnostic information for each content area of the test. (Also see **How Are Exams Scored?** section of this handbook for more information.) Consistent with the **Appeals Policy**, you cannot challenge a passing score or actions taken in setting a passing score, the examination or individual test items, or the validity of the test content.

Retesting

ANCC has a policy that allows candidates who do not pass their certification examination to retest. If you do not pass the examination, you may retest after 60 calendar days from the date you last tested. You may not test more than three times in any 12-month period. All candidates who retest must submit a retest application, meet eligibility requirements in effect when the retest application is submitted, and pay the retest fees. ANCC may require additional supporting documentation to determine eligibility.

To apply for a retest, please follow the instructions at **https://www.nursingworld.org/certification/certification-policies/scores-retest-application/** or send an email to **customerservice@ana.org**. You are required to retake the entire examination.

ACHIEVING ANCC CERTIFICATION

Certification Period

Once awarded, ANCC certification is valid for a period of five (5) years.

Your certification start date is the date you passed the examination, provided that all required documentation has been received. However, if your application is pending evidence of graduation/degree conferral, ANCC will not issue certification until the requested documents are received, and all eligibility requirements are met. In this case, your certification start date is the date all required documents are received and reviewed by ANCC. [See **APRN Application Abandonment** section of this handbook for more information.]

Your certificate and ANCC pin are mailed to you approximately 4 weeks after you have successfully met all eligibility requirements and passed the examination. You must apply to renew your certification before the current certification period expires. [See **Renewing Your Certification** section in this handbook, or for more details, the **ANCC Certification Renewal Handbook**.]

Verification of Certification

ANCC provides primary source verification of certification. However, ANCC does not automatically send verification to your state board of nursing or employer. Certificants may request that verifications be sent directly to any state board of nursing at no cost. In addition, one free verification of certification is available and can be ordered through your online account. More information is available at **https://www.nursingworld.org/certification/our-certifications/verification/**.

How to Display Your Credentials

The ANCC certification credential is evidence that you met the eligibility requirements and passed the appropriate examination that assessed the knowledge and skills in your certification specialty. To use the ANCC certification credential, you must hold an active ANCC certification (initial or renewal) that corresponds to the credential.

You cannot use the ANCC credential if your certification has expired, or you have not taken or have failed the appropriate examination. ANCC investigates any unauthorized use of an ANCC credential or any person **misrepresenting** themselves as holding an ANCC certification or credential when in fact they do not.

When writing your credentials, the accepted order is highest degree, licensure, certification, honorary recognitions. ANCC has developed a brochure, *How to Display Your Credentials*, that provides additional information on displaying your credentials. The credential for each ANCC

certification is provided at **https://www.nursingworld.org/certification/certification-policies/certification-credentials/.**

RENEWING YOUR CERTIFICATION

Healthcare technology, strategies, and research can change professional practice and healthcare, and can impact public safety. Due to these changes, the Commission on Board Certification (COC) established a 5-year period for certification. Renewing certification every five years provides evidence to the public that the certificant is meeting requirements for continued competence by updating their knowledge and showing commitment to lifelong learning.

Certification must be renewed on or before your certification expiration date. Certification can be renewed through various professional development and practice activities. Certification renewal may also permit you to seek continued licensure, reimbursement, and potential employer recognition.

Certification renewal is required for continued use of your ANCC certification credentials. If you choose not to renew your ANCC certification, then you must cease using your ANCC credentials after your certification expiration date. The current renewal requirements are available at **https://www.nursingworld.org/certification/renewals/**.

Maintaining Your ANCC Certification

ANCC suggests the following strategies to ensure timely renewal and maintenance of your certification.

- Submit your renewal application no later than the expiration date of your current certification period. Certificants may submit their renewal application up to one year before their expiration date.
- Visit the ANCC website on a regular basis to download the most current renewal requirements. Certification renewal requirements can change to reflect changes in practice or regulatory requirements.
- Develop a plan to complete renewal requirements (mandatory continuing education and professional development activities) during your 5-year certification period.
- Provide ANCC with any **changes to your contact information** including a preferred email address.
- Maintain an active registered nurse (RN) license. You **must notify ANCC** immediately if there is a change in status to your license.
- Retain evidence of continuing education completion and other professional development activities. ANCC conducts random audits, and documentation must be provided during the audit; see **ANCC Certification Renewal Handbook** for information on documentation required.

No Grace Period or Backdating

ANCC policy does not allow a grace period or backdating of a certification period. Certification renewal applications received after the certification expiration date will have a new renewal period, consistent with the **reactivation policy**, and will result in a gap in the certification dates.

When there is a gap in certification dates, ANCC cannot backdate a certification renewal to meet regulatory, reimbursement, or other requirements for practice or employment. You will need to check with your state licensing board, your employer, and/or the agency that is reimbursing your services to determine if you can continue to practice and/or receive reimbursement for services while you are in the process of reactivating your certification. ANCC is not responsible for any adverse actions, fees, or penalties a certificant may incur because of an expired certification or lapse in certification dates.

Please submit the complete application when you renew—submitting a partial or incomplete renewal package will only delay approval of your certification renewal, resulting in a longer gap in the certification dates.

Certification Reactivation

ANCC has a policy that allows a lapsed or expired ANCC certification to be reactivated under certain conditions. Whether your certification is eligible to be reactivated depends on the amount of time that has lapsed since the certification expiration date and examination availability. You may be required to take and pass the certification examination again to reactivate your certification. Please refer to the full policy at **https://www.nursingworld.org/certification/certification-policies/reactivation-of-a-lapsed-certification/** for details and related procedures.

If you have multiple certifications that have expired, you will need to meet all certification renewal requirements for each expired certification. For each certification you wish to reactivate, you will need to submit separate applications and pay separate renewal fees and reactivation fees.

ADDITIONAL ANCC CERTIFICATION POLICIES

Misrepresentation of the ANCC Credential

If an individual is identified or recognized as misrepresenting themselves as certified by ANCC when in fact they are not, the Commission on Board Certification (COC) will investigate and take legal actions to protect the credential. Please refer to the Certification Credentials webpage at **https://www.nursingworld.org/certification/certification-policies/certification-credentials/**

Appeals

Individuals may appeal an adverse certification decision of ANCC's Commission on Board Certification (COC). Adverse certification decisions include:

- denial of eligibility for initial certification,
- denial of renewal of certification,
- suspension of certification or
- revocation of certification.

Individuals cannot appeal the eligibility requirements for initial certification or certification renewal, the passing score of an examination, the examination or other measurement tool or individual test items, test content validity, or actions taken against an individual's certification status as a result of a lack of valid RN license or other valid authorization to practice.

Please refer to the full Appeals policy and procedures at **https://www.nursingworld.org/certification/certification-policies/appeal-policy--procedure**.

Complaints and Grounds for Action

The ANCC's Commission on Board Certification (COC) will receive and investigate reports of certification misconduct, testing irregularities or scoring anomalies against ANCC certificants and applicants for misconduct related to certification or eligibility for certification. The COC will also receive and investigate reports regarding non-certificants (individuals who are neither applicants nor certificants) who are alleged to have held themselves out in some way as being ANCC certified (see COC Policy on **Misrepresentation**) or have participated in certification misconduct.

The COC's review under this policy is limited to certification-related matters. ANCC may decline to review complaints that, in its discretion, do not fall under the grounds for action of this policy. The grounds for action under the Complaint Policy are:

- Failing to complete or provide evidence of completion of the requirements for initial certification, certification renewal, or reactivation of certification
- Failure to maintain the required professional licensure or other authority to practice, including as a result of a conviction of any felony or misdemeanor, or pleading guilty or no-contest to any felony or misdemeanor;
- Failure to comply with the scope and standards of practice in an area in which ANCC certification is held as established by a final decision or order of a state board of nursing;
- Failure to respond to or comply with ANCC audit inquiries and/or requests;
- Determination that initial certification or certification renewal was improperly granted or that certification was improperly reactivated, including but not limited to instances where it is determined that eligibility, application, or recertification documentation submitted by or on behalf of an applicant or certificant was inaccurate; or any certification irregularity, whether caused by the applicant, ANCC, or a testing vendor;
- Providing false or misleading information, including but not limited to falsification or misstatement of information on any certification-related document;
- Cheating or assisting others to cheat, including but not limited to reproducing, distributing, or discussing by any means examination items/questions or content; acquiring by memorization and recollection from testing or by any other means, and/or knowingly using or acquiring materials containing such content;
- Causing, creating, or participating in an examination irregularity or misconduct, including but not limited to violating test center policies or engaging in any conduct that compromises examination irregularity;
- Assisting others to wrongfully obtain initial certification or to renew or reactivate certification
- Misrepresentation of ANCC credentials;
- Conduct unbecoming of the applicable profession that bears directly on certification, the certification process, or practice in the specific field in which certification is held;
- A finding of any of the above by a nursing regulatory body or any other professional certification body.

ANCC may report suspension or revocation decisions to licensing authorities, government entities, and to the individual's employer, and other third parties, including but not limited to, law enforcement officers or agencies.

Please refer to the full Complaint policy and procedures at **https://www.nursingworld.org/certification/certification-policies/complaints-against-a-certificant-applicant-or-non-certificant/**.

Confidentiality and Access to Certification Data

ANCC Certification data and statistics are proprietary information. Individual applicant, candidate, and certificant data are confidential. Except to meet requirements for certification accreditation and/or the certification business needs, certification data are not released to third

parties. Public data are available on the ANCC Certification website. Only aggregate data that does not violate the confidentiality of any certificant or candidate are available to the public.

Candidates for certification or those with an application in process for initial certification and/or certification renewal have an option to authorize release of additional information such as, test scores and/or status of their application, to approved third parties, including educational institutions. This option cannot be a condition to determine eligibility, sit for an examination, and/or to have a certification renewed.

Aggregate Data Reporting

ANCC will provide aggregate data reports of certification results to APRN educational programs consistent with maintaining confidentiality of certification information. Reports will be provided to programs having a minimum of three graduates, regardless of graduation date, who complete the same certification examination during the reporting period. ANCC will not provide an individual's score report to an educational institution or faculty, unless the individual provides ANCC with written authorization to do so. APRN applicants are provided opportunity during the application process to authorize the release of their examination results.

Records Management and Retention

ANCC has a policy for records management and retention. ANCC collects and maintains all certification records necessary to fulfill the legal requirements for record retention and disposition. This includes all information submitted in support of initial certification and certification renewal. The names of candidates for an examination, names of individuals failing an examination, or individual examination scores are not released.

Certificant and candidate information and certification examination results are maintained indefinitely in the ANCC Certification database. The records are password protected and accessible only to staff involved with the certification process. Information from hard copy applications or supporting documents are manually entered into the certification database and the documents imaged for storage on a password protected secure site. Supporting documents include but are not limited to transcripts, licenses, membership cards, or written communications. ANCC maintains electronic records of all customer activity and online applications within its database system.

YOUR RESPONSIBLITIES

Maintaining Your Legal Name and Contact Information

It is expected that applicants and certificants will keep ANCC informed about their legal name and current contact information, including email addresses. This ensures the accuracy of our records for verification purposes and successful delivery of all correspondence.

Change of Address

To make updates to your contact information, including email address, you can

- update in your account through your ANCC Login on **www.nursingworld.org**; or
- email us at customerservice@ana.org **with details** of the change; or
- call us at 1.800.284.2378.

Failure to maintain current contact information with ANCC will result in your missing critical updates.

Change of Legal Name

Requests for legal name change due to marriage, divorce, or a court-approved legal name change must be sent in writing with a copy of the marriage certificate, divorce decree, court-approved legal name change document or updated (and most recent) copy of your driver's license or state- issued identification card, reflecting the name change. For clinicians who have applied in the past under one name and are currently applying under a different name, please note that ANCC requires copies of legal name change documents before proceeding with the application review process.

For fastest service, please send your name change request and supporting documentation via email to customerservice@ana.org.

Duplicate Wall Certificate: If you are currently certified and have already been issued a wall certificate but wish to order a duplicate wall certificate with your new legal name, please send a completed **Duplicate Wall Certificate Order Form** with payment, to:

ANCC Certification
ATTN: Duplicate Wall Certificate
8403 Colesville Road, Suite 500
Silver Spring, MD 20910
Email: customerservice@ana.org

Notifying ANCC of License Status Changes or State Nursing Board Actions

A current and active RN or APRN license is required to maintain your certification. If your license is placed on probation, suspended, revoked, surrendered, or becomes inactive, you must notify ANCC immediately and provide the board of nursing documentation. Failure to notify ANCC of a change in the status of your RN or APRN license may jeopardize your ANCC certification.

CONTACT ANCC CERTIFICATION

Contact Need	Email	Phone/Fax
General Certification Inquiries	certification@ana.org	1.800.284.2378
International License or Education	customerservice@ana.org	1.800.284.2378
Special Accommodations Request for Testing	customerservice@ana.org	1.800.284.2378
Expedite Review Request Form *(Do not mail)*		301.628.5233 (FAX)
Submitting Transcripts (official/unofficial)	aprnvalidation@ana.org	1.800.284.2378
Hardship Requests	customerservice@ana.org	1.800.284.2378
Withdrawing an Application	customerservice@ana.org	1.800.284.2378
Name Change	customerservice@ana.org	1.800.284.2378
Contact Information Changes	customerservice@ana.org	1.800.284.2378
License Status Changes/Actions	customerservice@ana.org	1.800.284.2378
Verification of Certification	customerservice@ana.org	1.800.284.2378
Audits	certaudit@ana.org	1.800.284.2378

Mailing* Address:
ANCC Certification
8403 Colesville Road, Suite 500
Silver Spring, MD 20910

*If mailing materials to ANCC offices, we recommend keeping a copy of all documents for your records. We suggest using a mail service that offers tracking. Please note, you are responsible for ensuring your materials are successfully submitted to ANCC. ANCC is not responsible for any mail or packages that are misdelivered, damaged, or lost in transit.

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