

# INTRODUCTION

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## ABOUT THE NCIDQ EXAM

The National Council for Interior Design Qualification (NCIDQ)<sup>1</sup> exam is a two-day (Friday and Saturday) exam given twice a year in April and October at sites throughout North America. The exam is divided into three sections. Sections 1 and 2 are multiple-choice and are given on the Friday of the exam. Section 3 is a design practicum and is given on the Saturday of the exam. You may take any combination of Sections 1, 2, and/or 3 in the same weekend.

Exam Sections 1 and 2 are each 3.5 hours long and include 150 text- and illustration-based multiple-choice questions. For these questions you must choose one of four answer options as the correct answer. For example, the question may ask “Where is information about electrical outlets for portable lamps most likely to be found?” and the options given may be

- (A) furniture plan
- (B) partition plan

- (C) power plan
- (D) reflected ceiling plan

You would choose the best answer among the four options. Multiple-choice questions are machine graded.

Section 3 is eight hours long and includes seven individual exercises that will require you to interpret a program into schematics, produce plan drawings, and develop appropriate specifications and schedules. Problem statements, programs, and a four-page list of code requirements are provided on exam day. (The code requirements are also available on [www.ncidq.org](http://www.ncidq.org) prior to the exam.) Exercises are completed on the provided 18 in × 24 in (457 mm × 610 mm) sheets of paper. Section 3 is scored according to standardized guidelines by jurors who have passed the exam, have completed a comprehensive training program, and are practicing interior designers.

Each of the three sections is scored on a scale of 200 to 800 points. You pass an exam section when you earn a score of 500 or higher. Twenty-five questions in each multiple-choice section are used for development purposes and do not count

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<sup>1</sup>The National Council for Interior Design Qualification is referred to as “the council” throughout this introduction. The National Council for Interior Design Qualification exam is referred to as “the exam” throughout this introduction.

for grading. (Though you will not know in advance which questions these are.)

### NCIDQ Exam Specifications

The council uses *Analysis of the Interior Design Profession* to develop the exam specifications, which cover the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that interior designers must possess to protect public health, safety, and welfare. The number of questions on each topic is derived from each KSA's relative importance and criticality. Questions relating to the KSAs appear in the appropriate parts of the exam.

The specifications for the three sections of the exam, based on the 2008 *Analysis of the Interior Design Profession*, are as follows.

#### Section 1 (Codes, Building Systems, Construction Standards, and Contract Administration) requires

- knowledge of and skill in application of (16%)
  - code requirements, laws, standards and regulations, including accessibility guidelines
  - sustainable design practices
- knowledge of and skill in integration with (18.4%)
  - building systems
  - building construction
- knowledge of and skill in development and use of (20%)
  - construction documents
  - schedules
  - specifications
  - architectural woodworking
- knowledge of and skill in (9.6%)
  - measuring
  - drafting and technical drawing conventions
- knowledge of and skill in (18.4%)
  - interior design forms and documentation
  - contract administration
- knowledge of and skill in (17.6%)
  - selection, specification, use, and care of furniture, fixtures,

and equipment (including window treatments and textiles); interior finishes and materials (including acoustics, life safety considerations, performance, and properties); and lighting

- procurement
- cost estimating
- sourcing and researching as it relates to manufacturers' and vendors' information

#### Section 2 (Design Application, Project Coordination, and Professional Practice) requires

- knowledge of and skill in application of (13.6%)
  - the relationship between human behavior and the designed environment
  - design theory
- knowledge of and skill in (16%)
  - programming
  - site analysis procedures (e.g., project context, existing conditions, location, surroundings, views, and geography)
  - sustainable design practices
- knowledge of and skill in analyzing and synthesizing programmatic information (8%)
- knowledge of and skill in (8%)
  - selection, specification, use, and care of furniture, fixtures, and equipment, including window treatments and textiles
  - sourcing and research as it relates to manufacturers' and vendors' information
- knowledge of and skill in (16.8%)
  - written and verbal design communication methods and techniques
  - visual communication methods and techniques
- knowledge of and skill in (16%)
  - project coordination procedures

- roles and goals of related design professionals
- knowledge of and skill in application of (21.6%)
  - business practices
  - business ethics
  - post-occupancy evaluation services

### Section 3 (Practicum) requires skill in

- developing a design concept, using knowledge of programming and design theory
  - written design communication methods and techniques
  - visual design communication methods and techniques
  - measuring, drafting, and the use of technical drawing conventions for construction drawings, architectural woodwork, specifications, and lighting
  - analyzing and synthesizing programmatic information and using
    - knowledge of theories about the relationship between human behavior and the designed environment
    - building construction types
    - building systems
    - sustainable design practices
    - interior finishes and materials
  - space planning and using knowledge of code requirements, laws, standards, and regulations, including accessibility guidelines; site analysis procedures; and furniture, fixtures, and equipment, including window treatments and textiles

### ABOUT THE COUNCIL AND THE NCIDQ CERTIFICATE

The council is composed of representatives from professional design organizations and regulatory agencies from those states and provinces with statutory requirements. Its core purpose is “to protect the health, life safety, and welfare of the public by establishing standards of competence in the practice of interior design.”

With this purpose in mind, the council provides the NCIDQ certificate (which is earned by passing all three sections of the exam) as a means of identifying interior designers who demonstrate a minimum level of interior design competency. Officially, these individuals are called “NCIDQ certificate holders.”

NCIDQ certificate holders are eligible for membership in most professional interior design organizations, including those represented within the council: the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID), Interior Design Educators Council (IDEC), Interior Designers of Canada (IDC), and the International Interior Design Association (IIDA). Certificate holders are also eligible for advanced professional certification as offered by the Governing Board for Contract Interior Design Standards. In many states and provinces, only NCIDQ certificate holders are eligible to practice interior design and use certain titles (such as interior designer, certified interior designer, and registered interior designer).<sup>2</sup>

### HOW TO REGISTER FOR THE NCIDQ EXAM

Registering for the NCIDQ exam is a multi-step process. Before you can register for the exam, you must apply. Before you can apply, you must qualify under NCIDQ’s eligibility requirements. Confirm your eligibility and begin your application well in advance of your intended examination date.

#### Qualifying

Before applying to take the NCIDQ exam, you must qualify under the following requirements. Note that if you received academic credit for work experience, that work experience will not count toward the hours required.

<sup>2</sup>Some states require passing additional state-specific building code exams. California, furthermore, has its own exam, the IDEX California<sup>®</sup> exam, administered by the California Council for Interior Design Certification. *IDEX Essentials: The Power to Pass the IDEX California<sup>®</sup> Exam* is available from PPI for individuals preparing for that exam.

To qualify for the exam with a bachelor's or master's degree from an interior design program accredited by the Council for Interior Design Accreditation, you must have 3520 hours of work experience.<sup>3</sup> At least 1760 of your work hours must have been accrued after completing your education.

To qualify for the exam with a bachelor's degree from an interior design program that is not accredited by the Council for Interior Design Accreditation, you must have 3520 hours of work experience. At least 1760 of your work hours must have been accrued after completing your education. In addition, at least 60 semester (90 quarter) credits must have been in interior design coursework.

To qualify for the exam with a bachelor's degree in a major other than interior design, you must have 3520 hours of work experience. At least 1760 of those hours must have been accrued after completing your education. In addition, you must have at least 60 semester (90 quarter) credits of interior design coursework that led to a diploma, degree, or certificate.

To qualify for the exam with an associate's degree of 60 semester (90 quarter) units in interior design, you must have 5280 hours of work experience. All of these hours must have been accrued after you completed your education.

To qualify for the exam with an associate's degree of 40 semester (60 quarter) units in

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<sup>3</sup>Hours worked under an NCIDQ certificate holder, a licensed/registered interior designer, or an architect who offers interior design services count as "qualified" work experience, and accrue at 100%. Hours worked in alternative situations accrue at lower rates. Hours worked under direct supervision by an interior designer who is not registered, licensed, or an NCIDQ certificate holder accrue at a rate of 75%; work sponsored, but not directly supervised, by the same individual accrues at a rate of 25%. Work hours not supervised by a designer (i.e. supervised by someone other than a designer, or not supervised at all in the case of self-employment) accrue at a rate of 25%. The Interior Design Experience Program (IDEP) offered by NCIDQ satisfies your work experience requirement.

interior design, you must have 7040 hours of work experience. All of these hours must have been accrued after you completed your education.

To qualify for the exam with a bachelor's or master's degree from an architecture program accredited by the National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB) or Canadian Architectural Accrediting Board (CAAB), you must have 5280 hours of work experience. All of these hours must have been accrued after you completed your education.

Your education and work experience requirements must be fulfilled before applying for the NCIDQ exam.

### Applying

If you intend to take your exam at a certain time, be sure to submit your application for registration by the required deadline. Exam dates and application deadlines are listed on the NCIDQ website ([www.ncidq.org/exam/examdates.htm](http://www.ncidq.org/exam/examdates.htm)).

NCIDQ offers an online application form, available on MyNCIDQ, an application-specific section of the NCIDQ website. Applicants must submit their form and payment through the NCIDQ website. Supporting materials must be gathered and sent to NCIDQ in a single package.

- *Candidate Authorization and Consent Form*: Available for download through the NCIDQ website, this form must be printed, signed, and submitted in hard copy. This form attests to the truthfulness of your application documents, and grants NCIDQ permission to evaluate your application.

- *Official transcripts*: Your official transcript must be requested from each college or university you attended. Download the Transcript Request Form from the NCIDQ website and submit it to your college or university registrar (along with any fees the registrar requires). The registrar will send the transcript to you in a sealed envelope

which must be included, *unopened*, in your package of supporting materials.

- *Letters of reference.* You must submit three letters of reference to NCIDQ. Letters must be from employers, clients, or professional peers, and not from friends or family members. Each reference must complete the Letter of Reference Form (available on the NCIDQ website), and submit the letter to you in a sealed envelope with his or her signature across the flap. This envelope must be included, *unopened*, in your package of supporting materials.

- *Work experience verification forms.* If your work was completed under a direct supervisor, you may complete the Direct Supervision Work Experience Verification Form. If your work experience was not directly supervised by a design professional (for example, you are self-employed), you should complete the Sponsored Work Experience Verification Form. A sponsor is a design professional who agrees to oversee your work, but does not have direct control over or detailed knowledge of your work. You must submit a separate form for each position you have held.

Confine your application to the above materials. NCIDQ specifically states that any additional documents will be discarded. Be sure to have all materials submitted by the relevant deadline; NCIDQ will not review a partial application.

## Registering

If your application is accepted by NCIDQ, you will be automatically notified through MyNCIDQ. If your application is not accepted, you may acquire further education and experience to fulfill the requirements. If this process takes more than one year, you will have to resubmit your entire application.

After receiving notification of acceptance from NCIDQ, you may register for your exam or defer your examination date. Register or defer as soon as possible upon

receiving your acceptance; a delay in your response could result in an additional fee.

To register, return to MyNCIDQ (the system in which you completed your application) and click on “Exam Registration.” You will need to complete the candidate agreements (a confidentiality agreement and a statement of responsibility). Once you have completed these agreements, you will be asked for the registration fees for your intended exam sections, payable online by credit card or through the mail by check (this must be received in time for processing). You may register for as many exam sections as you like; the fee for each section is listed in the Exam Registration Guide (a brochure you may download from the NCIDQ website).

NCIDQ will send an email with further exam information after receipt of your payment. At least two weeks before the exam, you will receive an email with your letter of admission. You must print the letter of admission and present it with a government-issued photo ID on your examination day.

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

*Interior Design Reference Manual: Everything You Need to Know to Pass the NCIDQ Exam* gives you a thorough review of the topics covered on the NCIDQ exam. It can furthermore serve as a comprehensive general reference to the practice of interior design. In order to maximize its utility as such, use the table of contents, list of figures, list of tables, and index extensively. Every significant term has been indexed, and some subjects appear in more than one chapter. You will find that this book will often suffice as your first and last stop for interior design-related information. When it doesn't, the “Recommended Readings” section is helpful for finding supplemental readings to narrow your search for further details on a particular subject.

Sections 1 and 2 of this book cover the subject areas for Sections 1 and 2 of the exam,

**Table 1**  
Section 3  
Exercise Topics

topic	location in the <i>Interior Design Reference Manual</i>
space planning	Chapters 2, 3, 22, 25, and 30
lighting design	Chapters 4, 20, and 28
egress	Chapter 2
light safety	Chapters 1, 2, and 5
rest room (washroom)	Chapter 3
systems integration	Chapters 6, 7, 8, and 11
millwork	Chapters 3 and 10

respectively, and the order of the chapters matches the order of the exam specifications. Use the table of contents to find the material you need to know for the section of the exam you are studying for. Section 3 of the exam is a practicum with seven exercises. Use Table 1 to find information on Section 3's exercise topics.

Begin your exam review by perusing the pages of this book relatively quickly to get a feeling for the scope of the subject matter. Also seek out opportunities to talk with people who have already taken the exam. It is a good idea to get a feeling for the exam's general emphasis and the exam areas that previous candidates found difficult. A good resource is the Interior Design Exam Forum on PPI's website [www.ppi2pass.com/NCIDQforum](http://www.ppi2pass.com/NCIDQforum), where examinees discuss the process online.

Because the exam covers such a broad range of subject matter in the field of interior design, your study (and this book) cannot include every area of practice that could possibly come up. Use your prior experience and your brief review of the chapters to determine your strengths and weaknesses. If, for example, you have been involved with construction documents for several years, you will probably want to minimize your study of that subject and focus on other areas.

Before you tackle the details of the individual subjects, use Table 2 to plan your study schedule, with the broader subject areas broken down into manageable units. If you are studying for only one section of the exam, use just the corresponding section of the schedule. Choose a start date and assign time limits to each study unit. You don't need to study the chapters in book order, and in fact you should consider tackling first the subjects you are less familiar with. Be sure to schedule extra time for these subjects, wherever you put them in your study order. As you make these decisions, be sure to take into account the exam date, your life commitments, and your ability to focus.

Next, begin studying this book and stick with your schedule. Seek out additional resources (such as texts, seminars, or individual support) on more challenging subjects if you need them. Although the exam questions are different every time the exam is offered, it's helpful to know what types of questions may be asked. You will find your study significantly enhanced if you include *NCIDQ Section 1 Sample Questions and Practice Exam*, *NCIDQ Section 2 Sample Questions and Practice Exam*, and *NCIDQ Section 3 Practice Exam for the Interior Design Practicum* in your study schedule. Each of these books simulates one section of the actual exam, providing you with a realistic practice exam experience.

Sticking with your study schedule will, of course, be the most difficult part of the process and the one that requires the most self-discipline. You will find this much easier if you start studying early and create a realistic schedule, allowing time for recreation and other personal commitments. Your studying should end at least a day or two before the exam so that you can take time to relax.

## TAKING THE NCIDQ EXAM

Even if you are the most prepared of candidates, the exam can be arduous simply because of its length and the level of

**Table 2**  
Study Schedule

	chapter	topic	start date	finish date
Exam Section 1: Codes, Building Systems, Construction Standards, and Contract Administration	<i>Section 1.1: Code Requirements, Laws, Standards, Regulations, Accessibility, and Sustainability</i>			
	1	building regulations and codes		
	2	means of egress		
	3	barrier-free design		
	4	sustainable design		
	<i>Section 1.2: Building Systems and Construction</i>			
	5	interior construction		
	6	structural systems		
	7	mechanical and electrical systems		
	<i>Section 1.3: Construction Drawings, Schedules, Specifications, and Woodworking</i>			
	8	construction drawings		
	9	construction specifications		
	10	architectural woodwork		
	<i>Section 1.4: Measuring, Drafting, and Technical Drawing Conventions</i>			
	11	measurement and drafting		
	<i>Section 1.5: Contract Administration and Interior Design Documentation</i>			
	12	contract administration		
	13	construction and FF&E contracts		
	14	bidding and negotiation of contracts		
	<i>Section 1.6: Furniture, Fixtures, Equipment, Interior Finishes and Materials, Lighting, etc.</i>			
	15	selection of materials, finishes, and furnishings		
16	furniture and furnishings documents and procurement			
17	cost estimating and budgeting			
18	finishes			
19	acoustics			
20	lighting			
21	evaluation of products and details			
Exam Section 2: Design Application, Project Coordination, and Professional Practice	<i>Section 2.1: Design Theory and Human Behavior</i>			
	22	developing design concepts		
	23	elements of design		
	24	principles of design		
	<i>Section 2.2: Programming, Sustainability, and Site Analysis</i>			
	25	programming		
	26	site analysis		
	<i>Section 2.3: Analyzing and Synthesizing Programming Information</i>			
	27	information analysis and synthesis		
	<i>Section 2.4: Sourcing and Researching Manufacturer's and Vendor's Information</i>			
	28	sourcing and researching manufacturer's information for FF&E		
	<i>Section 2.5: Visual, Written, and Verbal Communication Methods</i>			
	29	communication methods		
	<i>Section 2.6: Project Coordination and Roles of Other Professionals</i>			
30	project management			
<i>Section 2.7: Ethics and Business Practices and Post-Occupancy Evaluations</i>				
31	interior design business practices			
32	owner-designer agreements			

concentration needed to get through it. As with any activity requiring endurance, it is important to be well rested on exam day. Stop studying a day or two before the exam, and relax as much as possible. Get plenty of sleep the nights before and between exam days.

Make sure that you have ready to go all the materials that you will need on exam day. However, be aware that the following items are not allowed in the exam room for any section of the exam.

- reference materials, including dictionaries
- calculators with advanced memory storage, programming, communicating, or printing capabilities
- cell phones or other similar electronic devices
- open food and beverage containers

The following are items you can (and should) bring to all three sections of the exam.

- three or more no. 2 or HB lead pencils
- three or more erasers
- a nonprogrammable, battery-operated calculator with fresh batteries
- survival tools, such as a watch, a water bottle (if allowed), aspirin, tissues, eye drops, and so on

On the day of the exam, allow yourself plenty of time to get to the exam site to avoid any potential complications in transportation. Enter the exam room early to select a seat with good lighting, as far away from distractions as possible. Arrange your working materials and other supplies to make it easy to begin as soon as allowed. The proctor will review the exam instructions, as well as general rules about breaks, smoking, permitted materials, and other housekeeping matters; you can ask any questions about the rules at that time.

Once the exam begins, quickly review the materials given in the exam booklet. One of the biggest problems you may have in taking

the exam is simply completing it in the time allowed. This is especially true of Section 3's practicum exercises.

Try to relax as much as possible during study periods and during the exam itself. For most people who know the material well and have experience in the field of interior design, there is plenty of time to complete Sections 1 and 2, as well as Section 3; worry cannot enhance any of these strengths.

### **Taking Exam Sections 1 and 2**

For Sections 1 and 2, you have 3.5 hours to complete each section's 150 questions. With this knowledge, make your way through the entire section, trying to answer each question in about 1 minute 15 seconds. Skip questions that seem to be taking longer. Clearly mark unanswered questions so you remember to go back and answer them. If you successfully manage to spend no more than 1 minute 15 seconds on each question, you will have a reserve of at least 20 minutes at the end of the exam session to review and at least guess at the questions you left unanswered. Reread questions you have already answered only if you have extra time after answering all questions. Regardless of your approach, be sure to mark an answer for every question. Unanswered questions are counted as wrong, so when necessary, make your best guess among the most likely options.

Here are some additional tips to consider while you take Sections 1 and 2.

- Many times, one or two choices can be easily eliminated. This may result in a guess, but at least the chances are better between two choices than among four.
- Some questions may appear too simple. Although there may be a few easy and obvious questions, it's more likely that a simple question has a level of complexity that is not immediately obvious. It might be best to reevaluate these questions for exceptions to a rule or special circumstance that would make the obvious, easy response incorrect.

- Absolute words such as “always,” “never,” or “completely” often indicate some minor exception that can turn what reads like a true statement into a false statement, or vice versa.

- Words like “seldom,” “usually,” “best,” or “most reasonable” generally indicate that some judgment will be involved in answering the question, so look for two or more options that may be very similar.

- Occasionally there may be a question that is fundamentally flawed. This does not happen very often, but if it does, make the best choice possible under the circumstances. Flawed questions are usually discovered by the council in the grading process, and these questions do not negatively impact your score.

### Taking Exam Section 3

In addition to the materials required for all exam sections, you will need supplemental materials and information before arriving at the exam site for Section 3. In addition to the previous list, be sure you have the following items ready to bring for Section 3.

- a portable drafting board (no smaller than 24 in × 36 in (610 mm × 914 mm)) with a parallel bar
- an architect’s scale (imperial or metric depending on what scale is being used and where the exam is being given)
  - 30°/60° and 45° triangles
  - templates for shapes such as plumbing, furniture, and circles
  - a pencil pointer and/or sharpener
  - tracing paper
  - a variety of grades of lead, and types and thicknesses of marking pens (the supplied vellum may smear one type of marker and not another)
- any other drawing tools that will make your work easier

Section 3 requires you to assimilate, analyze, and communicate a significant amount of information in a short period of time. NCIDQ provides on its website advance access to the exam booklet’s code

requirements. Take advantage of this access and review them prior to the exam. Also, remember while you’re taking the exam that drawings can be done freehand. The drawings can be rough as long as they show the jurors that the problem has been solved and all the program requirements have been met. In other words, highly refined, drafted drawings are not necessary. Do not use a T-square; it is too difficult to use when rushed. Many of the practicum exercises can be completed simply by marking the location of each item on the plan provided and filling in informational boxes. Only the space planning, egress, and millwork exercises require standard drawings to be produced.

For the space planning exercise, allow yourself enough time to develop and draw the concept. Do not attempt something that is complicated or unusual or that requires complex construction. Avoid using shapes and construction elements that require a lot of drawing time. Remember that the jurors are not looking for innovative, award-winning solutions, just proof that you can respond to a program, work within the context of an existing building plan, and integrate accessible design and health, safety, and welfare issues into a three-dimensional solution.

### WHAT TO DO AFTER THE EXAM

The council will notify you of your score within 14 weeks of your test date. If you happen to fail one or two of the three sections, you will only need to retake the failed section(s). Your state or province may impose restrictions on the number of years that you can wait between taking different sections of the exam.

When you learn that you have passed the exam, the council will issue you a certificate and a certificate number. Your certificate number will be unique to you, and you can use it to distinguish yourself within the interior design field. To identify yourself as

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an NCIDQ certificate holder on stationery, business cards, and so on, use the following format: “[First] [Last], NCIDQ® Certificate No. [#####].” For example, “David Ballast, NCIDQ® Certificate No. 9425.”

In order to maintain your active status as an NCIDQ certificate holder, you will need to pay a yearly certificate renewal fee. You will receive your first renewal notice one year after your exam date.