

FAQ's for new SPEX resource file

INTRODUCTION (What is the new version of the SPEX and why is it being changed?)

1. How is the new version of the SPEX different from the current version?

Content: The new version will focus more on tasks that physicians do in practice (i.e., patient management/care items) and less on mechanisms of disease items (i.e., disease applications relating to underlying basic sciences).

Length: The length of the exam will shift from an 8 hour exam consisting of 400 items (or eight blocks of 52 minutes each, with 50 questions in each block; plus break(s) and tutorial) to an 8½ hour exam with 336 items (7 blocks of 64 minutes each, with 48 items per block; plus break(s) and tutorial).

Test Software: The NBME software, known as FRED™, will replace the Prometric software in the new version of SPEX. The FRED software allows examinees to highlight and strike out item text as well as create annotations to items. Please note that the annotation feature allows you to record brief notes to yourself about individual items; it is not intended as a way to communicate to PLAS/SPEX staff members. There is no additional time granted for use of the additional features provided by FRED, so you should closely monitor examination time when using these features.

2. Why are these changes being made?

To update exam content and to address concerns expressed by examinees and those entities using the results of the SPEX (e.g., state medical boards) that the SPEX is not sufficiently relevant to what physicians do in their day-to-day practices.

3. When and where will the new version of the SPEX be available?

Testing under the new version of the SPEX will begin April 26, 2010. (The current version of the SPEX will no longer be available after April 11, 2010.)

The SPEX program will impose a “**blackout**” time from **April 12-25, 2010** to allow us to complete the transition to the new version of the SPEX with the Prometric testing centers. **No SPEX exams will be available during this time.** Please take this into account when registering for the SPEX and scheduling your testing date.

Beginning in mid-January, the standard 90-day eligibility period will be extended by 14 days to compensate for the two-week blackout period.

The test will still be administered at Prometric Testing Centers in the U.S. and Canada.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

1. Will the eligibility requirements change under the new version of the SPEX?

No. The exam is still designed and being used for the same purposes (i.e., to assess the ability to apply, at a minimally acceptable level, the general medical knowledge considered essential for continued, unsupervised medical practice). Therefore, eligibility requirements will remain the same. All examinees will be required to hold or have held a valid, unrestricted license in a United States or Canadian jurisdiction, depending on the method of application.

APPLICATION PROCESS

1. What is the SPEX fee?

The SPEX fee is currently \$1,200. Any future revisions to the SPEX fee will be announced on the FSMB website.

2. What if my 90-day eligibility period falls under both the current and new version of the SPEX?

Beginning in mid-January, we will extend the standard 90-day eligibility period by 14 days to compensate for the two-week blackout period (April 12-25) during which no SPEX examinations will be available. The 14 day extension will ensure that all examinees still have the full 90 days of eligible testing dates in which to take the examination. The extension will result in eligibility periods that extend into testing under the enhanced SPEX.

Examinees who have eligibility periods that fall under testing for both the current and enhanced version of the SPEX can sit for either version of the examination. Examinees who sit for SPEX on April 11 or before will take the current version. Examinees who sit for SPEX on April 26 or later will take the new version of the examination.

If you would prefer to take the new version of the SPEX, we recommend submitting your application in mid-March or April, to ensure that most or all of your eligibility period will fall under the new version of the examination. For applications approved on or after April 11, the entire eligibility period will fall under the new version of the examination.

Please note! Initially, scores for the new version of the SPEX will not be available until 6-8 weeks after the testing date (e.g., scores for examinees who test SPEX in late April will be available in mid- to late-June 2010). Scoring for the *current* version of the SPEX will *not* be impacted and scores will be available within the standard 2-4 week reporting time. Please take this into account when deciding which version of the examination to sit for and when submitting your application.

See “Scores” section below for additional information about score reporting under the new version of the SPEX.

SCORES

1. What will be the passing standard for the new version of the SPEX?

75 will remain the recommended minimum passing score.

2. When will scores be available for the new version of the SPEX?

Initially, 6-8 weeks will be required for scores to become available for examinees who test within the first few months of the new version of the SPEX becoming available (e.g., examinees who take the new SPEX in late April 2010 will have their scores released in mid- to late June 2010.). This is necessary for us to complete the quality assurance procedures for the new version of the exam. Once the quality assurance process is complete, we will be able to resume the customary 2-4 weeks timeframe for reporting scores.

Please note! We anticipate completing the new exam implementation process within the first 3 months of testing. However, low testing volume could delay completion of the process. Therefore, the 6-8 week turnaround for score reporting *could potentially* impact examinees who test within the first 4-5 months (April – September).

PREPARATION

1. What is the best way to prepare for the new version of the SPEX?

Same as with the current SPEX (e.g., study of current medical textbooks, clinicals and periodicals). We will also have a new, web-based “self-assessment” – the Comprehensive Clinical Medicine Self-Assessment (CCMSA). The CCMSA uses information typically covered in clinical encounters, and the content of the items resembles the content in SPEX. The CCMSA will help SPEX examinees become familiar with the question formats used in the examination and with how to maneuver within the examination before their actual test date. The CCMSA is available at:

https://apps.nbme.org/nsasweb/servlet/mesa_main.

Additional information about the CCMSA and how to use this website will be forthcoming.

TESTING ACCOMMODATIONS

1. What types of testing accommodations will be available for individuals covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)?

The primary testing accommodations will be extended testing time. Additional accommodations, such as aids to assist examinees with physical and visual impairments, are also available. Score reports and transcripts of examinees receiving test accommodations may receive an annotation. Score recipients who inquire about the annotation will be provided with information about the nature of the accommodation only. Detailed information on testing accommodations is available on the FSMB website at:

http://www.fsmb.org/plas_speptestaccommodations.html.