



International
Coaching
Federation

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Empower Your Journey:

**A Guide to Preparing for
the ICF Credentialing Exam**

Take the Next Step

Your interest in an ICF credential demonstrates your commitment to becoming a better coach tomorrow than you are today. The work you have done to this point will help you take the next step in preparing for the ICF Credentialing Exam.

Did you know that 75% of exam-takers pass on the first try? You, too, can join those ranks with hard work and dedication. Plus, this is where you can put your education and coaching experience to good use.

It will be challenging, but it will be worth it. ICF credential-holders report that preparing for and taking the exam has helped them become better coaches. It's pushed them to think about — and in some cases, re-examine — their own coaching practice as part of the process of studying or sitting for the exam.

When you pass the exam, you will join a dedicated community of coaches who uphold the highest professional standards, demonstrate a deeper competence, and portray credibility. And on an individual level, you will find increased confidence and greater professional fulfillment.

Are you ready? Keep reading to gain key insights and tips that can help you successfully prepare for the ICF Credentialing Exam.

“ The ICF Credentialing Exam really helped me prepare for my coaching career in a lot of ways.”

— *Sunny Bhasin, PCC*



About the Exam

As a coach practitioner, you are often required to make decisions in the moment to respond to your clients and support their needs during your coaching sessions. It is one of the elements that makes coaching such a demanding, rewarding profession.

The ICF Credentialing Exam tests your understanding of and ability to apply the ICF definition of coaching, ICF Core Competencies, and ICF Code of Ethics. It reflects real-life situations that coaches around the world have encountered within their practice. **It is specifically designed by coaches and for coaches.** Who better to speak to the nuances in the coaching profession than the experts within our field? Your peers were integrally involved in every stage of the exam development process — from drafting the scenarios presented to determining the correct responses and the exam passing standard. Each question and scenario is reviewed and validated by dozens of coaching subject matter volunteers through multiple phases of review and testing to ensure each item is fair, accurate, and valid.

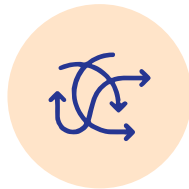
Format

The ICF Credentialing Exam is a Situational Judgment Test (SJT) designed to test your knowledge and how you make judgments and decisions in a coaching context. It is a three-hour (180-minute) computer-administered exam delivered in a proctored environment at test centers around the world or through remote testing services. The exam consists of 78 items, divided into two sections, with an optional 10-minute break midway through the exam.

What Is a Situational Judgement Test (SJT)?



Tests knowledge, abilities, and skills in the coaching context.



Reflects several “plausible yet not equally effective” ways of handling the situation.



More nuanced than simple right-wrong test questions.



Requires judgement and decision-making, just like coaching itself.

You are presented with a realistic scenario describing a coaching situation, followed by four response options. You are asked to identify:

- The **BEST ACTION** of the four presented.
- The **WORST ACTION** of the four presented.

Content Overview

The ICF Credentialing Exam consists of 78 situational judgment items, with 68 scored items and 10 unscored items. Additionally, you will have a 10-minute break in the middle of the exam to come back with a fresh mind.

Each exam item contains a realistic scenario describing a coaching situation, followed by four response options. For each scenario, you are asked to select the best action and the worst action among the options provided for that scenario.

There is only one correct **best** action and one correct **worst** action for each coaching scenario. Although more than one response may represent a reasonable response to the scenario presented, you will receive credit only for selecting the best possible action or worst possible action. You are asked not to respond with what YOU might do in response to the scenario, but which response is the most effective — in alignment with the ICF Core Competencies and Code of Ethics — and which is the least effective among the four options presented.

Your exam score is based on successfully identifying each correct best action and worst action. You receive credit for each correct action identified. You are not penalized for incorrect responses, so it is to your advantage to answer all questions on the exam.

Content Domains

The ICF Credentialing Exam focuses on four overarching content domains: Foundation, Co-Creating the Relationship, Communicating Effectively, and Learning and Growth. Those domains are further broken down into competencies:

Domain: Foundation

- 13% — Competency 1: Demonstrates Ethical Practice
- 12% — Competency 2: Embodies a Coaching Mindset

Domain: Co-Creating the Relationship

- 12% — Competency 3: Establishes and Maintains Agreements
- 13% — Competency 4: Cultivates Trust and Safety
- 13% — Competency 5: Maintains Presence

Domain: Communicating Effectively

- 12% — Competency 6: Listens Actively
- 13% — Competency 7: Evokes Awareness

Domain: Cultivating Learning and Growth

- 12% — Competency 8: Facilitates Client Growth



Preparing for the Exam

With diligent preparation, you can absolutely pass this exam. Remember, your education and experience are the best possible foundation you can have for preparing for the exam. But to give yourself an extra boost, here are some other essential tasks you should do when studying:

- Look through the materials you were given from your coaching education.
- Review the ICF Core Competencies and Code of Ethics.
- Reflect on common coaching situations and possible responses.
- What do the Core Competencies look like when effectively demonstrated by a coach?
- What does it look like when a coach does not effectively demonstrate the Core Competencies?
- Reflect on your mentor coaching experience, and don't be afraid to ask your mentor questions about their experience.

Plus, you can practice the exam in a simulated testing environment. The [ICF Credentialing Exam online tutorial](#) is a free, interactive simulation of the Pearson VUE testing platform where you can become familiar with the exam platform features, practice the exam navigation functionality, and review and answer sample exam questions at your own pace.

Quick Tips for Taking the Exam

- When reading the scenario, don't make assumptions or add details that are not presented.
- Recharge your batteries. A good night's sleep is your secret weapon, don't run on low power before the big day.
- Fuel up wisely. Plan your meals so you're not running on empty during the exam, and stay hydrated. Eating and drinking keep your brain functioning at its best!
- Remember: The four responses presented may not reflect what you would do. Of the four responses, which is the most aligned with the ICF Core Competencies and Code of Ethics? Which is the least aligned?
- Master the clock. Time management during the exam can help you sprint through easy questions and pace yourself on tougher ones.
- Try to discern which core competency each scenario represents. The exam is designed to test your understanding of the ICF Core Competencies, so this will give you clues as to which is the best action and worst action.
- Scout your route. If you're heading to an exam center, plan your route and account for traffic to ensure you arrive with plenty of time to spare. No need for last-minute stress.
- Prep your space. For online exam taking, clear your desk and remove distractions. Ensure your internet connection is solid, and have a backup plan ready.
- Pit stop before the race. Use the restroom before you start. You don't want any unnecessary distractions.

Additional Resources for Studying

We are here to support you in your credentialing journey. From videos to checklists to sample questions, we have many resources to help you prepare for the exam. Check out our resources to help you study and pass your exam with ease.

[ICF Core Competencies](#)

[ICF Core Competency Video Series](#)

[Updated ICF Core Competencies Overview webinar](#)

[ICF Code of Ethics](#)

[ICF Code of Ethics Video Series](#)

[Insights & Considerations for Ethics](#)

[Sample Questions](#)

[PCC Markers](#)

[ICF Credentialing Exam tutorial](#)

Remember, 75% of test-takers pass on their first time through because they studied hard and are dedicated to being the best coach they can be. Take this time to tap into your internal knowledge and skill as a practitioner and bring your best coaching mindset to your exam. With over 50,000 ICF credentialed coaches standing with you, we know you can do this.

Need additional help or have any questions?
Reach out to us at any time by email at

support@coachingfederation.org

“Earning an ICF credential meant and still means to me both a pledge and a commitment. It’s a pledge to the whole world that I coach by the highest level of professional standards, ethical rules, and competence as set forth by ICF. And it’s also a **commitment to myself and to those that are engaging me as a professional coach** that I will seek the highest level of competence and professional standards in engaging with my clients.”

— *Giuseppe Totino, MCC*

