Frequently Asked Questions Regarding LCSW Exam Preparation

Question #1  What about LCSW Exam Prep Courses, Self-Study Material, and/or Tutoring?

*Research what is available, know what you need and develop a plan of action.*

Applicants need to first define their specific expectations or needs and develop a detailed plan of action. Success is linked to solid clinical experience, accurate assessments of strengths and weaknesses, adequate and thoughtful preparation, and effective test taking strategies. Three suggestions: (a) Do an Internet search for “California LCSW Exam Preparation;” (b) Read the monthly NASW CA News; and (c) Talk with colleagues and co-workers about their experiences.

Question #2  How far in advance should I begin preparing for the exams?

It is highly suggested that applicants begin preparing for the exam four to six months in advance.

Question #3  How soon after sending in a completed LCSW Application can one expect to receive authorization to take the first exam?

The Board of Behavioral Sciences is allowed up to 90-days to process applications.

Question #4  How soon after passing the Standard Written Exam can the Clinical Vignette Exam be taken?

Candidates may immediately apply to take the Written Clinical Vignette examination after passing the Standard Written examination. Candidates will be notified of eligibility approximately three weeks after their Request for Examination is received. Candidates who are retaking the Written Clinical Vignette examination will be notified of eligibility 160-180 days from the initial test date.

Question #5  Does the BBS provide a schedule of when these exams are offered?

All written LCSW examinations are administered on a continuous basis. Once a candidate is notified of eligibility to take the exam he or she will receive an authorization and a booklet from the testing center. It is the applicant’s responsibility to call the testing center and schedule an appointment.

Question #6  How long must a person wait to retake it if they do not pass the exam?

You will receive a Request for Re-Examination Form and may apply immediately to retake the either written exam. However, you will not become eligible for re-examination for 160-180 days from your last examination date. You must retake the exam within one year from your test date. To stay in the system, applicants must take an exam once a year until successful.

Resources  The Board of Behavioral Sciences Web site at [www.bbs.ca.gov](http://www.bbs.ca.gov)

Under “Examinations,” the reader can find “Exam Calendar, Testing Accommodations, Examination Statistics, Exam Information, and Exam Handbooks.”

**NASW-CA Chapter does not endorse any individual or organization.**

*The following names are listed as resources not as suggestions:*

Stan Taubman, LCSW, PhD, Berkeley Training Associates  510-845-7650

Philip Tsui, LCSW, PsyD  415-828-1539

Association for Advanced Training in Behavioral Sciences  800-472-1931

NASW-CA offers a licensing exam prep class during the annual conference. Information can be found at [www.naswca.org](http://www.naswca.org) under “continuing education.”
Key Elements in Preparing for LCSW Exams

Written by Stan Taubman, LCSW, PhD
Director of Berkeley Training Associates
Visit this website for further details: http://www.nvo.com/blatraining

Key Elements in Exam Preparation

The best preparation for California LCSW examinations is no different than the best preparation for clinical practice. The key elements are:

1. Take a direct practice curriculum in a graduate school committed to quality clinical practice.
2. Receive supervision from articulate clinicians who expect you to:
   a. Validate your diagnostic and psychosocial assessment impressions.
   b. Articulate the basis for your clinical decisions.
   c. Describe the therapeutic relationship process as it develops between you and the client.
3. Experience a variety of fields of practice and psychosocial problems in your field placements and post-graduate practice.
4. Develop self-awareness for clinical practice by participating in psychotherapy or other practices designed to enhance self-exploration and personal growth.
5. Keep up to date by reading journals, books and participating in continuing education courses.

Social workers who build their clinical knowledge and skill on this five-point foundation have a solid, realistic base for confidence in clinical practice and in their license exams as well. Little additional exam preparation is needed other than perhaps reviewing the Candidate’s Handbook and other exam descriptions issued by the Board of Behavioral Sciences.

Obviously, not all future LCSW’s have had the opportunity to build their professional practice on such a secure foundation. Here are some of the ways in which others have made up the difference for a stronger license exam performance.

Standard Written Exam Preparation

   Home Study Courses

Courses that include exercises and sample practice examinations, are available and several have reported a high success rate. While these courses cannot address issues that can only be learned through participation and experience, they do allow you to clarify core concepts and terminology relevant to both written and oral exams. Practice examinations are useful in learning effective techniques for responding to multiple choice questions and identifying your relative strengths and weaknesses.

   Exam Preparation Workshops

Workshops usually involve a concentrated presentation over one or two days with lots of opportunities to ask questions and discuss the material.

Clinical Vignette Written Exam Preparation

   Workshops

Workshops provide a concentrated opportunity over a one or two day period to become familiar with the Clinical Vignette Written Exam, learn vignette response techniques, and get in some practice with sample questions. It is generally helpful to learn the perspectives of others in the class who are likely to have experience in a variety of fields of practice.
Clinical Vignette Practice Groups

Groups are smaller practice groups that meet over several weeks. They usually cover the kinds of information addressed in a workshop, plus they provide an opportunity to get individualized coaching and assessment of your relative strengths and weaknesses. Because they occur over several weeks, participants have an extended opportunity to practice what they learn between sessions.

Participating in Clinical Discussions

Clinical discussions can be one of the best ways to prepare for the Clinical Vignette Exam because it generally provides an introduction to a variety of Case Conferences and Grand Rounds where clinicians raise diagnostic and treatment planning dilemmas, and work toward resolution. These discussions are often offered for free and are available through local psychiatric hospitals, especially teaching hospitals.

Attend Selected Continuing Education Courses

If your clinical training has been weak in one or more content areas that are tested on the Clinical Vignette Exam, make up for what you’ve missed by selectively attending CE Courses. Especially important topics include differential diagnosis, clinical risk assessment and management, treatment planning for specific disorders commonly encountered in clinical practice, and clinical practice laws and ethics.

How Much Time Should I Leave For Preparation?

Sharon C. attended a school where most of her professors had substantial prior or current clinical experience. Her field placements were in community mental health case management followed by a family reunification program at the County Social Service Agency. Since graduation she has worked in a domestic violence program at a Family Service Agency. She says she learned even more from her field instructors than she did in her classroom studies.

Jan K. attended a school where students were taught what’s wrong with clinical practice rather than how to provide clinical services. Both of her field placements focused on community organizing in the field of gerontology, although she says that she saw a few counseling clients. She says that her supervisors were more interested in her productivity than in her learning. Since graduation she has served as the director of a small non-profit community agency serving elders where she maintains a quarter time caseload. Jan needs to spend much more time preparing for clinical license exams than does Sharon.

Summary

At Berkeley Training Associates we have found from our nationwide surveys that exam candidates spend an average of about 50 to 60 hours working with Home Study materials in preparation for standard Written Exams. With this degree of preparation they report scores averaging 85.5, approximately ten points more than what is needed to pass the exam in most states.

An additional few weeks to several months might be needed to assure one’s best possible performance on the Clinical Vignette Exam. Those who have limited clinical experience, or who lack experience in the variety of practice settings, need a longer time in which to prepare. Many candidates establish a regular schedule of clinical vignette discussions with colleagues, perhaps once or twice a week during the weeks just before the exam.

These are general observations. Each exam candidate needs to determine whether their preparation for clinical practice is more like Jan’s or more like Sharon’s, and prepare accordingly.

Successful exam candidates who entered their exams thoroughly prepared often report “I now use this information all the time in practice. I sure wish they had taught me this in school.” They are more thorough in their differential diagnoses, more comprehensive yet focused in their psychosocial assessments, and more articulate about the basis for clinical decision making. It’s clear that the best preparation for clinical license exams is not primarily about the exams, it’s about preparation for good clinical practice.

Additional information may be found on the Board of Behavioral Sciences website www.bbs.ca.org under “Examinations.” The Board’s website is a value resource for all applicants. The NASW-CA Chapter offers materials, information, resources and links at www.naswca.org under “licensing” and “continuing education.”