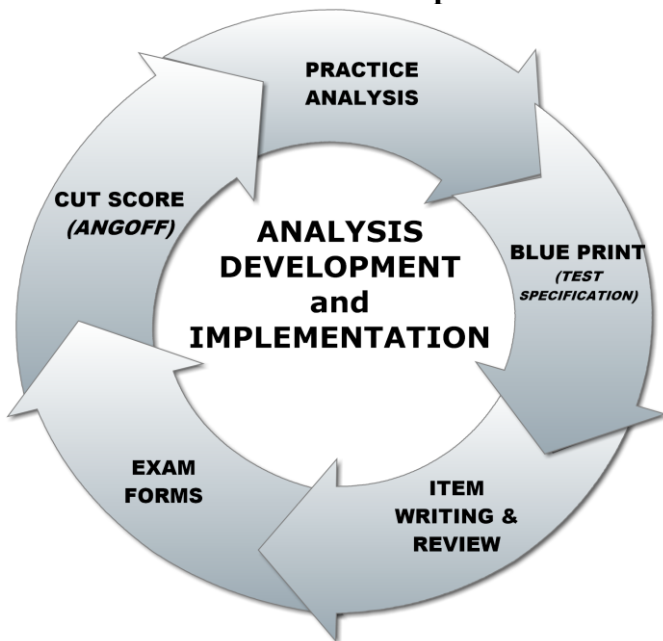


Examination Development



Valid and reliable tests do not arise spontaneously from item writers. They are carefully planned. A test has a specific blueprint, or test plan, which identifies what content needs to be included on the test. In addition, there is a list of the key content or activities performed by practitioners. Both the blueprint and the key content/activities serve as item-writing guides or "test specifications" for the item writers.

Where do these test specifications come from?

The content of a certification examination is based on a **practice analysis** survey of practitioners that identifies the key tasks/activities performed by entry-level practitioners. A national task force is brought together to plan the survey content. This task force can include practitioners, as well as clinical educators and supervisors of practitioners. Following data collection, the task force reviews the survey results and makes recommendations for the certification test specifications, or **blueprint**. Most importantly, a practice analysis is performed every five years to be sure the test reflects current practice and is kept up to date.

The group that oversees test development is the Certification Board, which is made up of certified practitioners. There is also usually a Test Committee that writes the actual test questions. **Item writers**, who are certified practitioners from a variety of geographic and practice settings, write test questions to meet the blueprint requirements. Members of both the Certification Board and the Test Committee are considered "content experts" concerning the knowledge and skills needed by practitioners for safe practice.

Each question on the test can be linked directly to the tasks/activities in the practice analysis survey. The Test Committee usually meets in person twice a year to review, evaluate, and write test questions. To be certain that the test content is accurate, all questions are supported, using the updated references, including a core curriculum for the practice, if available.

The test, now in **exam form**, consists of 150-175 questions that match the test blueprint. About 25-50 of the questions can be new, experimental or "pilot" questions that are not scored. Pilot testing of new questions allows for the evaluation of questions to determine if they are valid before they become scored questions.

The passing score, or **cut score**, of the test is determined by a panel of practitioners who serve as subject matter experts (SMEs). Both experienced and newly certified practitioners serve on this panel. This group performs a standard setting procedure (Angoff) in which each test question is reviewed to determine its level of difficulty. Finally, the passing score is determined. It is based on the SME panel's estimation of the level of difficulty required to identify individuals who have an acceptable level of knowledge and skill. Therefore, each candidate's test score is measured against a predetermined standard, not against the performance of other test takers.