Social Work Exam Guide

With Sample Questions & Rationales



Authors



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CEO & Founder of the Therapist Development Center

Amanda graduated with honors from Dartmouth College, where she majored in neuroscience and completed her senior thesis on the neuroscience of the learning process. She earned her Master's in Social Welfare at UCLA and is a licensed clinical social worker in California.

Amanda first conceived the idea for the Therapist Development Center while studying for her own clinical licensing exams. She reviewed two of the top programs in California; however, when she took the actual exams, she realized those programs had done very little to prepare her. At the time, the passing rate for social workers in California was a mere 50%. Amanda quickly recognized the critical need for a program that provided both clinical review and test-taking strategies, and that reflected how the material was actually tested.

Drawing on her background in the neuroscience of learning, Amanda developed TDC's innovative and highly effective study systems. She believes that by "studying smart," social workers can pass their exams and advance confidently in their careers.



Heidi Schriefer, M.Ed., LCSW

Vice President of Exam Prep and Co-Founder of the Therapist Development Center

Based in Saint Louis, Missouri, Heidi is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker with a strong foundation in both education and clinical practice. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Loyola University Chicago, a Master of Education from the University of Missouri-St. Louis, and a Master of Social Work from Washington University in Saint Louis.

Heidi brings extensive experience as an educator, clinician, supervisor, and coach, with specialized expertise in teaching, training, and clinical exam preparation. Passing both her LMSW and LCSW exams on the first attempt using TDC's programs, she became a dedicated advocate for the TDC method. She joined the organization as a coach in 2015, where she is known for her ability to break down complex concepts and teach the reasoning skills needed to pass the ASWB exams confidently. Her favorite customer feedback is when they share that TDC didn't just help them pass—it helped them grow into stronger, more confident social workers.

To learn more about Amanda and Heidi visit www.therapistdevelopmentcenter.com/about-us

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About the SW Exams

Understanding the ASWB

- The ASWB has been developing social work licensing exams since 1979, and every state uses them as part of their licensure process. Their goal is to ensure "minimum practice competency"
- Your test will consist of 122 questions, 110 of which are scored. The number you need in order to pass varies, but it's usually between 66 and 78 questions
- Different states refer to the exams and licensure levels differently, so make sure you know which test you should be taking in order to advance your career

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About the Clinical Exam (LCSW)

- In 2025, the Clinical Exam was administered 26,439 times with a pass rate of 75.7%
- The vast majority of the questions on the Clinical Exam are reasoning based (typically 90%+)
- The ASWB has the Clinical Exam content broken down into 3 categories:
  - Values and Ethics
  - Assessment and Planning
  - Intervention and Practice



About the Masters Exam (LMSW)

- In 2025, the Masters Exam was administered 20,636 times with a pass rate of 73.9%
- The majority of the Masters exam is made up of reasoning based questions (typically 65%+)
- The ASWB has the Masters Exam content broken down into 3 categories:
  - Values and Ethics
  - Assessment and Planning
  - Intervention and Practice

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10 Study Tips

1. The social work exam is challenging, but they aren't trying to trick you. That's right: There are NO TRICK QUESTIONS. With the right tools, you can pass with confidence.

2. The social work exam is a measure of your competence, not of your ability to memorize.

3. Competence is measured through reasoning based questions.

4. The vast majority of questions on the social work exams are reasoning based, so you will need clear strategies to know how to figure out the answers.

5. The exam is predictable. There are certain clinical situations that the board will want to be sure you know how to address.

6. The best way to manage test anxiety is to have clear test taking strategies so you know how to read and answer the questions.

7. An organized study plan is essential. Otherwise you can waste a lot of time "studying" but not actually "preparing to pass."

8. Not all exam prep materials are created equally. In fact, numerous study products and workshops are created by people who have NEVER even taken the exam (some aren't even social workers!). We're also seeing some very poor quality AI created prep showing up on the market. Be sure to find out who created the products, and be wary of any exam prep that posts testimonials without their customers' full names.

9. It's best to study in sessions of 2 hours or less. The average person stops learning after 90 minutes, so you won't absorb most of what is taught in daylong workshops.

10. Being able to talk through concepts and rationales you don't understand is essential to the learning process. Look for a study program that provides access to real coaches who have taken the exam.

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Practice Questions

Get a feel for the LCSW Exam

1. A social worker sees a couple who describe frequent conflict and arguments. During a session, the wife tells the social worker that her husband never wants to talk about his feelings. The husband confirms this, but says that when he tries to express himself his wife gets upset and yells at him. The wife jumps in and says loudly, “That’s not true! He’s always making things up about me!” The husband then says, “See?” and crosses his arms, sitting in silence. The social worker should NEXT:

A. Recommend that the husband and wife be seen individually

B. Point out the communication pattern that just occurred

C. Teach the couple more effective communication techniques

2. A social worker facilitates an inpatient therapy group for adolescents. One member of the group, a 14-year-old female, has been prescribed medication for a mood disorder and shares that she does not want to take it. The other members of the group identify with the girl’s feelings and become angry, yelling at the social worker and demanding that the social worker do something on the client’s behalf. The social worker should FIRST:

A. Explore group members feelings about medications

B. Bring the conversation back to the client’s behaviors that prompted the medication

C. Acknowledge the group members’ anger and explore underlying issues

3. A 28-year-old man seeks treatment from a social worker. He reports being dissatisfied with his career, but cannot identify why or what he would like to be different. He also states that he’s unhappy about his current relationship, wishes he was in better shape, and can’t seem to find a way to change. He says, “every time I try to change something, I get overwhelmed and end up right back where I started - or worse.” The social worker should FIRST:

A. Assist the client in prioritizing his concerns

B. Identify behavioral objectives to help the client change his behavior

C. Apply a strengths-based perspective by focusing on his strengths

4. A 26-year-old woman is referred to a social worker in private practice by a close friend. During the initial session, the client describes a number of problems, including a recent breakup with her boyfriend, a history of trauma, and almost daily methamphetamine use. The social worker should FIRST:

A. Assess the client’s motivation for change

B. Explore the connection between the trauma and the client’s substance use

C. Refer the client for a substance abuse evaluation



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Practice Questions



Get a feel for the LCSW Exam

5. A social worker at a community agency begins working with a family who report frequent arguments centering around the teenage son's behavior. The mother reports that while he maintains good grades and participation on the school soccer team, he is "totally uninterested" in family life. The father then interrupts and states that his wife has "unrealistic expectations" for his son. They continue to bicker about discipline while their son sits silently, rolling his eyes. The social worker should FIRST:

A. Refer the parents for couple's treatment

B. Suggest individual treatment for the son

C. Concentrate on interpersonal communication between family members

6. An emergency room social worker is asked to evaluate a 43-year-old woman who was brought in complaining of heart palpitations and an inability to sleep. The social worker notes that the woman's pupils are dilated and that she is wrapped in a large blanket despite the reasonable temperature in the ER. The client has most likely been using:

A. Cocaine

B. Oxycontin

C. Alcohol

7. A social worker has been working with a 9-year-old boy and his parents to address emotional and behavioral issues. A psychological evaluation has revealed that the boy has a learning disorder. The parents have requested an IEP from the boy's school, but have had difficulty making contact with the special education coordinator. The social worker's calls to the school administration are not returned. The social worker should FIRST:

A. Recommend that the family obtain legal representation

B. Request that the psychologist call the special education coordinator directly

C. Send a registered letter to the special education coordinator and administration with the psychologist's recommendations

8. A client seeks services at a community mental health center. His chief complaint is that he can't get a job and is "stuck living in his parents' basement." He is dressed in pajamas with a neck tie and reports that his only friends are people he knows online in an alien tracking club. The client shares that he often experiences coincidences as meaningful messages intended specifically for him. What diagnosis should be considered for this client?

A. Schizoid Personality Disorder

B. Schizophrenia

C. Schizotypal Personality Disorder

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Answers & Rationales

Get a feel for the LCSW Exam

1. **Answer: B**
Rationale: B is the best answer because the therapist should first help the couple become more aware of their existing communication patterns. A does not make sense because the problem is in the relationship. C may be a useful intervention, but not until the clients are more aware of their current communication style.

2. **Answer: C**
Rationale: C is the best answer because the social worker needs to start where the group members are and help identify any underlying issues that may be contributing to their responses. B disregards the group members' feelings of anger. A might be useful, but not until the social worker has recognized the feelings that are being expressed and has allowed group members' to process them.

3. **Answer: A**
Rationale: When a client reports having multiple concerns and feels overwhelmed, the most helpful intervention is to help them separate and prioritize their concerns (A). B and C may be useful interventions, but not until they prioritize his presenting issues.

4. **Answer: C**
Rationale: C is the best answer because substance abuse should be addressed first. A and B are useful interventions, but only after the therapist refers the client for a substance abuse evaluation.

5. **Answer: C**
Rationale: The family is demonstrating the communication patterns that are causing their distress, so the social worker should start where they are (C). A and B might be useful later if it becomes apparent that either the son or the parents are in need of focused treatment.

6. **Answer: A**
Rationale: This is an application question. The symptoms described in the stem are all indicative of cocaine abuse. With Oxycontin you would be more likely to see constricted pupils, sedation, and slowed breathing. Alcohol is a central nervous system depressant and you would be more likely to see sedation and impaired coordination than you would dilated pupils and insomnia.



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Answers & Rationales

Get a feel for the LCSW Exam

7. **Answer: C**

Rationale: C is the best answer because it creates a paper trail that can be referenced in later interactions and ensures that someone in the school will receive the communication. A may be necessary, but attempts to contact the school in writing should be done FIRST. B may not do anything to accomplish the family's goals if the call is not returned.

8. **Answer: C**

Rationale: This is a good example of a diagnosis question. Schizotypal Personality Disorder is characterized by social isolation, odd behavior, unusual dress and thinking, and unconventional beliefs.

Notes

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Success Stories



I can't thank TDC enough for supporting me and preparing me in passing my licensure exams. I used your program for both my LMSW and LCSW and I passed both on the first try. I truly felt like TDC cared about me passing and the encouragement meant so much. The program was organized, thorough, and easy to follow. I actually enjoyed studying! Thank you for making a stressful situation less anxiety producing and more bearable. I will always be grateful to TDC for helping me in accomplishing my goals and pursuing the career I've always dreamed of!

—HOLLY PONDER

TDC literally helped me pass my LCSW exam! After struggling with the exam, I finally found a program that gave me the structure, knowledge, and confidence I needed to succeed. TDC is far superior to any other study program I used. It truly has everything you need to prepare for the exam, from comprehensive content review and practice questions to helpful strategies for understanding how to approach the questions.

—MIRANDA SANTIAGO

The LCSW Exam study center was a great help in preparing for my exam. The study plan helped me organize my time, stay focused, and strengthen my reasoning skills when answering questions. The practice and guidance increased my confidence, and I am happy to say that I passed the ASWB exam! I highly recommend this study center to anyone preparing for the exam.

—EDNA RODRIGUEZ

TCD provides all the resources to pass this test with confidence! I have huge test anxiety and when studying with other resources I always felt like I was looking for more resources rather than really studying. TCD had everything in one place and made me feel super confident walking into the test!

—NATALIE LOTT

This is hands down the best study system! It will help you understand the test, how to approach it, what the test is looking for, and how to reason through the questions. It is far more than mock questions and memorization that other programs have. I passed on my first attempt with a 92%!

—ARIANA CACHO

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Study With Us

Learn How Our Program Works

- Our LCSW Study System is an online program that you can access immediately once you sign up. Just log in and start studying.
- We provide an organized, 10-step study plan with handouts, lectures, Quick Study sheets, quizzes, and practice exams.
- Our Masters prep program includes 600+ online practice questions like the ones in this guide and our Clinical prep program includes 800+ online practice questions.
- In addition to reviewing content, we emphasize the test taking strategies and reasoning skills you need to pass.
- We provide FREE access to LCSW EXAM COACHES (who have passed with a score of at least 90%) to answer any questions you have while studying, including advising whether you are ready to take the exam.
- We are with you until you pass. Extend or repeat the program for FREE. You only pay ONE time.
- 95% of social workers pass using our system. For people who have failed using other prep material, scores increase an average of 18 points with our program.

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