

NALA Certifying Board Announces New Exam Specifications Effective with 2018 Administrations

Background

The NALA Certifying Board provides oversight for the development and ongoing maintenance of the Certified Paralegal examination. The Certifying Board, NALA certification staff, and trained subject matter experts work in partnership with a qualified psychometric consultant to ensure the examination is developed and maintained in a manner consistent with generally accepted testing practices and utilizes best practices according to national accreditation standards for certification programs.

NALA conducts job analysis studies approximately every five to six years to identify and validate the knowledge and skills measured by the examination program. The results of the job analysis studies serve as the basis for exam specifications.

In October 2016, the NALA Certifying Board conducted its 2016 Job Task Analysis Study ("Study"). This Study examined the duties and responsibilities of paralegals in the workplace and the goals were to:

- Validate and update the Certified Paralegal examination content; and
- Ensure that NALA has current information about the roles and responsibilities of paralegals.

NALA contracted with PSI Services LLC, a leader in developing, delivering, and maintaining licensure and certification examinations, to conduct the Study. As part of the Study, NALA sent an electronic survey to more than 9,500 active Certified Paralegals. 1,839 Certified Paralegals responded, for a 19.2% response rate, which is typical for surveys of this nature. NALA included in the results responses only from those currently working in the paralegal field.

NALA posted the report detailing the process and the findings on its website under the Certification link.

New Examination Specifications

Based on analysis of the Study, improvements in technology, and recent refinements by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA), and the advice of NALA's psychometricians, the Certifying Board approved a new structure for the Certified Paralegal examination effective January 2018.

NALA also modified some policies and procedures based upon best practices in credentialing programs, and they are posted on its website under the Certification link.

NALA will administer the Certified Paralegal examination in its current structure for the May 2017 and September 2017 testing windows.

The new examination format will open in early 2018 for one-month of post-administration analysis, scoring, and standard setting.

With these modifications, the Certifying Board listened to member and nonmember paralegals working in the field, and applied findings of the Study to the examination. The Certifying Board works diligently to connect the Certified Paralegal examination directly to the day-to-day duties and responsibilities of paralegals in the workplace. The modifications announced for the 2018 examination

are part of the continued effort to ensure the Certified Paralegal examination remains an accurate and relevant reflection of today's paralegals.

Examination Format

The 2018 Certified Paralegal examination will consist of two required sections taken in the following order:

- **Knowledge Exam**
 - The Knowledge Exam will consist of multiple choice questions covering the topic areas listed in Appendix A.
 - The Knowledge Exam will be administered on-demand, year-round at testing centers with preliminary result reporting upon completion.
 - Candidates must successfully complete the Knowledge Exam in order to be eligible to take the Skills Exam.

- **Skills Exam**
 - The Skills Exam will consist of a written assignment; specifications are set forth in Appendix A.
 - The Skills Exam will be administered during four testing windows each year: February, April, July, and October.

- Successful completion of both the Knowledge and Skills Exams is required to obtain the Certified Paralegal credential.

Examination Policies

First Administration – Knowledge Exam

- The first administration of the Knowledge Exam will be offered during a 30-day window with 150 items. This administration will be used for post-administration analysis, scoring, and standard setting. For this session, results will not be available upon completion but will be provided once the analysis, scoring, and standard setting has been completed.
 - 100 items will be scored (determined after administration).
 - 50 items will be pretested for statistical analysis (determined after administration) but will not be scored.
 - 3.75 hours testing time (90 seconds per item) will be provided for this one-time testing session.

Subsequent Administrations – Knowledge Exam

- When the examination opens for year-round testing, 120 items will be included on each Knowledge Exam.
 - 100 items will be scored.
 - 20 items will be pretested for statistical analysis.
 - 3 hours testing time (90 seconds per item) will be provided for all subsequent Knowledge Exams.
 - Result reporting will be available upon completion with on-demand testing year-round.

Exam Administration Policies and Procedures

- **Knowledge Exam**
 - Candidates must first pass the Knowledge Exam.
 - Candidates are eligible to take the Knowledge Exam only after they have graduated from an educational program, if using that eligibility pathway, or have the required minimum experience, if using the experience category. The new system of on-demand testing will remove deadlines to apply for the examination. Candidates will be able to apply when they are eligible.
 - Once NALA approves an application for the Certified Paralegal examination, candidates will have 365 days from the approval date to sit for the Knowledge Exam. If the candidate does not take the Knowledge Exam within 365 days of the initial approval date, the application will be voided and a new application and nonrefundable fee will be required.
 - Candidates who do not pass the Knowledge Exam must wait 90 days before re-taking it.
 - Candidates must pass the Knowledge Exam within the first three attempts during the 365 day period or wait 365 days before trying again.

- **Skills Exam**
 - Candidates who pass the Knowledge Exam are then eligible to take the Skills Exam and must complete the Skills Exam within the next 365 days after receiving notice of eligibility from NALA.
 - Candidates must wait at least 2 weeks after passing the Knowledge Exam before receiving eligibility to take the Skills Exam.
 - Candidates who do not pass the Skills Exam must wait 90 days before re-taking it.
 - Candidates must pass the Skills Exam within the first three attempts in a 365 day period or start over by re-taking the Knowledge Exam.

- **Exam fees**
 - First time candidates
 - Nonrefundable examination fee of \$250 for NALA members, \$275 for nonmembers.
 - Includes one attempt for the Knowledge Exam and one attempt for the Skills exam.
 - Retake candidates
 - Nonrefundable attempt fee of \$60 per subsequent attempt for the Knowledge Exam.
 - Nonrefundable attempt fee of \$60 per subsequent attempt for the Skills Exam.

- **New applicants for the May 2017 and September 2017 testing windows**
 - Candidates who have not yet taken any sections prior to the May 2017 testing window have the option to sit for the examination in May 2017 or September 2017 but will have to complete the exam and pass all sections by the closing of the September 2017 testing window. If candidates do not take and pass all sections by the closing of the September 2017 testing window, NALA will require these candidates to retake the examination in its new format beginning in 2018.

Candidates who have not yet taken any sections of the exam also have the option to wait until 2018 to sit for the examination and the application will be transferred to 2018 upon

request.

- **Candidates in retake status**

- Candidates who first sat for any section in September 2015 through January 2016 will have the full two years provided in their original application to take and pass all sections of the exam since the applications will expire after the September 2017 testing window closes.
- Candidates who first sat for any section in the testing windows beginning May 2016 through January 2017 will need to successfully complete any remaining sections of the examination by the September 2017 testing window.
- Any candidates who do not successfully complete all sections by the September 2017 examination will retake the entire exam in its new format starting in 2018. Candidates in this situation have a reduction in time to complete the examination from the time allowed in the initial application. These candidates will be permitted to re-take the new exam once at half cost since the time period to complete the examination has been reduced. Any subsequent re-takes will be at full price.

- **Incomplete/pending applications**

Candidates filing incomplete applications must provide the documentation and/or fees required to complete the application within 60 days of initial filing or the application will be voided and a new application and nonrefundable fee will be required.

Appendix A

| Knowledge Exam | | 100 points |
|----------------|--|------------|
| 1 | United States Legal System | 15 |
| 1.A | Sources of Law | |
| 1.B | Judicial System | |
| 1.C | Remedies | |
| 1.D | Administrative Law | |
| 2 | Civil Litigation | 15 |
| 2.A | Jurisdiction | |
| 2.B | Federal Rules of Civil Procedure | |
| 3 | Contracts | 15 |
| 3.A | Formation, Rights, and Duties | |
| 3.B | Enforcement and Defenses | |
| 4 | Corporate/Commercial Law | 10 |
| 4.A | Business Organizations | |
| 4.B | Rights and Responsibilities | |
| 4.C | Transactions | |
| 5 | Criminal Law and Procedure | 5 |
| 5.A | Criminal Law | |
| 5.B | Criminal Procedure | |
| 6 | Estate Planning and Probate | 5 |
| 6.A | Estate and Trusts | |
| 6.B | Wills | |
| 7 | Real Estate and Property | 10 |
| 7.A | Property Rights and Ownership | |
| 7.B | Transactions | |
| 8 | Torts | 10 |
| 8.A | Intentional Torts | |
| 8.B | Negligence | |
| 8.C | Strict Liability | |
| 9 | Professional and Ethical Responsibility | 15 |
| 9.A | American Bar Association (ABA) Model Rules of Professional Conduct | |
| 9.B | Unauthorized Practice of Law | |

| Skills Exam | | 30 points |
|-------------|------------------------------------|-----------|
| 1 | Writing | 12 |
| 1.A | Grammar, Spelling, and Punctuation | 6 |
| 1.B | Clarity of Expression | 6 |
| 2 | Critical Thinking | 18 |
| 2.A | Reading Comprehension | 6 |
| 2.B | Analysis of Information | 6 |
| 2.C | Decision Making | 6 |