**Must read . . . If you are taking the CPCE read this right now . . . yes, it is that important!**

**Special Announcement for CPCE test takers only.** **NEW ABC ANSWER STEM FORMAT.** Counselors who took the CPCE between January 2024 and July 2024 had to answer 50% ABC (three answer stems) and 50% of the traditional ABCD (4 answer stems). Information suggested this format would be evaluated, and additional changes will be announced before the August CPCE 2024 publication. Currently, the experts who compose the CPCE felt the new the ABC (three answer stem format) is more accurate than the old ABCD (four answer stem) versions.

To be 100% certain I was giving you the exact rationale for the change from the previous ABCD answer stems to the NEW ABC answer choices I contacted **Callie Marino, MS, EdS, NCC**, **LCMHC Vice President, Credentialing and Quality Assurance, NBCC, Inc. and Affiliates**.

She was kind enough to provide a concise summary of the reason for the change replete with a journal article to back up the reason for the exam format update. This is the latest up-to-the-minute information as of 4/22/2025 from an official source. **Here is a verbatim account**:

NBCC / CCE makes a concerted effort to stay apprised of best practices in the field of testing. Contemporary research shows that multiple choice questions with three response options can function equally well to four or five response option questions because there are often "non-functioning distractors" or response options that are not being chosen much or at all. In evaluating the item bank for the CPCE, we identified that this exam would be a viable candidate for transition to the three-response option format, and that writers and candidates would both benefit from this change. Item writers can focus their energy on evaluating knowledge with compelling distractors rather than arbitrarily needing to write three distractors which often produces one completely obvious incorrect answer, and the candidate experience can be enhanced by reducing the cognitive load required for each item. Research shows that making this change does not impact on the psychometric statistics of the items nor does it necessarily make the examination easier when carefully and strategically implemented. For more information, see the link below: [https://www.credentialinginsights.org/Article/comparison-of-3-option-and-4-option-multiple -choice-questions-and-related-issues-and-practices](https://www.credentialinginsights.org/Article/comparison-of-3-option-and-4-option-multiple-choice-questions-and-related-issues-and-practices)

**According to Callie Marino there are NO plans to change the NCE. Since a job analysis is being conducted on the HS-BCPE it is possible the number of answer stems on this exam could change, but there is no information at this time.**

**Finally, my all my strategies for guessing answers *will still work on the CPCE,* except for the advice to guess “b” when you are clueless. “B” is not a bad choice, however, statistically it is no better than guessing “a” or “c.” Remember on my video how to guess answers I reveal that exams with ABC formats do not respond to this strategy.**

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**Dr. Rosenthal’s Brief Summary of the journal article supporting fewer answer stems** **linked by Callie Marino**.

Keep in mind these are merely my ideas about the article and **do not** reflect the position of NBCC and the CPCE exam developers. I have decided to share since a lot of counselors are asking me: Why would the CPCE change from the traditional ABCD answer format to the shorter ABC three answer choice format?

I urge all test takers who are curious to read the article for yourself and come to their own conclusions. I am personally not taking a position either way but sharing my thoughts to give you a better understanding of this key change.

**Rethinking Multiple Choice Questions: The Benefits of Having Fewer Answer Choices**

**Why Fewer Answer Choices Might Just Make a Good Exam Even Better**

Multiple choice test questions (aka MCQs) to assess knowledge are extremely common, however, some research seems to indicate that using fewer answer choices, most notably just three, can improve the testing experience for everyone.

1. **Faster Test Completion Time**. When comparing an exam with four or five answer choices to one with just three answer stems, the exam using just three can be completed roughly 10-15% faster. Interestingly, reducing the number of answer choices speeds up exams without lowering the accuracy or pass rate.
2. **Examinees find it easier to focus.** Too many answer choices can overwhelm test-takers. Removing answers that are clearly incorrect reduces stress and allows the examinee to concentrate more effectively.
3. **Fairer for All Test-Takers.** Fewer answer choices could make the exam more accessible for counselors with ADHD, dyslexia, or even those taking exams in their second language.
4. **Makes Exam Creation a Simpler Process.** Writing good distractors (in plain everyday English, wrong answers) is hard work. Trust me, I am speaking from experience here, not only from years as a professor, but for 1100 tutorial questions and answers in the ***Encyclopedia of Counseling alone!!!***
5. **Research in PubMed seems to support an Exam with Fewer choices.** Studies in veterinary medicine, nursing, medicine and biology reveal no loss in test quality when using just three answer choices instead of the traditional four or five. Three answer exams match the reliability and validity of exams with more options.

Hope this helps!

Dr. Howard Rosenthal

APA Citation for Article being Summarized:

Garcia, A. N., Ebert, I. S., Sun, H.-P., Davis, J., & Wu, B. (2024, September 19). *Comparison of 3-option and 4-option multiple choice questions and related issues and practices*. Institute for Credentialing Excellence. *Credentialing Insights: The Online Journal for I.C.E.*

*I.C.E. stands for Institute for Credentialing Excellence.*