CSLB C-20 HVAC Contractor Practice Test

20 original practice questions for the California contractor license exam, with an answer key and explanations.

Format
Multiple choice, 4 options, one best answer

Topics
Grouped by the published CSLB topic areas

Question bank
Last updated: November 2026

How to use this test

1. Answer all 20 questions without notes — the CSLB exam is closed-book.
2. Check the answer key at the end and read the explanation for every miss.
3. Take the same test online for instant explanations and a result by topic: test2pro.com/free-practice-tests/c20-hvac-contractor

Scan to take it online

Exam topic areas and approximate weights

Planning and Estimating	22%
Fabrication, Installation, and Startup	38%
Troubleshooting, Repair, and Maintenance	20%
Safety	20%

Test2Pro provides online prep only; CSLB and PSI handle exam scheduling, testing, licensing, and results. These are original practice questions, not real CSLB exam questions.

Questions

1 TROUBLESHOOTING, REPAIR, AND MAINTENANCE

To determine total suction superheat, where should a technician take the suction-line temperature and pressure readings together?

(A) At the evaporator inlet
(B) At the evaporator outlet
(C) Halfway along the suction line
(D) At the compressor suction inlet

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2 TROUBLESHOOTING, REPAIR, AND MAINTENANCE

A TXV system repeatedly shows 0°F of superheat at the evaporator outlet. Which condition should the technician suspect?

(A) The evaporator is starved of refrigerant
(B) Liquid refrigerant may be returning toward the compressor
(C) The system is low on refrigerant charge
(D) The evaporator saturation temperature is below 0°F

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3 TROUBLESHOOTING, REPAIR, AND MAINTENANCE

With a fixed-speed blower and otherwise unchanged cooling conditions, which refrigerant-pressure change is expected as an air conditioner's return-air filter becomes clogged?

(A) Suction pressure rises
(B) Discharge pressure rises
(C) Suction pressure falls
(D) Both pressures remain unchanged

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4 TROUBLESHOOTING, REPAIR, AND MAINTENANCE

After startup, a running reciprocating air-conditioning compressor develops an unusually small difference between suction and discharge pressures. Which fault best fits this symptom?

(A) Leaking compressor valves
(B) Too little refrigerant charge
(C) A restricted liquid-line filter-drier
(D) Too much refrigerant charge

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5 PLANNING AND ESTIMATING

Under the California Building Code, what minimum indoor temperature must a space-heating system be able to maintain on the design heating day, measured how high above the floor?

(A) 68°F at 5 feet
(B) 68°F at 3 feet
(C) 70°F at 3 feet
(D) 70°F at 5 feet

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6 PLANNING AND ESTIMATING

A fan moves 7,500 cfm at 600 rpm. Using the first fan law and unchanged system conditions, what speed will produce 10,000 cfm?

(A) 800 rpm
(B) 750 rpm
(C) 900 rpm
(D) 450 rpm

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7 PLANNING AND ESTIMATING

Under the standard indoor-combustion-air method, how much room volume is required for each 1,000 Btu/h of total appliance input?

(A) 75 cubic feet
(B) 50 cubic feet
(C) 25 cubic feet
(D) 100 cubic feet

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8 PLANNING AND ESTIMATING

Under the mandatory requirements of the 2025 California Energy Code, what minimum installed insulation value must single-family supply and return ducts have under the general insulation option? Assume no exception applies and set aside any stricter prescriptive requirement.

(A) R-8.0
(B) R-6.0
(C) R-4.2
(D) R-3.5

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9 SAFETY

Under the APWA Uniform Color Code, what do white paint or stakes identify?

(A) Reclaimed-water lines
(B) Sewer and drain lines
(C) Proposed excavation
(D) Communication and signal lines

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10 SAFETY

When must a forklift driver perform the vehicle safety check required by Cal/OSHA?

(A) At the beginning of each shift
(B) At the end of each shift
(C) At the beginning of each week
(D) At the beginning of each month

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11 SAFETY

Under Cal/OSHA's portable ladder rules, what is the greatest permitted overall length of a stepladder?

(A) 16 feet
(B) 24 feet
(C) 30 feet
(D) 20 feet

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12 SAFETY

During HVAC renovation work covered by Cal/OSHA construction asbestos rules, what is the 8-hour time-weighted-average exposure limit for airborne asbestos?

(A) 1.0 fiber/cc
(B) 0.01 fiber/cc
(C) 0.3 fiber/cc
(D) 0.1 fiber/cc

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13 FABRICATION, INSTALLATION, AND STARTUP

An attic HVAC appliance needs a separate level platform at its service side. What are the minimum platform dimensions under the 2025 California Mechanical Code?

(A) 24 × 30 inches
(B) 30 × 36 inches
(C) 24 × 36 inches
(D) 30 × 30 inches

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14 FABRICATION, INSTALLATION, AND STARTUP

Under the 2025 CMC, what is the greatest distance allowed between a furnace and its individual manual gas shutoff valve when no code exception applies?

(A) 10 feet
(B) 3 feet
(C) 6 feet
(D) 8 feet

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15 FABRICATION, INSTALLATION, AND STARTUP

What minimum downward pitch must a gravity condensate drain have toward its discharge point under the 2025 California Mechanical Code?

(A) 1 inch per foot
(B) 1/8 inch per foot
(C) 1/4 inch per foot
(D) 1/2 inch per foot

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16 FABRICATION, INSTALLATION, AND STARTUP

For a gas furnace in a residential garage, with no flammable-vapor-ignition-resistance exception, what is the minimum height of the burner or burner ignition device above the floor under the 2025 CMC?

A 12 inches
B 24 inches
C 18 inches
D 30 inches

17 FABRICATION, INSTALLATION, AND STARTUP

A natural-draft gas furnace has a vent connector with a 6-foot horizontal run toward the chimney. What minimum total rise does the 2025 California Mechanical Code require over that run?

A 3/4 inch
B 3 inches
C 4-1/2 inches
D 1-1/2 inches

18 FABRICATION, INSTALLATION, AND STARTUP

A single-stage heat pump's reversing valve is wired to thermostat terminal O. Which thermostat circuits close during a cooling call that also runs the indoor fan?

A R–W, R–G, and R–O
B R–Y, R–G, and R–O
C R–Y and R–G, with R–O left open
D R–Y, R–O, and R–C

19 FABRICATION, INSTALLATION, AND STARTUP

An attic access opening must allow an HVAC appliance’s components to be removed. Under the 2025 CMC, what minimum opening size is required even when removal would need less space?

A 22 × 30 inches
B 30 × 30 inches
C 20 × 30 inches
D 22 × 24 inches

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20 FABRICATION, INSTALLATION, AND STARTUP

Under the 2010 ADA Standards, a thermostat must be usable from an unobstructed forward or side reach. What is the maximum height of its highest operable part above the finished floor?

(A) 60 inches
(B) 44 inches
(C) 48 inches
(D) 54 inches

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Answer key and explanations

#	ANSWER	WHY
1	**D**	Total superheat is evaluated at the compressor suction inlet. It includes superheat gained in the evaporator and in the suction line; readings at the evaporator outlet measure evaporator superheat instead.
2	**B**	Zero superheat means the refrigerant leaving the evaporator is no warmer than its saturation temperature, so liquid may remain in the flow and cause floodback. A starved evaporator or low charge normally raises superheat. Superheat is a temperature difference, so 0°F superheat does not indicate a 0°F saturation temperature.
3	**C**	A clogged filter reduces airflow and heat absorption at the evaporator. The lower evaporator load tends to reduce evaporating pressure and compressor suction pressure.
4	**A**	Leaking compressor valves weaken the pumping action, allowing suction pressure to remain high while discharge pressure stays low. This reduces the pressure difference across the running compressor.
5	**B**	2025 CBC 1203.1 requires heating capable of maintaining at least 68°F at a point 3 feet above the floor on the design heating day, unless an exception applies. For dwellings, CRC R325.8 states the same 68°F at 3 feet above the floor and 2 feet from exterior walls in habitable rooms, and portable space heaters do not count toward compliance.
6	**A**	By the first fan law, airflow is proportional to fan speed: $N_2 = N_1 \times \text{dfrac}Q_2Q_1 = 600 \times \text{dfrac}10{,}0007{,}500 = 800$ rpm where N is the fan speed and Q the airflow. 450 rpm comes from inverting the ratio.
7	**B**	CMC Section 701.4.1 requires at least 50 cubic feet per 1,000 Btu/h for the standard method. If the known infiltration rate is below 0.40 air changes per hour, Section 701.4 requires the known-infiltration-rate method instead.
8	**B**	2025 Energy Code 150.0(m)1Bi requires portions of supply-air and return-air ducts and plenums to have a minimum installed insulation level of R-6.0. R-4.2 appears only in an exception for ducts in an unvented attic with roof insulation, and prescriptive or alteration requirements can call for more, such as R-8 in many climate zones.
9	**C**	White marks identify the location, route, or boundary of proposed excavation under the APWA Uniform Color Code.
10	**A**	Title 8 Section 3650(t)(7) requires drivers to check the vehicle at the beginning of each shift, including tires, horn, lights, brakes, steering and the lift system. An unsafe vehicle must be reported and kept out of service until it has been made safe.
11	**D**	Title 8 Section 3276(e)(16)(D) does not allow stepladders longer than 20 feet; a stepladder's size is its overall length measured along the front edge of the side rails, not the height a worker may stand at. Painter's stepladders are limited to 12 feet.
12	**D**	Title 8 Section 1529(c)(1) sets the 8-hour TWA limit at 0.1 fiber per cubic centimeter of air. The 1.0 fiber/cc limit applies to a separate 30-minute sampling period.
13	**D**	CMC Section 304.4.3 requires a level working platform at least 30 × 30 inches in front of the service side. The access-opening exception does not apply to the separate platform described here.
14	**C**	CMC Section 1312.6 requires an accessible manual shutoff valve within 6 feet of the appliance it serves. Where a connector is used, the valve must be installed upstream of it.

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#	ANSWER	WHY
15	**B**	CMC Section 310.1 requires at least 1/8 inch of fall per foot toward the discharge point. This pitch allows condensate to drain by gravity.
16	**C**	CMC Section 305.1 requires the burner and burner ignition device to be at least 18 inches above the garage floor. The stated condition excludes the listed flammable-vapor-ignition-resistant appliance exception.
17	**D**	CMC Section 802.10.7 requires an upward slope of at least 1/4 inch per foot. For 6 feet, the minimum rise is 6 × 1/4 = 1-1/2 inches.
18	**B**	Terminal O energizes the reversing valve in cooling; a B terminal would energize it in heating instead. On a cooling call with the fan, R supplies control power to Y for the compressor, G for the indoor fan and O for the reversing valve. W is the heating or auxiliary-heat call, and connecting R to C would short the transformer's secondary. Wire colors alone do not establish terminal function.
19	**A**	CMC Section 304.4 sets a minimum opening of 22 × 30 inches. The opening and passage must also be larger than the appliance component that must pass through them.
20	**C**	For an unobstructed forward or side reach, the high reach limit is 48 inches above the finished floor (Sections 308.2.1 and 308.3.1), and Section 309.3 requires operable parts to fall within that range. The 44-inch value applies to certain obstructed forward reaches.

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