



California Esthetician

Practice test

April 6, 2026

Time limit: 90 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-esthetician/ca-esthetician-practice-solution.pdf

1. 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. Pricing and expiration date only
 - D. Product name, hazard warnings, and manufacturer information
2. 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
3. Which Fitzpatrick skin type is most prone to hyperpigmentation after sun exposure or skin trauma?
 - A. Fitzpatrick type III only
 - B. Fitzpatrick types IV through VI
 - C. All Fitzpatrick types equally
 - D. Fitzpatrick types I and II
4. A high-frequency facial treatment produces which gas that provides antiseptic benefits?
 - A. Nitrogen to tighten pores
 - B. Carbon dioxide for deep penetration
 - C. Hydrogen peroxide for bleaching pigmentation
 - D. Ozone (O₃) with antiseptic and antibacterial properties
5. The term "pathogen" refers to:
 - A. Any microorganism capable of causing disease
 - B. Any chemical substance found in salon products
 - C. A virus that only affects plants
 - D. A type of allergen found in hair dye

6. A California cosmetology license must be renewed how often?
- A. Every two years
 - B. Every three years
 - C. Every five years
 - D. Every year
7. Under California law, the minimum age requirement to obtain a cosmetology license is:
- A. 21 years old
 - B. 17 years old
 - C. 16 years old
 - D. 18 years old
8. How long must California cosmetology establishments retain employee and client service records?
- A. 5 years
 - B. 7 years
 - C. 3 years
 - D. 1 year
9. In California, a client complaint against a licensed cosmetologist is filed with:
- A. The California Attorney General's office
 - B. The Better Business Bureau
 - C. The local county health department
 - D. The California Board of Barbering and Cosmetology (BBC)
10. What is the purpose of an exfoliant in a facial treatment?
- A. Remove dead cells from the stratum corneum, promoting cell turnover and penetration
 - B. Disinfect the skin surface
 - C. Close enlarged pores
 - D. Deeply moisturize the skin
11. Under California law, a cosmetologist found practicing without a current, valid license is subject to:
- A. A misdemeanor — subject to fines and potential criminal charges
 - B. An automatic 30-day suspension
 - C. No penalty if unlicensed for less than 90 days
 - D. A written warning only
12. In California, a cosmetology establishment that operates without a valid establishment license is subject to:
- A. Civil penalties and cease-and-desist orders
 - B. No penalty for first offense
 - C. Only a written warning
 - D. Automatic permanent closure
13. Alpha hydroxy acids (AHAs) work by:
- A. Increase melanin production to even skin tone
 - B. Break bonds holding dead cells on the skin surface, promoting cell turnover
 - C. Physically scrub away dead skin with abrasive particles
 - D. Kill acne-causing bacteria in sebaceous follicles
14. What is the nail matrix?
- A. The cuticle that overlaps the nail plate
 - B. The tissue beneath the base of the nail plate that produces the nail plate
 - C. The nail groove on the sides of the nail
 - D. The visible nail plate above the finger
15. Before performing a waxing service, the esthetician must perform a patch test to check for:
- A. Check for skin sensitivity or allergic reaction to wax and waxing products
 - B. Measure the thickness of body hair
 - C. Confirm the client has not recently shaved
 - D. Determine the correct wax temperature
16. Which of the following best describes the purpose of applying toner after cleansing during a facial service?
- A. Seal the skin after moisturizer application
 - B. Restore the skin's pH balance and prepare it for treatment products
 - C. Act as a physical exfoliant to remove dead skin cells
 - D. Provide deep cleansing of the pores
17. Rosacea is a skin condition characterized by:
- A. A bacterial infection causing cystic breakouts on the back
 - B. Loss of skin pigmentation in patches
 - C. Chronic facial redness, visible blood vessels, flushing, and sometimes papules
 - D. A fungal infection causing circular patches
18. A comedone is:
- A. A type of skin tumor
 - B. A superficial fungal skin condition
 - C. A bacterial skin infection
 - D. A clogged hair follicle — open (blackhead) or closed (whitehead)

19. Which type of disinfectant is EPA-registered and most commonly required for non-porous tools in Texas salons?
- A. EPA-registered hospital-grade disinfectant (quats or phenolics)
 - B. Bleach diluted in water
 - C. Isopropyl alcohol only
 - D. Soap and hot water
20. What nail condition is characterized by separation of the nail plate from the nail bed?
- A. Paronychia
 - B. Leukonychia
 - C. Onychomycosis
 - D. Onycholysis
21. HIV is classified as which type of pathogen?
- A. An airborne pathogen
 - B. A waterborne pathogen
 - C. A bloodborne pathogen
 - D. A food-borne pathogen
22. A client presents with psoriasis on their scalp. The cosmetologist should:
- A. Perform the service carefully if no open or bleeding lesions are present
 - B. Refuse service entirely
 - C. Refer to a physician and reschedule
 - D. Apply medicated shampoo and continue
23. What term describes the process of destroying all microbial life including spores?
- A. Sterilization
 - B. Disinfection
 - C. Decontamination
 - D. Sanitation
24. What is the Fitzpatrick Type I skin characteristic?
- A. Burns sometimes, tans gradually, medium complexion
 - B. Always tans, never burns, dark skin and hair
 - C. Always burns, never tans, very fair skin with red or blonde hair
 - D. Never burns, deeply pigmented skin
25. Single-use items such as neck strips, cotton rounds, and wooden applicators must be:
- A. Used once then discarded
 - B. Disinfected and stored for reuse
 - C. Washed with soap and water between clients
 - D. Autoclaved between clients
26. What is the difference between cleaning and disinfecting?
- A. Cleaning kills pathogens; disinfecting removes dirt
 - B. Disinfecting always comes before cleaning
 - C. Cleaning removes dirt physically; disinfecting uses chemicals to kill pathogens
 - D. They are the same process
27. What is the minimum contact time required for most EPA-registered disinfectants to effectively kill pathogens?
- A. 10 minutes
 - B. 1 minute
 - C. 5 minutes
 - D. 30 minutes
28. Soft wax (strip wax) differs from hard wax in which key way?
- A. Soft wax is removed with a strip; hard wax hardens and is removed without a strip
 - B. Both types require muslin strips for removal
 - C. Soft wax requires no strip; hard wax requires a muslin strip
 - D. Hard wax must be applied cold; soft wax is always heated
29. Under SB 803 (effective January 1, 2022), California estheticians may now legally perform which additional service?
- A. Administer injectable fillers and Botox
 - B. Lash and brow lamination/perming and dermaplaning
 - C. Perform electrolysis for permanent hair removal
 - D. Prescribe topical medications for acne
30. The California cosmetology written exam is available in which languages as of 2024?
- A. English only
 - B. English, French, and Spanish
 - C. English, Spanish, Korean, Simplified Chinese, Vietnamese, and Tagalog
 - D. English and Spanish only
31. How must soiled towels and linens be stored in a Texas salon or barbershop?
- A. Mixed with clean linens and washed later
 - B. In a closed, covered container separate from clean linens
 - C. On the floor near the workstation
 - D. Left on the counter until end of day

32. A client presents with red, flaky patches around the nose and eyebrows. Which skin condition does this most likely indicate?
- Seborrheic dermatitis
 - Contact dermatitis
 - Psoriasis
 - Rosacea
33. Which EPA registration category indicates a disinfectant is effective against both bacteria and viruses?
- Hospital-grade or broad-spectrum disinfectant
 - Quaternary ammonium compound at any concentration
 - Bacteriostatic disinfectant
 - Disinfectant labeled for household use only
34. What is the purpose of wearing gloves when applying chemical services?
- They improve grip on tools during chemical services
 - Protect from chemical burns, skin sensitization, and absorption of harmful chemicals
 - Required only when using bleach products
 - They eliminate the need for an SDS review
35. What is the purpose of a comedone extractor in esthetics?
- Administer electric current to pores
 - Safely extract blackheads and comedones without pinching surrounding tissue
 - Apply chemical exfoliant to clogged follicles
 - Apply heat to melt sebum plugs
36. Which of the following is a non-porous surface that can be effectively disinfected?
- A wooden cuticle pusher
 - A fabric cape
 - A metal shear blade
 - A porous sponge applicator
37. What does "sanitation" mean in the context of a salon?
- Reduce microbial contamination to safe levels but not eliminate all pathogens
 - Destroy all microbial life including spores
 - Kill all bacteria but not viruses
 - Remove all physical debris from a surface
38. A client arrives with a visible nail fungus infection on one hand. What is the correct course of action?
- Refuse service and refer the client to a physician
 - Perform the service only on the unaffected hand
 - Apply antifungal powder and proceed with service
 - Wear gloves and complete the full service
39. What is the transepidermal water loss (TEWL) concept important for in esthetics?
- The skin's natural sun protection rating
 - Water evaporating through the epidermis — high TEWL indicates a compromised barrier
 - The skin's ability to absorb topical products
 - The amount of oil produced by sebaceous glands
40. Which layer of the epidermis contains melanocytes (pigment-producing cells)?
- Stratum corneum (outermost layer)
 - The dermis
 - The subcutis layer
 - Stratum germinativum (stratum basale)
41. What does SPF (Sun Protection Factor) measure?
- How resistant the skin is to UVA rays
 - The moisturizing level of the product
 - The percentage of chemical UV filters in the formula
 - How long a sunscreen extends the skin's natural UVB protection
42. Microdermabrasion is classified as which type of exfoliation?
- Electrical stimulation to tighten skin
 - Chemical exfoliation using AHAs
 - Light-based treatment using LED technology
 - Mechanical exfoliation using crystal or diamond-tip abrasion
43. What is the purpose of an autoclave?
- Use steam under pressure to sterilize instruments completely
 - Use UV light to kill surface bacteria
 - Circulate disinfectant chemical through a sealed chamber
 - Dry heat metal instruments to 400°F
44. Under California law, a cosmetology establishment must display which of the following prominently?
- Establishment license and all individual practitioner licenses where visible to clients
 - Only the establishment license at the reception desk
 - Only the health inspection report
 - No display is required — licenses are held digitally

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45. A contraindication for facial extraction services includes:
- A. Active herpes simplex, sunburned skin, open wounds, or clients on Accutane
 - B. Oily skin with minor congestion
 - C. Dehydrated skin needing moisture
 - D. Sensitive skin without any active breakouts
46. Which of the following conditions requires the licensee to refuse service?
- A. A client with a minor cut on their arm
 - B. A client with dry, flaky scalp
 - C. A client with dandruff
 - D. A client with head lice (pediculosis)
47. Which of the following describes a first-degree (superficial) burn?
- A. Blistering and damage into the dermis
 - B. Redness and minor pain affecting only the epidermis, no blistering
 - C. Full thickness damage through all skin layers
 - D. Charring and nerve damage
48. Safety Data Sheets (SDS) are required to provide information about:
- A. Only the product ingredients and fragrance profile
 - B. Instructions for mixing chemical formulas
 - C. Pricing and wholesale ordering information
 - D. Hazard information, safe handling, PPE requirements, and emergency response
49. The correct order for a basic facial service is:
- A. Steam first, then cleanse, then exfoliate
 - B. Mask, cleanse, exfoliate, steam, massage, tone, moisturize
 - C. Cleanse, apply mask, steam, exfoliate, moisturize
 - D. Consultation, cleanse, exfoliate, steam, extractions, massage, mask, tone, moisturize
50. Which skin type is characterized by flakiness, tightness, and lack of sebum production?
- A. Oily, shiny T-zone with dry cheeks
 - B. Flakiness, tightness, and lack of sebum production
 - C. Oily all over with enlarged pores
 - D. Sensitive, easily reddened skin
51. California BBC inspectors have the authority to enter a licensed cosmetology establishment:
- A. During business hours without prior notice
 - B. Only on scheduled inspection dates
 - C. Only after a formal complaint has been filed
 - D. Only with a court order
52. Effleurage in a facial massage refers to:
- A. Deep kneading of the muscle tissue
 - B. Light, gliding, stroking movement
 - C. Rapid tapping or drumming movements
 - D. Vibrating movements using fingertips
53. The galvanic current treatment in esthetics uses which processes to benefit the skin?
- A. Produce electrical current to stimulate muscle contractions
 - B. Remove hair permanently through follicle destruction
 - C. Generate heat to open pores and drive product in
 - D. Iontophoresis (drive water-soluble products in) and desincrustation (soften sebum)
54. Which of the following best describes a bactericide?
- A. A natural antibacterial derived from plants
 - B. A chemical that kills bacteria
 - C. A chemical that inhibits bacterial growth without killing them
 - D. A product that removes bacteria without chemicals
55. What type of skin benefits most from a clay mask?
- A. Dry, dehydrated skin needing intense moisture
 - B. Sensitive, reactive skin needing calming
 - C. Oily and combination skin prone to congestion
 - D. All skin types equally
56. 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
57. Which of the following nail conditions requires the cosmetologist to refuse nail services?
- A. Nail biting (onychophagy)
 - B. Onychomycosis (nail fungus)
 - C. Brittle nails (onychorrhexis)
 - D. White spots (leukonychia)

58. The purpose of a cuticle softener or remover in a manicure service is to:
- A. Harden the cuticle for easier removal
 - B. Break down dead cuticle skin so it can be pushed back or removed safely
 - C. Strengthen the nail plate before applying gel
 - D. Disinfect the cuticle area before a nail service
59. The three layers of the skin from outermost to innermost are:
- A. Cuticle, cortex, medulla
 - B. Epidermis, dermis, subcutis (hypodermis)
 - C. Subcutis, dermis, epidermis
 - D. Dermis, epidermis, subcutis
60. After a waxing service, the esthetician should advise the client to avoid which activities for 24 hours?
- A. Avoid sun exposure, heat (saunas, hot baths), tight clothing, and exercise for 24 hours
 - B. Exfoliate immediately to remove remaining hair
 - C. Apply retinol cream to soothe the skin
 - D. Immediately apply heavy moisturizer and tanning oil
61. The California Board of Barbering and Cosmetology (BBC) is regulated under which state agency?
- A. Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA)
 - B. California Labor Commission
 - C. California State Licensing Board
 - D. California Department of Public Health
62. What does SPF measure on a sunscreen label?
- A. How long the product extends the skin's natural protection against UVB rays
 - B. The amount of UVA radiation blocked by the product
 - C. The moisturizing level of the sunscreen
 - D. The percentage of UV filters in the formula
63. What is the hyponychium?
- A. The cuticle fold over the nail base
 - B. The nail matrix beneath the base of the nail
 - C. The thickened skin beneath the free edge of the nail plate
 - D. The visible white tip of the nail plate
64. Double dipping (reusing the same wax applicator stick in the wax pot) is prohibited because:
- A. It is only prohibited for hard wax, not soft wax
 - B. It contaminates the wax pot with bacteria and dead skin, spreading infection between clients
 - C. It wastes product unnecessarily
 - D. It causes wax to cool too quickly
65. As of January 1, 2022, how many training hours are required to qualify for the California Cosmetology Operator written exam?
- A. 1,600 hours
 - B. 600 hours
 - C. 2,000 hours
 - D. 1,000 hours
66. During a skin analysis, an esthetician observes open comedones across the client's T-zone. Which skin condition is present?
- A. Milia
 - B. Closed comedones (whiteheads)
 - C. Open comedones (blackheads)
 - D. Pustules
67. Which of the following is the correct order for hand washing in a salon setting?
- A. Apply soap, wet hands, lather 10 seconds, rinse, air dry
 - B. Wet hands, apply soap, lather 20 seconds, rinse, dry with clean towel
 - C. Wet hands, rinse, apply soap, lather 5 seconds, dry
 - D. Apply hand sanitizer instead of soap and water
68. Threading for hair removal uses which technique?
- A. Applying warm wax and removing with a strip
 - B. Using laser energy to permanently disable follicles
 - C. A twisted cotton thread rolled across skin to pull multiple hairs at the follicle
 - D. Applying a depilatory cream to dissolve hair at the surface
69. A client with active pustular acne should receive which facial treatment?
- A. A glycolic acid peel at full strength
 - B. Microdermabrasion to remove surface bacteria
 - C. A calming, anti-inflammatory treatment without extractions
 - D. Deep extractions and hot steam to unclog pores

- 70.** What is the Fitzpatrick skin type scale used for in esthetics?
- A. Determine the correct moisturizer viscosity for a client
 - B. Identify the presence of rosacea
 - C. Measure the pH of skin products
 - D. Classify skin types by UV response to guide peel strength and laser treatment decisions
- 71.** How often must disinfectant solution in a wet sanitizer jar be changed?
- A. Once a week
 - B. After every single use
 - C. Daily or whenever visibly contaminated
 - D. Once a month
- 72.** What is the primary contraindication for waxing over an area treated with Retin-A or tretinoin?
- A. Retin-A increases sun sensitivity but does not affect waxing
 - B. Retin-A makes hair grow faster after waxing
 - C. Retin-A thickens the dermis, making waxing less effective
 - D. Retin-A thins the epidermis — waxing can lift skin layers causing severe damage
- 73.** A licensee cuts a client and draws blood. What is the correct first response?
- A. Stop service, cover wound, remove and disinfect contaminated tools
 - B. Discard all tools and continue with new ones
 - C. Apply antiseptic and continue immediately
 - D. Continue the service wearing gloves
- 74.** EPA-registered salon disinfectants must be effective against which three categories of microorganisms?
- A. Bacteria and viruses only
 - B. Bacteria only
 - C. Bacteria, viruses, and fungi
 - D. Viruses and fungi only
- 75.** The function of a toner in a facial routine is to:
- A. Restore pH, remove residual cleanser, and prepare skin for subsequent products
 - B. Deeply hydrate the dermis
 - C. Provide heavy occlusive moisture
 - D. Replace a moisturizer for oily skin