



CSCS Exam Preparation Suggestions

Suggestions for Using the NSCA Certification's Preparation Materials to Prepare for the Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist Exam

Overview

The ideas presented here are merely suggestions to assist exam candidates in the studying process. They should not be considered as the only method to prepare for the CSCS exam. Ultimately, it will be each candidate's academic, experiential and test-taking abilities that dictate how effective the preparation materials are in promoting success on the CSCS exam. Also, while understanding the information presented in the preparation materials should certainly increase the likelihood of passing the CSCS exam, it does not guarantee a successful performance. The questions on the CSCS exam are developed from resources in addition to these materials (refer to the "Additional Textbook References" list found on pages 12-16).

Because candidates with diverse backgrounds take the CSCS exam, it is difficult to recommend a single approach when preparing to take the exam. An academic background in an exercise science/physiology, strength training and conditioning, physical therapy or athletic training related curriculum provides the ideal foundation from which a candidate may begin to prepare for the CSCS exam. However, there are candidates without an exercise science-related degree, but with a significant amount of professional experience who want to take the CSCS exam. Therefore, candidates should follow the portion of this document and flowchart that best reflects their academic background.

This document begins with a description of the exam preparation materials and follows with suggestions for how to use the materials based on a candidate's academic background.

CSCS Prerequisites

Please note that to be eligible to take the CSCS exam, candidates must be CPR/AED certified and hold a bachelor's degree, be enrolled as a college senior at an accredited college or university or hold a degree in chiropractic medicine. Contact NSCA Certification for more information on prerequisites for the CSCS exam:

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Certification Online: www.nasca-cc.org
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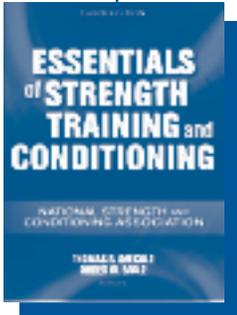




CSCS Exam Preparation Suggestions

Available Exam Preparation Materials

Essentials of Strength and Conditioning, Third Edition



This text is the definitive source for strength training and conditioning information and the primary resource for preparing for the CSCS exam. Written and edited by the world's leading exercise science professionals, the Third Edition includes:

- Restructured information about the body's adaptations to anaerobic and aerobic exercise training
- Greatly expanded information about performance-enhancing substances
- Up-to-date nutritional information, including recent research-based nutritional guidelines
- Additional sport-specific testing protocols and comprehensive normative and descriptive data tables
- New photographs of resistance training exercise technique
- New terminology for concepts related to the design of resistance training programs and periodization
- Concise explanations of speed and agility training guidelines
- Step-by-step guidelines on designing aerobic endurance training programs
- Revised descriptions of strength and conditioning staff duties and checklists for facility maintenance

Each chapter begins with objectives and includes key points to guide the reader along the way. Key terms are boldfaced and listed at the end of the chapter, with page numbers indicating where they are explained in the chapter. Chapters include sidebars that apply the content, and each chapter ends with multiple-choice study questions with an answer key at the end of the book. Later chapters include sample resistance training programs for three different sports. Detailed instructions and photos are provided for testing, stretching, resistance training and plyometrics.

CSCS Exam Content Description booklet



The purpose of this booklet is to describe the content, scope and distribution of CSCS exam questions. This comprehensive information emerges from the "CSCS Exam Detailed Content Outline" (DCO), which is the result of a nationwide job analysis study of strength and conditioning professionals. It is this outline that the CSCS Exam Development Committee refers to when creating questions for the CSCS exam. Any concept not addressed in the DCO will not be included on the exam; conversely, any concept listed in the DCO is a potential content area to test a candidate's knowledge.

The CSCS Exam Content Description booklet breaks down the exam into a list of specific "objectives" and follows each with essay-type questions designed to stimulate thought about issues related to the associated knowledge area, skill or ability. Candidates can evaluate their current knowledge based on how well they can answer these questions.



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An additional benefit of the CSCS Practice Exam is the ability to earn Continuing Education Units (CEUs). After passing both sections of the actual CSCS exam, certificate holders can earn 0.5 CEU by filling out the "Practice Exam Comment Form" and returning it to the NSCA Certification.

All three volumes of the CSCS Practice Exam can be completed entirely online at the NSCA Certification Web site (www.nsca-cc.org).

Exercise Technique Manual for Resistance Training, Second Edition



The Exercise Technique Manual for Resistance Training, Second Edition gives detailed explanations on technique for each of the 57 free-weight and machine exercises, and the accompanying DVDs show the movements for each exercise in action. Candidates using this manual to study for the CSCS or NSCA-CPT exams will find this resource particularly helpful as they prepare for exam questions relating to anatomy, biomechanics, program design and exercise technique.

The manual and DVDs supply 5 total body, 14 lower-body, 36 upper-body and 2 abdominal exercises. For each exercise the manual details the type of exercise (e.g. whether it is a single-joint or multi-joint exercise), the predominant muscle groups and muscles involved and technique guidelines from beginning to end, including starting position, downward movements and upward movements. It offers spotting guidelines, safety suggestions, weight belt recommendations and breathing guidelines. The result is a complete manual with expert guidance in safely performing common resistance training exercises.

Essentials of Strength Training and Conditioning Multimedia Symposium CDs



The Multimedia Symposium CDs provide a unique opportunity to experience live lectures and prepare for the CSCS exam from the convenience of a computer. Candidates can watch professional lecturers present on the topic areas covered in the Essentials of Strength Training and Conditioning Symposium. As they lecture, candidates can follow along on the screen with a PowerPoint® slide show and take notes on a printable outline. Each presentation also includes an interactive 10-question self-assessment that evaluates the retention of the information presented.

The features of the Essentials of Strength Training and Conditioning Multimedia Symposium CDs include:

- 10 presentations covering approximately 11 hours on 12 CDs
- "Talking head" video footage similar to a "live" symposium
- Printable Adobe Acrobat files of all of the presenters' lecture outlines
- Auto-advancing PowerPoint slides that add to the content found in all of the presentation outlines
- Detailed explanations and video demonstrations of proper techniques for many free weight and machine resistance training exercises
- A total of 100 practice exam questions written in the same style and scope as the actual CSCS exam questions

Note: The presentation topics are similar to those found in the Essentials of Strength Training and Conditioning Symposium workbook and audio CDs.



CSCS Exam Preparation Suggestions

Essentials of Strength Training and Conditioning Symposium workbook and audio CDs



The "Essentials" symposium is a two-day seminar about the major CSCS exam content areas and facts, concepts and theories relevant to strength training and conditioning. The lectures are recorded on 15 audio CDs and combined with the presenters' lecture outlines, glossaries, figures and tables into the workbook. The sections of the workbook are titled:

- Structure and Function of the Muscular, Respiratory and Cardiovascular Systems
- Bioenergetics of Exercise and Training
- Biomechanical Principles
- Responses and Adaptations to Training
- Measurement and Evaluation
- Speed Development and Plyometric Training
- Free Weight and Machine Exercise Techniques
- Aerobic Exercise and Interval Training Prescription
- Resistance Training Exercise Prescription
- Sports Nutrition Concepts and Applied Strategies

CSCS Practice Exams (Volume 1, 2 and/or 3)



At approximately one-third the length of the actual exam, the *CSCS Practice Exams* closely parallel the exam's format, content and types of questions. These 64-question self-assessment tools allow candidates to learn the nature and scope of the exam, experience its format, discover the difficulty level of typical questions and receive feedback on their preparation level before taking the actual exam. They also identify the location of excerpts within the *Essentials of Strength Training and Conditioning, Second Edition* text that focus on the content covered in each question.

Like the actual exam, the *CSCS Practice Exams* consist of an exam booklet and video segments on a DVD or PAL format videotape. The video component includes questions that assess knowledge in topics such as exercise technique, applied anatomy and biomechanics. At the end of each practice exam is a self-assessment profile form that enables candidates to identify their strong and weak areas of preparation and a scoring form that compares their *CSCS Practice Exam* results to statistically similar scores that are required to pass the actual CSCS exam.

The NSCA Certification has three volumes of the *CSCS Practice Exam*. All questions are completely unique to each volume to provide a diverse exposure to sample exam questions. Also, the *CSCS Practice Exam* is not an actual CSCS exam, and none of its questions are found on the CSCS exam. It is similar in difficulty and content distribution, but not length (the actual exam is three times longer). Therefore, the CSCS Practice Exam should not serve as the only method to prepare for the CSCS exam.



CSCS Exam Preparation Suggestions

Content and Weighting of the CSCS Exam

The CSCS exam is comprised of two separate sections — “Scientific Foundations” (consisting of 80 scored and 10 nonscored multiple-choice questions) and “Practical/Applied” (consisting of 110 scored and 10 nonscored multiple-choice questions) — that are divided into a total of six distinct content areas or domains. To become certified, candidates must pass both sections of the exam. Below is a brief summary of the content, scope and weighting of the CSCS exam:

CSCS SCIENTIFIC FOUNDATIONS		
DOMAIN	PERCENT OF EXAM SECTION	NUMBER OF QUESTIONS*
Exercise Sciences	71%	57
Nutrition	29%	23
TOTAL	100%	80

CSCS PRACTICAL/APPLIED		
DOMAIN	PERCENT OF EXAM SECTION	NUMBER OF QUESTIONS*
Program Design	36%	39
Exercise Technique	36%	40
Organization and Administration	10%	11
Testing and Evaluation	18%	20
TOTAL	100%	110

*Note: These numbers do not include the non-scored questions. For more information on nonscored questions, refer to the CSCS Exam Candidate Handbook.



CSCS Exam Preparation Suggestions

Exam Preparation Suggestions

Although the following sections describe two separate strategies for preparing for the CSCS exam based on academic background, all candidates would benefit from reading both approaches.

Candidates with an Academic Background

1

Step one: CSCS Practice Exams (Volume 1, 2 and/or 3)

The first step in preparing for the CSCS exam is to test your current level of understanding by completing a CSCS Practice Exam. There are three volumes of the CSCS Practice Exam. Step one recommends that you complete one volume and save the others for later (e.g., step four).

Until this point, hopefully you have not looked through the practice exam booklet. It is important that you have not tried to answer the questions because it may give you an advantage when you formally take the CSCS Practice Exam (e.g., you may score higher, thereby incorrectly assessing your knowledge level).

If you are taking the practice exam online, sign in with your name and email address and follow the directions. If you are completing the practice exam from the booklet and video, open the booklet to page three and follow all of the directions. If you want to mimic the conditions of an actual CSCS exam, do not deviate from any of the directions; complete the CSCS Practice Exam as shown. Significant effort was given to make the CSCS Practice Exam similar to the content, scope and difficulty of an actual CSCS exam. Afterward, check your answers and fill in the "Score Profile Sheet" to assess your knowledge of the six domains. Be honest and also "mark off" the questions you answered correctly by guessing instead of actually knowing the answer.

2

Step two: Based on your performance on the practice exam, you can refer to these preparation materials to begin your study:

- *CSCS Exam Content Description booklet*

Refer to the "CSCS Exam Detailed Content Outline" (DCO) found in the *CSCS Exam Content Description* booklet to familiarize yourself with the content and scope of a CSCS exam. Then, follow the *CSCS Exam Content Description* booklet directions by reviewing the tasks included in the DCO and assessing your ability to answer the "Content Questions." Again, these questions are more encompassing than CSCS exam questions and are purposely more essay-like to facilitate self-evaluation. Note also that each *CSCS Practice Exam* question is referenced in the *CSCS Exam Content Description* booklet.

- *Essentials of Strength Training and Conditioning, Third Edition* textbook

Use the "Self-Scoring/Reference Sheets" of the *CSCS Practice Exam* to look up the specific location (e.g., the chapter, page, column and paragraph) in the *Essentials of Strength Training and Conditioning, Third Edition* text for the answers to incorrect and guessed questions.



CSCS Exam Preparation Suggestions

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Step three: Complete an in-depth study of the following preparation materials:

- *Exercise technique manual for Resistance Training, Second Edition* and DVDs
AND
- *Essentials of Strength Training and Conditioning Multimedia Symposium* CDs
OR
- *Essentials of Strength Training and Conditioning Symposium* workbook and audio CDs

After studying the materials below, you should understand the content addressed in all of the practice exam questions and why the correct answer is correct. A bonus would be to understand why the other three responses (of the multiple-choice question format) are NOT correct.

Exercise Technique Manual for Resistance Training, Second Edition & DVDs

In conjunction with reviewing chapter ??? (check on the chapter number) of the *Essentials of Strength Training and Conditioning, Third Edition* text, study the enhanced content found in the *Exercise Technique Manual for Resistance Training, Second Edition* and DVDs. Many of the "Practical/Applied" CSCS exam video and functional anatomy questions are based on content presented in these materials. These exam preparation materials are especially helpful if you are deficient in the "Exercise Techniques" or "Program Design" domain (e.g., after testing yourself with a CSCS Practice Exam)

AND

Essentials of Strength Training and Conditioning Multimedia Symposium CDs

When studying the Multimedia Symposium CDs, it is recommended that you begin with the first presentation and play each CD while simultaneously watching the PowerPoint slide show and adding notes to the outline with content from the presentation. The presenters developed a summary of the important topics, but much more information can be added to the outlines from the multimedia lectures. If there is insufficient room to make notes on the outline pages use extra paper. After listening to the entire symposium, you may want to watch the CDs again to proofread your notes. This step can be repeated as often as necessary to capture all of the information.

Evaluate your retention of the information presented by completing the interactive 10-question self-assessment that is included with each presentation. The self-assessment questions are all written in the style of actual CSCS exam questions.

OR

Essentials of Strength Training and Conditioning Symposium workbook and audio CDs

When studying the workbook and audio CDs, it is recommended that you begin with the first presentation and play each CD and write notes in the outline at the same time (using extra paper if needed). (The suggestion of taking notes while listening to the lecture prevents you from listening to the CDs while in your car or exercising.) After listening to the entire symposium, you may want to listen to the audio CDs again to check your notes. Repeat this step until you have grasped all of the information.

It is important to realize that the symposium presenters (of the multimedia CDs and the audio CDs) are not teaching for the exam. They are speaking on topics relating to material that the CSCS exam is based upon as opposed to identifying "what will and what will not be" on the actual exam.



CSCS Exam Preparation Suggestions

4

Step four: Take a different CSCS Practice Exam

During step one, you took one of the volumes of the *CSCS Practice Exam*. Here in step four, choose a different volume to determine what (and how much) content was learned and retained. Again, it is important that you follow all of the testing directions and that you do not look at the questions in advance of when you formally sit down to take the practice exam.

Check your answers (remember to mark the questions you correctly guessed as “wrong”) and fill in the “Score Profile Sheet” to reassess your knowledge of the six domains.

If you are not satisfied with your performance on the practice exam — even if your “Score Profile Sheet” shows that you “passed” one or more volumes — you can go back to step two to reexamine the other exam preparation materials to further prepare. Once you feel you are ready, take the CSCS exam!

Summary

Candidates who have an exercise science-related degree can use the CSCS exam preparation materials in this manner:

- Take a *CSCS Practice Exam*
- Use the practice exam scores to identify the knowledge areas that need further review
- Consult the *CSCS Exam Content Description* booklet and *Essentials of Strength Training and Conditioning, Third Edition* textbook to learn more about the knowledge areas that require additional study
- Study the other exam preparation materials, if necessary
- Take a different *CSCS Practice Exam* to reassess your increased knowledge base
- Decide if further study of the exam preparation materials is needed; if not, take the CSCS exam

The philosophy of this strategy is to focus exam preparation on weak content areas, rather than reviewing all exercise science-related concepts (since they were initially learned in an academic environment).

As a final note, another studying idea is to write your own practice exam — just developing questions that have one right answer and three wrong answers can be very helpful (and difficult). Use the *CSCS Exam Content Description* booklet to give you ideas for sample questions so that you will not be tempted to make your practice exam based solely on the *Essentials of Strength Training and Conditioning, Third Edition* text.



CSCS Exam Preparation Suggestions

Candidates without an Academic Background

Because CSCS exam candidates have different experiences and backgrounds, the approach outlined below is designed for those who have not received a formal education in an exercise science/physiology, strength training and conditioning, physical therapy or athletic training related curriculum. This approach is also helpful for those who have been away from the academic environment for an extended time. The CSCS exam preparation materials are effective study aids, even for those who do not have an exercise science-related degree, and many of the same suggestions are beneficial. Often, however, candidates without this base level of academic preparation may need to go through the preparation materials several times and consult additional resources for clarification of advanced or unfamiliar concepts. These resources can include exercise physiology, anatomy and biomechanics textbooks and professional journals (e.g., the NSCA's *Strength and Conditioning Journal*, *The Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research* and the NSCA's *Performance Training Journal*).

1

Step one: CSCS Exam Content Description booklet

As previously described, the *CSCS Exam Content Description* booklet describes the content and scope of the CSCS exam. This is especially important if you are unfamiliar with strength and conditioning concepts. If you do not understand many of the objectives included in the DCO, you may need to take some exercise science-related academic courses to become adequately prepared for the CSCS exam. Another approach to try to learn the information is to actually respond to the "Content Questions" by looking up the answers in the CSCS exam preparation materials and other textbooks.

2

Step two: *Essentials of Strength Training and Conditioning, Third Edition*, textbook

This textbook provides an "academic" foundation for preparing for the CSCS exam, especially for exam candidates who did not take traditional college courses in an exercise science-related field. Because of the obvious discrepancy in the quantity of information between a 642-page textbook and the 210-question multiple-choice CSCS exam, it can be difficult to decide what to study from the *Essentials of Strength Training and Conditioning, Third Edition* text. One method is to first skim (not read) the text looking for topics (chapters) that are less familiar to you. Then, go back and read those chapters and, if needed, consult the chapter references for further study. Next, answer the study questions at the end of each chapter. Lastly, you may benefit from writing an outline of the chapters that contain the most unfamiliar content.

Please realize that this step may be very time consuming or quite brief, depending upon your initial level of understanding. Take your time, but remind yourself that there is more information in each chapter than can ever be included on one CSCS exam. Also, although the text is a very valuable resource, the CSCS exam is not a test of the content found in the *Essentials of Strength Training and Conditioning, Third Edition* text. The text is only a reference. For example, the content, scope and difficulty of the study questions at the end of each chapter only relate to the information discussed in that chapter (although they were written in a style similar to those found on an actual CSCS exam).

The next three steps are similar to steps three and four for candidates with an academic background, except that the first time that you will take a *CSCS Practice Exam* is AFTER studying the other materials.



CSCS Exam Preparation Suggestions

3

Steps three through five:

Steps three and four recommend an in-depth study of the *Exercise Technique Manual or Resistance Training, Second Edition* and DVDs and the *Essentials of Strength Training and Conditioning Multimedia Symposium* CDs -OR- the *Essentials of Strength Training and Conditioning Symposium* workbook and audio CDs. Taking a *CSCS Practice Exam* to determine what (and how much) content was learned and retained is step five.

6

Step six:

Based on your scores on the practice exam, you can reexamine the other exam preparation materials for additional study as indicated by your score on the "Score Profile Sheet." For example, a low score for the "Exercise Techniques" domain may be improved by restudying the *Exercise Technique Manual or Resistance Training, Second Edition* and DVDs. Also, you can refer to the *CSCS Practice Exam "Self-Scoring/Reference Sheets"* to locate the specific concept in the DCO and where in the *Essentials of Strength Training and Conditioning, Third Edition* text that further information can be found.

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Step seven: Take a different CSCS Practice Exam

During step five, you took one of the volumes of the *CSCS Practice Exam*. Here in step seven, choose a different volume to determine how well you understand all of the information learned in steps three and four. It is important that you follow all of the testing directions and that you do not "sneak a quick look" at the practice exam questions.

If you are not satisfied with your performance on the practice exam — even if your "Score Profile Sheet" shows that you "passed" one or more volumes — step six can be repeated until all of the concepts addressed in the *CSCS Practice Exams* are studied. Once you feel you are ready, take the CSCS exam.

Summary

Candidates who do not have an exercise science-related degree can follow these steps to use the CSCS exam preparation materials:

- Refer to the *CSCS Exam Content Description* booklet to discover the content and scope of the CSCS exam and to decide if more formal instruction or classes are necessary
- Study each exam preparation material (one at a time)
- Take a *CSCS Practice Exam*
- Use the practice exam scores to identify the knowledge areas requiring further study
- Go back to the other exam preparation materials, if needed
- Take a different *CSCS Practice Exam* to reassess your increased knowledge base
- Decide if further study of the exam preparation materials is needed; if not, take the CSCS exam

The philosophy of this strategy is to first review all exercise science-related concepts, assess what was learned via the practice exams and then focus exam preparation on weak content areas.



CSCS Exam Preparation Suggestions

Additional Textbook References

(Newer editions may exist since this list was compiled)

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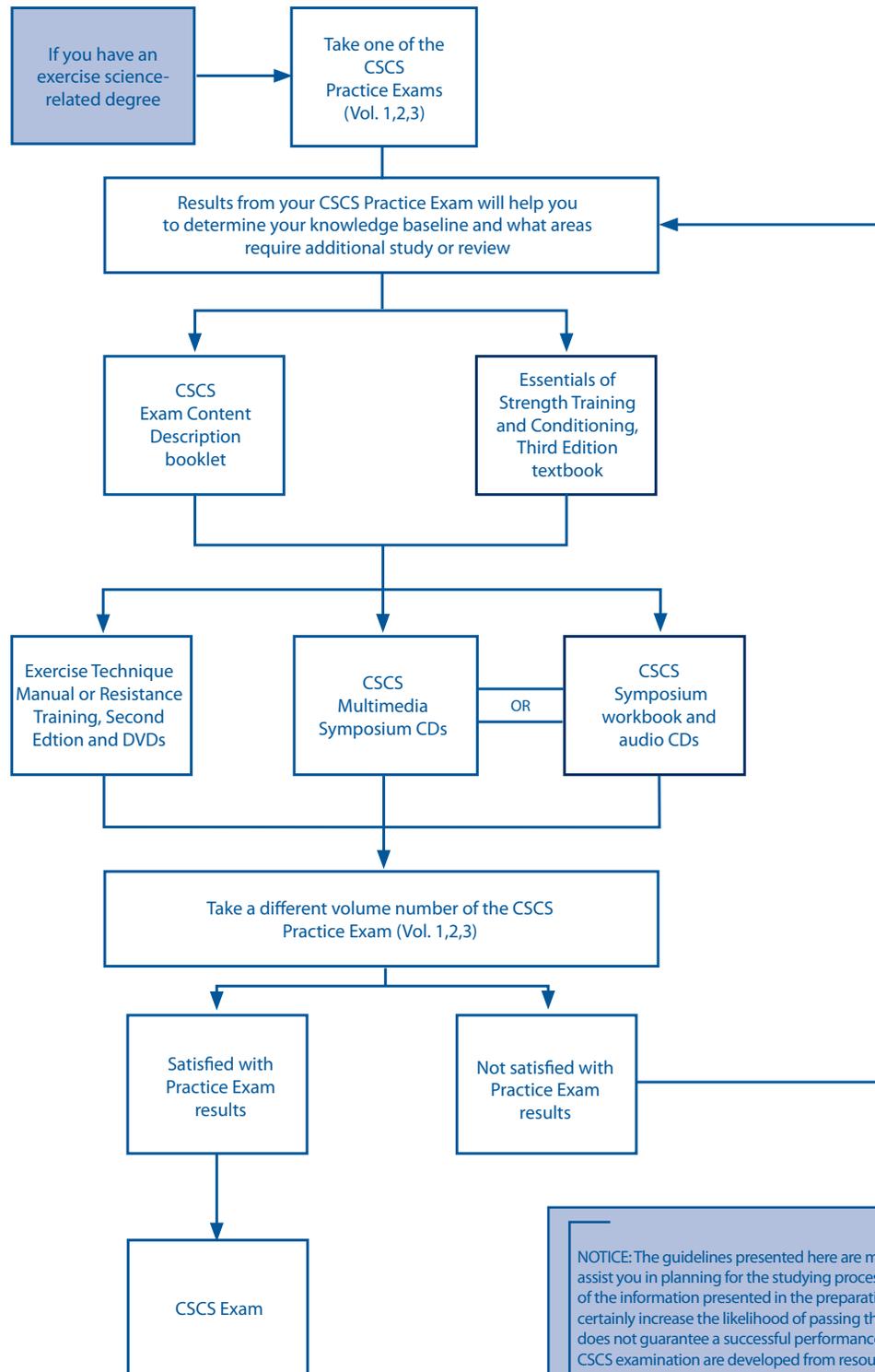
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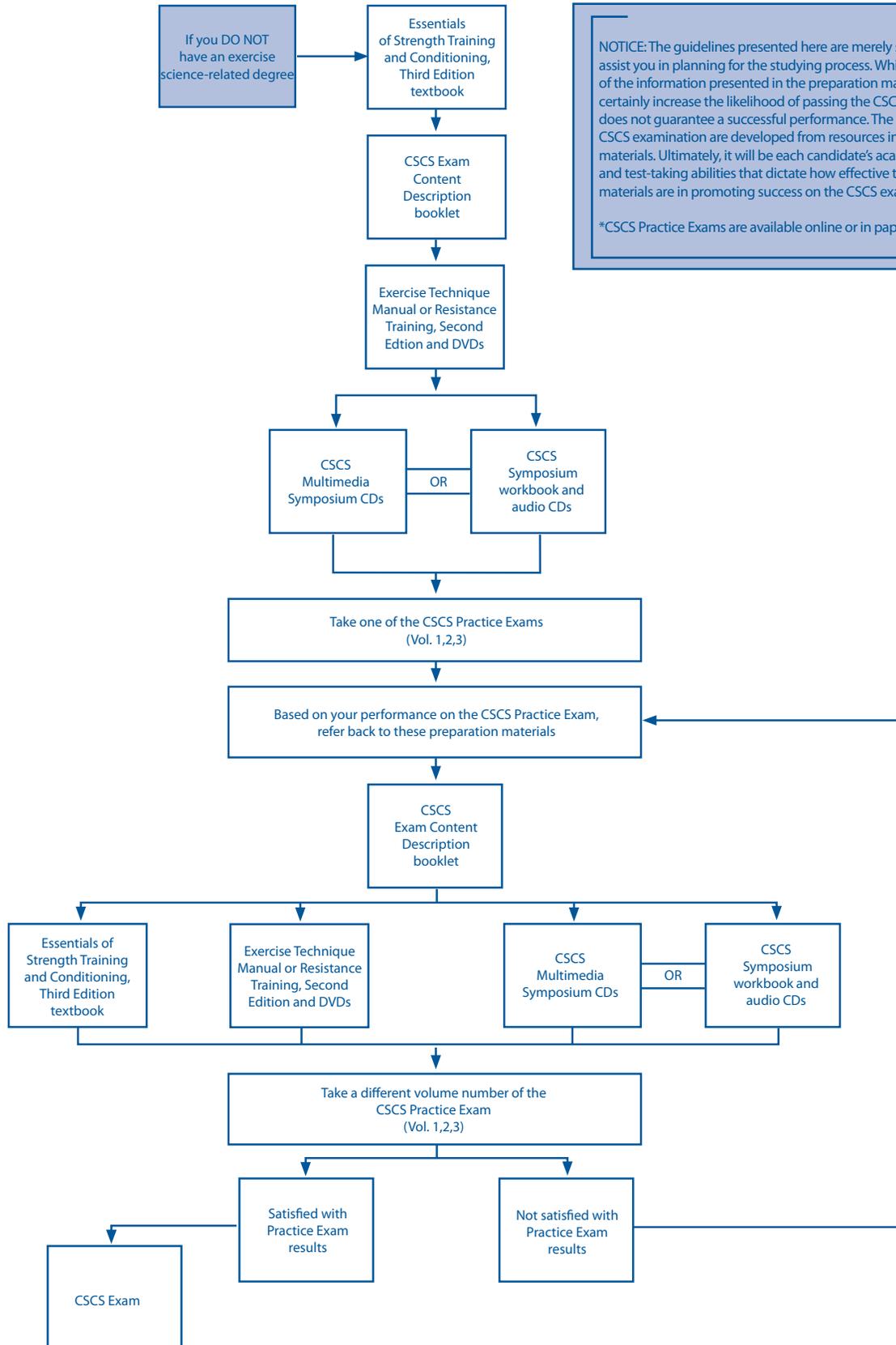


NOTICE: The guidelines presented here are merely suggestions to assist you in planning for the studying process. While comprehension of the information presented in the preparation materials should certainly increase the likelihood of passing the CSCS examination, it does not guarantee a successful performance. The questions on the CSCS examination are developed from resources in addition to these materials. Ultimately, it will be each candidate's academic, experiential and test-taking abilities that dictate how effective the preparation materials are in promoting success on the CSCS examination.

*CSCS Practice Exams are available online or in paper form.



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Credentials of Distinction



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CSCS EXAM CHANGES

Results of the Job Analysis Survey will be reflected on upcoming exams.



NSCA Certification recently conducted a Job Analysis Survey to revalidate the CSCS certification exam. As a result, the content weighting and scope of the knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) tested on the exam will change somewhat. The format of the exam you choose – Paper/Pencil or Computer-Based – and the date you plan to take the exam will determine which set of KSAs you will be tested on.

Please note that the changes in the exam primarily affect the distribution of questions across the content areas. The review materials you may have purchased are not out of date and still accurately reflect the content covered on the exam. **To see the changes in the question distribution in the content areas, refer to the content weighting charts below.** If you have any questions regarding the exam changes, please feel free to contact the NSCA Certification office at 800-815-6826 or 719-632-6722 or exams@nsca-lift.org.

**PAPER/PENCIL EXAM
BEFORE JUNE 1, 2008
OR
COMPUTER-BASED EXAM
BEFORE AUGUST 1, 2008**

CSCS SCIENTIFIC FOUNDATIONS		
DOMAIN	PERCENT OF EXAM SECTION	NUMBER OF QUESTIONS*
Exercise Sciences	72.5%	58
Nutrition	27.5%	22
TOTAL	100%	80

CSCS PRACTICAL/APPLIED		
DOMAIN	PERCENT OF EXAM SECTION	NUMBER OF QUESTIONS*
Exercise Technique	35.5%	39
Program Design	35.5%	39
Organization and Administration	9%	10
Testing and Evaluation	20%	22
TOTAL	100%	110

**Note: These numbers do not include the non-scored questions.*

CSCS SCIENTIFIC FOUNDATIONS		
DOMAIN	PERCENT OF EXAM SECTION	NUMBER OF QUESTIONS*
Exercise Sciences	71%	57
Nutrition	29%	23
TOTAL	100%	80

CSCS PRACTICAL/APPLIED		
DOMAIN	PERCENT OF EXAM SECTION	NUMBER OF QUESTIONS*
Exercise Technique	36%	39
Program Design	36%	40
Organization and Administration	10%	11
Testing and Evaluation	18%	20
TOTAL	100%	110

**PAPER/PENCIL EXAM
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