NBRC Respiratory Therapy Exam Guide

The 2027 RT exam: format, content outline, eligibility, the TMC and CSE transition, and an 8-week study plan

ICU Basics
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THE EXAM AT A GLANCE

FEATURE	DETAIL
Items	185 multiple choice: 160 scored, 25 unmarked pretest
Time	4 hours, one sitting
Format	Fixed length, not adaptive, no simulations; forms vary by candidate (LOFT)
Passing	Raw score vs two cut scores: low earns CRT, high earns RRT
Eligibility	18+ with a CoARC-supported or accredited RT associate degree or higher, or the CSRT RRT
Cost	$360 first attempt; $300 repeat
Dates	Apply from Oct 1, 2026; testing from Jan 4, 2027
Scheduling	PSI centers, Monday to Saturday; 90 days to test after acceptance
Reschedule	Once, free, at least 1 business day ahead
Results	Pass/fail on screen; report emailed within 24 hours
Retakes	3 attempts, then a 120-day wait between attempts

NBRC had not published the two RT cut score numbers as of October 2026.

IF YOU TEST BEFORE 2027

- TMC: last applications December 15, 2026; last test day December 31, 2026.
- Passed the TMC at the high cut before December 31, 2026? You may take the CSE through December 31, 2027, or the RT exam if you meet its admission rules.
- Current CRTs who meet RT admission rules can test for the RRT; scoring below the low cut keeps the CRT.
- TMC and CSE attempts do not count toward RT exam attempts.
- Credential maintenance is unchanged.

CRT-to-Registry admission routes end December 31, 2026. From 2027, a CRT without the RT degree or CSRT RRT cannot enter the RT exam.

WHAT IS ON IT

Scored items per form, NBRC RT outline effective January 2027

CONTENT AREA	ITEMS	SHARE
Patient Data	25	15.6%
Devices and Patient Safety	25	15.6%
Interventions	50	31.3%
Breadth of Knowledge subtotal	100	62.5%
Adults	50	31.3%
Pediatric and neonatal	10	6.3%
Depth of Clinical Judgment subtotal	60	37.5%
Total	160	100%

CLINICAL JUDGMENT PATIENT TYPE	ITEMS
Adult chronic lung disease	17
Adult medical (infection, ARDS, other)	15
Cardiovascular	5
Pre- and post-operative	5
Trauma	4
Neurological or neuromuscular	4
Neonatal (resuscitation, RDS)	6
Pediatric	4

Chronic lung disease: invasive ventilation 5, noninvasive 6, outpatient 3, new diagnosis 3. Judgment type: 20 information gathering, 40 decision making. Neonatal or pediatric items across the whole exam: 15 to 18.

EXAM TIP Only 23 of 160 scored items test recall, and every clinical judgment item is application or analysis. Practice choosing the next step, not reciting facts.

EXAM TIP The largest single task is device troubleshooting: 19 of the 25 Devices items. Next come oxygenation and ventilation support (10) and care-plan changes (10).

HOW TO STUDY: 8 WEEKS

1. Week 1: read the content outline, then take NBRC's free RT practice exam and a timed app Mock Exam as baselines.
2. Weeks 1 to 2: Patient Data, with the ABG Interpretation and Capnography One-Pagers.
3. Weeks 3 to 4: Interventions, with the Ventilator Modes and Settings One-Pager. Troubleshoot each device as you go (ventilators, CPAP/NPPV, high-flow, resuscitation, airways).
4. Week 5: Devices and Patient Safety: troubleshooting, then infection control and quality control.
5. Week 6: both Clinical Judgment subjects. For each stem, ask what to assess or what to change.
6. Daily: Daily Review; twice a week, a Weakest Subject set.
7. Weeks 7 to 8: two more Mock Exams, Missed and Trouble Questions, and an official NBRC Self-Assessment Exam if you choose.

EXAM TIP The real exam allows about 78 seconds per item. At that pace, the 160-item app Mock Exam takes about 3.5 hours.

TEST-DAY TIPS

- Bring two current IDs with your name and signature, one with a photo. No temporary IDs.
- Over 15 minutes late: no test, no refund.
- No personal calculator; use the on-screen one. Scratch paper comes one sheet at a time.
- Breaks are allowed, but the clock keeps running.
- Bookmark hard items and come back. Answer every item; there is no guessing penalty.
- Pretest items look like scored items, so give each one full effort.
- Turn your phone off and leave it in the locker. If it rings or vibrates, your test ends.

OFFICIAL RESOURCES

- RT Examination page and FAQs: nbrc.org/rt
- RT Detailed Content Outline: nbrc.org/doc/RT-DCO
- Candidate Handbook: nbrc.org/candidate-handbook
- Free RT practice exam and Self-Assessment Exams: nbrc.org/resources
- Scheduling: test-takers.psiexams.com/nbrc

NBRC does not endorse any review program.

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Sources (11) are listed with links at icubasics.com/sheets/guide-nbrc-rte.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.