



ADEC

The Thanatology Association®

CT / FT Certification

Exam Handbook and Study Outline



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Message from ADEC's Credentialing Council

Congratulations on your commitment to pursue Certification in death, dying, and bereavement. The Association for Death Education and Counseling developed the program by setting the standards required for Certification in thanatology. The purpose of Certification is two-fold: 1) To protect the public, and 2) To recognize those who hold ADEC's credential of CT® (Certified in Thanatology) or FT® (Fellow in Thanatology) for their professional focus and specialization in a thanatology role.

Based on post-exam survey feedback from test takers over the past several years, it is our experience that the candidates most likely to pass the exam the first time utilized the information and tips found in our Study Outline. They created personalized study strategies, developed a study plan timeline, and set realistic study goals. As you embark on your pursuit of a Thanatology credential, we wish you success in developing and implementing your study plan and on completing your exam. Thank you for the valuable thanatology services you provide to those in need of your specialized knowledge, skills, and compassion.

Exam Candidate Responsibilities

Communication

- Ensure you are receiving emails regarding the exam (check spam box, mark credentialing@adec.com as a “safe sender”)
- Respond in a timely manner to emails or other communication from ADEC
- If your preferred contact email address changes during the exam cycle, please:
 - Update your profile on the ADEC website
 - Communicate this directly to credentialing@adec.com during the exam cycle to ensure no critical messages are missed
- We always recommend using a personal email to maintain communication in the event that you switch employers

Confidentiality

- Candidates must sign an agreement of confidentiality
- Revealing exam question content to anyone is strictly prohibited
- Any measure to retain exam content is strictly prohibited. This includes, but is not limited to:
 - Using screen capture or recording technology on your testing device
 - Taking photos or recordings of the exam portal with secondary devices
 - Downloading or printing exam content
 - Manually recording exam content
- Violation of confidentiality will result in denial of awarding the certification or revoking of the certification if already awarded

Exam Preparation

- Ensure that you utilize the CURRENT Exam Handbook and Study Outline by downloading it directly from ADEC website
- Develop a plan of self-study that best fits your learning style utilizing ADEC’s Body of Knowledge and Exam Content Areas
- ADEC will publicly list the reference books used to create exam questions. While purchasing the texts is not required, it is HIGHLY recommended - our policy requires ALL questions on the exam to be directly supported by the listed reference books, which will also specify the edition used. We cannot guarantee that content in editions other than what is currently published will contain the same content
- While not mandatory, it is strongly recommended to access the Practice Exam once online access is provided to you.

Choosing Your Testing Site, Device, and Start Time

- Candidates may test at the site of their choice
- Candidates are responsible for obtaining a reliable laptop that can maintain power throughout the three-hour exam time
 - iPads and similar devices do not provide adequate view of the test questions on one screen and are not recommended as a testing device
- Candidates are responsible for ensuring they will have reliable internet access for the duration of the exam
- Candidates are given a 24-hour window to complete the exam and may start at any time within the window. The window will close automatically after 24 hours - start no later than 3 hours before the window

closes to ensure you are able to use the full testing time allotted. If you have a time-based accommodation, you must start early enough to account for the extra time provided

Exam Candidate Rights

Testing Accommodations

ADEC's Testing Accommodation Policy is in accordance with the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and 1991 U.S. Civil Rights Act.

Candidates who require testing accommodation must request their accommodation and provide the required documentation when submitting the credentialing application.

Required documentation from the candidate's healthcare provider must include:

- The reason the testing accommodation is required (e.g. diagnosis)
- The specific accommodation recommendation

ADEC aims to respond to accommodation requests within 30 days of submission.

Testing Accommodation Requests and documentation must be submitted here:

<https://www.adec.org/page/TestingAccommodationRequest>

Exam Postponement Request

Candidates may submit a request to postpone their exam to the following year. Requests must be made at least 24 hours before the exam opens. If approved, the candidate will:

- be allowed to complete the exam the following year without having to reapply
- be required to pay a \$50 non-refundable administrative fee for each postponement request

A candidate may only postpone, take, or retake the exam on the 3 annual testing dates following the submission of their exam application. All fees will be relinquished if the exam is not taken or passed in the 3 year window.

Additional testing opportunities beyond the 3 year window will require the submission of a new credentialing application to demonstrate continuing eligibility according to current standards.

Exam Postponement Requests must be submitted here:

<https://www.adec.org/page/ExamPostponementRequest>

Exam Cancellation Request

Candidates may submit a request to cancel their exam.

- Candidates who submit a cancellation request at least 14 days prior to the exam will receive a refund equal to the application fee minus a \$75 administrative fee

- Candidates who submit a cancellation request less than 14 days prior to the exam are not eligible for a refund. In this case, we recommend submitting for postponement to retain your option to take the test in the following 2 years
- If a candidate cancels their exam, they must reapply if they elect to pursue certification in the future

Exam Cancellation Requests must be submitted here: <https://www.adec.org/page/ExamCancellationRequest>

Appeal of Exam Results

Candidates have the right to appeal if they believe their outcome was the result of errors within the exam content or testing process.

- Candidates must file the appeal within 10 days of receiving the exam results.
- Candidates will be notified of the decision within 45 days of the appeal.

Appeals of Exam Results must be submitted here: <https://www.adec.org/page/AppealofExamResults>

Retesting Request

Candidates who do not achieve a passing score on the exam remain eligible to retest two times without having to reapply.

- Retesting requests must be submitted on or before the general application deadline of the year you intend to retest
- Retesters are required to pay a \$150 fee for each retest attempt
- Retesters are not permitted to retake the same exam again. A new version will be administered for each attempt, which may or may not include questions that appeared on the previous exams completed by the candidate

A candidate may only postpone, take, or retake the exam on the 3 annual testing dates following the submission of their exam application. All fees will be relinquished if the exam is not taken or passed in the 3 year window.

Additional testing opportunities beyond the 3 year window will require the submission of a new credentialing application to demonstrate continuing eligibility according to current standards.

Retesting Requests must be submitted here: <https://www.adec.org/page/RetestingRequest>

Request for Situational Review

Candidates who experienced technical difficulties during the exam or have experienced another concerning situation that does not fit within the other appeals and requests offered have the right to a peer review of the situation.

- To ensure a fair review, candidates may be contacted by phone, email, or receive a meeting request to provide clarification
- ADEC aims to reach a decision within 45 days of the request. However, some situations may require more

extensive investigation.

Requests for Situational Review must be submitted here:

<https://www.adec.org/page/RequestSituationalReview>

Exam Administration

Exam Format

The exam consists of 150 multiple choice questions. Each question will have 4 answer options with a single correct answer.

Practice Exam & Getting Familiar with the Testing Platform

Approximately 3-4 weeks before the exam date, candidates will receive access to a 25-question practice exam. The purpose of the practice exam is to:

- Ensure you can successfully access the exam platform
- Help familiarize you with how the questions are designed
- Understand the breadth and depth of exam questions
- Gauge the pace at which you need to record responses
- Test the functionality of the platform, including:
 - Navigating between questions
 - Selecting your answer
 - Changing your answer
 - Flagging questions for later review
 - Returning to flagged or unanswered questions
 - Submitting the exam

More detailed instructions will be provided when access to the practice exam is granted.

Critical Information for Taking the Exam

- The exam is offered once per year. Dates may vary by year, and the annual date will be published on the ADEC website
- Candidates are granted access for 24 hours, with open and close times published alongside the exam date
 - Open and close times are listed according to US Eastern Daylight Time (UTC/GMT -4 hours)
 - Be sure to account for differences in time zones when starting the exam – the exam will open and close at the designated Eastern Daylight Time time
 - You must start your exam 3 hours before the close of the window to ensure you can utilize the allotted testing time. Candidates with time-based accommodations must start earlier to utilize their full allotted time.
 - We recommend using <https://www.worldtimebuddy.com/> to confirm start and end times in your time zone, particularly if you are in a time zone that may cross date lines
- Only one test attempt is granted during the exam window. You must complete the exam once you have started the timer

- The exam has a fixed 3-hour time limit with no option to pause. Candidates may take breaks at their own discretion, understanding that this will reduce the time they have to answer or review questions.
 - Closing the exam window will not pause the timer
- The exam cannot be submitted with unanswered questions unless you have reached the 3-hour time limit,
- If you reach the 3-hour time limit or the end of the 24 hour window, the exam will self-submit regardless of how many questions are unanswered
- This is not an open book test. With the exception of the exam instructions, no other books, notes, devices, etc. are permitted in the room where you take the exam.

Technical Difficulties and Exam Interruption

ADEC does not control the technological system end to end and, therefore, is not responsible for the function or dysfunction of a candidate's equipment, internet service, bandwidth, or other equipment and services required to take the exam. You will receive detailed information 2 weeks before the exam on how to handle technical difficulties.

Should there be a system-wide failure affecting the ability of ALL learners to access or complete the exam, ADEC will convene an emergency meeting to discuss the problem and determine the best solution. Candidates will be contacted within 72 hours of a decision to provide information and instructions.

Submitting the Exam

IMPORTANT: Once you submit your completed exam, please note that the screen will not show/state “Completed”. The screen will instead show that your exam is “Started”. Please do not be concerned that it doesn’t say “Completed”, this is a function of our scoring process, please see below:

Understanding the Exam Scoring Process

You will not receive an automatic pass or fail score when your exam is submitted. While this may be frustrating, it is important to understand that the process used to score the exam is comprehensive and ultimately of greater benefit to the test taker than using methods that provide immediate scores.

Post exam, our Test Consultant conducts an in-depth, analytic review of each question on the exam. Questions that were incorrectly answered by many test takers are then scrutinized by a team of thanatology subject matter experts to determine if any of the questions were ambiguous, invalid, or unfair.

Questions identified as problematic are excluded from the scoring and the pass score is determined based only on the remaining questions. This important process ensures reliability, fairness, equity, and credibility of our exam. It takes between 4 and 6 weeks post-exam for this analysis to be completed.

Because the difficulty level of individual questions, as well as the total number of scored questions may vary from administration to administration, an exact percentage or score required to pass the exam is not published.

Passing scores for each year are determined by comparing overall test difficulty to an “anchor” exam, ensuring continuity of the passing standard across administrations. The “anchor” passing percentage is 70%, and the

current passing percentage may be above or below 70% depending on the comparison of difficulty.

Receiving Exam Results

After review by ADEC's psychometrician and exam management committee, candidates will be notified of their results by email within 6-7 weeks of taking the exam. Successful candidates can expect to receive a signed printable digital certificate that shows they have been awarded the CT or FT. Results are released as Pass or Fail only.

Candidates who do not receive a passing score are not certified and will be eligible to take the exam again the following year in accordance with the current retest policy.

Exam Content Overview

What the Exam Measures

Exam candidates come from diverse thanatology roles (funeral directors, nurses, clergy, social workers, therapists, counselors, end of life doulas, organ transplant professionals, death educators, and so many more).

Because each professional discipline has its own set of knowledge, skills, and abilities required to practice within its thanatology role, the certification exam is intended to measure the breadth of your foundational, conceptual, and contextual knowledge in the expansive field of Thanatology. It is not intended to measure competence within your particular professional role.

You may be subject to additional licensing requirements for your role and local regulations.

ADEC's Body of Knowledge

Overall exam content is derived from ADEC's Body of Knowledge Outline, found here, which depicts the breadth of essential knowledge required for competency in the field of death, dying and bereavement.

The Body of Knowledge Outline can be found here: <https://www.adec.org/page/BodyofKnowledgeOutline>

Actual questions for the exam are written from information published in two exam source references, cited below.

Exam Content Source References

Exam questions are based on the following reference books. Click the hyperlinks to be directed to a purchase source for the book.

- Corr, C.A., Corr, D.M., & Doka, K.J. (2025). [Death & Dying, Life & Living \(9th Ed.\)](#). Cengage Learning. ISBN-13: ISBN-13: 978-0-357-94692-3. (This book can also be rented or purchased as "used".)

- Servaty-Seib, H.L. and Chapple, H.S., (Eds). (2021). [Handbook of Thanatology: The essential body of knowledge for the study of death, dying, and bereavement \(3rd ed.\)](#). Association for Death Education and Counseling®; The Thanatology Association®. ISBN: 978-1-736117-0-0

ADEC does not provide a preparatory exam course but does strongly recommend utilizing the exam reference books to develop your own independent study plan that fits your unique learning style. You are not required to purchase the reference books from which the exam questions are created, but all exam questions will be directly supported by content in the above texts.

Cognitive Level of Questions

- 105 questions (70% of the exam) require basic knowledge/recall skills.
- 45 questions (30% of the exam) require a higher level of critical thinking skills. These include deeper comprehension, application, or analysis.

Exam Content Areas

There are four major content areas or “pillars of knowledge” covered in the Certification Exam, categorized as Content “Domains”. Under each Domain described below, you will find the number of questions to expect from that domain, where to find some of the information to study, and examples of domain topics that could appear on the exam.

Content Domain Overview

- Domain 1: *Dying Death: Foreseen & Unforeseen; Matters Pertaining to Death*
 - Number of questions per exam: 51
 - Proportion of overall exam content: 34%
 - Suggested study content:
 - Servaty-Seib and Chapple: Chapters 1-3 ,6, 7,12-16,19
 - Corr, Corr, and Doka: Chapters 2-8,10,12-17,19, 20
- Domain 2: *End-of-Life Preparation & Decision Making*
 - Number of questions per exam: 15
 - Proportion of overall exam content: 10%
 - Suggested study content:
 - Servaty-Seib and Chapple: Chapters 4, 5, 7, 19
 - Corr, Corr, and Doka: Chapters 5, 7, 10, 12-15, 16, 18, 19
- Domain 3: *All Loss: Grief, Mourning, & Memorialization*
 - Number of questions per exam: 63
 - Proportion of overall exam content 42%:
 - Suggested study content:
 - Servaty-Seib and Chapple: Chapters 7-11, 13-17, 19, 22
 - Corr, Corr, and Doka: Chapters 5, 7, 9-15, 19
- Domain 4: *History & Evolution of Thanatology and Death Education*
 - Number of questions per exam: 21

- Proportion of overall exam content: 14%
- Suggested study content:
 - Servaty-Seib and Chapple: Chapters 18, 20, 21
 - Corr, Corr, and Doka: Chapters 1, 4

Core Sub-Categories Within Domains

- Practice Issues Affecting all Thanatology Professionals
 - Number of questions per exam: ~9% of the 129 questions across Domains 1-3
 - Suggested study content:
 - Servaty-Seib and Chappel: Chapter 19
 - Corr, Corr, and Doka: Chapters 7, 10
- Key Contributors to Thanatology
 - Questions about individuals whose core concepts, theories, and models inform the practice of thanatology may be found in all content domains, and the number of questions per exam varies with each administration
 - Study content is available throughout all exam references

Example Topics by Domain and Sub-Category

Disclaimer: This is not an exhaustive list of topics that may appear on the exam. Some topics listed will not be included as exam questions this year while other topics, not listed here, may be included.

- **Domain 1. Dying Death: Foreseen & Unforeseen; Matters Pertaining to Death**
 - Care of the dying
 - Important practice considerations when assessing and choosing appropriate interventions and resources
 - Cultural, religious, psychosocial and cognitive developmental stage, family systems, individual identity and personhood, marginalized individuals / populations
 - Ethical, moral, and legal issues
 - Holistic concerns and care needs of the dying
 - Management of common symptoms experienced by the dying as death nears
 - Care settings: implications and issues
 - Hospice and palliative care: Need, access, goals
 - Common illness trajectories
 - Disease trajectories
 - Issues around hastening death: euthanasia, medical aid in dying
 - Prominent legal cases related to the right to refuse or remove life-sustaining treatment
 - Contemporary and foundational theories / research / models / concepts that inform the practice of care for the dying
 - Bluebond-Langner's research; children's acquisition of knowledge of their own dying
 - Nagy's research; children's understanding of death
 - Speece and Brent's five principal sub-concepts of children's understanding of death
 - Theory of Psychosocial Development
 - Theory of Cognitive Development
 - Death Acceptance Theory
 - Meaning-Management Theory

- Fear of Dying/Death
- Five Stages of Dying
- Terror Management Theory
- Uncertainty in Illness Theory
- Theory of Self-Transcendence
- Task-based Model for Coping with Dying
- Phase-based Model for Living with Life-Threatening Illness
- Theory of Motivated Information Management
- Symbolic Immortality
- Final Conversations
- Death attitudes
- Death acceptance
- Death notification
- Factors influencing death practices and experience
 - Policies, laws, and societal limitations
 - Ethics, morals, and values
 - Cultural beliefs and taboos
 - Religious beliefs
 - Family systems / dynamics
 - Disability and differently abled individuals
 - Stages and conflicts of psychosocial development
 - Stages of cognitive development
 - Technology
 - Representations of death found in the media, arts, and entertainment
- Issues Related to Manner of Death
 - Expected death: Illness trajectories, disease trajectories, patient/caregiver needs
 - Suicide: Categories, etiology, risk, prevalence, prevention
 - Homicide / wrongful death: Types, perpetrators, victims
 - Accidents / unexpected / non volitional deaths: Types, prevalence
- Topics and Terminology Pertaining to Death
 - Definitions of death
 - Perceptions of death
 - Global demographics related to death
 - Determination of death
 - Natural disasters
 - Traumatic Death; Trauma
 - Violence
 - Terrorism
 - War, Genocide, Ethnic Cleansing
 - Mass shootings and mass murders
 - Body disposal
 - Death acceptance / denial
 - Death attitudes
 - Death awareness
 - Death systems
 - Death rituals
 - Fantasized death

- Vicarious death experiences
- Near death experiences
- Afterlife

- **Domain 2. End-of-Life Preparation & Decision Making**

- Factors influencing one's ability and willingness to prepare for death and make end-of-life decisions
 - Policies and laws
 - Ethical and moral values
 - Cultural and religious beliefs and taboos
 - Family systems / family dynamics
 - Individual identity and personhood
 - Stages and conflicts of psychosocial development
 - Stages of cognitive development
- Professional skills needed to effectively assist in preparing individuals and families for end-of-life
 - Education regarding disease trajectories, dying process, death, organ /body/tissue donation, and body disposition
 - Communication, including weighing benefits and burdens, related to preferences and goals of care at the end of life
 - Recording end-of-life decisions:
 - Documents, tools, role responsibilities, ethical and legal implications

- **Domain 3: All Loss: Grief, Mourning, & Memorialization**

- Care and support of the bereaved
 - Important practice considerations when assessing and choosing appropriate interventions and resource
 - Cultural, religious, psychosocial and cognitive developmental stage, family systems, personhood, marginalized individuals
 - Ethical, moral, and legal issues
 - Critical variables that influence the grief experience
 - Grief counseling
 - Grief therapy
 - Bereavement support groups roles / helping factors
 - Support of community and social institutions
 - Resources and assessment instruments / tools
- Contemporary and foundational theories / research / models / concepts that inform the practice of caring for the bereaved
 - Adaptive Grieving Styles
 - Continuing Bonds
 - Dual Process
 - Meaning Reconstruction
 - Post-Traumatic Growth
 - Two-Track
 - Coping with Dying Tasks
 - Phases in Living with a Life-threatening Illness
 - Grief Recovery Model
 - Restorative Story Telling
 - Narrative Reconstruction
 - Six "R" Model

- Intersectionality Theory
- Tasks of Mourning
- Tripartate Model
- Harvard Bereavement Study
- Prolonged Grief
- Attachment Theory
- Themes of Loss
- Ten Questions of Loss
- Funeral Viewing Research
- Phases of Mourning
- Assumptive World
- Mourning and Memorialization
 - Mourning rituals, short and long term
 - Influence of culture and religion on mourning practices
 - Ways to memorialize
 - Funeral practices: historically and currently
- Topics and terminology pertaining to grief and loss
 - Bereavement
 - Acute grief
 - Trauma
 - Historical trauma
 - Anticipatory grief / mourning
 - Disenfranchised grief
 - Worden's types of complicated grief reactions
 - Complicated / Prolonged / Pathological /Traumatic grief
 - Disordered grief
 - Uncomplicated grief
 - Absent grief
 - Resilience
 - Guilt types
 - Forgotten grievers
 - Ambiguous loss
 - Non-finite loss
 - Non-death loss
 - Chronic sorrow
 - Frozen grief
- **Domain 4: History & Evolution of Thanatology and Death Education**
 - Death Education
 - Social movements
 - Formal and informal approaches
 - Social initiatives designed to promote conversations about death
 - Death education through art and the media
 - Professional qualifications for death educators and educational standards
 - Consideration of psychosocial and cognitive developmental stages
 - Consideration of diverse cultural and religious beliefs
 - Consideration of different ways of learning and learning styles

- Moral and ethical issues
- Target audience
 - Students of primary, secondary, and post-secondary schools
 - Professionals preparing to work within the field of Thanatology
 - Volunteers/non-professionals who support the dying and bereaved
 - Family
 - Community
- Prominent individuals from multi-disciplinary academic fields who have contributed to the body of knowledge in Thanatology
 - Early contributors and their contributions in terms of foundational theories, research, models, concepts, important publications
 - Recent and current contributors and their contributions in terms of contemporary theories, research, models, important publications
- **Practice Issues Affecting All Thanatology Professionals**
 - Training, continuing education, professional development, certification
 - Self-awareness of one's own issues related to dying, death, loss, grief, and bereavement
 - Self-care and self-care models
 - Evolving practice settings for providing and receiving services
 - Cultural humility
 - Death competence
 - Grief literacy
 - Therapeutic presence
 - Burnout
 - Compassion / empathy
 - Compassion fatigue
 - Vicarious trauma
 - Traumatic stress
 - Moral distress
- **Key Contributors to Thanatology**

○ Aries, Philippe ○ Attig, Thomas ○ Balk, David ○ Becker, Ernest ○ Bertman, Sandra ○ Bluebond-Langer, Myra ○ Bonnano, George ○ Boss, Pauline ○ Bowlby, John ○ Brent, Sandor ○ Byock, Ira ○ Calhoun, Lawrence ○ Callahan, Daniel ○ Chapple, Helen ○ Charmaz, Kathy ○ Connor, Stephen ○ Corr, Charles	○ Davies, Betty ○ DeSpelder, Lynne ○ Doka, Ken ○ Durkheim, Emile ○ Erikson, Erik ○ Feifel, Herman ○ Freud, Sigmund ○ Fulton, Robert ○ Gamino, Louis ○ Gawande, Atul ○ Glaser, Barney ○ Harris, Darcy ○ Hone, Lucy ○ Kastenbaum, Robert ○ Klass, Dennis ○ Kohlberg, Lawrence ○ Kubler-Ross, Elisabeth	○ Larson, Dale ○ Leviton, Daniel ○ Lifton, Robert ○ Lindemann, Erich ○ Martin, Terry ○ Mishel, Walter ○ Mount, Balfour ○ Murray, Judith ○ Nagy, Maria ○ Neimeyer, Robert ○ Parkes, Colin Murray ○ Piaget, Jean ○ Pine, Vanderlyn ○ Prigerson, Holly ○ Rando, Therese ○ Raphael, Beverly ○ Reed, Pamela ○ Rosenblatt, Paul
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- Rubin, Simon
- Rynearson, Edward
- Sanders, Catherine
- Saunders, Cicely
- Shneidman, Edwin
- Schut, Henk
- Servaty-Seib, Heather
- Shand, Alexander
- Shneidman, Edwin
- Silverman, Phyllis
- Speece, Mark
- Strauss, Anselm
- Stroebe, Margaret
- Tedeschi, Richard
- Vygotsky, Lev
- Wald, Florence
- Wass, Hannelore
- Weisman, Avery
- Worden, William

Study Tips

Important: ADEC's certification exam is not based on a designated course that provides you with the exam content nor does ADEC provide an exam preparatory course. We strongly recommend you create a self-directed independent study plan that fits your unique learning style. You should use the exam reference books that provide the basis for exam questions, and rely on this Study Outline to help you focus your studies on the topics covered in the exam.

Create a plan, set goals, create a timeline where you can pace yourself. Plan when and how much you will read each time with a goal of being finished at least two weeks before the exam date. Use that final time to go back and review.

Read everything. Being tempted to skip over information that is overwhelming or seems irrelevant to your particular thanatology prevents you from owning an important chunk of knowledge that is essential.

Read to comprehend. The goal is not to read the reference books. It is to learn the information.

Don't skip chapter introductions and summaries, highlighted words, or key term glossaries. If authors find these areas important enough to include, they are important.

Utilize the Practice Exam provided before the actual exam date.