

BOARD CERTIFICATION OVERVIEW

The National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage & Bodywork (NCBTMB) is a nationally accredited credentialing organization formed to set higher standards for those who practice therapeutic massage and bodywork. It does this through a nationally recognized certification program—Board Certification. Board Certification represents the highest attainable credential within the profession; it is an advanced credential separate from entry-level massage therapy state licensure.

NCBTMB offers one examination for certification, the Board Certification Examination for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork (BCETMB). NCBTMB has included a content outline for the BCETMB within this handbook. The eligibility criteria for Board Certification can be found in the section titled, “Eligibility Requirements,” of this handbook. Please review these criteria carefully before submitting your application to test.

Once you have become Board Certified, you will join thousands of other massage and bodywork professionals who are committed to fostering higher standards of ethical and professional practice in the delivery of therapeutic massage and bodywork services.

NCBTMB contracts with Prometric, an independent testing company, to administer the Board Certification Examination. Experts at Prometric work closely with NCBTMB to develop the exam that is used to evaluate the knowledge of therapeutic massage and bodywork professionals.

Prometric also scores the exam and sends the results to NCBTMB. NCBTMB oversees Prometric’s activities to assure that all components of the examination process meet national standards.

GENERAL EXAM INFORMATION

The Board Certification exam is a certification examination that candidates can take and pass to show they have earned a higher voluntary credential within the profession.

Exam Facts

- The Board Certification exam consists of 140 multiple-choice questions.
- Four choices are provided for each multiple- choice question. Only one choice is the correct answer.
- You will have 140 minutes (2.3 hours) to complete the certification exam.
- A computer scores the exam as either pass or fail.
- Prior to September 14, 2026, your exam results will be sent via email during the month of September 2026. After September 14, 2026, you will receive on-screen notification of having either passed or failed the exam as soon as you have completed it.

NCBTMB has resources to assist you in preparing for the exam. You can check out these resources in our [Important Links & Resources section](#).

EXAM MAKE-UP

Assessment, Care Planning, and Documentation (25%)

Knowledge

- Interview techniques (e.g., open-ended and fact-finding questions, verbal and nonverbal communication skills, reflective listening)
- Assessment methods (e.g., health history, observation, palpation, range of motion, posture, gait,

- pain scale, special tests)
- Common pathologies, injuries, and pre-/post-surgical considerations
- Common prescription and non-prescription medications, their effects, and side effects (e.g., pain medications, muscle relaxants, cardiovascular agents, anti-inflammatories)
- Stages of tissue healing
- Special populations (e.g., pregnancy, oncology, geriatric, athletes, disabilities, palliative)
- Indications and contraindications
- How to customize a massage (e.g., analysis, synthesis, application of client information, and research data)
- How to communicate with clients in understandable terms
- Informed consent (e.g., risks and benefits)
- Documentation formats (e.g., Subjective, Objective, Assessment/Application, Plan [SOAP], Focus, Data, Action, Response [FDAR])
- Medically accepted terminology
- Health care practices (e.g., prescription for treatment, medical insurance, procedural codes)

Skills

- Use a variety of interview techniques to gather client information
- Conduct a variety of assessments (e.g., range of motion, posture, gait, pain scale, palpation)
- Develop a plan for the massage session (e.g., short-term, long-term where appropriate)
- Identify and discuss indications, contraindications, pathologies, and special accommodations, and adapt the session as needed
- Obtain informed consent
- Adapt massage for pre- and post-surgical considerations
- Adapt massage based on prescription and non-prescription medications
- Customize massage based on client's goals
- Monitor client responses, and solicit feedback during and after the session
- Educate client about the care plan, including self-care activities as appropriate
- Maintain client documentation
- Utilize medically accepted terminology in client documentation
- Collaborate with health care providers when appropriate
- Apply research evidence to client-centered care planning

Massage Techniques and Modalities (24%)

Knowledge

- General massage techniques (e.g., effleurage, petrissage, tapotement, vibration, friction)
- Massage modalities (e.g., Swedish, deep tissue, neuromuscular/trigger point therapy, proprioceptive neuromuscular facilitation [PNF], Eastern and energetic bodywork therapies)
- Pressure and manual forces (e.g., compression, tension/decompression, friction/shear, bending, torsion, vibration)
- Stretching (e.g., barriers, end-feel)
- Joint mobilization
- Endangerment sites and adverse events
- Client positioning (e.g., prone, supine, bolstered, side-lying, seated)
- Appropriate use of tools and equipment
- Appropriate use of topical agents (e.g., analgesics, essential oils, CBD)
- Benefits and effects of techniques and modalities
- Draping techniques

Skills

- Apply massage and bodywork techniques in a safe manner, monitoring responses and adapting techniques as needed
- Utilize effective body mechanics during the session
- Identify the benefits of massage and bodywork techniques and modalities
- Identify endangerment sites and adverse effects
- Position clients for comfort and safety, utilizing positioning equipment as appropriate
- Apply appropriate draping techniques

Anatomy, Physiology, and Kinesiology (24%)

Knowledge

- Anatomy and physiology of all body systems, including:
 - Integumentary system
 - Muscular system
 - Skeletal system
 - Nervous system
 - Cardiovascular system
 - Lymphatic system
 - Endocrine system
 - Reproductive system
 - Respiratory system
 - Digestive system
 - Urinary system
- Immune response (e.g., inflammation, lethargy)
- Kinesiology (e.g., mechanics of body movement including levers, agonists, antagonists, synergists, compensatory patterns)

Skills

- Identify structures, functions, and interactions of body systems (i.e., integumentary, muscular, skeletal, nervous, cardiovascular, lymphatic, endocrine, reproductive, respiratory, digestive, urinary)
- Identify origins, insertions, actions, functions, and innervations of muscles
- Identify types of muscle contractions

Professional Practice (14%)

Knowledge

- NCBTMB's Standards of Practice
- Standard of care for safe practice procedures (e.g., infection control)
- Information literacy and research literacy (i.e., how to locate and evaluate research)
- Professional development (e.g., continuing education, specialty credentials, board certification)
- Therapist self-care (e.g., body mechanics, physical activity, hand-held tools, professional consultation, mentorships)
- Business entities (e.g., independent contractor, employee, business structure)
- Business practices and policies (e.g., marketing, cancellation, no-show)

- Accounting principles and financial record keeping (e.g., tax filings, profit and loss, income reporting, bartering)
- Professional liability insurance
- Emergency preparedness (e.g., medical emergencies, disaster preparedness)

Skills

- Maintain a clean, sanitary, safe, and accessible facility
- Clean, disinfect, and maintain tools and equipment
- Stay current with massage therapy research
- Participate in professional development
- Apply standard massage therapy business and employment practices
- Practice self-care regimen for injury prevention and career longevity
- Manage medical emergencies when they arise

Law and Ethics (13%)

Knowledge

- Massage practice laws and regulations (e.g., licensing, scope of practice, insurance requirements)
- Legal requirements for record keeping (e.g., retention, release, disposal, HIPAA)
- Establishment laws and zoning ordinances
- Ethical principles (e.g., confidentiality, autonomy, veracity, non-malfeasance, beneficence, nondiscrimination, empathy)
- Professional roles and boundaries (e.g., dual relationships, power differential, transference and countertransference)
- Ethical strategies for managing and resolving conflict (e.g., conflicts of interest, how and when to terminate a session, right of refusal)
- NCBTMB's Code of Ethics
- Cultural sensitivity
- When, where, and how to report inappropriate behavior and sexual misconduct (e.g., clients, peers)
- Mandatory reporting requirements (e.g., human trafficking, minors and dependent adults)

Skills

- Follow local and state laws and regulations for massage therapy practice, operating within scope of practice
- Maintain client information and records, safeguarding client confidentiality
- Apply ethical principles in professional interactions
- Establish and maintain professional, culturally sensitive relationships with clients
- Identify and manage legal and ethical conflicts
- Establish, communicate, and respect therapist/client roles and boundaries
- Report inappropriate behavior and sexual misconduct to the proper authorities