

California RDA Exam Study Guide (2026)

The Combined Written and Law and Ethics Examination: format, outline, pathways, and stale-prep traps.
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The exam at a glance

- Official name: Registered Dental Assistant Combined Written and Law and Ethics Examination, run by the Dental Board of California (DBC) and administered by PSI.
- One combined exam since 2018 -- the separate general written and law and ethics exams no longer exist -- and the practical exam was eliminated (BPC S1752.1 requires a written exam only).
- Format: 125 multiple-choice items (100 scored + 25 unscored pretest) in 3 hours, computer-based at PSI test centers, English only.
- Passing standard: criterion-referenced pass/fail set with the modified Angoff method (16 CCR S1081) -- not a fixed 75%. The Board does not publish a fixed passing percentage.
- Fees: \$120 DBC application fee plus the PSI examination fee per sitting, retakes included. Confirm the current PSI amount in your candidate bulletin before you pay.
- Eligibility window: 2 years from when the DBC receives the application. Retakes go through PSI, typically schedulable in about 7-10 business days, with no cap on attempts inside the window.
- June 2026 results (DBC monthly statistics): 263 candidates, 72% passed overall; board-approved-program candidates 79%; work-experience pathway 62%; repeat testers 38%.

The official 2023 outline -- weight your study time

Area 1: Assessment and Diagnostic Records -- 15%

Medical and dental histories, vital signs, charting existing conditions, radiographs and other diagnostic records

1A Patient Information and Assessment -- 8%

1B Diagnostic Tests and Records -- 7%

Area 2: Dental Procedures -- 50%

Chairside procedure knowledge -- setups, isolation, matrices, provisionals, sealants, polishing, patient education, and specialty assisting

2A Treatment Preparation -- 15%

2B Direct and Indirect Restorations -- 10%

2C Preventative and Aesthetic Procedures -- 10%

2D Patient Education -- 10%

2E Specialty Procedures -- 5%

Area 3: Infection Control and Health and Safety -- 25%

Standard precautions, PPE, sharps handling, instrument processing and sterilization monitoring, waterlines -- anchored in 16 CCR S1005 and Cal/OSHA's bloodborne pathogen standard (8 CCR S5193)

3A Patient Safety and Prevention of Disease Transmission -- 15%

3B Equipment Disinfection and Cross-Contamination Prevention -- 10%

Area 4: Laws and Regulations -- 10%

Dental Practice Act rules, licensure requirements, supervision levels and permitted duties, consent and confidentiality, mandated reporting, unprofessional conduct

Eligibility pathways (BPC S1752.1, as re-enacted by SB 1453)

- Board-approved program: Graduate from a Dental Board-approved educational program in registered dental assisting.
- Work experience: At least 15 months AND a minimum of 1,280 hours of satisfactory work experience performing dental assistant duties, certified by your supervising dentist.
- DANB CDA: Current, valid Certified Dental Assistant certification from the Dental Assisting National Board. It qualifies you to take this exam -- it does not exempt you from it.
- Alternative program: At least 500 hours of didactic and laboratory coursework plus at least 300 hours of clinical chairside experience under a licensed dentist.
- Preceptorship: At least 500 hours of clinical chairside work experience supervised by a preceptor dentist plus at least 300 hours of dental-assisting coursework.
- RDH crossover: A California Registered Dental Hygienist may apply for RDA licensure by passing this combined exam.

Required course certificates and their recency clocks

- California Dental Practice Act (2-hour course) -- Within 2 years
- Infection control (8-hour course) -- Within 2 years
- Coronal polishing -- Within 5 years
- Pit and fissure sealants -- Within 5 years
- Radiation safety -- Within 10 years
- Basic Life Support (BLS) -- Current, with a live in-person skills session

Stale-prep traps (what changed)

- No practical exam exists; materials teaching typodont requirements are obsolete.
- The general written and law and ethics exams merged in 2018; there is one exam, not two.
- The current structure is 125 items (100 scored + 25 pretest); older sources cite 140 or 150.
- There is no fixed 75% passing score -- scoring is criterion-referenced (modified Angoff, 16 CCR S1081).
- The Board's Table of Permitted Duties was restructured effective January 1, 2025, so any pre-2025 duty chart is unsafe to study from.

Official study references

The Board points candidates to the California Dental Practice Act (BPC S1600 et seq.), the Board's regulations (16 CCR S1000 et seq.), the Minimum Standards for Infection Control (16 CCR S1005), and Cal/OSHA bloodborne pathogen standards (8 CCR S5193).

Free practice, free data

- Free 15-question practice test with instant explanations: dentovio.com/rda/free-practice-test
- Every 2026 pass rate the Board publishes, month by month: dentovio.com/rda/pass-rates
- Free how-to-pass guide keyed to the outline: dentovio.com/guide/california-rda-exam/how-to-pass

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