

MSNCB Test Development Volunteering

Every certification exam goes through a rigorous cycle of test development activities to ensure that the exam measures competence fairly, accurately, and reliably. The Medical-Surgical Nursing Certification Board is in place to maintain the Certified Medical-Surgical Registered Nurse® and Certified Acute-Care Virtual Registered Nurse™ as psychometrically sound and legally defensible certification programs. Our continued accreditation by the Accreditation Board of Specialty Nursing Certification (ABSNC) is a testament to the quality of these programs.

In collaboration with psychometricians, test development professionals, and volunteer subject matter experts, MSNCB adheres to the following cycle of test development activities.



While some activities, such as test design, job analysis, and standard setting, happen at least every 5 years, other activities are part of an annual maintenance cycle. This is the purpose of MSNCB's test development committees.

The **Item Writing Committee** works collaboratively and independently to write exam items according to the MSNCB's Item Writing Style Guide and areas of the exam blueprint that need more depth in our item bank. (See the CMSRN Exam Blueprint [here](#) and the CAVRN Exam Blueprint [here](#).) Item writers are encouraged to write from their experience, and committee chairs are mindful of selecting a diverse group of subject matter experts from across roles, settings, and backgrounds.

Items generated by the Item Writing Committee are then reviewed by the **Item Review Committee**. Item reviewers assess the content of the test items, ensure that they meet item writing criteria, validate the correct answer, content area, and reference of each item, and evaluate the appropriateness of the test items for the exam. Past-banked items may also be reviewed at this time to assess current relevance or to update item references.

With a robust item bank, unique test forms are published annually. The **Test Development Committee** is responsible for reviewing and finalizing test forms after they are assembled by the psychometric team. Each form is built so that all content areas, or domains, are represented as specified by the exam blueprint and so that the difficulty of each form is approximately equal. Test Development Committee members use their subject matter expertise to ensure that no two items are “friends” or “enemies.” New items are included in test forms as unscored “experimental” items in order to gather statistics on item performance and difficulty.

After the form is tested in the field, the **Test Development Committee** convenes again to review “problematic items,” or items whose performance statistics indicate that it may be too easy or difficult, or that there may be some issue with how the item is written or understood. The committee ultimately determines if these items are used as is, sent for edits, or retired.

And so the cycle repeats itself!

Volunteers involved in test development bring a range of strengths that contribute to creating a fair, reliable, and valid certification exam. Key strengths include:

1. **Diverse Subject Matter Expertise:** Committee members often represent various areas of the field, bringing a breadth of knowledge that ensures the exam covers essential competencies comprehensively.
2. **Experience in the Field:** Practical experience helps members identify the most relevant and current skills and knowledge that should be assessed in the exam.
3. **Analytical Thinking:** The ability to analyze and evaluate questions rigorously ensures that test items are clear, relevant, and challenging enough to measure real-world competency.
4. **Commitment to Fairness and Equity:** Strong committee members ensure that exam items reflect diverse perspectives and avoid bias, ensuring fairness for all candidates.
5. **Collaboration and Teamwork:** The ability to work well with other experts, psychometricians, and test developers is crucial in balancing input and reaching consensus on exam content.

6. **Communication Skills and Attention to Detail:** Strong written and verbal communication helps convey questions and concepts clearly and effectively. A focus on the precision and clarity of test items ensures that questions are well-constructed and free of ambiguity or confusion.
7. **Understanding of Learning and Assessment:** Familiarity with how individuals learn and are assessed helps in designing exams that measure competency rather than memorization. Additionally, a good grasp of testing principles, such as validity, reliability, and item difficulty, helps Test Development Committee members create balanced and effective exam forms.
8. **Commitment to Standards:** A strong dedication to maintaining the integrity and standards of the certification ensures that the exam upholds its intended purpose.
9. **Problem-Solving Skills:** The ability to find solutions to complex test development challenges, such as content gaps or ambiguity in questions, strengthens the overall exam.
10. **Adaptability:** Openness to feedback and the ability to adjust test items based on analysis and pilot testing results ensure continuous improvement of the exam.

These strengths work together to create a certification exam that accurately reflects the demands of the profession and fairly evaluates candidates' knowledge and skills. If you share these strengths and an interest in test development work, you can make a meaningful contribution to MSNCB and the validation of medical-surgical nursing excellence.