



PRACTICE & PROFESSION

## How to Pass the NCCAOM Exam the First Time

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The NCCAOM exam is the national certification exam for AOM practitioners. It consists of four modules: three are taken for a certification in acupuncture, and four for a certification in Oriental medicine (acupuncture plus Chinese herbs). The National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM) administers it.

Your first and most important resource is the NCCAOM website, which provides all the information you need to know in order to take the test:

[www.nccaom.org/certification/nccaom-exam-preparation-center/](http://www.nccaom.org/certification/nccaom-exam-preparation-center/).

### Why the Exam Matters

Every AOM graduate should realize that taking the exam is the first step to complete after graduation because NCCAOM examination and certification are important for several reasons:

- Professional impact - they provide credibility and credentialing
- Fulfilling the requirement of the acupuncture boards of 47 states and the District of Columbia
- Reputation - board certification is recognized by the public
- ACCAOM assessment of the pass rate for individual schools periodically
- Finding a job!

Table 1. Estimated Budget for Taking NCCAOM Exam as of 2020.\*

Items	Budget	
NCCAOM application for Acupuncture or OM	\$500 / \$595	Required
Exam fee (four modules)	\$310x4 = \$1,240	Required

TCM test - review questions (four modules)	\$250/three-month module x 4 = \$1,000 (estimate)	Optional
TCM review course x 4 modules	\$100/three-month module x 4 = \$400 (estimate)	Optional
Prep books and materials	\$200 (estimate)	Optional
NCCAOM practice test	\$70	Optional
Exam results to a state board	\$45	Required
Total Estimated Cost	\$1,880-\$3,550	

*\*Prices subject to change. Check online for current prices.*

### Studying for the Exam

The first step is to read and understand the exam content outlines for each of the NCCAOM modules. Determine how familiar you are with the topics and estimate how much study you may need. Study times vary significantly from individual to individual. Some questions to ask yourself: *How well did I memorize basic Chinese medical theory and practice in school? How long have I been out of school? How easily do I memorize?*

Studying for the national board exam is an intensive process. You need to carve out sufficient time over several months to focus on this material. Many people say two hours per day for 3-4 months is a minimum to prepare for the first module.

You know yourself and how easily memorization comes to you. If you can memorize easily, it will take you less time. If memorization is something you need to work at, it will take you more time.

### Understand the Modules

The four modules are Foundations of Oriental Medicine (FOM), Acupuncture and Point Location (Acu/PL), Bio-Medicine and Chinese Herbs. You only need the first three for a Diplomate in Acupuncture; you need all four for a Diplomate in Oriental Medicine. Most people take the FOM first and Acu/PL second. This is because you need to know the foundations of Oriental medicine, including how to diagnose and develop a treatment strategy, before you know what points and techniques to use.

Bio-Medicine is purely Western medicine, so you might want to take it first if you have a Western medicine background, or last because it is a whole separate area of study. The herbal module should be taken after FOM, and it is individual choice whether to take it before or after Acu/PL.

After you take the FOM, allow at least one month of additional study for the Acu/PL and one month of additional study for Chinese Herbs. Bio-Medicine can take an additional three months, depending on your Western medical background.

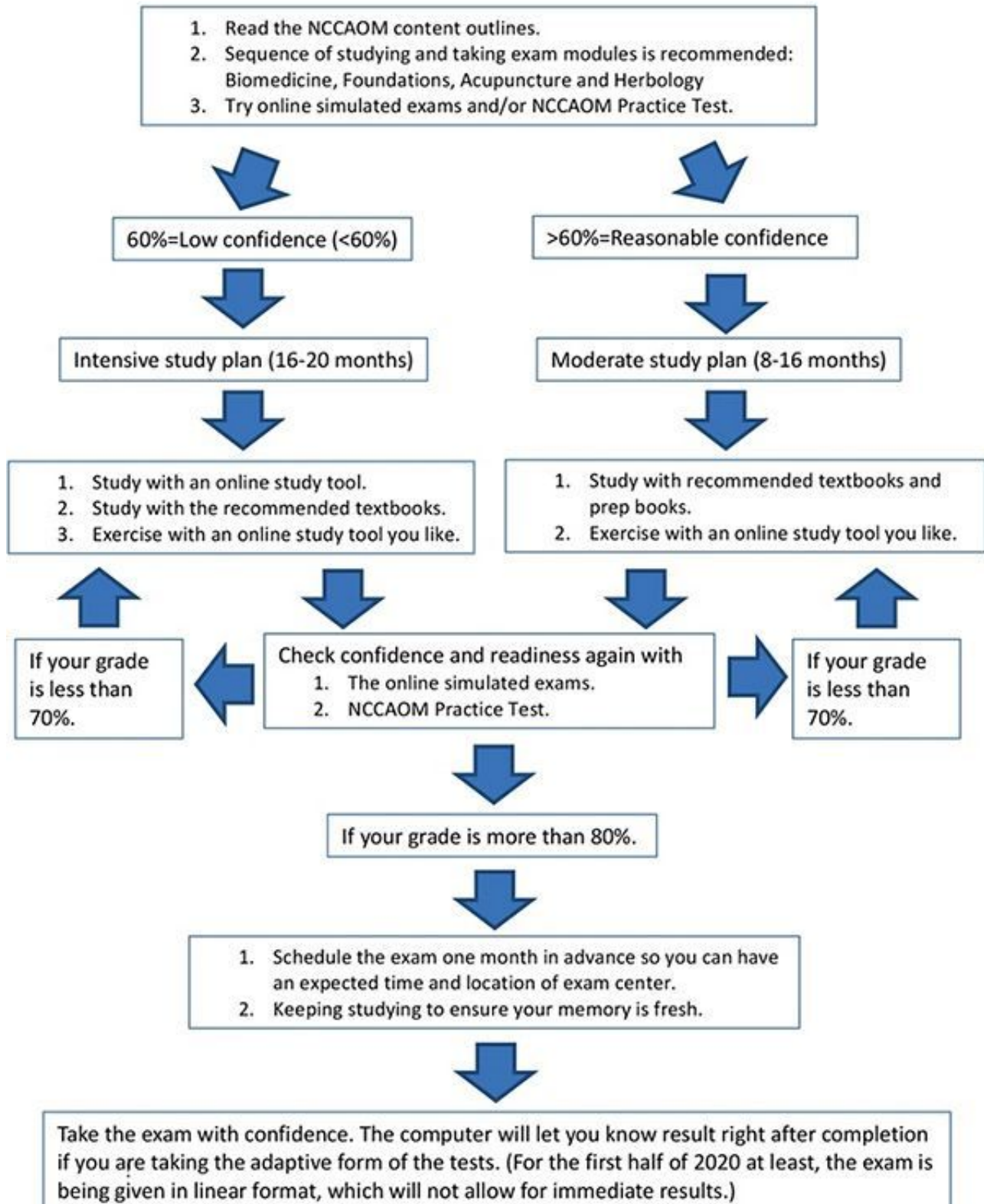
You know how you study best. If you study best with people, identify those people and make a plan on how you are going to study. If you study best alone, set aside time each day to do so. Daily study will help reinforce this material.

We strongly recommend walking with flash cards and quizzing yourself or your study mates. Your learning must be active; it is not enough to read a book (unless you are able to read and remember easily.) Most of us have to work at it.

Many people recommend using the "memory palace" process, which is an imaginary place in your mind where you create images of the things you want to remember and place them throughout this imagined space. There is a lot of theory to support this memory aid, which calls on one of the strongest aspects of memory: visual.

It is also easy to make audio flash cards: record patterns, herbs or points and then pause to give yourself time to answer before the recorded answer.

### Flow Chart: Preparing for the NCCAOM Exam



## Study Resources

The NCCAOM Content Outlines for each module provide an extensive bibliography of texts used to create the questions. It is extremely useful to be familiar with the language of the different texts, as the questions can reflect this language. They should be the primary sources for your study.

There are also many commercially available resources, and your school may offer a review class. The commercial resources can be found via an online search with keywords such as "NCCAOM exam prep," "TCM test" and "TCM review." Support groups through social media are also available and useful.

The NCCAOM site also provides a practice exam for each module (for a fee). Go to: [www.nccaom.org/certification/nccaom-exam-preparation-center/practice-tests-disclaimer/](http://www.nccaom.org/certification/nccaom-exam-preparation-center/practice-tests-disclaimer/).

You also can purchase premade flashcards on the Internet, in paper form and through an app you can access on your phone. Flashcards allow you to be an "active" learner, forcing you to recall facts, rather than recognize the correct answer as part of a list.

## Examination Costs

Prepare your budget for between \$1,880 to \$3,550 for the NCCAOM application, exam fee, books and online study tools if you take all four modules. Table 1 includes two examples of the commercial options for three months.

You might need to order more than one three-month study course that is not included in the table. If you don't need the online study tools, your costs will be greatly reduced.

## Expected results with different scenarios

1. *Pass the four modules after of 12-16 months' total study time; 3-4 months per module.* This is the most common time allotment. Make sure you have the necessary time in your life to complete the recommended preparation. Some people do not work at all or work part-time while they are studying, depending on how much of the basic information they already know.
2. *Pass the four modules after 16-20 months' total study time; 4-5 months per module.* The time frame can be spread up to 36 months. This allows for flexibility and is suitable for people who like a slow study pace and/or keep their regular work and lifestyle.
3. *Pass the four modules after eight months' total study time; two months per module.* This time allotment is relatively tight. It is not a common pattern because it can produce considerable stress, and may influence normal life and work. If you choose this option, make sure to arrange your life so you have four hours to study per day. You will need time to review material every day, as well as learn new material. Reducing outside work during this time would be most beneficial.

## You Can Do This

If you follow these basic steps and put in the necessary amount of study time and effort, have confidence that you will pass. The day before the exam, treat yourself to a day of leisure: walk in nature, get an acupuncture treatment or a massage, do whatever your need to do to relax. Get a good night's sleep, and take the exam in a relaxed and confident state. You can do this!

