



# COMLEX-USA Level 2-Performance Evaluation (PE) Examination

## Post-Examination FAQ

March 2017

The National Board of Osteopathic Medical Examiners (NBOME) includes a standardized patient-based clinical skills examination in the COMLEX-USA examination series. The Post-Examination Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) are intended for informational purposes only. Regular updates regarding the COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE will be posted on the [NBOME website](http://www.nbome.org).

### 1. How is COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE scored?

Candidates will receive a score of "Pass" or "Fail" for the examination. Successful passing of COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE requires that the candidate pass each of two examination domains: the Biomedical/Biomechanical Domain and the Humanistic Domain.

The Biomedical/Biomechanical Domain measures skills in three areas: 1) data-gathering, 2) osteopathic manipulative treatment, and 3) documentation skills (SOAP Notes). The data-gathering component reflects skills in history-taking and physical examination. The OMT portion represents performance in osteopathic assessment and manipulative treatment in select cases. The following areas are assessed globally for OMT:

- Osteopathic Examination/Evaluation
- Patient/Physician Position for Treatment
- OMT Modality Selected
- OMT Technique
- Treatment Repetition/Duration
- Post-Treatment Assessment

The completed SOAP Note measures documentation (synthesizing information gathered in the clinical encounter), clinical problem-solving, integrated differential diagnosis and formulation of a therapeutic plan. Osteopathic principles are incorporated into each of the three areas.

The Humanistic Domain measures skills in Physician-Patient Communication, Interpersonal Skills, and Professionalism. Assessed skills within this domain include:

- Ability to elicit information
- Listening Skills

- Giving information
- Respectfulness
- Empathy
- Professionalism

Highly trained standardized patients document history-taking and physical examination maneuvers performed, and record behaviors related to the humanistic physician attributes mentioned above. Trained osteopathic physician examiners score osteopathic manipulative treatment and SOAP notes.

## **2. When will I receive my examination scores?**

Scores are generally available within 8-10 weeks of the examination date; please see the website for [score release dates](#). This time is required to ensure accurate, reliable and valid examination scoring and reporting. Scores are analyzed and checked for accuracy before the scores are released. There may be additional delays that are dependent on candidate testing and other variables that are not within NBOME's control.

## **3. How can I access my examination scores?**

Candidates and deans will receive an e-mail notifying them that score reports are available through the [Client Registration System \(CRS\)](#) at the NBOME website. A notice will also be posted via social media (Facebook and Twitter) and on the NBOME website. Score reports can be accessed via CRS using your username and password. Candidates should consult the [COMLEX-USA Bulletin of Information](#) and the [COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE Orientation Guide](#) for additional information.

## **4. Can I request a score confirmation?**

A score confirmation checks the accuracy and computation of scores. The score confirmation does not include having videotape performances or SOAP Notes rescored by additional examiners.

You can request a score confirmation for COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE via the [Client Registration System \(CRS\)](#). All requests must be received within 120 days of the completion of the examination. You will be notified of the score confirmation results electronically via your CRS secure user account within two weeks of the receipt of your request.

## **5. What is "Irregular Conduct," as annotated on the score report?**

Any irregular behavior that would constitute unprofessional conduct, as outlined in the [COMLEX-USA Bulletin of Information](#) and [Orientation Guide](#), in regards to the application or registration for, the taking of, or the conduct after taking any COMLEX-USA examination series subject to NBOME's policies, could result in invalidation of an examination or disqualification. This includes copying, fraud, or sharing of any examination content or material, use of prohibited reference materials during the examination, and verbally or physically harassing any NBOME staff at any time, including when contacting NBOME for information about failing scores. In addition, misrepresentation of findings documented on the medical record (SOAP Notes) in COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE by documenting medical history that was not elicited or physical examination maneuvers or techniques that were not

performed is considered irregular conduct and will be thoroughly investigated and dealt with as specified in NBOME's Bulletin of Information.

## **6. What if I do not pass the COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE?**

In the event that you do not pass, you will be able to reschedule to retake the examination upon receipt of the initial score report.

For first time takers in the 2015-2016 testing cycle, the pass rate was 92.9 %. (Historic pass rates over the past 10 years have been in the 93-94% range.)

## **7. Why did I fail the COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE examination? My medical school course grades and test scores, COMLEX-USA Level 1, Level 2-CE scores, and/or my clerkship ratings are very good.**

Candidates should be aware that cognitive knowledge is measured principally by the COMLEX Level 1, Level 2-CE and Level 3 examinations, whereas clinical skills and performance are measured by COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE. The assessment formats of Level 2-CE and Level 2-PE examinations are different, and the examinations therefore are designed to measure different competencies.

Numerous published studies show that there is only a very modest correlation between national clinical skills examinations (such as COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE) and other measures of academic performances (i.e., academic grades in medical school years 1 and 2, COMLEX-USA multiple choice cognitive examinations such as COMLEX-USA Level 1, Level 2-CE, USMLE scores, MCAT scores, and clerkship ratings). Consequently, the fact that a student may have performed satisfactorily or even quite well in an academic or other setting may not predict achievement in clinical skills. There is extensive literature that documents the low correlation between clerkship global rating forms and other academic measures (e.g., Multiple Choice Question- MCQ- examinations) as well as with national clinical skills examinations including COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE. For research related to the COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE, please see the [Research and Resources](#) link on the website.

## **8. How could I have failed the Humanistic Domain? I am a good person and generally get along well in my rotations.**

This is not a judgment about your character. It means that over the course of 7 hours with 12 clinical encounters with standardized patients on your exam day, you performed below standards for doctor-patient communication, interpersonal skills, and professionalism established by experts in osteopathic medical education and practice. One suggestion is to practice with standardized patients and real patients under direct observation, and get feedback from your supervisors. Another suggestion is to examine the Humanistic Domain dimensions carefully, asking your supervisor to provide constructive feedback using these criteria after directly observing your interactions with patients.

## **9. Can I get more specific feedback as to what I need to do to improve?**

The COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE was designed to make reliable pass/fail decisions for licensure. If you did not pass, more specific feedback is provided on the back page of the score report.

Within the Biomedical/Biomechanical domain, further feedback is presented, by score component, for data-gathering (history-taking and physical examination), OMT, and the SOAP Notes.

For the Humanistic Domain, feedback is presented as to the level of proficiency demonstrated in the examination in this domain as a whole.

Doctor-patient communication, interpersonal skills and professionalism are complex and multidimensional, and are best defined in the assessment context as specific observable behaviors and conduct throughout the entire examination. For this reason, further information as to the performance on each of the dimensions of the domain, cannot be reliably reported. Investigations show that students who fail this domain should seek out remediation in all of these skill areas. In the COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE the Global Patient Assessment (GPA) is a global holistic rating scale under the Humanistic Domain that assesses the interpersonal, communication skills and professionalism quality of osteopathic medical students. This scale evaluates candidate quality in two areas:

1. Patient Examination and Treatment Quality – The ability to gather and exchange information with the patient to ensure diagnostic accuracy and treatment quality. Dimensions in this area include:
  - Eliciting information - the ability to gather information in an understandable, straight-forward manner)
  - Listening skills – the ability to listen to and respond to the patient’s statements and questions
  - Giving information – the ability to inform, educate and counsel the patient
2. Patient Relationship Quality - The ability to demonstrate an interpersonal connection to the patient, pay attention to the psychological, situational and cultural contexts of the doctor-patient relationship and collaborate with patients in their care. Dimensions in this area include:
  - Respectfulness – the ability to hold the patient in high regard or esteem
  - Empathy – the ability to demonstrate understanding, concern and interest in the patient’s medical problem and life situation
  - Professionalism – the ability to help the patient, instill confidence and maintain ethical standards.

## **10. Why can’t I get more information on what specifically I did wrong to fail the examination?**

Unlike scoring approaches that are typically used in an educational setting to provide detailed feedback about performance on specific behavior or knowledge, the COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE utilizes a global scoring approach which is designed to provide a reliable summative score in the COMLEX-USA licensure series, but not to provide the detail to help with further training as would be common in the osteopathic medical education setting (e.g. formative OSCE). For example, for the Global Patient Assessment Tool, which is the scoring tool used to evaluate behaviors for the Humanistic Domain, Standardized Patients are trained to use a holistic rubric that assesses the overall performance of an examinee in specific aspects of doctor-patient communication, interpersonal skills and professionalism. Each of the 12 Standardized Patients is trained to recognize well researched, well-documented behaviors which are associated with positive physician-patient relationships, and improved patient satisfaction, compliance and outcomes. For the post-encounter SOAP

note, each case note is scored by a Physician Examiner trained to that case. For each case in which OMT is scored, a trained individual Physician Examiner has viewed and scored that particular case. So for both domains, there are many trained raters contributing to one reliable final score. Furthermore, because there are multiple behaviors/observations that are assigned to a global rating score, it is not possible to disaggregate specific skills that contributed to an examinee's overall performance rating (e.g., information gathering, questioning style, eye contact). Further, it is the examinee's performance across several stations that becomes his or her final rating.

### **11. How do I improve my performance or remediate?**

Unlike formative assessments used at medical schools, COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE is a summative high-stakes assessment where performance is evaluated against a national standard. The public relies on a system of licensure that incorporates these types of competency-based assessments. To this end, remediation is not provided by the NBOME, and examination content (cases, etc.) must remain secure. Case-specific feedback (e.g., "What questions should I have asked," or "What communication skills did I not demonstrate in the exam") cannot be provided.

Prior to retesting, you should consult with your dean or school representative to obtain reference materials and to formulate a remediation plan. Typically, candidates will schedule specific activities with the faculty of their school, including clinical clerkships with direct observation, videotaping with real or standardized patients, and hands-on guided practice for defined skills (e.g., history-taking and physical examination, osteopathic manipulative medicine, documentation of SOAP Notes, doctor-patient communication, etc.).

### **12. If I failed, how do I reschedule to take the examination?**

Upon receipt of a failing score, you may register for another examination through the [Client Registration System](#). When logging into the registration program, you should have several opportunities to reschedule for the examination, including specific seats that are reserved for students retaking the examination.

If you do not see an acceptable date within 6-8 weeks or have specific questions, please call us at 1-866-479-6828 for assistance with scheduling.

### **13. When should I reschedule for the examination?**

When rescheduling, be sure to allow adequate time to retake the examination prior to your school's graduation deadline, and keep in mind the time required for remediation, rescheduling, and [score report release](#) (typically 8-10 weeks). Remember that passing COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE is a requirement for graduation, and is therefore a requirement for starting a postgraduate medical education or residency training program.

### **14. Is there a limit on how many times I can take the COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE examination?**

Yes. Effective July 1, 2016, you will be limited to total of six attempts, including but not limited to all attempts prior to July 1, 2016, and a total of three attempts within a 12-month period. Review the [COMLEX-USA Bulletin of Information](#) for details.

### **15. Where can I learn more about COMLEX-USA Level 2-PE?**

Visit the [NBOME website](#) for additional information about the COMLEX Level 2-PE.

To speak to someone at the NBOME National Center for Clinical Skills Testing, call us at (866) 479-6828.

Like us on [Facebook](#) or follow us on [Twitter](#)!

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