



Music Therapy Board Certification The Examination Development Process: Item Writing & Standard Setting

From the February 19, 2026, Educator & Internship Director Discussion

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THE EXAMINATION DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

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PURPOSE OF CREDENTIALING

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JOURNEY TO MT-BC

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ANALYSIS & REPORTING

RESOURCES FOR TEST PREPARATION

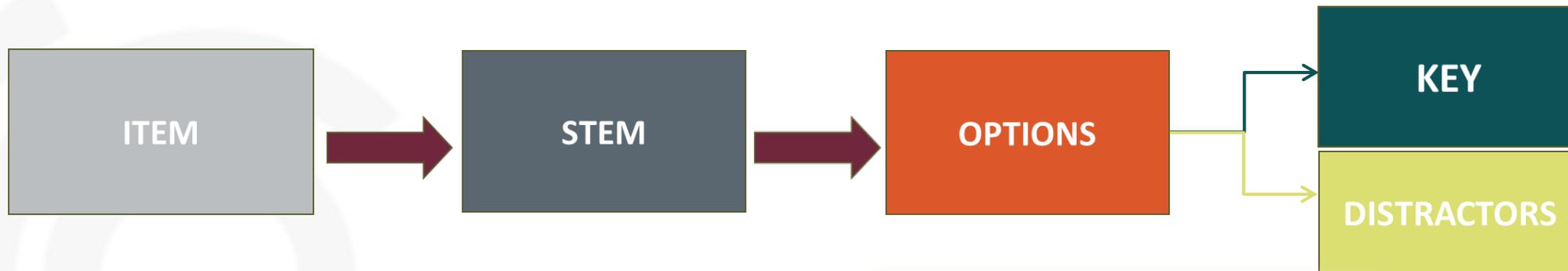
ITEM WRITING

ITEM	STEM
OPTIONS	KEY
DISTRACTOR	

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STANDARD SETTING

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 certification board
 for music therapists

Music Therapy Board Certification
Board Certification Domains – 2025
 From the 2024 Music Therapy Practice Analysis Study, Effective October 27, 2025

Domain I: Safety (6 exam items)

Knowledge Statements: The knowledge needed to fulfill job responsibilities

- 1A Emergency response and crisis intervention techniques (e.g., cardiopulmonary resuscitation [CPR], first aid, de-escalation techniques)
- 1B Identification of potential for harm within treatment (e.g., physical, psychological, interpersonal, spiritual, environmental)
- 1C Client-specific safety considerations (e.g., clinical disposition, diagnosis, active symptoms, trauma, medication use, physical and mental well-being)
- 1D Roles and responsibilities of other professionals for client safety (e.g., safety officer, infection control personnel)
- 1E Verbal, physical, and music interventions for client safety
- 1F Sanitation precautions, applications, and disposal methods for reusable and non-reusable goods (e.g., personal protective equipment [PPE], instrument materials)
- 1G Safe physical management practices and compliance principles (e.g., handling medical equipment, transportation, physical support and assistance)

Task Statements: The underlying responsibilities of the music therapist within this domain area

1. Recognize and respond to situations in which there are clear and present physical dangers to a client and/or others and comply with emergency procedures
2. Recognize the potential harm and contraindications of music experiences for clients and adapt treatment as necessary
3. Recognize the potential harm and contraindication of verbal and physical interventions for clients and adapt treatment as necessary
4. Observe infection control protocols (e.g., universal precautions, instrument disinfection)
5. Apply organizational safety compliance training principles and policies
6. Comply with relevant safety protocols when providing physical support to clients
7. Facilitate appropriate and safe use of all materials, equipment, and instruments based on the physical environment

Domain II: Referral, Assessment, Interpretation of Assessment, and Treatment Planning (39 exam items)

2A. Referral

Knowledge Statements: The knowledge needed to fulfill job responsibilities

- 2A-1 Referral system processes and criteria for determining eligibility
- 2A-2 Communication of the referral system processes and criteria with other professionals

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Board Certification Domains | © 2025 The Certification Board for Music Therapists 7.2.25



How the MT-BC Exam Is Built & Evaluated

- ✓ Exam items are written by active MT-BC clinicians and aligned with the Board Certification Domains (BCD)
- ✓ Each exam includes 130 scored items and 20 unscored pretest items mixed throughout
- ✓ Pretest items are used to evaluate new questions before they count toward scores
- ✓ Questions are reviewed using data to ensure they:
 - ✓ Are not too easy or too hard
 - ✓ Differentiate stronger and weaker test-takers
- ✓ The item bank is secure, continuously updated, and exams are statistically equivalent in difficulty

Key Differences

Recall Items

Application/Analysis Items

Focus	 Memorizing facts and concepts	 Applying knowledge to specific scenarios
Complexity	Straightforward	 Analytical and situational
Testing Objective	Knowledge retention	 Decision-making and problem-solving
Answer Approach	Retrieve the correct fact or definition	 Identify the best action based on the scenario

Each MT-BC examination contains between 15% to 25% recall items (questions) and between 75% to 85% application/analysis items (questions).

The Item

Content & Relevance

- Aligned with Board Certification Domains
- Job-relevant and practice-based
- Realistic clinical scenarios

Language & Clarity

- Clear, professional language
- Entry-level technical terms

Equity & Accuracy

- Current, evidence-based information
- Objective descriptions
- Avoids bias, stereotypes, and pronouns

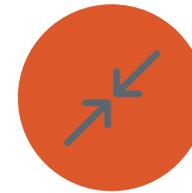
The Stem (Question)



- solicits a single response.



- contains all necessary information to answer the question.



- is concise.



- is not negatively-worded.



- does not include a clue word that makes the key obvious.

Stem Examples

Recall: A music therapist engages a client in a stress-relieving exercise that involves tensing and relaxing various parts of the body while listening to client-preferred sedative music. This technique is known as

Application/Analysis: After six months of treatment to promote a child's language development, the music therapist wishes to determine the effectiveness of music therapy treatment. The therapist should

The Options (Answers)



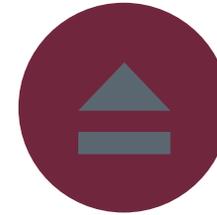
- ANSWER WHAT IS ASKED IN THE STEM.



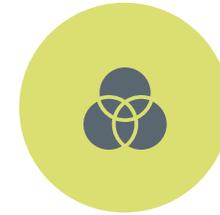
- CONFORM GRAMMATICALLY TO THE STEM.



- ARE REALISTIC AND GENUINE CONCEPTS OR TERMS.



- AVOID REPEATING OR OVERLAPPING CONTENT ACROSS OPTIONS.



- ARE CONSISTENT WITH OTHER OPTIONS IN TERMS OF LENGTH AND DETAIL.



- DO NOT CONTAIN "ALL OF THE ABOVE" OR "NONE OF THE ABOVE".



- EXCLUDE QUALIFYING WORDS OR EXTRANEOUS DETAILS.

The Key (Correct Answer)



- is the only correct answer.



- is supported by an authoritative reference.



- is not subject to opinion.



- represents what is correct in actual practice.

The Distractors (Wrong Answers)



- are defensibly incorrect.



- cannot be incredibly obvious.



- reflect misconceptions and errors.



- cannot be partially correct.



- must be plausible to those who don't know the correct answer.

Recall Stem with Options Example

A music therapist engages a client in a stress-relieving exercise that involves tensing and relaxing various parts of the body while listening to client-preferred sedative music. This technique is known as

- A. systematic desensitization.
- B. progressive muscle relaxation.**
- C. autogenic training.
- D. applied relaxation training.

Application/Analysis Stem with Options Example

After six months of treatment to promote a child's language development, the music therapist wishes to determine the effectiveness of music therapy treatment. The therapist should

- A. repeat the initial assessment to compare results.**
- B. arrange to have a speech/language therapist evaluate the child.
- C. administer a new evaluation tool specifically designed for this child.
- D. apply a standardized test to assess current level of language development.

Testing Recall versus Application/Analysis Questions

HOW TO APPROACH EXAM QUESTIONS

RECALL QUESTIONS	APPLICATION & ANALYSIS QUESTIONS	GENERAL TEST-TAKING TIPS
 READ Read the question carefully.	 READ Read the entire question carefully	 Mix recall and application practice
 RECALL Recall the information from memory	 ANALYZE Analyze what the question is asking	 Practice under timed conditions
 VERIFY Verify your recall against the choices	 ELIMINATE Eliminate clearly wrong answers	 Answer every question
 SELECT Select the best match	 CHOOSE Choose the best option	

STANDARD SETTING



Minimum Acceptable Competence

- Individuals who have the capabilities to perform job tasks and responsibilities in a way that meets the minimum requirements of effectiveness, safety, and ethical practice.



Highly effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Performs actions beyond what is required• Demonstrates knowledge greater than what is required
Ineffective	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does not meet minimum standards of practice• Does not follow generally-accepted professional practices
Minimally competent	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meets standards of practice consistent with required experience and education• Does not cause harm to the public

“A minimally competent music therapist intentionally utilizes piano, guitar, percussion, and voice to promote optimal health outcomes for clients and patients by designing, assessing, implementing, and documenting treatment and termination plans. Minimally competent music therapists must identify safety and ethical considerations and respond appropriately within scope of practice when providing treatment.”

Summary of the Angoff Process

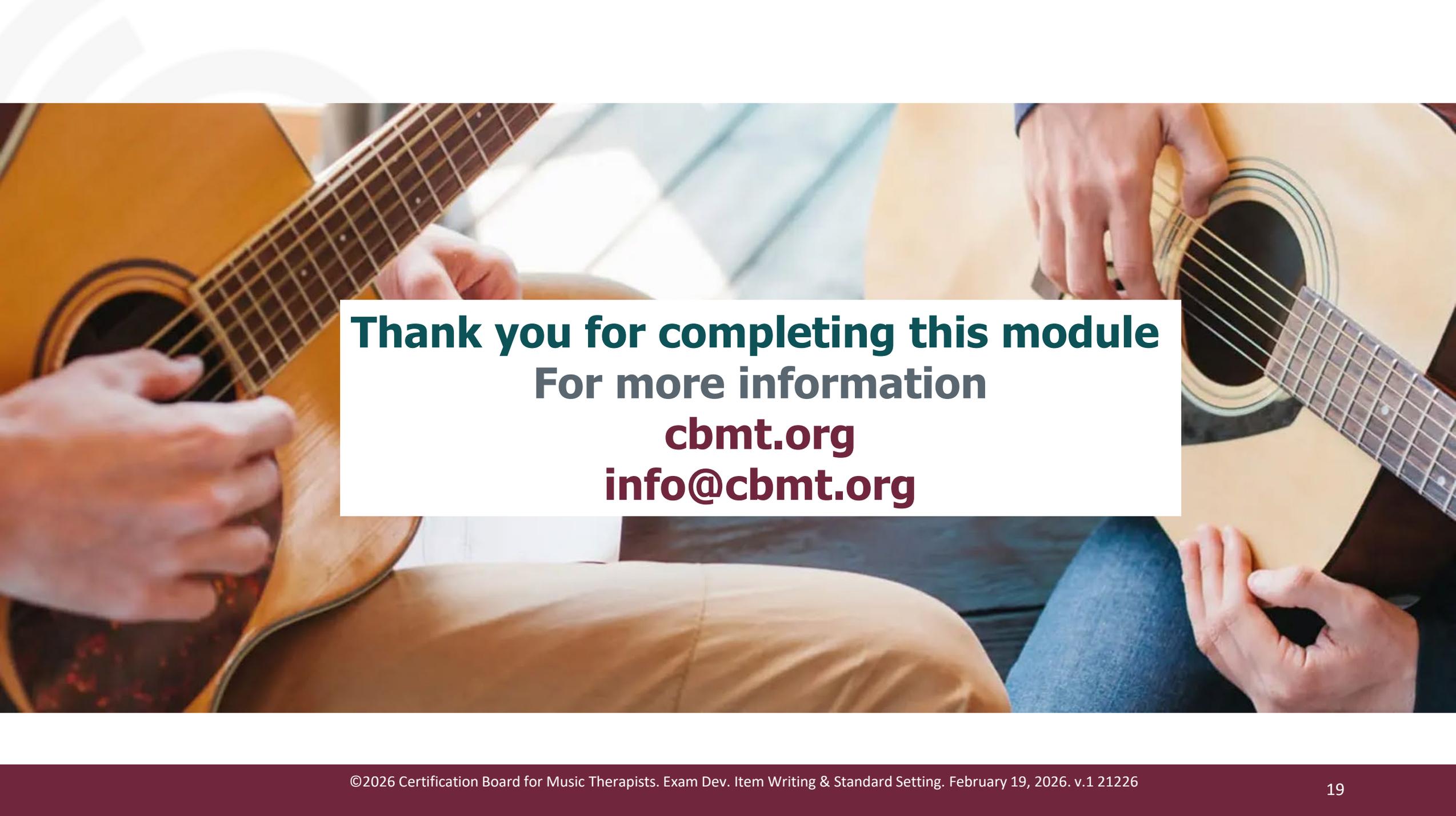
- Panel of experts take the exam.
- Individually complete item review and estimate probability of minimally competent candidate **WOULD** answer correctly.
- Psychometrician provides p-value.
- Individuals reassess probability.
- Highest and lowest ratings discussed in the group.
- Probabilities across all items summed to yield passing score.



Cut Score Basics

2025 Standard Setting:

- To pass the exam, a candidate must answer at least 97 of the 130 scored questions correctly. The exam contains 150 total questions, including 20 unscored pretest items.
- 74.6 % correct to pass
 - ❖ 2.0 or 2.5 on a 4.0 scale
 - ❖ Common grading would equate to a “C” or “C+” (73 – 76.9% range)
 - ❖ Lower end of average, often categorized as “satisfactory”
 - ❖ Demonstrates “minimal level competence”

A close-up photograph of two people sitting on the floor, playing acoustic guitars. The person on the left is wearing a tan shirt and is focused on playing the guitar. The person on the right is wearing a blue shirt and is also playing the guitar. The background is a bright, slightly blurred indoor setting.

Thank you for completing this module
For more information
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