

## ***Studying for the TNRDA Exam and the DANB CDA Exam: Advice from DANB***

At the Dental Assisting National Board, Inc. (DANB), we frequently hear the question “How do I study for a DANB exam?”

It is natural that an exam candidate may be uncertain about the best method to use for preparing to take a DANB exam, such as the Tennessee Registered Dental Assistant (TNRDA) Exam administered by DANB or the DANB Certified Dental Assistant (CDA) Exam, because the content of these exams does not correspond exactly to the content of any particular textbook or to any specific classroom curriculum. Rather, the content of DANB’s national competency exams is based on an underlying job analysis or “task analysis” outlining the duties that dental assistants perform in actual practice. The content of state-specific “registered dental assistant” exams administered by DANB, including the TNRDA Exam, is determined by the list of tasks that, by law, may be delegated to dental assistants under the dental practice act and/or administrative rules in that state.

Because each person enters the exam process with a unique combination of education, training, work experience, and test-taking experience, there is no one study plan that will serve all exam candidates equally well. However, we do have a number of recommendations for developing a unique study plan that is tailored to your own individual needs.

### **Developing a Study Plan**

To develop your unique study plan for the CDA Exam or the TNRDA exam, DANB recommends that you begin by reviewing the content outline for the exam.

The content outline for the TNRDA Exam can be found on the TNDAA website at the following address: [http://www.tndaa.org/Documents/TNRDA\\_ExamOutline\\_09\\_15\\_04.pdf](http://www.tndaa.org/Documents/TNRDA_ExamOutline_09_15_04.pdf).

The task analysis underlying each DANB national exam serves as an effective outline of the exam’s content. Content outlines for DANB’s national exams, including the CDA Exam, are contained in *The DANB Review*, an exam preparation tool published by DANB that is discussed in more detail below, or in the stand-alone publication *Task Analysis, 9<sup>th</sup> Edition*, both of which can be purchased from DANB.

The content outline contains a list of every topic that might be covered on the exam. We suggest that you

start the exam preparation process with a review of the exam content outline, reading each item and deciding if it is a topic about which you feel completely confident, somewhat confident, or not at all confident. After you identify areas of strength and weakness, use this information as a blueprint for exam preparation.

Some candidates may find it helpful to engage in a thorough review of every topic listed in the content outline, while others may prefer to begin by concentrating on the areas where their knowledge is incomplete or imperfect and reviewing more familiar areas later.

In addition, consider your own test-taking history. If you have not taken a test in many years or feel apprehensive about taking an exam, you may want to ensure that you have included ample time in your study plan to familiarize yourself with the format and style of exam questions in order to make yourself more comfortable on the day of the test.

### **Study Materials**

Whether you choose to review every topic in the content outline or to concentrate on the less familiar topics first, you will need to gather reference materials to use for studying. In general, the three primary types of materials that may be needed for studying are textbooks and other reference works, exam preparation materials published by DANB, and third-party exam preparation guides.

*Textbooks and Other Reference Materials.* If you have attended or graduated from a formal dental assisting education program, your textbook and course materials will be invaluable in helping you prepare for the TNRDA or CDA Exams. For those who do not already have a dental assisting textbook, DANB provides a sample list of reference materials in its CDA Candidate Guide, beginning on page 35. (Download the electronic version of the 2005 CDA Candidate Guide in PDF format at the following address: <http://www.danb.org/PDFs/CDAweb04.pdf>.)

You may be able to borrow a copy of one of these textbooks from a college or university library in your area. Or, if you would like to purchase a textbook, you might be able to find or order one at a college or university bookstore, order directly from the publisher, or buy a used textbook online. A list of dental assisting textbook publishers can be found on page 21 of *The DANB Review*. Used dental assisting textbooks can often be purchased at the websites [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) and [www.ebay.com](http://www.ebay.com). It may be wise to note the edition number or publication year be-

fore purchasing, to ensure that you are studying from the most up-to-date materials available.

The objectivity requirements of the credentialing process prohibit DANB from recommending a specific third-party reference work. However, any of the dental assisting textbooks listed should provide ample information about dental assisting practices and procedures. Generally, only one good textbook is needed, and may be supplemented by topic-specific articles or pamphlets, such as those dealing with infection control and radiography.

*DANB's Preparation Tools.* The only exam preparation tools that are produced and published by DANB are *The DANB Review* and *DANB's Glossary of Dental Assisting Terms*.

*The DANB Review* is a 134-page booklet that contains the content outlines for every national Certification exam administered by DANB, including each component of the CDA Exam – Radiation Health and Safety (RHS), Infection Control (ICE), and General Chairside Assisting (GC). (*The DANB Review* also covers the components of the Certified Orthodontic Assistant [COA] Exam and the Certified Dental Practice Management Administrator [CDPMA] Exam.)

In addition to the content outlines, *The DANB Review* contains a series of practice questions for each exam, along with an answer key, explanations of each correct answer, and references that point the exam candidate to sources for additional reading. The practice questions appearing in *The DANB Review* are actual DANB exam items that have been retired. These questions can help exam candidates familiarize themselves with the style and format of questions that will be found on the actual exam. These practice items may also be useful in preparing to take the TNRDA Exam.

*The DANB Review* is not a textbook and will not tell you everything you need to know about dental assisting. The purpose of *The DANB Review* is to give you a picture of what each national DANB exam is like; for maximum benefit, it should be used in conjunction with your dental assisting textbook and other reliable dental assisting reference materials.

DANB also publishes *DANB's Glossary of Dental Assisting Terms*, which contains definitions for dental assisting terms found on DANB-administered exams. The *Glossary* can be a valuable resource for exam candidates who need help with dental assisting vocabulary or who would like to review important dental assisting terms.

An order form for *The DANB Review* and the *Glossary* can be found at the following web address: <http://www.danb.org/PDFs/pubform.pdf>.

*Third-Party Exam Preparation Guides.* A number of third-party publishers offer “dental assisting exam preparation guides,” many of which have sample questions that purport to be similar to the questions found on DANB exams. Exam candidates often ask DANB if the use of these preparation guides will help them to achieve a passing score on DANB exams.

Because promotion of a third-party exam preparation guide would violate a number of accepted competency-measurement principles, DANB does not review or endorse any exam preparation materials published by third parties. Accordingly, you can be sure that any third-party guide has been prepared *without* the input, assistance, cooperation, or review of DANB.

Some exam candidates have found some of these preparation guides to be helpful. On the other hand, some exam candidates have also discovered errors in a number of these guides. DANB neither encourages nor discourages the use of third-party exam preparation guides, but does caution exam candidates against over-reliance on this type of preparation aid to the exclusion of other reliable sources of dental assisting information. The practice exercises contained in these guides should be used as a supplement to, and *not a substitute* for, other types of studying and preparation.

### **Study Groups and Sharing Information: A Caution**

In many cases, exam candidates find it helpful to study in groups, and DANB does not discourage exam candidates from helping each other study. However, it must be noted that there are legal restrictions on the types of information that can be shared.

If you have already taken a DANB exam and are approached by a friend or fellow dental assistant for advice, you *may* help him or her by sharing the following information:

- Study guides or reference materials that you found effective
- Studying strategies that worked for you
- Any information pertaining directly to the practice of dental assisting

Please be aware that DANB's policies and intellectual property laws *prohibit* you from disclosing the following information to any person:

- Information about the actual questions that you saw on the exam
- Any exam item or part of any exam item

The content of all DANB exams is confidential and proprietary. The disclosure of any DANB exam item by an examinee is punishable by cancellation of that examinee's score and revocation of any Certification or registration issued pursuant to that score, in addition to legal action. Therefore, we urge all dental assistants who have already taken a DANB exam to exercise extreme caution when helping other dental assistants study for the same exam.

### **A Final Thought**

DANB is proud to be working with the State of Tennessee to administer the TNRDA Exam. DANB wishes all TNRDA and CDA exam candidates in Tennessee the best of luck on their upcoming exams and continued success in their dental assisting careers.