COMMISSION ON NURSE CERTIFICATION

CNL® Certification Frequently Asked Questions

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1. What is the purpose of the CNL credential?

The CNL certification is a unique credential that recognizes graduates of master's and post-master's Clinical Nurse Leader programs or similar master's programs who have demonstrated accepted standards of practice. The CNL mark of excellence promotes safe, quality practice through its ongoing requirements for professional growth.

2. What are the eligibility requirements for CNL certification?

To be considered for full certification, a candidate must meet the following requirements:

- Registered Nurse licensure (The candidate will be ineligible if currently being disciplined by a state nursing board.)
- Graduation from a CNL master's or post-master's program, accredited by a nursing accrediting agency recognized by the U.S Secretary of Education, that prepares individuals with the CNL. Visit the **CNL Initial Application Process** page to learn more and view the Faculty Eligibility Requirements.

3. Can I take the exam without RN licensure?

Individuals may sit for the CNL Certification Examination prior to sitting for the NCLEX RN licensure exam. However, a candidate will not be granted CNL certification status until documentation of RN licensure (RN license number and state in which licensed) is received by the Commission on Nurse Certification (CNC).

4. Can I take the exam even though I have not graduated?
Students are encouraged to sit for the exam once classes have started for the last term of their CNL master's or post-master's program. The CNL program director (or equivalent) must complete the online Education Documentation Form and indicate that the student has completed or is in the process of completing the program. However, students should have completed the majority of the clinical hours since this impacts a student's ability to be successful on the exam.

5. When and where are the exams offered?
Exams are offered during testing periods determined by CNC. Learn more about the current **Exam Dates and Fees**. All exams are offered at testing centers. The certification application must be submitted and then approved by CNC prior to selecting a testing center provided by the testing agency. Candidate exam applications must be received by the CNC no later than the published deadline; late registrations will be considered for the next testing window.

6. What are the exam fees? *Note: All fees are subject to change and are nonrefundable.*

Exam Fees	
Initial Exam Fee (1st Time Applicant Only)	$425
Retake Exam Fee	$325

7. What is the format of the exam?
The CNL Certification Exam is a computer-based exam offered in a multiple choice format. Items are based upon the **CNL Job Analysis Study**.

8. How soon will I find out my exam results?
Candidates taking the exam will receive automatic results following the certification exam; performance is reported as Pass or Fail. Unsuccessful candidates receive an individual score report summary. Reports are electronically sent to the candidate's email address provided in the certification application and the computer used at the time of the exam.

9. How soon will I receive my official congratulatory packet (certificate, letter)?
The official congratulatory packet is mailed **approximately 60 days after the end of the testing period (not exam date)**. CNC must confirm that all required documents have been submitted prior to sending the official congratulatory packet. Candidates with outstanding information such as RN licensure will be notified by CNC and official certification will be delayed until all outstanding materials are submitted. **NOTE:** Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, congratulatory packets will be sent electronically. Once the CNC office is back to normal operating status, the packets will be sent via mail.

10. If I am unsuccessful, how many times can I retake the exam?
There is not a restriction on the number of times you may retest. Candidates may not retest during the same testing period.

11. What must I submit when applying to retest?
The CNL Certification Exam online application and retesting fee payment must be submitted each time you apply. The Education Documentation Form does not have to be resubmitted since it was part of your initial application packet.

12. What are the resource materials for the exam?

Please be sure to review the **CNL Certification Guide** and the **Exam Prep section** of the website. There you will find the following resource materials to help you prepare for the exam:

- CNL Content Outline and Job Analysis Study
- Self-Assessment Exam
- Personal Action Plan
- CNL Practice Exam
- Recommended Reading List
- AACN's *CNL Competencies and Curricular Expectations for Education and Practice* and CNL Certification Exam Review Course

13. How do I cancel my exam registration and can I be refunded the registration fee?

Candidates may only reschedule the exam to another testing period. Candidates who postpone or change their examination date will be charged $75. One change is allowed, however, if additional changes are necessary, the candidate must reapply. **Registration fees are non-refundable.**

14. What happens if I don't show up to take the exam?

Candidates who fail to submit the Exam Date/Location Form by the deadline date listed on the form and/or fail to show for the exam will be marked as "No-Shows". Individuals marked as "No-Shows" forfeit all exam fees and will need to re-apply for the exam and pay the fee again.

15. How do I change my exam date?

Please review the **Request for Testing Date Changes** page for specific details. You will need to log into the **CNC Portal** to submit the test date change request. Once logged in, look under the "Forms tab" click on "View Available Forms" and select the Exam Date Change Form.

16. Is retesting required to maintain certification?

Renewal is required to maintain an active certification status. The initial CNL certification is granted for a period of five (5) years; renewal is required prior to the expiration date on one's certificate. Retesting is not required if the renewal application is submitted prior to expiration. Continuing education is required during each five-year cycle. **Note:** The job title of "Clinical Nurse Leader" is not required to renew. Learn more about the **CNL Renewal Requirements**.

17. Once I earn the designation, how do I list CNL as a credential?

"CNL" is listed following "RN". Example: Jane Doe, MSN, RN, CNL

18. Can I use the CNL acronym if I am not certified?

You must receive your CNL certification certificate from CNC in order to use the CNL acronym. "CNL" is a registered trademark; "Clinical Nurse Leader" is a service mark. The CNL acronym is for those certified as a Clinical Nurse Leader. Review the **Use of the CNL Logo**.

19. Is the CNL Certification Program accredited?

The CNL Certification Program is accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA).

Questions? Contact CNC's Staff at **CNL@aacnnursing.org**