

June 2024 Discovery Series: Preparing Students for the ICF Credentialing Exam

The ICF Credentialing exam is a robust, rigorous exam. However, the pass rate is quite high for the exam (particularly as compared to certifications for professions with a similar exam format) – approximately 75% among candidates on the first attempt. In 2023 87% of all candidates ultimately passed the exam and earned an ICF Credential. And this pass rate is consistent across all three levels of candidates.

2023 ICF Credentialing Exam & Credential-Holder Statistics

Total Number of Candidates Tested, 2023	First Attempt Pass Rate, 2023	% of Candidates Who Pass on Subsequent Exam Attempt, 2023	Total Candidate Pass Rate, 2023
9,795	75%	12%	87%

For candidates who are not successful on the first attempt, however, we understand it can be disappointing and frustrating. We appreciate this feedback. We hear you and your students.

To this end, ICF is exploring additional resources and guidance that may help future candidates as they prepare for the exam. In the meantime, there are several existing resources that can support candidates in their preparations:

- **ICF Core Competencies** - <https://coachingfederation.org/credentials-and-standards/core-competencies>
- **ICF YouTube video Series on the Core Competencies** - <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLMBtOVpaN5DjRt-VAJla0Xe0MLuA-LZNk>
- **ICF Vimeo video with overview video on the Core Competencies** - <https://vimeo.com/372622916>
- **ICF Code of Ethics** - <https://coachingfederation.org/ethics/code-of-ethics>
- **ICF Code of Ethics Interpretive Statements** - <https://coachingfederation.org/insights-considerations-for-ethics>
- **ICF Minimum Skills Requirements** - <https://coachingfederation.org/credentials-and-standards/performance-evaluations/minimum-skills-requirements>
- **ICF PCC Markers** - <https://coachingfederation.org/credentials-and-standards/performance-evaluations/pcc-markers>
- **Referring a Client to Therapy** - <https://coachingfederation.org/research/academic-research>

General Strategies and Tips for Exam Takers:

- Education and experience remain the best preparation.
- Consider common coaching situations and possible responses for such a scenario.
- When reading the scenario, don't make assumptions or add details that are not presented.
- Read the scenario carefully and identify the primary competency of focus in the situation.
- Remember: the four responses presented may not reflect what YOU would do. Of the four, which is the most aligned with the Core Competencies or Code of Ethics? Which is the least aligned?

What is different about the ICF Credentialing Exam?

The ICF Credentialing exam uses Situational judgement questions, and the ACC Pilot exam is going to use knowledge-based questions, what is the difference?

Situational judgement questions evaluate how individuals respond to practical situations, while knowledge-based questions assess knowledge and understanding of specific facts or concepts. Situational judgement questions are often longer and require more deliberation to answer correctly.

To better illustrate the differences an example follows. Please note the example is not representative of any content included in ICF exams:

Situational Judgment Scenario:

You are a graphic designer working on a project for a client. The client has requested a design that conveys a sense of trust and reliability for their financial services company. They are uncertain about color choices. What do you do?

1. Choose bright and vibrant colors to make the design stand out.
2. Use a mix of various colors to create a visually interesting design.
3. Recommend using professional colors such as blue and gray to evoke trust.
4. Proceed with colors you personally prefer since you are the designer.

Correct Response: 3. Recommend using conservative and professional colors such as blue and gray to evoke trust.

Knowledge-Based:

Question: In color psychology, which color is often associated with trust, reliability, and professionalism?

1. Red
2. Green
3. Yellow
4. Blue

Correct Response: 4. Blue

Exam Content

The ICF Credentialing Exam content covers four broad domains: Foundation, Co- Creating the Relationship, Communicating Effectively, and Cultivating Learning and Growth. Exam questions cover the four domains accordingly as outlined below.

Domain: Foundation

- 13% - Competency: Demonstrates Ethical Practice
- 12% - Competency: Embodies a Coaching Mindset

Domain: Co-Creating the Relationship

- 12% - Competency: Establishes and Maintains Agreements
- 13% - Competency: Cultivates Trust and Safety
- 13% - Competency: Maintains Presence

Domain: Communicating Effectively

- 12% - Competency: Listens Actively
- 13% - Competency: Evokes Awareness

Domain: Cultivating Learning and Growth

- 12% Facilitates Client Growth

Exam Format and Delivery

Computer-Based Testing Delivery

The ICF Credentialing Exam is computer based. Testing takes place at testing centers selected and confirmed by the testing vendor (Pearson VUE) or through Pearson's OnVUE remote proctored testing service. Exams are scheduled for a total of three hours with the total exam time organized into the following sections:

Exam Format

1. Candidate Non-Disclosure Agreement: Untimed
2. Introduction & Instructions: 3 minutes
3. Exam Section 1 (41 items): 87 minutes
4. Scheduled Break: 5 minutes
5. Exam Section 2 (40 items): 85 minutes

The ICF Credentialing Exam contains 81 situational judgement items. Each exam item contains a realistic scenario describing a coaching situation, followed by four response options. For each scenario, candidates are asked to select the best response and the worst response among the options provided for that scenario.

There is only one correct best response and one correct worst response for each coaching scenario. Although more than one response may represent a reasonable response to the scenario presented, candidates will receive credit only for selecting the best possible response or the worst possible response.

Candidates can "flag" items. Flagging items allows candidates to revisit those items again before exiting the exam section if the section time has not elapsed. Candidates are also able to review any unanswered items before exiting a section of the exam.

ICF Credentialing Exam for Returning Candidates

Candidates who have previously passed the ICF Credentialing Exam when completing their ACC credential, and who apply for the PCC within 12-months of passing the exam, will have the requirement to re-sit for the ICF Credentialing Exam waived. All other candidates will be required to sit the ICF Credentialing exam to complete the PCC certification process.

Exam Scoring

The passing score and all exam results on the ICF Credentialing Exam are reported as scaled scores. The range of possible scores is 200 to 600, with a passing score of 460.

Sample Exam Questions

ICF Credentials and Standards provides [sample questions](#) for the ICF Credentialing Exam to support candidates in preparing for the exam. These questions are designed to help candidates become familiar with the format of the exam questions and how they will be presented on the exam. Performance on sample questions is not indicative of performance on the ICF Credentialing Exam.

Helpful Links from ICF:

Credentialing Exam Overview: <https://coachingfederation.org/credentials-and-standards/credentialing-exam>

Exam Content: <https://coachingfederation.org/credentials-and-standards/credentialing-exam-content>

Sample Exam Questions: <https://coachingfederation.org/credentials-and-standards/credentialing-exam-content#more-exam-content>

Exam Procedures: <https://coachingfederation.org/credentials-and-standards/exam-procedures>

Exam Accommodations: <https://coachingfederation.org/credentials-and-standards/exam-accommodations>

Current Exam Languages: <https://coachingfederation.org/credentials-and-standards/credentialing-exam-content#more-exam-content>

Language Support Request Form: <https://coachingfederation.org/app/uploads/2022/08/ICF-Exam-Language-Support-Request-8-2022.pdf>

Exam Retake Policies: <https://coachingfederation.org/credentials-and-standards/exam-procedures>

ACC Candidate Guide: <https://coachingfederation.org/app/uploads/2024/01/ACC-Candidate-Guide.pdf>

PCC Candidate Guide: <https://coachingfederation.org/app/uploads/2024/01/PCC-Candidate-Guide.pdf>

Helpful Links from Pearson VUE:

Exam Format Decision Tree: <https://coachingfederation.org/app/uploads/2022/07/PearsonVUE-decision-tree.pdf>

What to expect when testing with Pearson Vue in person:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L1wNSNzdINw>

What to expect when testing with Pearson VUE online:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L1wNSNzdINw>

OnVUE Remote Testing

Video: OnVUE [Exams Pre-Flight](#)

Video: OnVUE [Exams What To Expect](#)

Video: OnVUE [Exams Rules](#)

Video: OnVUE [Exams Systems Check](#)

Pearson VUE Online Exam Guide: <https://coachingfederation.org/app/uploads/2022/07/OnVUE-Taking-Exam-Online-Guide.pdf>

Pearson Online Registration Guide: <https://coachingfederation.org/app/uploads/2021/12/Schedule-and-Reschedule-Desktop-Instructions-TCC.pdf>

Pearson System Test: <https://home.pearsonvue.com/icf/onvue#b4ExamDay>

Pearson VUE ID Policy: <https://home.pearsonvue.com/Policies/1S/English>

Community Developed Resources:

Community Blog - How to Train the Worst Answer:

<https://engage.coachingfederation.org/icfcoachingeducation/blogs/alli-lake/2024/03/06/the-icf-credentialing-exam-how-to-train-students-f>

Credentialing Video/Presentation: [The ICF Credentialing Exam formatted.pptx](#)

March 2023 Discovery Series Recording:

<https://engage.coachingfederation.org/icfcoachingeducation/viewdocument/2023-discovery-series-sessions>

Credentialing Webinar on ICF Exam (June 2024) Recording:

<https://learning.coachingfederation.org/cw/course-details?entryId=14507414&itemId=717766&subscribed=false>

Exam FAQs:

***The most up to date policies and FAQs can be found here:** <https://coachingfederation.org/credentials-and-standards/credentialing-exam>

Question: Why is ICF changing the way it delivers the ICF Credentialing Exam?

Answer: ICF Credentials and Standards is committed to improving exam security as an important mark of quality for our Credentialing process, and we're equally committed to supporting our global community of candidates. The new exam meets the highest global standards for high stakes certification exam development. That's why we're pleased to offer the new ICF Credentialing exam through the global network of Pearson VUE testing centers, as well as through Pearson OnVUE—a live, remote proctoring service. Delivered on a secure platform, live remote proctoring provides the same high quality and security in the testing process, all from the convenience of a candidate's home or office!

Transitioning to a more secure delivery format for the ICF Credentialing Exam means that each candidate will have a fair, equal opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skill in coaching. By securely delivering the exam, it also means that the ICF Credentialing Exam will be better protected from any potential misuse or malpractice, including copying and distribution of exam questions, that could prevent an equal and fair examination process for future candidates.

The biggest benefit of these changes is to applicants and ICF Credential-holders – improving the security on the exam, raising the validity, integrity and, ultimately, the **value** of the credential. A more secure setting for taking the exam ensures that it is truly the applicant's knowledge that is being tested.

Q: How will the updated ICF Credentialing Exam be delivered?

A: ICF Credentials and Standards is pleased to offer the ICF Credentialing exam through the global network of Pearson VUE testing centers, as well as through Pearson OnVUE — a live, remote proctoring service. Delivered on a secure platform, live remote proctoring provides the same high quality and security in the testing process, all from the convenience of a candidate's home or office!

The test is comprised of approximately 81 scenario-based items that will test the candidate's knowledge of the ICF Core Competencies and how to apply them in realistic coaching scenarios. Each item contains a realistic scenario describing a coaching situation, followed by four response options. For each item, candidates will be asked to select the best response and the worst response among the options provided for that scenario. There will be one "correct" answer for each question.

Q: When/how does an applicant receive an invitation to complete the ICF Credentialing Exam?

A: Once an applicant's credential application is reviewed, ICF staff will contact the applicant via email with a status update containing the next step in the review process. The steps for a credential application review vary depending on the path in which the applicant applies for the credential.

Q: Once I receive an invitation to complete the ICF Credentialing Exam, how long do I have to take the exam?

A: You are given 60 days to schedule and complete the ICF Credentialing Exam. During the exam appointment, you will have three hours to complete the exam.

Q: How did ICF determine that three hours is sufficient to complete the test?

A: The total exam time is based on exam completion time data collected through a pilot of the ICF Credentialing Exam and is consistent with other situational judgement certification exams of similar length.

Q: What is the question format?

A: The test is comprised of approximately 81 scenario-based items that will test the candidate's knowledge of the ICF Core Competencies and how to apply them in realistic coaching scenarios. Each item contains a realistic scenario describing a coaching situation, followed by four response options. For each item, candidates will be asked to select the best action and the worst action among the options provided for that scenario. There will be one "correct" answer for each question.

Q: What do the exam questions cover?

A: All questions are based on the ICF Core Competencies, ICF Code of Ethics and ICF's Definition of Coaching. Questions are of varying levels of difficulty.

Q: Who created the ICF Credentialing Exam?

A: The exam was developed by ICF using globally accepted practices for test development, including a comprehensive job analysis of the knowledge, skills and abilities required of coaches. Experienced ICF coaches served as subject matter experts throughout an extensive process to develop, validate and review each exam item.

Q: Are there sample questions available for review?

A: Yes. Sample questions can be viewed on [the Exam Content page](#).

Q: How should I prepare to take the test?

A: By completing an ICF-accredited coaching education program, you will have received instruction that is in alignment with the ICF Core Competencies, ICF Code of Ethics and ICF's Definition of Coaching. Reviewing the education you receive, along with your coaching experience, is the best way to prepare for the ICF Credentialing Exam.

Q: If I miss my appointment or deadline to take the ICF Credentialing Exam, can I still take the exam, or will I need to reapply?

A: Candidates who are unable to take the exam at their scheduled exam appointment time are requested to cancel or reschedule their appointment at least 48 hours prior to the original appointment time, in alignment with Pearson Rescheduling and Cancellation policies. Those unable to cancel or reschedule at least 48 hours in advance will be subject to the forfeiture of exam fees. Candidates who miss their exam appointment will not be required to reapply but may be subject to the ICF Credentialing Exam retake fee to schedule a new appointment. The retake fee is \$105 USD.

Q: How is an applicant notified of their results?

A: Once an applicant completes the ICF Credentialing Exam, results are compiled and provided immediately to the applicant via the testing site. One week after completion of the ICF Credentialing Exam, applicants will receive official notification from ICF Credentials and Standards regarding the status of the credential application.

Q: What score is required to pass the ICF Credentialing Exam?

A: The passing score and all exam results on the ICF Credentialing Exam are reported as scaled scores. The range of possible scores is 200 to 600, with a passing score of 460.

Q: Is feedback provided regarding the questions missed?

A: An exam score is provided, along with the candidate's overall result. Feedback on individual exam items is not provided.

Q: What happens if a candidate does not pass the ICF Credentialing Exam on their first attempt?

A: Candidates who do not pass an ICF exam on their first attempt may retake the exam. Each exam retake is subject to the ICF exam retake fee of \$105 USD, which covers the cost of exam administration with ICF test delivery partners.

Candidates must wait 14 days following their first attempt to retake an exam. For any subsequent attempts, candidates must wait 30 days to retake the exam following their most recent attempt.

Candidates may take an ICF exam up to six times within a 12-month (365-day) period following the date of their first attempt. Candidates who do not achieve a passing score within the first 12-month period are eligible to retake the exam up to six times during each subsequent 12-month (365-day) period that begins on the anniversary of the candidate's initial exam attempt.

Q: Who needs to take the new ICF Credentialing Exam? Do I need to take the exam when I renew my ICF Credential?

A: Those who submit a new or upgraded ICF Credential application after August 1, 2022, will be required to complete the ICF Credentialing Exam, even if they previously completed the CKA for a prior ICF Credential.

Individuals renewing an ICF Credential will **not** be required to take the exam as part of the renewal process.

Q: If I previously passed the Coach Knowledge Assessment (CKA) for a prior Credential, why do I have to take the new ICF Credentialing Exam when applying for a higher-level Credential?

A: The Coach Knowledge Assessment (CKA) has been delivered since 2015 through an online, on-demand format with limited security measures. Because of this, the exam has accumulated high exposure since its original release.

To comply with global standards for certification bodies and to ensure consistency, fairness and equity in the Credentialing process, it is important that each candidate applying for an ICF Credential complete each requirement. Given that ICF is launching a new ICF Credentialing Exam, it will be important for each candidate applying for a Credential to complete the same exam. This allows all candidates to be held to the same standards and requirements for the Credentialing process.

Q: Once I take the updated ICF Credentialing Exam, will I need to take it again if I apply for another Credential?

A: At this time, the ICF Credentialing Exam must be taken with each new application for a Credential, unless the exam has been passed within 12 months of applying for the next credential level.

ICF Credentials and Standards will be supporting ongoing updates to the ICF Credentialing Exam. ICF Credential-holders who apply for a higher-level credential in the future may see different forms of the exam to be completed at each Credential level.

Q: Is there anyone who cannot take the ICF Credentialing Exam?

A: As U.S.-based organizations, ICF Credentials and Standards and Pearson VUE are subject to and must comply with international trade sanctions laws and regulations imposed by the U.S. government (Office of Foreign Assets Control). These sanctions regulations prohibit ICF Credentials and Standards from providing certain products and services—including exam administration—to individuals or organizations in designated countries subject to comprehensive U.S. sanctions, or to individuals identified on the U.S. Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control List of Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons.

As such, ICF Credentials and Standards is prohibited by law to administer its Credentialing exams in the following countries and regions subject to comprehensive U.S. sanctions, which currently includes: Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Russia, Sudan, Syria, and the Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine.

Additionally, Pearson VUE has suspended delivery of all testing services throughout Belarus, including in-person exam at test centers and online testing via OnVUE. Remote test delivery is also unavailable in China due to limited internet and connectivity issues.