



# **RAC-CT Candidate Handbook**

Your Reference for Details on Achieving the Resident Assessment  
Coordinator–Certified (RAC-CT) Credential

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AAPACN certifications and educational courses were developed to serve as programs and references for long-term care. To the best of our knowledge, they reflect current federal regulations and practices. However, they cannot be considered absolute and universal. The information in these courses must be considered in light of the individual organization and state regulations.

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This handbook reflects the policies and procedures as of March 2026. All policies and procedures are subject to change. If you have any questions or require further information, visit [www.AAPACN.org](http://www.AAPACN.org) or contact AAPACN staff toll-free at (800) 768-1880.

## **Statement of nondiscrimination**

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## **Accreditation**

American Association of Post-Acute Care Nursing (AAPACN) is accredited as a provider of nursing continuing professional development by the American Nurses Credentialing Center's Commission on Accreditation.

# Resident Assessment Coordinator–Certified (RAC-CT®) Candidate Handbook

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## **Welcome**

Congratulations on taking the first step toward earning the Resident Assessment Coordinator—Certified (RAC-CT®) credential. The American Association of Post-Acute Care Nursing (AAPACN) established the certification program in 1999 to promote the highest standards for clinical assessment and care planning in the long-term care profession. Reviewing this handbook is the first step toward joining long-term care professionals who have distinguished themselves with certified knowledge of the Resident Assessment Instrument/Minimum Data Set (RAI/MDS 3.0) process.

### **About AAPACN**

The American Association of Post-Acute Care Nursing (AAPACN) represents more than 18,000 post-acute care nurses and professionals working in more than 6,100 facilities. Dedicated to supporting LTPAC nurses and healthcare professionals in providing quality care, AAPACN offers members best-in-class education, certification, resources, and strong collaborative communities.

Whether you're looking to earn one of our respected certifications or just want to brush up your knowledge by taking a course or two, AAPACN keeps you up to date and makes the complexities of long-term care easy to understand.

### **How to use this Candidate Handbook**

This handbook is intended to help you understand the policies and procedures for RAC-CT certification and the steps required to earn and maintain your credential. This handbook is also intended to help you learn about RAC-CT education. Once you decide to pursue the RAC-CT credential, this Candidate Handbook will be a useful reference as you:

- Review the RAC-CT Body of Knowledge
- Assess your knowledge and professional experience of the content
- Identify gaps in knowledge and develop a personal course of study
- Study, prepare for, and take the RAC-CT examinations
- Maintain your credential through recertification

AAPACN's educational materials are reviewed and updated by a team of experts to ensure you receive the most up-to-date information related to this complex body of knowledge. No document can address the full list of potential questions, policy details, or future program changes. You are encouraged to use this handbook as a supplement to the information listed on the [AAPACN website](#) as well as information provided by AAPACN staff, whom you can contact toll-free at (800) 768-1880.

## **Overview**

### **What is the purpose of RAC-CT certification courses?**

RAC-CT certification has long set the national standard for knowledge of the Skilled Nursing Facility Prospective Payment System (SNF PPS) and MDS 3.0. AAPACN serves the public interest by developing, administering, and reviewing a certification process that reflects current standards of competent performance in clinical assessment and care planning using the RAI/MDS process. Whereas the fundamental concept of the RAI/MDS process is to promote quality of care and quality of life for residents in skilled nursing facilities, the goal of RAC-CT certification is to establish that nurses have the knowledge and skills necessary to demonstrate competence in this area.

### **What are the benefits of certification?**

Upon completion of the 10 RAC-CT courses, and after passing the exams with a score of 80% or better, you will be allowed to use the credentials RAC-CT to designate your status. This designation indicates you have met a nationally recognized standard of expertise in SNF PPS and MDS 3.0 assessments.

Both individuals and employers can benefit from an individual's receiving RAC-CT certification.

<p>Individual professional benefits can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verification by an independent organization of your mastery of the knowledge required to perform your job</li> <li>• Professional growth and development</li> <li>• Enhanced job opportunities</li> </ul>	<p>Organizational benefits can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased productivity, as the RAI/MDS process is properly implemented</li> <li>• Less training time needed to educate employees on the complex Medicare regulations and procedures</li> <li>• Accurate billing, leading to full receipt of Medicare funds for services provided</li> </ul> <p><a href="#">Learn more</a> about the value of AAPACN certification and how certified staff benefit organizations.</p>
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### **Who is eligible to take the exams?**

AAPACN encourages all members of the interdisciplinary team to seek RAC-CT certification: registered nurses (RNs), licensed practical nurses (LPNs), licensed vocational nurses (LVNs), nurse assessment coordinators (NACs), physical therapists (PTs), occupational therapists (OTs), speech therapists, social workers, health information professionals, dietitians, and administrators.

AAPACN recommends that individuals have at least six months of experience with the RAI/MDS process before beginning the certification process. If you have less than six months of experience, consider the [MDS Essentials On-Demand Workshop](#) and also gaining practical experience in your long-term care facility.

To design the educational path that is right for you, AAPACN has developed the Learning Timeline and Where to Start? Education Quiz to guide you. You can find these resources on the AAPACN website on the main [Education page](#).

**How do I register for certification?**

To purchase the RAC-CT courses and exams in the format most beneficial to you, visit the [AAPACN website](#).

**How much does education, certification, and recertification cost?**

The RAC-CT program consists of 10 courses, offered in several formats to support various learning styles. The associated certification exams are included with the purchase of each educational course. Recertification requires purchasing the on-demand or live virtual workshop and passing the associated exams with a score of 80% or higher. Pricing is based on cost per course and varies by format. AAPACN members receive substantial discounts.

**Getting Ready for the Exam****RAC-CT Body of Knowledge**

AAPACN undertook a rigorous process with numerous experts in the profession to determine the domains and tasks within the RAC-CT Body of Knowledge, in terms of both criticality and importance. The domain emphasis reflects the percentage of questions that come from each domain.

*RAC-CT Body of Knowledge*

- Domain 1 – MDS 3.0 Coding for OBRA and PPS (Domain Emphasis: 32%)
  - Perform an accurate assessment using the Resident Assessment Instrument (RAI) process and the Minimum Data Set (MDS). Understand the intent of each MDS item as it relates to effective care planning, accurately code each item of the MDS, and understand the effects of inaccurate MDS coding.
  - Tasks:
    - *Part 1 Course*
      - Demonstrate an understanding of the background of the regulatory requirement and the purpose of the RAI/MDS process
      - Section A: Identification Information
      - Section B: Hearing, Speech, and Vision
      - Section C: Cognitive Patterns
      - Section D: Mood
      - Section E: Behavior
      - Section F: Preferences for Customary Routine and Activities
      - Section GG: Functional Abilities and Goals
      - Section H: Bladder and Bowel
    - *Part 2 Course*
      - Section I: Active Diagnoses
      - Section J: Health Conditions
      - Section K: Swallowing/Nutritional Status
      - Section L: Oral/Dental Status

- Section M: Skin Conditions
  - Section N: Medications
  - Section O: Special Treatments, Procedures, and Programs
  - Section P: Restraints and Alarms
  - Section Q: Participation in Assessment and Goal Setting
  - Section X: Correction Request
  
- Domain 2 – Introduction to ICD-10-CM Coding for Long-Term Care (Domain Emphasis: 8%)
  - Utilize the *ICD-10-CM Official Guidelines for Coding and Reporting* guidance to accurately assign ICD-10-CM coding in the LTC setting.
    - Tasks:
      - Identify the ICD-10-CM coding conventions relevant to the long-term care setting
      - Describe the ICD-10-CM general guidelines relevant to the long-term care setting
      - Understand the documentation required for ICD-10-CM assignment
  
- Domain 3 – Managing the Patient-Driven Payment Model (PDPM) in a Skilled Nursing Facility (SNF) (Domain Emphasis: 10%)
  - Increase the knowledge and skills required to understand the Skilled Nursing Facility Prospective Payment System (SNF PPS)—the method of payment used for skilled nursing facilities. The focus of this educational course is the Skilled Nursing Facility Prospective Payment System (SNF PPS).
  - Tasks:
    - Describe the methodology and philosophy of the SNF PPS and the general framework of PDPM
    - Understand the six components of PDPM
    - Calculate the daily per diem under PDPM
    - Understand the PPS assessment schedule
    - Delineate administrative presumption of the skilled level of care
    - Identify the connection between the MDS and PDPM
    - Recognize the ongoing monitoring and oversight of therapy provisions by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)
  
- Domain 4 – OBRA Timing and Scheduling for the MDS 3.0 (Domain Emphasis: 8%)
  - Understand the requirements for scheduling and timing OBRA-required MDS assessments.
  - Tasks:
    - Understand the timing of OBRA-required assessments
    - Differentiate between and accurately manage assessment time frames
    - Accurately conduct Significant Change of Status Assessments (SCSA)
    - Accurately conduct Significant Correction to Prior Comprehensive Assessments (SCPA)
    - Accurately conduct Discharge assessments, Entry records, and tracking records

- Domain 5 – Care Area Assessments (CAAs) and the MDS 3.0 (Domain Emphasis: 8%)
  - Implement the process of the CAAs, the 20 care areas, CAA documentation requirements, timing requirements for completion, and related MDS items.
  - Tasks:
    - Understand the role and process of CAAs
    - Conduct CAAs
    - Apply CAA documentation requirements, including assessment findings and date requirements for Section V: Care Area Assessment Summary
  
- Domain 6 – Care Planning and the MDS 3.0 (Domain Emphasis: 8%)
  - Develop an individualized, interdisciplinary care plan designed to address the resident’s specific problems, risk factors, and complications, with the goal of attaining and maintaining the highest practicable physical, mental, and psychosocial well-being for the resident.
  - Tasks:
    - Understand the purpose and foundation of the care planning process to effectively apply critical-thinking skills
    - Develop a care plan
    - Apply appropriate time frames and allow updates and revisions to the care plan according to the resident’s changing needs
  
- Domain 7 – Quality Measures and the MDS 3.0 (Domain Emphasis: 8%)
  - Understand the Quality Measures (QMs), including how they are calculated; identify the MDS items that drive the Quality Measures; and accurately code the MDS to improve the quality of care in nursing facilities.
  - Tasks:
    - Demonstrate an understanding of the role and objectives of the Quality Measures in the Nursing Home Quality Initiative and for the survey process
    - Demonstrate an understanding of Quality Measure concepts, assessment definitions, and components of the calculation
    - Manage the Quality Measures with effective processes to achieve high-quality resident care and competitive QM scores
  
- Domain 8 – The Five-Star Quality Rating System (Domain Emphasis: 8%)
  - Understand how the Five-Star Quality Rating System is designed to help individuals, family members, caregivers, and the public find and compare the quality of nursing facilities; identify how to improve the rating for your facility.
  - Tasks:
    - Demonstrate an understanding of the purpose and background of the Five-Star Quality Rating System
    - Demonstrate an understanding of the Quality Measures star rating
    - Identify how to proactively manage and improve your facility's Five-Star rating with the goal of improving resident care

- Domain 9 – Introduction to Medicare Part A (Domain Emphasis: 10%)
  - Understand Medicare Part A coverage and the facility’s responsibilities for managing the Medicare benefit, making appropriate coverage decisions, and maintaining compliance as a Medicare provider; understand the facility’s responsibility when a resident is denied coverage.
  - Tasks:
    - Demonstrate an understanding of Medicare Part A coverage, managing the Medicare benefit, and making appropriate coverage decisions
    - Demonstrate an understanding of the medical review process and procedures for managing claims

### **What is the format of the exam?**

A certification exam accompanies each course and is completed online and accessed through your Learner Dashboard on the AAPACN website. The certification exams are an objective, multiple-choice question format. The questions are designed to test your recall of specific knowledge, as well as your ability to analyze and apply that knowledge to example situations. It is not a timed test. The questions test knowledge of the domains and tasks in the RAC-CT Body of Knowledge. The domain emphasis reflects the percentage of questions that comes from each domain. You will be asked to select the correct or best answer from four options. Only one answer is correct for every question.

### **How do I prepare for the exam?**

Content for examinations is not obtained from any one particular source. The RAC-CT Body of Knowledge should be a guideline for study preparation. The educational materials from the online curriculum, as well as the in-person or virtual workshop curriculum, provide a basis of knowledge for exam preparation. You should also utilize current journals, textbooks, source documents like the [MDS 3.0 RAI User’s Manual](#), and other reference material related to the subjects listed in the Body of Knowledge as supplemental preparatory materials for the exam.

After reviewing the Body of Knowledge, you can plan your exam preparation based on your general understanding and working knowledge of the subject areas. For example, because of daily use at your current job, you may have a good understanding and working knowledge of some of the domain areas—these areas may need only a quick review as you prepare for the test. For areas with which you are less familiar, you may decide you need more in-depth study or training before completing the certification exam; you can allocate your study time appropriately.

You should also consider what percentage of the test questions will cover each major content area; this information is listed as the domain emphasis percentage in the Body of Knowledge section of this handbook. By focusing your studies, you can spend extra time as needed to thoroughly understand the most significant sources of content area on the exam.

### **How are reasonable accommodations made?**

If you require reasonable accommodations to complete the certification exams for the program, please contact AAPACN toll-free at (800) 768-1880, or by email at [memberexperience@AAPACN.org](mailto:memberexperience@AAPACN.org).

## Taking the Exam

### What are the requirements during the exam?

AAPACN assigns you a username as a key control in monitoring and verifying user identity in the Learner Dashboard area of the AAPACN website. You create the password for this username. This login information helps ensure that each user's information is available only to the authorized user. As a user of the Learner Dashboard, it is important that you do not share this username, or the password you create for your login, with anyone. You should be the only one to access and complete your exam and course material in your Learner Dashboard.

Once you begin each certification exam, you may complete it either in one sitting or in sections. It is an open-book format, so you may use reference materials when you take the exam. However, you cannot seek assistance from other individuals while completing the exam. The exams are offered on an honor-system basis that assumes you will act in good faith to ensure your performance is an accurate representation of your own personal knowledge and skills related to the subject matter.

AAPACN does not tolerate cheating or any breach of academic or professional ethics that may compromise the security or integrity of its certification exams. All incidents of reported cheating will be investigated. Discussing content found on the certification exams is strictly prohibited; any such posts on Community discussion boards will be removed. Anyone found compromising the security of the exams by attempting to copy, record, or distribute questions in any manner will be permanently excluded from the certification process.

### How long do I have to complete a course/exam?

- **Online course(s) and certification examinations** – The educational courses and certification exams are completed through your Learner Dashboard. The courses are offered in a self-paced interactive online format. The exams are not timed, and you may exit the exam and return at a later time to complete it. Your courses and exams expire one year after purchase. After the one-year expiration date, you will lose access to the course and exam content.
- **Workshop and certification examinations** – The educational content is presented during the in-person/virtual workshop dates. You will take the certification exams separately through your Learner Dashboard. These are not timed, and you may exit the exam and return at a later time to complete it. Your courses and exams expire one year after the start date of the event. After the one-year expiration date, you will lose access to the course and exam content.
- **Printed manuals and certification examinations** – The educational content is presented in a printed format, shipped directly to you. You will take the certification exams separately through your Learner Dashboard. These are not timed, and you may exit the exam and return at a later time to complete it. Your courses and exams expire one year after purchase. After the one-year expiration date, you will lose access to the course and exam content.
- **Exam attempts** – You have three attempts per course to pass the certification exam with a score of 80% or better. The exam itself is not timed, and you do not have to complete it in one sitting. If you have exhausted all exam attempts, you may request additional attempts one time per course. If your request is approved, you will receive an additional three exam attempts. If you do not pass after six attempts, you must wait one year before taking the certification exams again.

In the case of an extenuating circumstance, you can submit a formal, written appeal to request an exception to the policy. To begin the appeals process, login to your Learner Dashboard and click on the “Apply for Appeal” link in the menu on the left-hand side of the site.

## **After the Test**

### **How is my information kept confidential?**

Information about candidates and their examination results is confidential. AAPACN carefully protects your data from loss, misuse, unauthorized access or disclosure, alteration, or destruction. Within the company, data is stored in password-controlled servers with limited access. Your personal information is never shared outside the company without your permission, unless required by law to comply with a current judicial proceeding, court order, or legal process. If AAPACN is required by law to release your confidential information, you will be notified by email, unless prohibited by law.

### **How is the exam scored?**

The RAC-CT exams, as well as RAC-CT courses and workshops, set a standard of basic levels of knowledge that can reasonably be expected of long-term care professionals involved in the RAI/MDS process. Your performance on the exams will be measured against this predetermined standard to assess your competency in these subject matters. Your performance will not be measured against other candidates taking the certification exams; your individual performance will determine whether you meet the knowledge standards required to pass.

### **What information will I receive about my score?**

Once you have completed the examination, you will be presented with the percentage of questions correctly answered. Based on the percentage, your exam results will indicate “pass” or “fail.” You must achieve a score of 80% or better to pass the exam.

To protect the confidentiality of the exam content, and to maintain the value and integrity of the certification, AAPACN does not provide the correct answers to missed questions on the exam results. The certification exam is intended to measure proficiency in the subject and to determine whether an individual has the knowledge necessary for certification.

### **When will I receive my score?**

The certification exams are self-scoring and provide immediate feedback. Upon completion of the exam, your computer screen will display the percentage of correctly answered questions and indicate “pass” or “fail.” You may access this information at a later date by logging into your Learner Dashboard.

Once you pass 10 certification exams, you may begin using the credentials RAC-CT to designate your status as a certified Resident Assessment Coordinator. Credentials are awarded for a two-year period.

### **Can I retake the exam if I don't pass?**

You have three attempts to pass the certification exam with a score of 80% or better. If you have exhausted all exam attempts, you may request additional attempts one time per course. If your request is approved, you will

receive an additional three exam attempts. If you do not pass after six attempts, you must wait one year before taking the certification exams again.

In the case of an extenuating circumstance, you can submit a formal, written appeal to request an exception to the policy. To begin the appeals process, login to your Learner Dashboard and click on the “Apply for Appeal” link in the menu on the left-hand side of the site.

### **Is there an appeals provision?**

AAPACN works diligently to provide top-quality course materials and exams using a standardized process of question development and validation. AAPACN also affords candidates a high level of flexibility in completing the exam. Due to these policies and procedures, an appeal will be heard only in the case of an extenuating circumstance. In this case, you may submit a formal, written appeal to AAPACN to request an exception to the policy. To begin the appeals process, login to your Learner Dashboard and click on the “Apply for Appeal” link in the menu on the left-hand side of the site.

## **Recertification: Certification Maintenance**

### **When do I need to recertify?**

The RAC-CT certification is valid for two years from your certification completion date. Your credential expires two years from when you completed your exam requirements. Your certification expiration date can be found in the My Certifications area of your Learner Dashboard. You must complete your recertification requirements before the expiration date of your credential. If you do not complete the recertification requirements before your certification expiration date, you will be required to restart the full program to regain your certification at a later date.

### **What are the recertification requirements?**

To maintain your RAC-CT certification, you must recertify every two years. To recertify, you must take and pass the recertification exams. Alternatively, you can complete the 10-course RAC-CT program again, along with the associated exams.

Each recertification exam requires a passing score of 80% or better.

Purchasing recertification courses does not extend the expiration date of your credential. You must complete the recertification requirements before your certification expiration date to maintain your credential.

### **How much does RAC-CT recertification cost?**

Recertification pricing can be found on the [AAPACN website](#).

**What if I let my certification lapse?**

You must complete your recertification requirements before the expiration date of your credential. If you do not complete the recertification requirements before your certification expiration date, you will be required to restart the full program to regain your certification at a later date.

If you have any questions, please contact AAPACN toll-free at (800) 768-1880, or by email at [memberexperience@AAPACN.org](mailto:memberexperience@AAPACN.org).