



National Association of Social Workers—California Chapter

## **The Basics in Preparing for the California LCSW Licensure Exams**

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This article is designed to provide LCSW exam candidates with basic information and available resources in preparation for taking the two California LCSW licensure exams. The article is divided into three sections. The first section pertains to information provided by the BBS about exam eligibility. The second section pertains to the first exam, the California Law and Ethics Exam, while the third section pertains to the second exam, the ASWB Clinical Level Exam.

### **Section 1: BBS Information about Transfer of Exam Eligibility**

The following was copied from BBS emails and pertains to exam candidates that have already been deemed eligible to sit for exams.

*As of January 1, 2016, PSI began to administer the new LCSW California Law & Ethics exams, while ASWB is administering the new LCSW Clinical Exam.*

*January 12, 2016, the Board has successfully transferred exam eligibility for most candidates, for LCSW Law & Ethics Examinations (PSI) and the LCSW Clinical Exam (ASWB).*

*Candidates for PSI exams should receive a candidate handbook soon, which will have each candidate's ID number. ASWB exam candidates may download the handbook from ASWB, at <https://www.aswb.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Candidate-Handbook.pdf>*

*Candidates experiencing difficulty scheduling exams with PSI or ASWB should email the Board's Exam Unit at [bbs.exams@dca.ca.gov](mailto:bbs.exams@dca.ca.gov). Please be sure to include your full name in your email. From there, one of the Board's representatives will assist candidates to ensure they are eligible to schedule their exams.*

For more information, visit the BBS website at [www.bbs.ca.gov](http://www.bbs.ca.gov). The BBS recently updated the "Contact Us" information at <http://www.bbs.ca.gov/contact.shtml>.

### **Section 2: The California LCSW Law and Ethics Exam**

Within the first year of registering as an ASW and before their first renewal (after January 1, 2016), ASWs must sit for the California Law and Ethics Exam. The registrant must take this exam at least once per year until successfully passing it. ASWs must pass the California Law and Ethics Exam, obtain the required clinical hours and supervision, and complete all required pre-license coursework before they can sit for the ASWB Clinical Level Exam. California Law and Ethics Exam Structure and Content

The BBS provides information about the California Law and Ethics Exam on its website at [http://bbs.ca.gov/exams/exam\\_news.shtml](http://bbs.ca.gov/exams/exam_news.shtml).

*A California Law and Ethics Examination will replace the Standard Written Examination for LMFT and LCSW applicants. The Law & Ethics Examination will be a separate exam for each license type. It is designed to assess the applicant's knowledge of and ability to apply legal and ethical standards relating to clinical practice. This will consist of 75 multiple-choice items administered over a 90 minute period. The re-exam waiting period is 90 days. The [Law and Ethics Exam Plan](#) outline further information about these exams.*

The following "content outline" was copied from the 11-page PDF document "LCSW California Law and Ethics Examination Plan," which delineates the exam content and much more. All registrants should print and carefully the "Plan" and the "Candidate Handbook" listed under "Resources."

*LCSW California Law and Ethics Examination Content Outline*

*A. Law (40%)*

- |  |            |
|--|------------|
| <i>A. Confidentiality, Privilege, and Consent</i>      | <i>14%</i> |
| <i>B. Limits to Confidentiality/Mandated Reporting</i> | <i>16%</i> |
| <i>C. Legal Standards for Professional Practice</i>    | <i>10%</i> |

*II. Ethics (60%)*

- |   |            |
|---|------------|
| <i>A. Professional Competence and Preventing Harm</i> | <i>18%</i> |
| <i>B. Therapeutic Relationship/Services</i>           | <i>27%</i> |
| <i>C. Business Practices and Policies</i>             | <i>15%</i> |

**Resources**

- LCSW Law and Ethics Examination Plan (including content outline)  
[http://bbs.ca.gov/pdf/publications/lcsw\\_2016-law-ethics\\_exam\\_plan.pdf](http://bbs.ca.gov/pdf/publications/lcsw_2016-law-ethics_exam_plan.pdf)
- LCSW Law and Ethics Examination Candidate Handbook (2016)  
[http://www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/publications/lcle\\_handbook\\_01042016.pdf](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/publications/lcle_handbook_01042016.pdf)
- BBS Exam Information  
[http://www.bbs.ca.gov/exams/exam\\_plans.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/exams/exam_plans.shtml)

Chapter 14 of the *BBS Statutes and Regulations* also lists topics that must be addressed in mandated law and ethics training for candidates holding a MSW from outside of California. Exam candidates would be wise to do an assessment of their legal and ethical knowledge related to each of the following topics.

- Advertising
- Scope of practice
- Scope of competence
- Treatment of minors
- Confidentiality

- Dangerous patients
- Psychotherapist-patient privilege
- Record keeping
- Patient access to records
- State and federal laws regarding confidentiality of patient health information
- Dual relationships
- Child abuse
- Elder and dependent adult abuse
- Online therapy
- Insurance reimbursement
- Civil liability
- Disciplinary actions
- Unprofessional conduct
- Ethics complaints and ethical standards
- Termination of therapy
- Standards of care
- Relevant family law
- Therapist disclosures to patients
- Differences in legal and ethical standards in different types of work settings
- Licensing law and process

### **Section 3: The Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) Clinical Level Exam**

As of January 1, 2016, California began utilizing the ASWB Clinical Level Exam as one of the two exams required for licensure. A benefit of California adopting the ASWB Clinical Level Exam, rather than maintaining the two California specific exams of the past, is that all 49 other states utilize the ASWB Clinical Level Exam for a LCSW license. Consequently, while no state offers complete reciprocity, after January 1, 2016, practitioners who obtain a California LCSW license having passed the ASWB Clinical Level Exam will find their license more portable.

The following excerpt was copied from the ASWB website.

*Each examination contains 170 four-option, multiple-choice questions designed to measure minimum competencies at four categories of practice. Only 150 of the 170 items are scored; the remaining 20 questions are pretest items included to measure their effectiveness as items on future examinations. These pretest items are scattered randomly throughout the examination. Candidates have four hours to complete the test, which is administered electronically.*

The ASWB exams test candidates' ability to comprehend, apply, evaluate, and synthesize social work knowledge. The bulleted points provide examples of the types of knowledge that is tested.

- In a case where several interventions might be appropriate for a specific client, candidates are asked to select which would be the very most appropriate intervention.
- In a particular case, when two ethical standards are in conflict, candidates must select which of the two takes precedence.
- When a supervisee claims to take an eclectic approach to practice, candidates are asked which concepts and practice principles are drawn from each theory utilized.

Additionally, the ASWB exam tests the candidate's abilities as related to the following:

- **Comprehensiveness:** The candidate's ability to thoroughly consider a range of relevant options. This ability relates to the quality of professional maturity, or the ability to refrain from premature judgments based on insufficient information.
- **Synthesis:** The candidate's ability to integrate, summarize, and refine clinical information.
- **Prioritize information:** The candidate's ability to recognize the importance of information, depending on its relationship to other information.
- **Sequence in practice:** The candidate's ability to understand the sequence and draw clear, explicit relationships between the identification of a presenting problem, assessment findings, diagnostic formulation, treatment plan, intervention strategy, progress evaluation, and termination.

Most of the ASWB Clinical Level Exam questions are written in a format suggesting clinical application, rather than a straightforward question that simply requires one to recall a specific fact. This exam's questions often describe a clinical situation and ask the candidate to select the "best thing to do" in a specific situation, but do not include factual recall questions that require evaluative judgments.

Both vignette style questions and single sentence factual questions are used in the ASWB Clinical Level Exam. Vignette style, multiple choice questions are designed to test the candidate's ability to apply, analyze, synthesize and evaluate social work knowledge and are most likely to appear in relation to clinical practice content such as casework, group work, interviewing skills, assessment and diagnosis. Vignette style questions reflect the type of thinking that is much more typical of actual complex clinical practice situations, rather than the more basic, abstract, and academic multiple choice questions designed to test a candidate's ability to recall and comprehend information. With vignette style questions, each question presents its own brief case scenario as a stem or introduction to the question.

## **Resources**

- ASWB Clinical Level Exam Content Outline (PDF)  
<https://www.aswb.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/ClinicalKSAs.pdf>
- ASWB Examination Candidate Handbook (PDF)  
<https://www.aswb.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Candidate-Handbook.pdf>
- ASWB Exam Online Practice Test  
<https://www.aswb.org/exam-candidates/>
- BBS Exam Information  
[http://www.bbs.ca.gov/exams/exam\\_plans.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/exams/exam_plans.shtml)

## **NASW California Chapter**

While the NASW-CA Chapter offers live and online law and ethics training, as of January 22, 2016, the chapter does not have a live CA Law & Ethics exam prep course scheduled.

However, exam candidates should check the chapter's website for future state or local events and course offerings at [www.naswca.org](http://www.naswca.org) under "Education" or under "Events."