CCRN (Adult) Exam Guide

Format, the November 2025 test plan, eligibility and an 8-week study plan

THE EXAM AT A GLANCE

FEATURE	CCRN (ADULT)
Items	150: 125 scored, 25 unscored pretest
Time	3 hours (about 72 seconds per item)
Item type	Multiple choice, 4 options, one answer
Format	Fixed length, not adaptive; bookmark and go back
Passing standard	83 of 125 scored items (since 11/12/2025)
Pass rate	72.02% first-time in 2025 (mostly the previous exam)
Fee	$260 member, $375 nonmember
Retest	$185 member, $290 nonmember; up to 4 tries in 12 months
Where	PSI testing center or live remote proctoring
Results	On screen; emailed report by content area

EXAM TIP The cut score is a raw count that can change with exam updates. Treat every item as scored. Most items test application and analysis, not recall.

WHAT IS ON IT

Test plan for exams from November 12, 2025, based on a 2024 study of practice. Adult patients only.

Older review books may still use the 2020 weights.

CONTENT AREA	NOW	2020 PLAN
Clinical Judgment (total)	80%	80%
Cardiovascular	13%	17%
Respiratory	12%	15%
Endo, Heme, GI, Renal, Integumentary	21%	20%
Musculoskeletal, Neuro, Behavioral	18%	14%
Multisystem	16%	14%
Professional Caring and Ethical Practice	20%	20%

EXAM TIP Endo through Integumentary (21%) is the largest area; Cardiovascular fell from 17% to 13%. Testable actions include circulatory support devices, temporary pacing, CRRT, ECMO, proning, targeted temperature management and organ donation. Professional Caring tests seven Synergy Model competencies, such as advocacy.

WHO CAN TAKE IT

- Current, unencumbered U.S. RN or APRN license
- Two-year option: 1,750 hours with acutely/critically ill adults in 2 years, 875 in the most recent year
- Five-year option: 2,000 hours over 5 years, 144 in the most recent year
- Most hours, overall and in the year before applying, must be with critically ill patients
- Facility in the U.S. or Canada, or elsewhere with Magnet or JCI status
- Orientation counts only when you hold the assignment
- Educators, managers, APRNs and preceptors may count bedside supervision if directly involved in care

Acuity, not unit name, decides: ICU, ED, trauma, flight and nurse anesthesia hours can count. Other pathways: Tele-critical Care, Knowledge Professional. Testing window: currently 180 days (normally 90).

HOW TO STUDY: 8 WEEKS

1. Week 1: baseline Mock Exam, then Cardiovascular. One-Pagers: Rhythm Gallery, ACLS Algorithms, Hemodynamic Normals, IABP Management, Vasopressors and Inotropes.
2. Week 2: Respiratory. One-Pagers: Ventilator Modes, Capnography.
3. Weeks 3 to 4: Endo, Heme, GI, Renal and Integumentary.
4. Week 5: Musculoskeletal, Neuro and Behavioral. One-Pager: Sedation Scales.
5. Week 6: Multisystem. One-Pagers: Sepsis Bundle, Shock Types, ABG Interpretation, Electrolyte Imbalances.
6. Week 7: Professional Caring practice, a second Mock Exam, then Weakest Subject and Missed Questions.
7. Week 8: final Mock Exam early, then Daily Review and Trouble Questions only. Rest the day before.

EXAM TIP Clear Daily Review every day. AACN suggests weighting study time by your baseline area scores; most new certificants started about three months out.

TEST-DAY TIPS

- Current government photo ID with signature, name matching your AACN record; no military or temporary ID
- Schedule 24+ hours ahead; reschedule or cancel up to 48 hours before
- Testing center: over 15 minutes late means no admission
- Remote: check in 15 to 30 minutes early (no entry if over 30 minutes late); check-in can take an hour; run PSI's Tutorial Test; digital notepad only
- Learn generic drug names; AACN is moving to generic-only items
- Answer every item; guessing is not penalized
- Up to two 5-minute breaks; the clock keeps running

SAFETY Leaving the testing area without permission voids the exam. Phones, notes or recording can mean dismissal: no score, no refund. Remote proctors can warn or end the exam for looking away, covering your mouth or talking.

OFFICIAL RESOURCES

- CCRN Exam Handbook, Direct Care (July 2026): test plan, testable actions, sample questions, bibliography
- Certification Exam Policy Handbook (September 2026): scheduling and exam-day rules
- AACN Practice Exam: free 30-question trial; 150 questions for $35 member, $45 nonmember

Selected titles from AACN's item-validation bibliography:

- Hartjes, AACN Core Curriculum for Progressive and Critical Care Nursing, 8th ed. (2022)
- Urden et al., Critical Care Nursing: Diagnosis and Management, 10th ed. (2025)
- ELSO Red Book, 6th ed. (2022)

It still lists the AHA 2020 CPR and ECC Guidelines, so items may not reflect AHA 2025 changes yet.

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Sources (11) are listed with links at icubasics.com/sheets/guide-ccrn-adult.html. For education and exam preparation only. Not medical advice; follow current guidelines and your institution's protocols. ICU Basics is an independent study aid not affiliated with any certifying body.