



UNDERSTANDING AND INTERPRETING YOUR EXAMINATION SCORE REPORT

This publication was created to help you understand how BCSP sets the minimum passing score for its examinations and how you can interpret the official score report you received.

Examination Structure

The purpose of the examination is to measure whether candidates have demonstrated at least a minimum standard of knowledge of professional safety practice at the level for which they are being tested. The current examinations' structures are based on validation studies. Validation studies involve people in professional safety practice who identify and characterize the subject matter important in professional safety practice at a specific designation or certification's level. The results from these studies are summarized in the examinations' blueprints. The blueprints contain the subject matter found on the examinations as well as the portion of the examinations covered by each subject.

Examinations Minimum Passing Score

An examination has a single minimum passing score against which all candidates are measured. The minimum passing score is based on the total score on the examination; therefore, candidates are not required to earn a minimum score in each subject area, or domain, of practice.

As part of BCSP's item quality processes, BCSP placed a number of items on the examination for developmental purposes. These items were not scored and did not count toward your total score, but BCSP obtains item performance information from these developmental items for use on future versions of the examination. Your examination score was based on how many of the scored items you answered correctly. All those scored items had the same weighting, and there was no penalty for selecting an incorrect answer.

How BCSP Sets the Minimum Passing Score

You may expect that the minimum passing score is 70% based on your experience in academic settings where the instructor arbitrarily sets this value as the passing score on a test.

Alternatively, you may be familiar with "grading on a curve" (called normative scoring) where the passing score on a test is determined by the instructor based on how well each student in the class performed on the test and then normalized so that 50-70% of the class pass, regardless of the raw scores earned by the students.

These two approaches are not acceptable for accredited certification examinations as these two methods do not measure minimum competency objectively.

For nationally accredited certifications all candidates must have an equal opportunity to pass the credentialing examinations regardless of the population of candidates attempting the examinations. The purpose of the examination is to assess whether each candidate has met the minimum standard of knowledge required of a safety professional at the specified level. This minimum standard is represented by the minimum passing score on the examinations. What this means is that if everyone within a given time period meets or exceeds this minimum passing score, everyone will pass.

BCSP uses the modified Angoff technique for setting passing scores for certification examinations. This criterion-referenced method is the most common approach for establishing examination standards. The technique requires convening one or more diverse panels of experts in safety to individually rate each item on the examination against the criterion of the minimally-competent, or minimally-qualified candidate. Once these ratings are obtained, further analysis of the items is performed to verify that the ratings derived by the panels of experts are consistent.

The modified Angoff technique results in a minimum passing score based on the aggregated difficulty of each item on the examination. With each examination revision, the passing score may change in response to the assessed difficulties of any new, scored items that are placed on the examination revision. In the end, the modified Angoff technique results in an objectively-established minimum passing score against which every candidate is measured, and which provides every candidate the same opportunity to pass the examination.

How to Interpret Your Examination Score

When you completed the examination at the computer testing center, you received an unofficial pass/fail result. BCSP later provided you with your official score report showing how you performed within each of the domains of practice.

If you passed, you ought to be curious about how well you performed on the examination. Domains and task areas in which your performance was weakest are the areas in which you may consider additional professional development.

If you failed the examination, you need to understand how you scored in each domain of practice and use that information to develop a mitigation strategy for further preparation before retaking the examination. Certification examinations are statistically reliable. What this means is that if you retake the examination without sufficiently remedying your weaker knowledge areas, you will likely receive a similar score. The solution to this is directed study in the areas in which you are weakest.

The domains represent major professional safety functions at the level for which you tested. The next tier below the domains are the tasks or topic areas that make up the domain.

Your official score report shows the overall minimum passing score which must be met or exceeded to pass the examination. Your overall score is also shown. Within the body of the official score report is a diagnostic account describing how you scored within each of the domains and the tasks/topics making up that domain. The first column shows the maximum possible percentage in a particular domain or task/topic. The second column shows how you scored. The percentages shown in these columns are based on the total number of items within a particular domain or task/topic divided by the total number of scored items on the examination. Thus, in the first column (the maximum possible column), the percentages shown represent the proportion of the examination devoted to that particular domain or task/topic.

How to Use Your Score Report for Retaking the Examination

It is a bad idea merely to retake the examination without remedying your weaker areas. Doing this likely will not yield a passing score; in fact, the statistical reliability of the examination suggests that you will receive almost the same score. However, your score report is one of several essential tools you can use to develop a successful examination retake strategy.

Conduct a Self-Evaluation of Your Knowledge. Now that you have completed the examination, evaluate your knowledge of each domain and task/topic covered in the examination. For this, it is essential that you have the latest edition of the specific examination's examination guide (available at www.bcsp.org). Within those publications is a self-evaluation checklist and rating chart.

Evaluate Your Strengths and Weaknesses from Your Score Report. Evaluate your examination performance from the information presented on your official score report. Identify the domains and tasks/topics where your performance was below that required to pass the overall examination. In other words, divide your percentage score by the maximum score possible for that domain or task/topic. If your performance in that domain or task/topic is less than the examination's overall minimum passing score, make a note of that domain or task/topic as one of your weaker areas.

Compare your self-evaluation with the above evaluation of your actual performance. Are they similar? Does this provide additional insight? Adjust your preparation strategy based on what you find.

Recollect Concepts and Theories from the Examination. Using the examination blueprint, stimulate your recollection of concepts and theories from the examination with which you struggled. Though it is impossible to memorize precisely everything you experienced on the examination, it is likely that there are some concepts and practices with which you were unfamiliar. The examination blueprint can help you remember these.

Write down as much as you can remember and feed that information into the self-evaluation of your knowledge and your actual performance on the examination. From these three exercises, you will have generated a customized study guide that you can use to prepare for retaking the examination.

The final step is to use the study tools you have at your disposal to help remedy your weaknesses based on your customized study guide. Your study tools likely will include BCSP-published documents, books related to practice, third-party examination preparation materials, and even Internet searches to assist you with understanding some of the concepts and theories with which you know you struggled. Spend time changing and enhancing your knowledge before retaking the examination.