
WELCOME TO THE NATIONAL BOARD EXAM

2025



Get to Know The Conference

The International Conference of Funeral Service Examining Boards (The Conference) is a not-for-profit voluntary association providing examination services, information, and regulatory support to funeral service licensing boards, educators, governmental bodies, and other regulatory agencies. The Conference develops and maintains the National Board Exam, as well as offers other testing services for licensing boards (such as Laws, Rules, & Regulations exams).

Since The Conference works in partnership with the American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE), we wanted to provide this document as a resource for its accredited programs. Updated annually, we hope this document will provide your program with insight into what The Conference offers and how it is connected to the licensure process. As always, we encourage you to reach out to our office with any questions. Staff contact information is listed at the end of this document.

Purpose of the National Board Exam

Like education, the National Board Exam (NBE) is one component of the licensure process. The exam is used by regulatory licensing boards as an assessment of content knowledge needed to safely practice as an entry-level Funeral Director or Embalmer. While the ABFSE uses the first-time test taker pass rate as one factor of the accreditation process, the NBE is specifically developed to provide licensing boards with a content-valid evaluation of applicants for licensure.

The exam's purpose is to determine who possesses the minimum knowledge necessary to perform tasks on the job safely and competently as an entry-level practitioner. Essentially, it measures whether or not a candidate for licensure meets the threshold of knowledge required to serve the public safely. It's important to note that the exam is not designed to measure how much a candidate knows; it only measures if they meet the minimum threshold. This may be different than how traditional grading is interpreted, as the key factor with the NBE is that candidates meet the minimum threshold, not how much they exceed it.

Structure of the National Board Exam

The NBE contains two separate sections, a 170-item Arts section and a 170-item Sciences section. The exam is delivered nation-wide at nearly 290 Pearson VUE Professional Centers. The current exam blueprint, as of January 1, 2023, covers the following topics:

NBE-Arts

- I. Funeral Arranging and Directing - 51 Items
- II. Funeral Service Marketing/Merchandising - 21 Items
- III. Funeral Service Counseling - 19 Items
- IV. Legal and Regulatory Compliance - 35 Items
- V. Cemetery/Crematory/Other Dispositions - 24 Items

Pretest Questions - 20 Items

NBE-Sciences

- I. Embalming - 62 Items
- II. Restorative Art - 34 Items
- III. Other Preparation of the Deceased - 28 Items
- IV. Funeral Service Sciences - 26 Items

Pretest Questions - 20 Items

Exam Scoring

The NBE-Arts and NBE-Sciences are scored separately. Candidates must achieve a **75 scaled score** or higher in order to pass a section of the NBE.

Scaled scores are part of how The Conference ensures the NBE is a fair and valid measure of a candidate's professional knowledge. The questions are pulled from an item bank in accordance with accepted psychometric procedures. Since some questions are more difficult than others, one form of the exam might be slightly easier or harder than another. Using psychometric data, scaled scores take into account the varying degree of difficulty of each question, so that regardless of which version of the test you take, the total score represents an equivalent level of knowledge. Using scaled scores in testing ensures that no candidate receives an unfair advantage by taking an easier form of the test or is unfairly evaluated by taking a more difficult form. It is a complex, but much fairer, method of calculating scores.

Furthermore, every question is pretested before it becomes a scored question on the exam. This is so the statistics can be reviewed and approved by psychometricians before a question ever counts for or against a candidate's score. There are 20 pretest questions that appear on each section of the NBE.

National Board Exam Development

The current exam content outline was developed from a Job Task Analysis (JTA) Survey conducted in 2022 utilizing a diverse group of funeral service licensees from across the country. Several ABFSE educators participated as part of the Job Task Analysis Committee and many more took the time to complete the survey.

The JTA survey is conducted every five to seven years by The Conference under the guidance of testing and psychometric experts, and is used to determine the significance/importance of the various activities performed by current practitioners across the country. From the analysis of data, the new content outline is developed. This job analysis produces a practitioner-oriented outline, which is the basis for an exam possessing substantial content validity. This process is not unique to the NBE, as it is used by professions across the globe to ensure legally valid exams.

Every step in the exam development process is conducted by funeral service licensees – not Conference staff. It's also important to note that every question on the exam is referenced to each of the following three resources:

Exam Content Outline

Also referred to as the exam blueprint, this document is the outcome of the JTA Survey. Licensed funeral service practitioners across the country are surveyed on the importance and frequency of job tasks performed on the job. Through the JTA process we can ensure the exam, which is a direct reflection of the survey results, is current and testing relevant material that is vital knowledge for **entry-level** practitioners to serve the public safely. While confidential and proprietary, each ABFSE program director can request a copy of the detailed content outline from The Conference.

ABFSE Curriculum Outline

This document is created by the American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE) and used by its accredited programs.

Reference Book(s)

Each question is tied to at least one reference on the approved textbook list, which is developed solely from a survey sent to ABFSE accredited programs and reflects the textbooks most widely used as reported by the schools. This list distributed to the schools and can also be found in the front section of the NBE Study Guide.

Application & Eligibility Process for the NBE

For the ABFSE Accredited Program:

Candidates must graduate from an [ABFSE accredited/affiliated* program](#) **or** meet state eligibility requirements to take the exam. *An ABFSE affiliated program is operated within an ABFSE accredited program, but does not meet the full associates degree requirements to be accredited (ex: funeral directing only/embalming only). These are the programs that previously submitted SBE eligibility and have been pre-approved by a member board for specific licensure purposes within their jurisdiction.

ABFSE accredited programs may submit the Verification of Graduation as official eligibility for a candidate to take the full NBE once the candidate has completed ALL requirements for graduation. This is done by using the online Eligibility Portal and selecting "Administrators."

ABFSE affiliated programs may submit eligibility for a candidate to take either the NBE-Arts or NBE-Sciences once the candidate has completed ALL requirements for that one certificate program. This is done by using the online Eligibility Portal and selecting "Administrators." If a candidate is made eligible as an affiliate program candidate, their statistics will always be reflected as an affiliate program candidate.

Candidates may also submit their official transcripts directly to The Conference as a means of NBE eligibility.

Detailed instructions on how to submit eligibilities are sent after an authorized user is set up to submit eligibilities with The Conference. Please contact The Conference if you need to update the authorized user.

Programs that pay for their candidate's exams can purchase voucher codes through The Conference. This allows the candidate to create their portal account and apply for their exam utilizing a program purchased voucher code.

For the Candidates:

Exam candidates can request a Candidate Portal account and apply for the NBE at any time. However, they will not be able to schedule their exam until their eligibility has been verified and processed. Applications and eligibilities are processed within 2-3 business days. Exam fees are valid for one full year from the date they are received.

Exam Scheduling

Once an exam candidate is eligible and has a *processed* application/payment on file, they will be able to schedule at www.PearsonVUE.com/theconference. Candidates can enter their address and see the available test centers closest to them. It's important to note that sometimes candidates may need to drive further than their closest centers to take their exam in a preferred date range. If availability is extremely limited within a certain area, we may be able to have Pearson VUE expand testing availability. Please reach out to our office with any specific scheduling concerns so that we are able to look further into testing availability. Example of scheduling an exam online:

1. Select a date at your preferred test center

< December 2022 >

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

Pearson Professional Centers-Rogers AR
4206 South JB Hunt Drive
Suite 110
Rogers, Arkansas 72758
United States

[Find another test center](#)

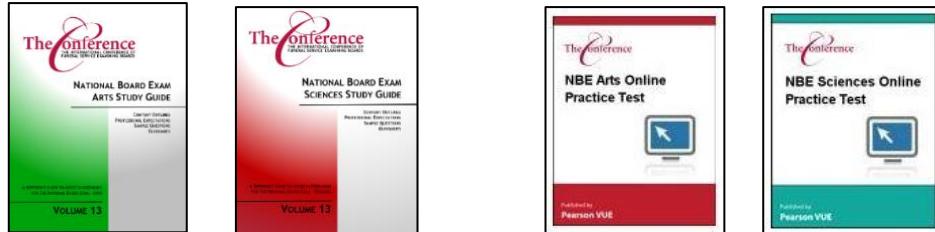
Helpful Resources for Candidates & Programs

NBE Registration Steps – When preparing for the NBE, the best first step is to direct candidates to the application landing page where they will find a list of registration steps. The first and most important step is to read the NBE Candidate Handbook. This handbook is updated annually and provides an overview of the exam process, as well as lists all exam policies and procedures that candidates agree to at the time of application. Most of the issues and questions we see with candidates could have been avoided if they had thoroughly read this resource. Candidates will then be directed to register for Candidate Portal account. Candidates will be able to apply for their exam(s) within their portal.

FAQ Page – Provides answers to our most commonly asked questions.

Top Five Exam Policies to Remember – In the front of the NBE Candidate Handbook is a comprehensive list of all the exam policies and procedures, including a list of the most common issues that can delay processing for an exam application.

NBE Study Material



While no study tool can replace what is learned in school, we do offer official study materials to help guide exam candidates as they prepare for the exam. Below are the study tools created and published by The Conference:

NBE-Arts Study Guide & NBE-Sciences Study Guide

There is an NBE-Arts Study Guide and an NBE-Sciences Study Guide. These spiral-bound books include the exam content outline, vocabulary, sample questions, and more. Bulk orders are available through [The Conference's](#)

[website](#). Interactive digital versions of these materials are also available through [The Conference website](#).

NBE-Arts & NBE-Sciences Practice Exams

Available online, there are two versions of the NBE-Arts and two versions of the NBE-Sciences practice exams. Each version has 75 multiple choice questions that are statistically representative of the number of questions in each domain of the exam content outline. At the conclusion of the practice exam, candidates receive a score report reflecting their score and general feedback on content areas in which candidates answered items incorrectly. ABFSE accredited programs can purchase vouchers for student use through [Pearson VUE](#).

Sample questions – There are sample questions available on The Conference’s website to give candidates a feel for the format and style of questions they will encounter on the exam. These are a free resource and in no case will they be found on the actual exam.

NBE Reporting

The Conference publishes monthly aggregate reports which include each program’s pass rates for first-time test takers, as well as average overall scores and subsection scores for each program. These year-to-date reports are posted approximately mid-month on The Conference’s website on the [NBE Statistics page](#). National pass rates and average scores are also available via this link.

As of January 1, 2023, this monthly report contains statistics for all first-time candidates that completed that particular accredited program. For accreditation purposes, a full annual report will be given to the ABFSE in January of each year.

NBE candidates are also given the option to release their first-time pass/fail exam results to the program they attended. These year-to-date reports are released quarterly. If they select “No/Not Applicable,” their pass/fail status will only be shared as part of the aggregate data and not identifiable by individual. If they choose to have it sent at a later time, they may do so by placing an order on The Conference’s website. For reference, the option is presented as follows at the testing center, prior to the start of their exam:

Option to Release Pass/Fail Results to Program Attended

The Conference provides certain data, including pass/fail results, to the academic program that you attended as part of their accreditation process and to assist them in evaluating the effectiveness of their program. As an examinee, you have the right to opt-in to sending individualized exam performance data for each exam attempt to the academic program you attended. If you did not attend a mortuary science program, please select "No/Not Applicable."

Yes, I consent to the release of my pass/fail status of this NBE administration to my academic program.

No/Not Applicable, I do not consent to the release of my pass/fail status of this NBE administration to my academic program OR I did not attend a mortuary science program. I understand that if I change my mind I can order the report sent to them for a fee at a later date.

What ABFSE Accredited Programs Receive

The Conference provides data to educational programs on a weekly, monthly, quarterly, and annual basis. These reports include information on first-time test takers that their program deemed eligible and/or test-takers made eligible via transcripts reflecting program completion.

To summarize, here's what each program has access to for both the NBE-Arts and the NBE-Sciences:

Weekly

Sent via email

- Confirmation of all first-time NBE candidates which includes:
 - candidate name
 - exam date & section taken
 - candidate eligibility classification (ABFSE-accredited or affiliate program)

Monthly

Shared on The Conference website

- Year-to-date aggregate data for all accredited first-time NBE candidates which includes:
 - number of candidates
 - percentage of passing/failing candidates
 - average scores and sub-section scores

Quarterly

Sent via email

- Year-to-date pass/fail information of consenting accredited first-time NBE candidates which includes:
 - name of each candidate that consents to release their pass/fail data to their program
 - exam date & individual pass/fail status of each consenting candidate

Annually

Shared on The Conference website around the middle of January each year

- Aggregate data of accredited first-time NBE candidates for the complete prior year which includes:
 - total number of candidates
 - annual percentage of passing/failing candidates
 - average scores and sub-section scores

Sent via email

- Confirmation of all accredited first-time NBE candidates which includes the following:
 - candidate name
 - exam date & section taken

Sent via email

- Year-to-date pass/fail information of consenting accredited first-time NBE candidates which includes:
 - name of each candidate that consents to release their pass/fail data to their program
 - exam date & individual pass/fail status of each consenting candidate

What NBE Candidates Receive:

At the completion of the NBE-Arts and NBE-Sciences, the candidate's pass/fail results will appear on the computer screen.

If the candidate successfully passed the exam, "Pass" will be displayed. Candidates that pass the exam will NOT be given their numerical scores.

If candidates are unsuccessful, "Fail" will be displayed. Candidates that fail an exam receive their numerical scaled score.

All candidates will receive an unofficial printout of exam results which will include additional information regarding next steps and a reminder about their obligation to exam security. Unsuccessful candidates will also receive a list of objective areas from the content outline where they answered one or more questions incorrectly.

Official exam results will be sent directly from The Conference to the licensing board(s) indicated on the candidate's exam application. It is Conference policy that NBE scores can only be released to state boards for licensing purposes.

Upon successfully passing a section of the exam, candidates receive a wall certificate (one certificate for NBE-Arts and/or one certificate for NBE-Sciences).

NBE Pass Rate

The Conference understands the interest in the NBE pass rate, as we know for many examinees this is one of the last steps toward achieving licensure as a funeral service professional. And for educators, the NBE pass rate is one of the factors used as part of the mortuary science program accreditation process.

When considering the pass rate, it's important to first understand the purpose and the development process of licensure exams explained earlier, as well as the range of possible factors that contribute to the overall pass rate. While these factors may ebb and flow throughout the year, the exam is a consistent measure of entry-level knowledge that only changes when the profession demonstrates a need. Any changes are determined through the Job Task Analysis (JTA) and Standard Setting process, which is the accepted standard for all high-stakes licensure exams.

The JTA is typically conducted every five years and produces the exam content outline, also known as the blueprint. During this time period, this outline remains the same with every question on the exam being tied to a designated section of the outline. This ensures that the necessary knowledge is being tested throughout the lifecycle of the blueprint.

Immediately following the JTA, the passing cut score of the exam is set through the Standard Setting process, which is a direct measure of the amount of knowledge required to safely serve the public in the funeral service profession. Using that passing standard, every form of the exam is then equated by evaluating the psychometrics of each exam question to ensure that every

version of the exam is statistically testing the same level of knowledge, regardless of which version of the test each candidate receives. During this time period, the individual test questions are refreshed in order to preserve the integrity of the exam and prevent memorization, but the framework and passing standard of the test does not fluctuate.

What Affects the NBE Pass Rate?

While there is likely not one overall driving force of the NBE pass rate, there are a combination of factors that can have an overall impact. A few potential elements are as follows:

- Introduction of a new exam blueprint (*Occurring approximately every five to seven years, this is where any changes, which are a direct reflection of current practice, are introduced. It's not uncommon to see a brief change in pass rates as candidates/programs adjust to the new blueprint.*)
- Educational standards (*ABFSE accredits mortuary science programs & publishes program information, including those on probation, on their website. While programs are held to the same accreditation standards, the programs will have varying admission requirements, syllabuses, class options, professors, etc.*)
- Varying use of textbooks by students and professors (*Every question on the NBE is tied to a textbook on the approved reference book list. This list is compiled using the direct results from a survey open to all ABFSE accredited programs regarding which books are utilized most in their program. If a program does not utilize textbooks, their students may be at a disadvantage during the exam.*)
- Varying state licensure requirements (ex: *Some licensing agencies require mortuary science education, while others do not require any education beyond high school.*)

- Varying levels of previous professional experience for each candidate
- Pandemic impact (*ex: increased online learning, decreased hands-on/in-person learning, etc.*)
- Condensed ABFSE curriculum outlines (*In addition to the exam blueprint and textbook list, every question on the exam is tied to this outline created by the ABFSE. In recent years, some of these sections, such as Embalming, have been reduced to more general content.*)
- Individual student engagement and performance during educational experience
- Individual study/preparation methods

Exam Integrity

High-stakes licensure exams, such as the NBE, can dramatically affect a person's ability to practice in funeral service. It is The Conference's responsibility to ensure that every candidate has the same opportunity to succeed on the exam. The Conference works diligently to maintain a secure exam program to prevent incidents that could disrupt test administration or give any candidate an unfair advantage. It's also imperative that The Conference can stand confidently behind the exam results that it provides to state boards as part of their licensure/public protection process.

Many of the policies, ranging from the identification requirements to not being able to take personal items in and out of the testing room, exist to protect the content and administration of the NBE. It is important to note that exam content cannot be shared in any format (verbal, written, electronically, etc.). By enforcing these guidelines, The Conference can provide a secure testing environment and a reliable exam program.

Throughout the application and testing process, candidates agree to the terms surrounding the security of the NBE. Each program representative also agrees to security terms when submitting exam eligibility. This language is stated under "Authorization" on the Verification of Eligibility form.

While we recognize that many of the policies may seem stringent, they are often a direct response to actual security breaches experienced by The Conference. From a candidate caught leaving the testing center during their exam, to an accredited program illicitly collecting and sharing exam content, The Conference is constantly monitoring the security of the exam to ensure the integrity and validity of the results.

Read further about exam integrity:

<https://theconferenceonline.org/examinations/exam-integrity/>

Anonymously report a security breach:

<https://theconferenceonline.org/report-concern/>

Stay Connected

To ensure you receive important updates from The Conference, please let our office know if any contact information for your program changes. You can also [subscribe to our newsletter](#) and we welcome you to join us at our [Annual Meeting](#), which takes place in February of each year.

Occasionally we will also have volunteer opportunities which is a great way to give back to the profession, while also learning more in-depth about the exam development process. These open calls are posted on our website, newsletter, and social media.

Contact Info

Please contact our office with any questions. We are here to help you and the candidate understand the exam process.

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- Best staff resource for questions about exam development.



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- Best staff resource for questions about exam eligibility, ADA, bulk applications and study guides, and candidate inquiries.



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- Best staff resource for questions regarding continuing education, disciplinary actions, finances, and candidate inquiries.

Notes



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