PHARM TECH BASICS · ONE-PAGER

PTCE Exam Guide

The PTCE under the January 2026 outline: format, domains, eligibility, what changed, and a 6-week study plan

11 sources + more detail
pharmtechbasics.com/sheets/guide-ptcb-ptce.html
checked Nov 2026

1 The exam at a glance

FEATURE	DETAIL
Items	90 multiple choice: 80 scored, 10 unscored (placed at random, not marked)
Time	2-hour appointment: 5-minute tutorial, 1 hour 50 minutes of exam, 5-minute survey
Passing	Scaled score of 1,400 on a 1,000 to 1,600 scale
Fee	$129 for the application and exam
Where	In person at Pearson VUE test centers (more than 1,400, including 100+ military bases), with a live proctor. PTCB lists no online option.
Eligibility	US resident, plus a PTCB-recognized education/training program or 500+ hours of technician work experience
Results	Unofficial result on screen; official result in your PTCB Account within 3 weeks
Credential	CPhT, renewed every 2 years
Outline	Version 1.4, effective January 6, 2026

In 2025 PTCB gave 49,253 PTCEs, and the CPhT pass rate was 69%.

2 What is on it

About = scored items per form (80 x share). PTCB publishes the percentages only.

DOMAIN	SHARE	ABOUT	WHAT IT ASKS
1. Medications	35%	28	Brand and generic names and classes, indications, doses and dosage forms, side effects, interactions, duplications, stability, storage
2. Federal Requirements	18.75%	15	Waste and disposal, controlled substance prescriptions and handling, pseudoephedrine and REMS, recalls, DSCSA
3. Patient Safety and Quality Assurance	23.75%	19	High-alert and look-alike/sound-alike drugs, error prevention, when to get the pharmacist, error reporting, infection prevention
4. Order Entry and Processing	22.5%	18	Calculations, sig codes and abbreviations, administration supplies, NDC, lot and expiration, returns

EXAM TIP Math is not only in Domain 4. The outline marks nine statements across all four domains as calculation-based, from doses and days supply to controlled substance quantities.

EXAM TIP Medications is the largest domain at 35%. Know brand and generic pairs, class and main use of common drugs before anything else.

3 What changed in January 2026

- Removed: nonsterile compounding.
- Removed: alligations.
- Removed: narrow therapeutic index (NTI) drugs as their own area. They can still come up elsewhere when relevant.
- Added: the Drug Supply Chain Security Act (DSCSA): serialization, tracing, verification and quarantine.
- Medications and Patient Safety shrank; Federal Requirements and Order Entry grew.
- Same four domains, same total length.

EXAM TIP Books, apps and practice tests written before 2026 may still teach compounding and alligation for the PTCE, and may skip DSCSA. Study DSCSA. (The ExCPT still tests compounding and alligation.)

4 How to study: 6 weeks

1. Week 1: Read the content outline. Set your exam date in Settings. Take a timed Mock Exam (90 items, 110 minutes) as a baseline. Start the drug cards by class.
2. Week 2: Finish Medications: brand and generic names, indications, side effects, interactions, storage and stability (the storage, recalls and returns page helps). Daily Review every day from here on.
3. Week 3: Federal Requirements with the DEA Schedules, CMEA, DSCSA, FDA recalls and REMS, and hazardous drugs pages.
4. Week 4: Patient Safety with the Medication Safety and Error Prevention and OBRA 90 pages. Learn which issues go to the pharmacist.
5. Week 5: Order Entry with the sig codes and pharmacy math pages and the Days Supply and Dilution calculators. Then NDC (Prescription Intake page), lot numbers, expiration dates and returns.
6. Week 6: A second Mock Exam, then Weakest Subject, Missed Questions and Trouble Questions. Rest the day before.

EXAM TIP You get about 73 seconds per item. The app Mock Exam uses the real sitting: 90 items in 110 minutes.

5 Test-day tips

- Arrive at the Pearson VUE center 30 minutes before your appointment.
- Bring an approved ID that matches your name as it appears in your PTCB Account. Without proper ID you cannot test.
- Try Pearson's PTCB exam tutorial at home so the screen is familiar.
- Unscored items look like scored ones. Give every item full effort.
- Do not let one hard item eat your time. Choose your best answer and keep moving.
- Answer every item: a blank cannot earn credit.
- Check the PTCB Help Center for the ID list and the rules on breaks, calculators and personal items.

6 Official resources

- CPhT credential page: ptcb.org/credentials/certification/certified-pharmacy-technician
- PTCE Content Outline (effective January 6, 2026): linked from the credential page
- Official practice tools (PTCE Practice Bank, Pre-PTCE): ptcb.org/official-ptcb-practice-tools
- PTCB-Recognized Education/Training Program Directory: ptcb.org/ptcb-recognized-education-training-program-directory
- PTCB Help Center (ID, scheduling, retakes, renewal): ptcb.zendesk.com
- Test centers: pearsonvue.com/ptcb

PTCB does not recommend or endorse specific study materials.

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MORE Every knowledge area, in plain words

The outline has 24 knowledge areas. This is what each one asks of a technician, and where to study it in the app. An asterisk means the outline marks the area as partly or fully calculation-based.

MORE Technician or pharmacist?

Area 3.3 is about recognizing issues that need pharmacist intervention. The exam expects the technician to notice the problem and bring it to the pharmacist, not to solve it.

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