COACHCERTIFY / STUDY SERIES

20 free ICF ACC exam sample questions

2026 edition. Questions first. Answer key and explanations after.

FORMAT

60 questions, four options, one correct answer

TIME

90 minutes: 2-minute instructions, 39-minute Section 1, optional 10-minute break, 39-minute Section 2

SCORING

200-600 scaled score; 460 to pass. Ten unscored field-test questions; no penalty for wrong answers.

DOMAINS

Ethics 30%; Definition and Boundaries 30%; Competencies 40%

STANDARDS

2019 ICF Core Competencies and 2020 ICF Code of Ethics

DELIVERY

Pearson VUE test centre or OnVUE online

These are original CoachCertify practice questions, not real ICF exam questions. CoachCertify is independent and is not affiliated with or endorsed by ICF. Practice results do not predict exam performance.

https://www.coachcertify.com/blog/icf-acc-exam-sample-questions

Official exam guidance: https://coachingfederation.org/credentialing/icf-credential-exams/acc-exam/

Coaching Ethics

Question 1: Sponsor asks for session details

Domain: Coaching Ethics | Reference: Code: Responsibility to Clients (confidentiality, roles in sponsored engagements); Competency 1

A company pays for coaching for one of its managers. The three-party agreement says the sponsor gets attendance and an end-of-engagement progress summary agreed with the client. Midway through, the HR director emails asking what the manager has been discussing in sessions. What should the coach do?

A) Send a short summary of the main themes, since the company is paying for the coaching

B) Decline to share session content and point to the confidentiality terms in the agreement, sharing only what all parties agreed to

C) Ask the client to write the HR director a summary of what they've discussed

D) Share only the positive progress the client has made, leaving out sensitive topics

Your answer: _____

Question 2: A referral fee from a financial planner

Domain: Coaching Ethics | Reference: Code: Responsibility to Practice and Performance (conflicts of interest; disclosing third-party compensation for referrals)

A financial planner offers a coach a fee for every client the coach refers. Several of the coach's clients have money-related goals. What is the ethical way to handle this?

A) Accept the arrangement without telling clients, because the referral costs them nothing extra

B) Refuse to ever refer clients to any other professional

C) Disclose the referral fee to any client before referring them, and refer only when it serves the client

D) Accept the fee but pass half of it on to the client as a discount

Your answer: _____

Coaching Ethics

Question 3: When confidentiality must be broken

Domain: Coaching Ethics | Reference: Code: Responsibility to Clients (limits of confidentiality; applicable laws)

During a session, a client describes events at home that clearly indicate a child in their care is being abused. The coaching agreement explains that confidentiality has limits where the law requires disclosure. What should the coach do?

A) Follow the applicable law and the confidentiality limits in the agreement, which may mean reporting to the appropriate authorities

B) Keep the information confidential, because coaching conversations are always private

C) Coach the client on how they could improve the situation at home

D) End the coaching relationship immediately and say nothing further

Your answer: _____

Question 4: An anonymised client story on social media

Domain: Coaching Ethics | Reference: Code: Responsibility to Clients (confidentiality and privacy)

A coach wants to share a powerful breakthrough from a current client's session in a LinkedIn post to show the value of coaching. What should the coach do first?

A) Post it as long as the client's name is changed

B) Wait until the engagement ends, then post the story

C) Ask the sponsor for permission, because the sponsor pays for the engagement

D) Get the client's explicit permission before sharing any details from their coaching

Your answer: _____

Coaching Ethics

Question 5: Invited to invest in the client's startup

Domain: Coaching Ethics | Reference: Code: Responsibility to Practice and Performance (conflicts of interest; managing dual relationships)

A client who is launching a startup invites their coach to become a paid investor. What is the most appropriate response?

A) Invest. The coach's belief in the client will strengthen the coaching relationship

B) Name the potential conflict of interest with the client, decline the investment, and continue coaching; or end the coaching if the conflict can't be resolved

C) Invest quietly, and stop coaching the client on topics related to the business

D) Ask the client to decide, since the coaching agenda is theirs

Your answer: _____

Question 6: The coach's own situation gets in the way

Domain: Coaching Ethics | Reference: Code: Responsibility to Practice and Performance (personal limitations); Competency 2

A coach going through a painful divorce notices she's distracted and emotionally reactive while a client talks about their own separation. What is the best course of action?

A) Keep going as normal, since the client hasn't noticed anything

B) Share her own divorce story so the client feels understood

C) Seek support, such as coaching supervision or a mentor coach, and if her ability to coach is impaired, consider pausing or referring the client

D) Steer the client away from discussing their separation

Your answer: _____

Definition and Boundaries

Question 7: The ICF definition of coaching

Domain: Definition and Boundaries of Coaching | Reference: ICF definition of coaching

Which statement best reflects how ICF defines coaching?

A) Giving clients expert guidance so they can solve problems faster

B) Helping clients understand and heal the past experiences that shape their behaviour

C) Teaching clients the skills and knowledge they need for their roles

D) Partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximise their personal and professional potential

Your answer: _____

Question 8: Coaching vs. mentoring

Domain: Definition and Boundaries of Coaching | Reference: Coaching vs. mentoring

What is the main difference between coaching and mentoring?

A) A mentor typically shares their own experience and guidance; a coach partners with the client to draw out the client's own insight and solutions

B) Mentoring is for personal life and coaching is for professional life

C) Coaching always happens inside an organisation, mentoring outside it

D) A mentor works with groups, and a coach only works one-to-one

Your answer: _____

Definition and Boundaries

Question 9: A client wants to understand their childhood

Domain: Definition and Boundaries of Coaching | Reference: Coaching vs. therapy

A client asks the coach to help them work out why experiences from childhood still make them anxious in relationships. What should the coach do?

A) Explore the client's childhood in depth over the next few sessions

B) Offer an interpretation of what the anxiety is likely rooted in

C) Explain that coaching focuses on the present and future rather than healing the past, and discuss whether working with a licensed therapist would serve this goal

D) Tell the client this topic isn't allowed and move to another goal

Your answer: _____

Question 10: Signs that may need a mental health referral

Domain: Definition and Boundaries of Coaching | Reference: Mental health signs and referral

Over four sessions, a client reports sleeping badly, losing interest in things they used to enjoy, feeling hopeless, and missing work for three weeks. What is the best response?

A) Tell the client they appear to be depressed and should see a doctor

B) Share these observations with the client, explore whether support from a licensed mental health professional could help, and offer referral resources

C) Keep focusing on the client's goals, since mood often improves with progress

D) End the coaching engagement immediately

Your answer: _____

Definition and Boundaries

Question 11: The coach spots a weak resume

Domain: Definition and Boundaries of Coaching | Reference: Coaching vs. consulting

A client is coaching toward landing a new role. The coach, who has an HR background, notices the client's resume undersells their experience. What is the most appropriate action?

A) Rewrite the resume during the next session to save time

B) Say nothing, because offering expertise is never part of coaching

C) Refer the client to a resume writer without discussing it

D) Share the observation, ask what the client makes of it, and if the client wants a resume review, agree explicitly that it's a separate consulting service

Your answer: _____

Question 12: Is the client ready for coaching?

Domain: Definition and Boundaries of Coaching | Reference: Readiness for coaching

Which sign best indicates that a prospective client is ready for coaching?

A) They are willing to explore their own thinking and take ownership of their choices and actions

B) They want the coach to tell them the right answer

C) Their manager has insisted they attend coaching

D) They want help processing a recent trauma

Your answer: _____

Coaching Competencies

Question 13: Back-to-back sessions

Domain: Coaching Competencies, Strategies and Techniques | Reference: C2 Embodies a Coaching Mindset

A coach finishes a tense call with a supplier and has five minutes before a client session. She still feels irritated. What reflects a coaching mindset?

A) Start the session on time and hope the irritation fades

B) Tell the client she's had a bad morning so they understand any distraction

C) Use the minutes to notice and regulate her emotions and prepare mentally for the client

D) Cancel the session at the last minute

Your answer: _____

Question 14: The topic shifts mid-session

Domain: Coaching Competencies, Strategies and Techniques | Reference: C3 Establishes and Maintains Agreements

A client sets a session goal of planning a difficult conversation with their boss. Twenty minutes in, they start talking at length about whether to change careers. What should the coach do?

A) Gently bring the client back to the original goal, since that was the agreement

B) Notice the shift and ask the client what they want to focus on for the rest of the session

C) Follow the new topic without comment, since the client is leading

D) Suggest the career question is more important and switch to it

Your answer: _____

Coaching Competencies

Question 15: "Sorry, I'm rambling"

Domain: Coaching Competencies, Strategies and Techniques | Reference: C4 Cultivates Trust and Safety

A client shares an embarrassing mistake at work, then says, "Sorry, I'm rambling. This probably isn't worth your time." What is the best response?

A) Reassure them that everyone makes mistakes, and move on to action planning

B) Share a bigger mistake from the coach's own career to make them feel better

C) Suggest they come back to the topic when they feel less emotional

D) Acknowledge their openness in sharing it, and invite them to continue at their own pace

Your answer: _____

Question 16: The client becomes tearful

Domain: Coaching Competencies, Strategies and Techniques | Reference: C5 Maintains Presence

Halfway through a session, a client becomes tearful while talking about a project that failed. What should the coach do?

A) Stay with the client, allow the pause, and remain comfortable while they experience the emotion

B) Change the subject to something more positive

C) Quickly offer solutions so the client feels better

D) Suggest ending the session early so they can compose themselves

Your answer: _____

Coaching Competencies

Question 17: "I'm fine with the reorg"

Domain: Coaching Competencies, Strategies and Techniques | Reference: C6 Listens Actively

A client says, "Honestly, I'm fine with the reorg," then describes working until midnight most days and skipping lunch. What is the strongest response?

A) "Great. Let's focus on your goals for next quarter."

B) "You should talk to your manager about your workload."

C) "You said you're fine, and you've also mentioned late nights and skipped lunches. What do you notice about that?"

D) "Reorgs are always stressful, so it's normal."

Your answer: _____

Question 18: Stuck on a promotion decision

Domain: Coaching Competencies, Strategies and Techniques | Reference: C7 Evokes Awareness

A client has been going back and forth for weeks about accepting a promotion. Which question is most likely to evoke new awareness?

A) "Have you thought about the salary increase?"

B) "What would saying yes mean for the person you want to be two years from now?"

C) "Why haven't you decided yet?"

D) "If I were you, I'd take it. What's stopping you?"

Your answer: _____

Coaching Competencies

Question 19: Turning insight into action

Domain: Coaching Competencies, Strategies and Techniques | Reference: C8 Facilitates Client Growth

Near the end of a session, a client has a clear insight about why they keep avoiding delegation. What should the coach do next?

A) Give the client three delegation exercises to complete before next time

B) Email a written action plan after the session

C) Summarise the insight and close the session on time

D) Ask what the client wants to do with this insight, including what support they'll need and what might get in the way

Your answer: _____

Question 20: What goes in the coaching agreement

Domain: Coaching Competencies, Strategies and Techniques | Reference: C3 Agreements (contracting)

Which of the following belongs in the overall coaching agreement set up at the start of an engagement?

A) Guidelines on confidentiality, fees, scheduling, duration and how the engagement can end

B) A guarantee that the client will reach their goal by the end of the engagement

C) A list of solutions the coach will provide to the client's problems

D) The coach's assessment of the client's personality and weaknesses

Your answer: _____

Answer key at a glance

Score each domain separately: Ethics Q1-6; Boundaries Q7-12; Competencies Q13-20. Use missed answers to choose what to review next.

Q	Answer	Domain / reference
1	B	Code: Responsibility to Clients (confidentiality, roles in sponsored engagements); Competency 1
2	C	Code: Responsibility to Practice and Performance (conflicts of interest; disclosing third-party compensation for referrals)
3	A	Code: Responsibility to Clients (limits of confidentiality; applicable laws)
4	D	Code: Responsibility to Clients (confidentiality and privacy)
5	B	Code: Responsibility to Practice and Performance (conflicts of interest; managing dual relationships)
6	C	Code: Responsibility to Practice and Performance (personal limitations); Competency 2
7	D	ICF definition of coaching
8	A	Coaching vs. mentoring
9	C	Coaching vs. therapy
10	B	Mental health signs and referral
11	D	Coaching vs. consulting
12	A	Readiness for coaching
13	C	C2 Embodies a Coaching Mindset
14	B	C3 Establishes and Maintains Agreements
15	D	C4 Cultivates Trust and Safety
16	A	C5 Maintains Presence
17	C	C6 Listens Actively
18	B	C7 Evokes Awareness
19	D	C8 Facilitates Client Growth
20	A	C3 Agreements (contracting)

Study priorities

Under 4 of 6 in Ethics or Boundaries, or under 6 of 8 in Competencies, marks a domain to review first. These are study priorities, not official readiness thresholds. Re-read the linked standards, then practise at full length: 60 questions in 90 minutes.

Performance on sample questions is not indicative of performance on the ACC exam.

Answers and explanations

Question 1 / Correct answer: B

Domain: Coaching Ethics | Reference: Code: Responsibility to Clients (confidentiality, roles in sponsored engagements); Competency 1

A sponsor's right to information is defined by the agreement made at the start, not by who pays. B honours that agreement and keeps session content confidential.

A treats payment as consent.

C pushes the client into a disclosure they never agreed to.

D still discloses content. Choosing "positive" topics is the coach deciding what to reveal without the client's consent.

Question 2 / Correct answer: C

Domain: Coaching Ethics | Reference: Code: Responsibility to Practice and Performance (conflicts of interest; disclosing third-party compensation for referrals)

The Code asks coaches to disclose any compensation they expect from third parties for referrals, and to manage conflicts of interest openly.

A hides a conflict that could bias the coach's recommendations.

B is unnecessary. Referrals are often in the client's interest.

D doesn't remove the conflict, and it still skips disclosure.

Question 3 / Correct answer: A

Domain: Coaching Ethics | Reference: Code: Responsibility to Clients (limits of confidentiality; applicable laws)

Confidentiality is not absolute. The Code requires coaches to explain its limits and to comply with laws that require disclosure, such as risk of serious harm or child protection.

B ignores those legal limits.

C treats a safeguarding issue as a coaching topic.

D abandons both the client and the child without meeting the coach's legal duty.

Question 4 / Correct answer: D

Domain: Coaching Ethics | Reference: Code: Responsibility to Clients (confidentiality and privacy)

Client information belongs to the client. Even with the name changed, details can identify someone, and the coach needs the client's explicit consent to share anything from a session.

A assumes anonymising is enough. It often isn't.

B: confidentiality doesn't expire when the engagement ends.

C asks the wrong person. The sponsor can't consent on the client's behalf.

Question 5 / Correct answer: B

Domain: Coaching Ethics | Reference: Code: Responsibility to Practice and Performance (conflicts of interest; managing dual relationships)

A financial stake in the client's outcomes could compromise the coach's objectivity and the client's freedom to choose. The Code asks coaches to identify such conflicts, discuss them openly, and remove themselves if the conflict can't be managed.

A and C create the conflict. C also hides it.

D shifts an ethical responsibility that belongs to the coach onto the client.

Question 6 / Correct answer: C

Domain: Coaching Ethics | Reference: Code: Responsibility to Practice and Performance (personal limitations); Competency 2

The Code asks coaches to recognise personal circumstances that may impair their coaching and to act on them, from seeking support up to suspending or referring. That's also part of Competency 2 (seeks help from outside sources when necessary).

A hides an impairment.

B makes the session about the coach.

D lets the coach's agenda override the client's.

Question 7 / Correct answer: D

Domain: Definition and Boundaries of Coaching | Reference: ICF definition of coaching

This is ICF's definition of coaching.

A describes consulting.

B describes therapy.

C describes training.

Question 8 / Correct answer: A

Domain: Definition and Boundaries of Coaching | Reference: Coaching vs. mentoring

The distinction is where the answers come from: the mentor's experience versus the client's own thinking.

B, C and D describe settings or formats. Coaching and mentoring can both happen in any of them.

Question 9 / Correct answer: C

Domain: Definition and Boundaries of Coaching | Reference: Coaching vs. therapy

Understanding and healing past trauma is the territory of therapy. C is transparent about the boundary and opens a referral conversation. If appropriate, coaching on present-focused goals can continue alongside therapy.

A and B step into therapy.

D dismisses the client instead of helping them get the right support.

Question 10 / Correct answer: B

Domain: Definition and Boundaries of Coaching | Reference: Mental health signs and referral

These are possible signs of a mental health condition that may block progress in coaching. The coach's role is to notice, name the observations, and support a referral.

A is a diagnosis, which coaches don't make.

C ignores the warning signs.

D abandons the client without helping them find support.

Question 11 / Correct answer: D

Domain: Definition and Boundaries of Coaching | Reference: Coaching vs. consulting

Sharing an observation without attachment and letting the client decide keeps the coaching client-led. Any switch into consulting should be named and agreed, not slipped into the session.

A is consulting by default.

B is too rigid; observations can be offered.

C decides for the client.

Question 12 / Correct answer: A

Domain: Definition and Boundaries of Coaching | Reference: Readiness for coaching

Coaching relies on the client's ownership and willingness to explore.

B is a request for consulting.

C means the coaching isn't the client's choice. Mandated coaching can still work, but only once the client takes ownership.

D points toward therapy.

Question 13 / Correct answer: C

Domain: Coaching Competencies, Strategies and Techniques | Reference: C2 Embodies a Coaching Mindset

Competency 2 includes developing and maintaining the ability to regulate one's emotions and preparing mentally and emotionally for sessions.

A leaves the reaction unmanaged.

B brings the coach's state into the client's time.

D lets the client down when the issue could be managed.

Question 14 / Correct answer: B

Domain: Coaching Competencies, Strategies and Techniques | Reference: C3 Establishes and Maintains Agreements

Competency 3 asks the coach to partner with the client to manage the time and focus of the session, and to keep coaching toward the client's desired outcome unless the client indicates otherwise. B makes the choice explicit and leaves it with the client.

A and D decide for the client.

C lets the agreement drift without the client choosing.

Related reading: https://www.coachcertify.com/blog/icf-establishes-agreements-competency

Question 15 / Correct answer: D

Domain: Coaching Competencies, Strategies and Techniques | Reference: C4 Cultivates Trust and Safety

Competency 4 includes acknowledging and respecting the client's feelings and contributions, and showing support and openness.

A rushes past what the client is feeling.

B shifts the focus to the coach.

C signals the topic isn't welcome.

Related reading: https://www.coachcertify.com/blog/icf-cultivates-trust-safety-competency

Question 16 / Correct answer: A

Domain: Coaching Competencies, Strategies and Techniques | Reference: C5 Maintains Presence

Competency 5 includes showing confidence in working with strong client emotions and creating or allowing space for silence, pause or reflection.

B, C and D are ways of escaping the emotion. That is the coach's discomfort, not the client's need.

Related reading: https://www.coachcertify.com/blog/icf-maintains-presence-competency

Question 17 / Correct answer: C

Domain: Coaching Competencies, Strategies and Techniques | Reference: C6 Listens Actively

Competency 6 includes integrating the client's words with other cues and noticing and exploring incongruence. C reflects both statements without judgment and lets the client make meaning of it.

A misses the signal.

B gives advice.

D normalises and closes the topic.

Related reading: https://www.coachcertify.com/blog/icf-active-listening-competency

Question 18 / Correct answer: B

Domain: Coaching Competencies, Strategies and Techniques | Reference: C7 Evokes Awareness

Competency 7 calls for powerful, open questions that help the client explore beyond current thinking, including about who they are and what they value.

A is closed and leading.

C's "why" can feel like judgment.

D is advice dressed as a question.

Related reading: https://www.coachcertify.com/blog/icf-evokes-awareness-competency

Question 19 / Correct answer: D

Domain: Coaching Competencies, Strategies and Techniques | Reference: C8 Facilitates Client Growth

Competency 8 asks the coach to partner with the client to turn insight into action, considering how to move forward, resources, support and potential barriers. The client designs the action.

A and B: the coach designs the actions.

C skips the step of turning insight into action.

Related reading: https://www.coachcertify.com/blog/icf-core-competencies-explained

Question 20 / Correct answer: A

Domain: Coaching Competencies, Strategies and Techniques | Reference: C3 Agreements (contracting)

Competency 3 covers agreeing the guidelines and parameters of the relationship: logistics, fees, scheduling, duration, termination, confidentiality, and the inclusion of others.

B promises an outcome no coach can guarantee.

C describes consulting.

D is an assessment that isn't part of contracting.

Related reading: https://www.coachcertify.com/blog/icf-establishes-agreements-competency