



NIC Testing: Providing a National Standard

NIC TESTING: FROM 1969 TO TOMORROW

The NIC Testing Program was established to create a national standard, to ensure consistency in the profession, and enhance reciprocity among the states.

The National-Interstate Council of State Boards of Cosmetology, Inc. was established in 1956 in a merger of the Interstate Council of State Boards of Cosmetology with the National Council of Boards of Beauty Culture.

In 1969, the *NIC Testing Program* was established to create a national standard, to ensure consistency in the profession, and to enhance reciprocity among the states.

NIC is composed of members of boards of cosmetology and barbers, or their counterparts, in each district, state, and territory of the United States. The result is an organization that offers testing quality and industry expertise beyond the resources of most individual states. Since then, the examination program has been expanded many times:

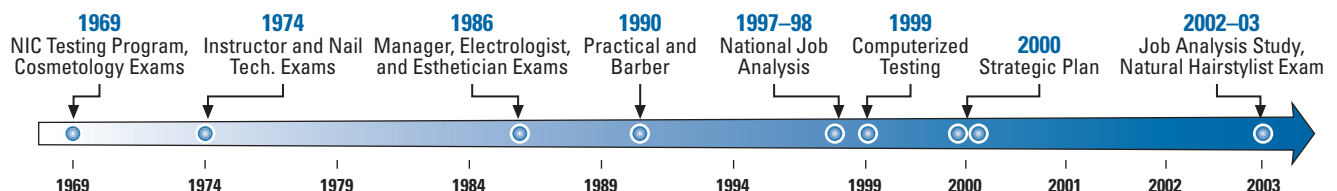
- **1969** *NIC Testing Program*
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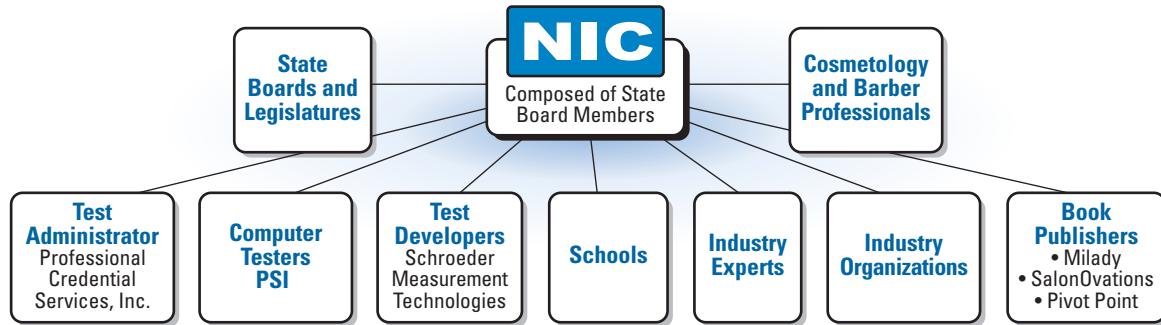
testing and to enhance licensing reciprocity among states.

- **1974** *Instructor and nail tech exams*
The NIC Testing Program was expanded to include instructor and nail technician examinations.
- **1986** *Manager, electrologist, and esthetician exams*
Examinations for the manager, electrologist, and esthetician were developed.
- **1990** *Practical and barber*
The practical examination was developed and offered as an option for all state boards. The barber examination was revised and added to the program.
- **1997-98** *National job analysis*
A comprehensive national job analysis was completed for all examination categories. The project involved thousands of practitioners and experts in various cosmetology-related occupations throughout the United

States, numerous focus groups, and psychometric and statistical analysis. All NIC examinations were updated.

- **1999** *Computerized testing*
Computerized testing was implemented by PSI, Inc., to provide more than 600 public and private testing centers, instant test results, and easy-to-understand test-taking.
- **2000** *Scoresheets and manuals*
Scoresheets and manuals for all practical examinations were updated.
- **2000** *Strategic plan*
A strategic plan for adapting to future growth was developed.
- **2001** *Updated all tests*
All test categories were updated, and test questions were revised and rewritten using a cross-section of well known experts throughout the United States. Item-writing continued for new examinations,





and all categories were translated into Spanish.

- **2002ñ03ó Job analysis studyó** All examination categories were trans-

lated into Vietnamese. Written and practical examinations for natural hair stylist were developed. Redeveloped examiner training program and

updated all practical examination materials. A new national job analysis study is under way, to determine industry trends for test standards.

NIC TESTING: UNIQUE ADVANTAGES

Advantages of participation in the NIC Testing Program include national support for state boards, relevance to current practice, opportunity for state-to-state endorsement, integrity and security, validity and reliability, cost-effectiveness, board participation, and compliance with industry testing standards.

The NIC Testing Program offers participants a number of unique advantages:

- **National support for state boardsó**
The NIC Testing program is national in scope and focus. It is the only organization that provides specific industry information to participating boards regarding performance of candidates, sunset review, legislative issues, up-to-date health and safety concerns, and other related topics.
- **Relevance to current practiceó** The NIC written and practical examina-

tions are based on a current national job analysis study covering each of the occupations. The study was conducted in 1997 utilizing recognized survey-based methodologies and including thousands of practitioners from all over the country. The findings were further validated by nationally represented panels of subject matter experts. This study is repeated every three to five years to accommodate changes in the profession and is continuously monitored and periodi-

cally reviewed by subject matter experts.

- **Reciprocity and endorsementó** The fact that the NIC Testing Program is used in a majority of states greatly enhances and facilitates decisions regarding reciprocity and endorsement.
- **Integrity and securityó** Many new forms of the written examination are systematically implemented each year to protect the integrity and security of the program and to ensure that exami-

ITEM RESPONSE THEORY UTILIZED

NIC examinations are developed using item response theory, which provides better solutions to test construction and scoring issues than previous methods.

Imagine two history students, one who is in middle school (11ñ13 years old) and one who is in college (18ñ22 years old). Both students received scores of 80 percent on their most recent history

examination. Although their scores are the same, it would be inferred that the college student knows more about history than the middle school student, because the college examination was undoubtedly more comprehensive. However, without knowing the relationship between the difficulty of the questions on the two examinations, it can't be known

how much more knowledge of history the college student possesses.

This is where item response theory comes into play. It allows test-takers who receive different questions to be placed on a common proficiency scale. The questions each test-taker receives can differ in difficulty because the statistical characteristics of the questions

are taken into account by IRT models when scoring the test-takers. In the example above, if the two history tests had been scored on a common item response theory scale, the college student would have received a higher score than the middle school student because the college student received more difficult questions. In this manner, every candidate

NIC TESTING: BOTH WRITTEN AND PRACTICAL

Both written and practical examinations, NIC provides both along with statistical reporting, examiner training, and other services.

NIC written examinations

NIC written examinations are offered for the following licenses:

- Cosmetology
- Nail technician
- Esthetician
- Electrologist
- Barber/barber stylist
- Instructor
- Manager
- State law
- Natural hair stylist

All tests are available in Spanish and Vietnamese, as well as English.

A number of secure and timely reports are available to allow states to keep continual watch on performance, reliability, and validity of the examinations:

- Biannual pass-fail statistics for each state plus summary data for overall U.S. testing.
- Annual statistical reporting
- Quarterly school reports
- Candidate information brochures

NIC practical examinations

Practical examinations are challenging to develop and difficult to administer and score. However, a practical examination is a critical component in assessing competence of prospective cosmetology, nail, esthetician, barber, and instructor licensees. Like NIC written examinations, the practical examinations are completely valid, reliable, standardized, and legally defensible, facilitating decisions concerning reciprocity and endorsement.

NIC practical examinations are offered for the following licenses:

- Cosmetology
- Nail technician
- Esthetician
- Barber stylist
- Natural hair stylist
- Instructor

The cosmetology practical examination covers core content:

- Hair-shaping
- Chemical waving
- Chemical relaxing
- Hair lightening and hair coloring

- Thermal curling

In addition, each state may elect to include any of the following optional services:

- Blow-dry styling
- Shaping and pincurl placement
- Roller placement
- Facials
- Manicuring
- Sculptured nails

Features of the NIC practical examination program include the following:

- Two-day seminar for examiner trainers
- Examiner trainer materials
- School overview for new states (state provides a meeting area and contacts school owners and instructors about the meeting)
- Four-hour presentation of new practical examinations to school owners and instructors
- Candidate information brochures, health and safety standards, and other useful materials
- Quarterly NIC examiner consistency reports

NIC TESTING: RELIABLE, VALID, AND STANDARDIZED

Does your examination yield the same results today that it will yield tomorrow?

Does the examination adequately measure what it is intended to measure?

Is the administration identical in all geographical locations?

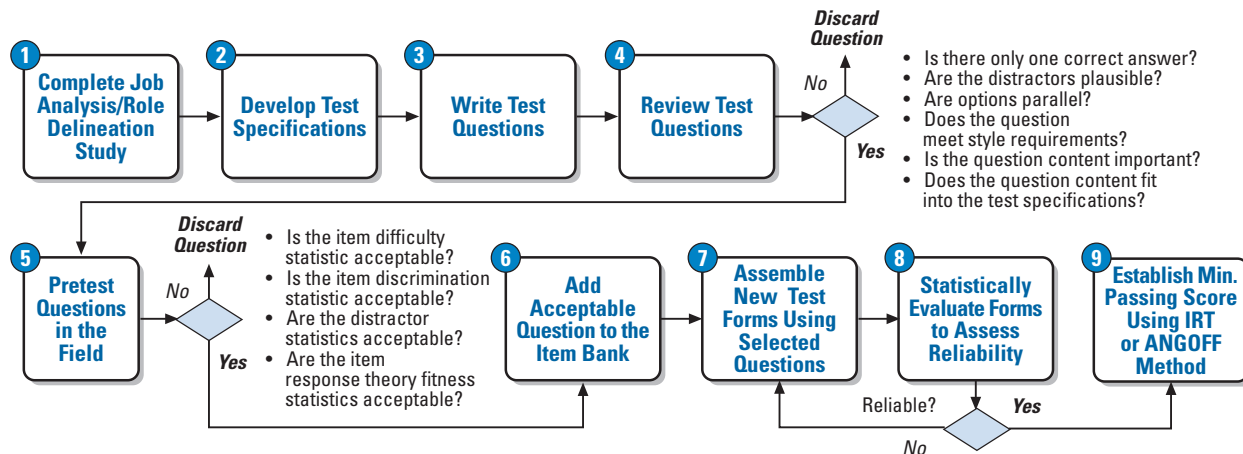
If the answer is "yes" to these questions, you're already participating in the NIC Testing Program.

Continual monitoring

For an examination to be reliable, valid, and standardized, it must be continually monitored throughout the test development process. Ongoing item-writing, item review, and test analysis are conducted to ensure validity and reliability.

NIC has defined minimum competency for all cosmetology-related professions through use of a national job analysis study (also referred to as "national role delineation study") of practitioners to identify which elements of knowledge, skills, and abilities are critical to each profession. Subject matter ex-

perts are then able to define the specific content outline for the practical examinations. Every written and practical test item is directly linked to the role delineation study. Ongoing item writing, item review, and test analysis are conducted to ensure validity and reliability of the examinations.



NIC TESTING: SCORE DELIVERY OPTIONS

Scores can be delivered overnight, faxed, e-mailed, or downloaded from the internet.

Conventional (noncomputer) test scores can be delivered four ways:

- Overnight deliveryó Scores can be delivered overnight to states the same day answer sheets are received.
- Fax deliveryó Scores can be sent between 4 and 5 p.m. Eastern time

on the day the answer sheets are received.

- E-mail deliveryó Scores can be sent by 5 p.m. Eastern time on the same day they are received.
- Electronic deliveryó Scores can be downloaded from a secure website

by 5 p.m. on the day the answer sheets are received.

NIC TESTING: COMPUTER-BASED EXAM OPTION

Instant results, highest security, many testing sites, nonstop tech support, and immediate deliveryó these are the advantages of NIC's computer-based testing.

Advantages of computer-based testing

Computer-based test-taking provides instant results during and following the

testó saving time. Other advantages include the following:

- Highest level of security
- Multilingual applications
- More than 600 testing sites with PSI, Inc.

- Continuous technical support
- User-friendly interface, with on-screen graphics and calculator, and voice files

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