



California Barber

Practice test

April 6, 2026

Time limit: 120 minutes

Official exam page

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Online timed practice

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Answer key for this session (PDF):

californiacerts.com/resources/pdfs/ca-barber/ca-barber-practice-solution.pdf

1. Under California law, a cosmetology establishment must display which of the following prominently?
 - A. Only the health inspection report
 - B. Only the establishment license at the reception desk
 - C. Establishment license and all individual practitioner licenses where visible to clients
 - D. No display is required — licenses are held digitally
2. California BBC inspectors have the authority to enter a licensed cosmetology establishment:
 - A. Only after a formal complaint has been filed
 - B. Only on scheduled inspection dates
 - C. During business hours without prior notice
 - D. Only with a court order
3. How often must disinfectant solution in a wet sanitizer jar be changed?
 - A. Once a month
 - B. After every single use
 - C. Daily or whenever visibly contaminated
 - D. Once a week
4. What does "sanitation" mean in the context of a salon?
 - A. Kill all bacteria but not viruses
 - B. Reduce microbial contamination to safe levels but not eliminate all pathogens
 - C. Destroy all microbial life including spores
 - D. Remove all physical debris from a surface
5. What is the purpose of shaving cream or gel in a shave service?
 - A. Condition and strengthen the beard
 - B. Disinfect the skin surface
 - C. Lubricate the skin, soften beard hair, and protect against razor irritation
 - D. Open pores for a deeper shave

6. The three phases of the hair growth cycle in correct order are:
- A. Telogen, anagen, catagen
 - B. Anagen, telogen, catagen
 - C. Catagen, telogen, anagen
 - D. Anagen, catagen, telogen
7. Pseudofolliculitis barbae (razor bumps) is caused by:
- A. An allergic reaction to shaving cream
 - B. A bacterial infection from an unclean razor
 - C. Hair curling back into the skin as it regrows, causing inflammation
 - D. A fungal condition of the beard follicles
8. What does "honing" a straight razor accomplish?
- A. Disinfect the blade surface
 - B. Align the blade edge without removing metal
 - C. Polish the blade for a smoother finish
 - D. Remove microscopic metal to restore sharpness when stropping is no longer sufficient
9. The California Board of Barbering and Cosmetology (BBC) is regulated under which state agency?
- A. California Department of Public Health
 - B. California Labor Commission
 - C. California State Licensing Board
 - D. Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA)
10. A licensee cuts a client and draws blood. What is the correct first response?
- A. Discard all tools and continue with new ones
 - B. Stop service, cover wound, remove and disinfect contaminated tools
 - C. Apply antiseptic and continue immediately
 - D. Continue the service wearing gloves
11. Hair texture affects clipper work because:
- A. It has no effect on clipper technique
 - B. Curly hair must always be cut dry
 - C. Fine hair always requires a higher guard number
 - D. Coarse/thick/curly hair may require more passes and different guard sizes for the same visual result
12. What is the minimum contact time required for most EPA-registered disinfectants to effectively kill pathogens?
- A. 5 minutes
 - B. 10 minutes
 - C. 30 minutes
 - D. 1 minute
13. Which of the following is a non-porous surface that can be effectively disinfected?
- A. A porous sponge applicator
 - B. A fabric cape
 - C. A metal shear blade
 - D. A wooden cuticle pusher
14. The clipper-over-comb technique is used to:
- A. Cut hair in a straight horizontal line
 - B. Blend and taper hair by running clippers over a comb held at varying angles
 - C. Lift hair with a comb and cut with scissors only
 - D. Remove bulk from thick hair using a razor
15. Before performing any shave service, the barber should conduct a:
- A. Identify skin type, beard density, growth direction, and any contraindications to customize the service
 - B. Confirm the client wants a straight razor vs safety razor
 - C. Determine which brand of shaving cream to use
 - D. Check the client's appointment history only
16. Which of the following describes hair that has been chemically over-processed?
- A. Extremely low porosity and high elasticity
 - B. Tightly closed cuticle with low moisture absorption
 - C. High shine and smooth cuticle
 - D. Extreme porosity, poor elasticity, gummy texture when wet
17. Before clipper blades are used on a new client, they must be:
- A. Sterilized in an autoclave after each client
 - B. Disinfected with an EPA-registered disinfectant spray
 - C. Wipe with a dry cloth only
 - D. Rinsed with water and dried

18. Which type of disinfectant is EPA-registered and most commonly required for non-porous tools in Texas salons?
- A. Bleach diluted in water
 - B. EPA-registered hospital-grade disinfectant (quats or phenolics)
 - C. Soap and hot water
 - D. Isopropyl alcohol only
19. What is the difference between a fade and a taper in terms of beard shaping?
- A. They are the same technique with different names
 - B. Both require a straight razor
 - C. A fade keeps some length; a taper goes to bare skin
 - D. A taper gradually reduces length; a fade reduces to skin level
20. What is the term for the area of the head where the hairline naturally rounds from the side to the back?
- A. The top of the head at the crown
 - B. The temple area on the sides of the head
 - C. The parietal ridge at the widest part of the head
 - D. The area where the hairline naturally rounds from the side to the back at the nape
21. Under California law, a cosmetologist found practicing without a current, valid license is subject to:
- A. An automatic 30-day suspension
 - B. A misdemeanor — subject to fines and potential criminal charges
 - C. A written warning only
 - D. No penalty if unlicensed for less than 90 days
22. EPA-registered salon disinfectants must be effective against which three categories of microorganisms?
- A. Bacteria only
 - B. Viruses and fungi only
 - C. Bacteria, viruses, and fungi
 - D. Bacteria and viruses only
23. What is a scalp massage most beneficial for during a shampoo service?
- A. Opens the cuticle for better product penetration
 - B. Reduces scalp oil production
 - C. Stimulates blood circulation to nourish hair follicles
 - D. Removes product buildup from the scalp
24. Alum block is used in barbering primarily to:
- A. Disinfect all tools after the shave service
 - B. Soften the beard for the next shave
 - C. Stop minor bleeding from razor nicks and provide mild antiseptic action
 - D. Reduce post-shave redness from chemical exposure
25. What is the technique of blending longer hair on top to shorter hair on the sides called?
- A. Shaping only the hairline without cutting length
 - B. Applying a texturizer to loosen the curl pattern
 - C. Cutting all hair to the same uniform length
 - D. Gradually transitioning hair length from longer at the crown to shorter at the sides and nape
26. Under California Health and Safety Code, cosmetology establishments must maintain hot and cold running water:
- A. Only licensed medical facilities are required to have running water
 - B. Water is optional if alcohol-based sanitizers are used
 - C. Only cold water is required
 - D. Hot and cold running water accessible for sanitation and handwashing
27. The term "pathogen" refers to:
- A. A virus that only affects plants
 - B. Any microorganism capable of causing disease
 - C. Any chemical substance found in salon products
 - D. A type of allergen found in hair dye
28. The four natural growth patterns that affect haircut planning include:
- A. Whorls, widow's peaks, nape growth direction, and recession patterns
 - B. Whether the client has had chemical services previously
 - C. The client's hair color and porosity only
 - D. The amount of product the client uses daily
29. What product is applied after a shave to soothe the skin and close pores?
- A. Lock in moisture like a heavy oil
 - B. Soften the beard before the next shave
 - C. Soothe razor irritation, close pores, provide mild antiseptic action
 - D. Stimulate beard growth
30. The three main layers of the hair shaft from outer to inner are:
- A. Cuticle, cortex, medulla
 - B. Cortex, cuticle, medulla
 - C. Epidermis, dermis, cortex
 - D. Medulla, cortex, cuticle

31. Which chemical product is prohibited from use in California nail salons?
- A. Liquid methyl methacrylate (MMA) monomer
 - B. Acetone nail polish remover
 - C. UV gel nail products
 - D. Hydrogen peroxide developer
32. Which of the following best describes a bactericide?
- A. A chemical that inhibits bacterial growth without killing them
 - B. A chemical that kills bacteria
 - C. A product that removes bacteria without chemicals
 - D. A natural antibacterial derived from plants
33. What is the primary purpose of the barber's consultation before a haircut?
- A. Sell the client additional products
 - B. Identify desired style, hair type, and any concerns to plan the appropriate technique
 - C. Determine which clipper guard to start with
 - D. Check if the client has paid for the service
34. Safety Data Sheets (SDS) are required to provide information about:
- A. Pricing and wholesale ordering information
 - B. Only the product ingredients and fragrance profile
 - C. Instructions for mixing chemical formulas
 - D. Hazard information, safe handling, PPE requirements, and emergency response
35. The term "porosity" in hair science refers to:
- A. How quickly hair dries after washing
 - B. How readily the hair absorbs and retains moisture
 - C. The natural wave pattern of the hair
 - D. The hair's resistance to breakage under tension
36. The scissors-over-comb technique in barbering is most useful for:
- A. Cut thick sections of hair in one pass
 - B. Remove bulk from the crown only
 - C. Blend the transition zone where faded sides meet longer top hair
 - D. Create a blunt one-length cut
37. A client arrives with a visible nail fungus infection on one hand. What is the correct course of action?
- A. Perform the service only on the unaffected hand
 - B. Apply antifungal powder and proceed with service
 - C. Refuse service and refer the client to a physician
 - D. Wear gloves and complete the full service
38. What is alopecia?
- A. An allergic reaction to color chemicals
 - B. Excessive hair growth
 - C. Hair loss
 - D. A fungal scalp infection
39. The California BBC requires that disinfectant solutions used on implements be:
- A. Soap and water is sufficient
 - B. Rubbing alcohol only
 - C. Any household bleach solution
 - D. EPA-registered hospital-grade disinfectants per manufacturer instructions
40. What is the recommended number of shave passes for a classic straight razor service?
- A. Three passes: with grain, across grain, against grain
 - B. One pass only
 - C. Two passes: with grain then against grain
 - D. As many passes as needed with no standard
41. The pH of the hair and scalp is approximately:
- A. 2.0–3.0 — strongly acidic
 - B. 8.5–9.5 — alkaline
 - C. 4.5–5.5 — slightly acidic
 - D. 7.0 — neutral
42. A client presents with acne pustules on their face. The barber should:
- A. Proceed carefully with light pressure
 - B. Apply antiseptic and proceed as normal
 - C. Modify or refuse the service — shaving over pustules risks spreading infection
 - D. Use a closer blade angle to avoid the pustules
43. The cortex of the hair contains what bonds that give hair its shape?
- A. Hydrogen bonds and disulfide bonds
 - B. Covalent and ionic bonds only
 - C. Salt bonds only
 - D. Peptide bonds only

44. Which clipper guard number removes the most hair (leaves the least length)?
- A. Guard #4
 - B. Guard #1
 - C. Guard #6
 - D. Guard #8
45. What term describes the process of destroying all microbial life including spores?
- A. Sterilization
 - B. Decontamination
 - C. Disinfection
 - D. Sanitation
46. What is the difference between cleaning and disinfecting?
- A. They are the same process
 - B. Disinfecting always comes before cleaning
 - C. Cleaning removes dirt physically; disinfecting uses chemicals to kill pathogens
 - D. Cleaning kills pathogens; disinfecting removes dirt
47. What is the primary route of transmission for head lice in a salon?
- A. Airborne droplets in the salon
 - B. Skin-to-skin contact with the hands
 - C. Contaminated water in the shampoo bowl
 - D. Direct head-to-head contact and shared tools, combs, and linens
48. Which EPA registration category indicates a disinfectant is effective against both bacteria and viruses?
- A. Disinfectant labeled for household use only
 - B. Hospital-grade or broad-spectrum disinfectant
 - C. Bacteriostatic disinfectant
 - D. Quaternary ammonium compound at any concentration
49. What is the purpose of an autoclave?
- A. Use UV light to kill surface bacteria
 - B. Use steam under pressure to sterilize instruments completely
 - C. Circulate disinfectant chemical through a sealed chamber
 - D. Dry heat metal instruments to 400°F
50. Used straight razor blades must be disposed of in:
- A. In a sealed plastic bag in the trash
 - B. In a puncture-resistant sharps container
 - C. Returned to the manufacturer for recycling
 - D. In the regular trash bin
51. What is the purpose of "outlining" (also called edging or lining) in a barber haircut?
- A. Blend the transition between the top and sides
 - B. Create crisp, clean definition at the hairline around ears, neck, and sideburns
 - C. Add length to the hairline
 - D. Taper the nape hair into a V-shape
52. As of January 1, 2022, how many training hours are required to qualify for the California Cosmetology Operator written exam?
- A. 1,000 hours
 - B. 2,000 hours
 - C. 600 hours
 - D. 1,600 hours
53. What is the purpose of clipper oil?
- A. Disinfect the blade between clients
 - B. Lubricate blades, reduce heat, prevent rust, and extend blade life
 - C. Make clippers cut closer to the skin
 - D. Clean hair and debris from between the teeth
54. The California cosmetology written exam is available in which languages as of 2024?
- A. English and Spanish only
 - B. English only
 - C. English, French, and Spanish
 - D. English, Spanish, Korean, Simplified Chinese, Vietnamese, and Tagalog
55. A California cosmetology establishment may employ an unlicensed person to perform which of the following tasks?
- A. Apply color with gloves
 - B. Perform blowouts with supervision
 - C. Reception, scheduling, and retail tasks only
 - D. Shampoo and condition client hair
56. A client arrives with an open sore on their scalp. The licensee should:
- A. Proceed carefully while wearing gloves
 - B. Refer the client to a dermatologist and continue the service
 - C. Refuse service until the condition has healed
 - D. Apply antiseptic and cover the area before proceeding

57. Under California law, the minimum age requirement to obtain a cosmetology license is:
- A. 18 years old
 - B. 21 years old
 - C. 17 years old
 - D. 16 years old
58. Under California law, a licensed cosmetologist may perform which of the following services without an additional license?
- A. Haircutting and styling only
 - B. Nail services require a separate license in all cases
 - C. Chemical services only with a cosmetology license
 - D. Haircutting, styling, chemical services, facials, and basic nail care within BBC scope
59. What does "zero gap" mean when applied to clippers or trimmers?
- A. Aligning the clipper blades to cut as close to the skin as possible without a guard
 - B. Closing the blade so no hair can be cut
 - C. Removing the clipper guard for a #0 cut only
 - D. Setting the clipper to its widest blade gap
60. A client has tinea capitis. What should the licensee do?
- A. Use an antifungal shampoo and continue
 - B. Proceed carefully using extra gloves
 - C. Refuse service and refer the client to a physician
 - D. Complete the service but disinfect all tools after
61. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in the salon most commonly includes:
- A. A lab coat only
 - B. Nitrile gloves only, no other equipment required
 - C. Gloves, safety glasses, and protective aprons as appropriate
 - D. A face mask and hairnet only
62. What is the purpose of wearing gloves when applying chemical services?
- A. Required only when using bleach products
 - B. They eliminate the need for an SDS review
 - C. Protect from chemical burns, skin sensitization, and absorption of harmful chemicals
 - D. They improve grip on tools during chemical services
63. When designing a beard neckline, the line should generally follow:
- A. Straight across the bottom of the chin
 - B. Following the jawline exactly
 - C. An arc from ear to ear, dipping to approximately two fingers above the Adam's apple
 - D. At the Adam's apple
64. Which of the following is required on the label of every professional chemical product?
- A. Instructions for use and fragrance ingredients only
 - B. The salon's name and purchase date
 - C. Product name, hazard warnings, and manufacturer information
 - D. Pricing and expiration date only
65. Which of the following conditions requires the licensee to refuse service?
- A. A client with dandruff
 - B. A client with head lice (pediculosis)
 - C. A client with a minor cut on their arm
 - D. A client with dry, flaky scalp
66. What does hair elasticity refer to?
- A. The diameter of the hair strand
 - B. The hair's resistance to chemical services
 - C. The hair's natural color depth
 - D. The hair's ability to stretch and return to original length without breaking
67. Hair texture is determined by the:
- A. Color depth of the melanin
 - B. Porosity of the hair shaft
 - C. Elasticity of the cortex bonds
 - D. Diameter of the individual hair strand
68. What is "pomade" used for in barbering?
- A. Lighten the hair color over time
 - B. Add shine, hold, and definition to styled hair
 - C. Condition and repair damaged hair
 - D. Protect hair from heat styling tools
69. The purpose of a strop when using a traditional straight razor is to:
- A. Disinfect the blade between uses
 - B. Remove metal to restore sharpness (honing)
 - C. Cool the blade after extended use
 - D. Realign the microscopic teeth of the blade edge to maintain cutting smoothness

- 70.** In California, a client complaint against a licensed cosmetologist is filed with:
- A. The California Board of Barbering and Cosmetology (BBC)
 - B. The California Attorney General's office
 - C. The Better Business Bureau
 - D. The local county health department
- 71.** A California cosmetology license must be renewed how often?
- A. Every three years
 - B. Every two years
 - C. Every year
 - D. Every five years
- 72.** Single-use items such as neck strips, cotton rounds, and wooden applicators must be:
- A. Used once then discarded
 - B. Autoclaved between clients
 - C. Washed with soap and water between clients
 - D. Disinfected and stored for reuse
- 73.** California requires cosmetology students to complete what percentage of their required training hours before being eligible to take the written exam?
- A. No hours required before scheduling the exam
 - B. 50% of required hours
 - C. 75% of required hours
 - D. 100% of required hours verified by their school
- 74.** California SB 803, effective January 1, 2022, created a new license type for professionals who want to provide hairstyling services without chemical services. This license is called:
- A. Esthetician
 - B. Nail Technician
 - C. Cosmetology Apprentice
 - D. Hairstylist
- 75.** What is the term for shaving in the direction opposite to hair growth?
- A. Using no angle on the razor blade
 - B. Shaving in the direction of hair growth
 - C. Shaving in the direction opposite to hair growth
 - D. Shaving across the grain at 90 degrees
- 76.** What is the term for excessive, unwanted hair growth on the face or body?
- A. Trichoptilosis
 - B. Alopecia
 - C. Monilethrix
 - D. Hypertrichosis
- 77.** How long must California cosmetology establishments retain employee and client service records?
- A. 5 years
 - B. 3 years
 - C. 7 years
 - D. 1 year
- 78.** Which of the following is the correct order for hand washing in a salon setting?
- A. Apply hand sanitizer instead of soap and water
 - B. Apply soap, wet hands, lather 10 seconds, rinse, air dry
 - C. Wet hands, apply soap, lather 20 seconds, rinse, dry with clean towel
 - D. Wet hands, rinse, apply soap, lather 5 seconds, dry
- 79.** What is the term for the natural pigment that gives hair its color?
- A. Melanin
 - B. Sebum
 - C. Keratin
 - D. Collagen
- 80.** What is the correct order of steps when disinfecting tools at a cosmetology or barbering station?
- A. Disinfect, clean, rinse, dry
 - B. Rinse, disinfect, clean, dry
 - C. Disinfect, rinse, clean, dry
 - D. Clean, rinse, disinfect, rinse, dry
- 81.** California AB 451 (effective January 1, 2024) amended California Insurance Code Section 1677 to require BBC exams be offered in how many languages beyond English?
- A. Three languages (Spanish, Korean, Vietnamese)
 - B. Two languages (Spanish and Chinese)
 - C. Five additional languages: Spanish, Korean, Simplified Chinese, Vietnamese, and Tagalog
 - D. One language (Spanish only)

82. Beard trimming with scissors requires the barber to:
- A. Trim only with clippers, never scissors
 - B. Cut without combing to preserve natural direction
 - C. Wet the beard thoroughly before any trimming
 - D. Comb the beard upward or outward to capture all hairs evenly in the cut
83. What is the correct angle for holding a straight razor during a shave?
- A. 90 degrees (perpendicular)
 - B. 60 degrees
 - C. 15 degrees
 - D. 30 degrees
84. Sebum is produced by which gland in the scalp?
- A. Arrector pili muscles
 - B. The dermal papilla
 - C. Sebaceous glands
 - D. Sudoriferous (sweat) glands
85. Which scalp condition is characterized by white or yellowish flakes and itching?
- A. Pityriasis (dandruff)
 - B. Tinea capitis
 - C. Psoriasis
 - D. Seborrheic dermatitis
86. How must soiled towels and linens be stored in a Texas salon or barbershop?
- A. In a closed, covered container separate from clean linens
 - B. Mixed with clean linens and washed later
 - C. Left on the counter until end of day
 - D. On the floor near the workstation
87. A high fade is characterized by:
- A. The fade is performed only on the nape
 - B. The hair on top is cut very short
 - C. The bare skin area starts high on the sides and back near the top of the head
 - D. The fade begins near the nape and ears
88. The "skin fade" or "bald fade" refers to:
- A. Hair tapers to a #1 guard at the nape only
 - B. A fade that starts high and ends at a #2 guard
 - C. Hair tapers completely down to bare skin at the lowest point of the fade
 - D. Hair is cut to a uniform short length throughout
89. In California, a cosmetology establishment that operates without a valid establishment license is subject to:
- A. Automatic permanent closure
 - B. Only a written warning
 - C. No penalty for first offense
 - D. Civil penalties and cease-and-desist orders
90. What is the technical term for split ends?
- A. Trichoptilosis
 - B. Alopecia
 - C. Hypertrichosis
 - D. Pityriasis
91. Under California law, a cosmetologist may have their license revoked for which of the following?
- A. Missing a single license renewal deadline
 - B. Using a product brand not listed on the BBC website
 - C. Working in a county other than the one on the license
 - D. Fraud in obtaining the license, repeated violations, practicing while impaired, or gross negligence
92. Which pathogen causes ringworm (tinea capitis) of the scalp?
- A. A dermatophyte fungus
 - B. A bacterium
 - C. A virus
 - D. A parasitic worm
93. Before performing a straight razor shave, the barber must disinfect the razor by:
- A. Sterilized in an autoclave weekly
 - B. Wiped with a dry cloth only
 - C. Rinsed under hot running water
 - D. Disinfected with EPA-registered disinfectant or blade changed for each client
94. What is the arrector pili muscle?
- A. A nerve ending in the scalp
 - B. A small muscle attached to each follicle that causes hair to stand upright
 - C. A blood vessel that nourishes the follicle
 - D. The innermost layer of the hair shaft

95. What is the function of the dermal papilla?
- A. Produces the hair's natural oil (sebum)
 - B. Contains melanocytes that produce hair pigment
 - C. Supplies nutrients to the hair matrix cells via blood vessels, driving hair growth
 - D. Determines the natural curl pattern of the hair
96. How must clean, disinfected implements be stored?
- A. In a clean, covered container or drawer separate from soiled tools
 - B. Next to the disinfectant jar
 - C. Wrapped in a paper towel until needed
 - D. In an open container on the counter
97. What is the primary protein that makes up the hair shaft?
- A. Collagen
 - B. Keratin
 - C. Elastin
 - D. Melanin
98. Hot towels are applied before a straight razor shave to:
- A. Disinfect the skin before razor contact
 - B. Cool the skin to close pores before shaving
 - C. Remove excess oil and product from the beard
 - D. Soften beard hair, open follicles, and relax skin to reduce razor burn
99. Which part of the hair is the only living portion?
- A. The cortex
 - B. The hair shaft
 - C. The cuticle layer
 - D. The hair follicle (dermal papilla)
100. HIV is classified as which type of pathogen?
- A. A bloodborne pathogen
 - B. An airborne pathogen
 - C. A waterborne pathogen
 - D. A food-borne pathogen