CSLB C-27 Landscaping 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/c27-landscaping-contractor

Scan to take it online

Exam topic areas and approximate weights

Planning and Estimating	18%
Construction Preparation	12%
Hardscape Installation	21%
Drainage, Irrigation, Lighting, and Plant Installation	21%
Maintenance and Repair	11%
Safety	17%

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Questions

1 HARDSCAPE INSTALLATION

Concrete for a patio will be placed on a hot, sunny afternoon. Which addition to the mix gives the crew more time to place and finish it?

(A) Extra portland cement
(B) A set-retarding admixture
(C) A set-accelerating admixture
(D) Extra coarse aggregate

2 HARDSCAPE INSTALLATION

What does years of sun (UV) exposure do to the uncovered edges of a flexible pond liner?

(A) It makes the liner attract mosquitoes
(B) It makes the liner leach dye into the water
(C) It breaks down the material and shortens its life
(D) It makes the liner swell and soften

3 HARDSCAPE INSTALLATION

What is the main reason for installing a perforated drain pipe behind a retaining wall?

(A) To make the backfill soil denser
(B) To relieve water pressure against the wall
(C) To vent air trapped in the backfill
(D) To supply water to plants above the wall

4 HARDSCAPE INSTALLATION

In masonry, what does a jack-on-jack bond pattern look like?

(A) A full course of headers every sixth course
(B) Units stacked directly over one another, joints aligned
(C) Headers and stretchers alternating in every sixth course
(D) Headers and stretchers alternating in every course

5 SAFETY

Before tipping a gas mower on its side to clear packed grass from under the deck, what should the operator disconnect first?

(A) The fuel line
(B) The spark plug wire
(C) The throttle cable
(D) The air filter cover

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6 SAFETY

A homeowner hires a landscape contractor to dig footings for a pergola. Who is responsible for notifying 811 (Underground Service Alert) before the digging starts?

(A) The homeowner who owns the property
(B) The city building inspector
(C) The contractor doing the digging
(D) The utility that serves the house

7 SAFETY

A crew member runs a backpack gas leaf blower for most of the workday. Which protective equipment guards against the most likely long-term injury?

(A) Steel-toe boots
(B) Safety glasses
(C) A dust mask
(D) Earplugs or earmuffs

8 SAFETY

A tree limb is resting on an overhead power line. How should a tree worker treat the limb?

(A) As safe to handle, since wood does not conduct electricity
(B) As safe to handle as long as the bark and leaves are dry
(C) As energized, since it can carry current to anyone who touches it
(D) As energized only when the line is rated above 50 kV

9 PLANNING AND ESTIMATING

A client wants a tree that will shade the west wall of the house in summer but let the sun warm that wall in winter. Which choice fits best?

(A) A dense broadleaf evergreen
(B) A tall pine or other evergreen conifer
(C) A deciduous shade tree
(D) A palm with a compact crown

10 PLANNING AND ESTIMATING

A 9,600 sq ft backyard is 65% lawn. All of the lawn will be replaced with sod sold in rolls that cover 10 sq ft each. How many rolls are needed?

(A) 960 rolls
(B) 336 rolls
(C) 6,240 rolls
(D) 624 rolls

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11 PLANNING AND ESTIMATING

A client wants a 6 ft fence along a side property line. Which local regulation sets the allowed fence height and setback?

(A) The street tree ordinance
(B) The parking ordinance
(C) The noise ordinance
(D) The zoning ordinance

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12 PLANNING AND ESTIMATING

An irrigation mainline is 325 feet long. If friction loss in this pipe is 3.20 psi per 100 feet, what is the total pressure loss along the run?

(A) 10.40 psi
(B) 3.25 psi
(C) 6.45 psi
(D) 104.00 psi

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13 DRAINAGE, IRRIGATION, LIGHTING, AND PLANT INSTALLATION

Groundwater collects in the soil next to a house foundation after every storm. Which subsurface system is most commonly installed in residential landscapes to intercept that water and carry it away?

(A) Dry well
(B) Catch basin
(C) French drain
(D) Grassy swale

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14 DRAINAGE, IRRIGATION, LIGHTING, AND PLANT INSTALLATION

On a low-voltage landscape lighting run, each fixture is a little dimmer than the one before it, and the last fixtures are the dimmest. What is the most likely cause?

(A) A transformer too small for the total load
(B) Fixtures wired in parallel on the run
(C) Cable too small for the length of the run
(D) Fixtures wired in series on the run

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15 DRAINAGE, IRRIGATION, LIGHTING, AND PLANT INSTALLATION

What voltage does a typical plug-in (AC-powered) irrigation controller send to the solenoids of its electric remote-control valves?

(A) 12 volts AC
(B) 24 volts AC
(C) 120 volts AC
(D) 9 volts DC

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16 DRAINAGE, IRRIGATION, LIGHTING, AND PLANT INSTALLATION

A 5-gallon shrub comes out of its can with roots circling the outside of the root ball. What should the installer do before planting it?

(A) Plant it in a hole dug twice as wide and leave the roots alone
(B) Wash all the soil off the roots before setting it in the hole
(C) Tease the circling roots outward and cut any that will not straighten
(D) Plant it as it is, because the roots will grow outward on their own

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17 MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR

A 3 ft by 5 ft area of a sand-set paver walkway has sunk about 1 in. What is the correct repair?

(A) Lift the pavers and bedding sand, add and compact base material, then relay the sand and pavers
(B) Lift the pavers, spread a layer of cement, and set the pavers back on it
(C) Lift the pavers, add extra bedding sand to raise the low area, then relay them
(D) Lift the pavers, install a subsurface drain, then relay them on the same sand

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18 MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR

When a branch is removed back to the trunk, where should the final cut be made?

(A) About one-quarter of the way out toward the branch tip
(B) Out from the trunk a distance equal to the branch diameter
(C) Flush with the trunk, removing the branch collar
(D) Just outside the branch collar, leaving the collar intact

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19 CONSTRUCTION PREPARATION

Before grading starts, a temporary fence is put up around a mature oak at or beyond its drip line. What is the main purpose of the fence?

(A) To mark the part of the canopy that must be thinned
(B) To keep compaction and digging out of the root zone
(C) To show where buried utilities pass under the tree
(D) To keep crews from trampling the lawn under the tree

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20 CONSTRUCTION PREPARATION

Straw wattles (fiber rolls) are staked in rows across a freshly graded slope. What are they for?

(A) Slowing runoff and trapping sediment
(B) Holding drip tubing in place on the slope
(C) Giving wildlife food and cover on the site
(D) Marking the grade lines for the finish crew

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Answer key and explanations

#	ANSWER	WHY
1	**B**	Heat speeds up cement hydration, so concrete loses slump and stiffens faster and may set before it is finished. A set-retarding admixture, often combined with a water reducer, slows the set and extends working time (NRMCA CIP 12, Hot Weather Concreting). An accelerator does the opposite and is used in cold weather, extra cement adds heat, and extra aggregate does not change the set time.
2	**C**	Ultraviolet light slowly breaks down the polymers in flexible liners, so exposed areas grow brittle and crack and the liner fails sooner; UV-stabilized EPDM resists this far better than PVC. That is why liner edges are covered with stone, gravel or soil and the water level is kept up. Mosquitoes are drawn to still water, not to the liner, and fish-safe liners do not leach dye.
3	**B**	Water that collects in the backfill pushes on the wall (hydrostatic pressure) and adds to the soil load, a leading cause of retaining wall failure. A perforated pipe in gravel at the base of the wall collects that water and carries it away, so pressure cannot build up. The drain does not compact soil, vent air or irrigate plants.
4	**B**	Jack-on-jack, more often called stack bond, places each unit directly over the one below, so the head joints line up in continuous vertical lines and the units do not overlap. Because nothing interlocks across those joints, stack-bond walls usually need horizontal joint reinforcement. A header course every fifth to seventh course is common (American) bond, and headers and stretchers alternating within each course is Flemish bond.
5	**B**	Turning the blade by hand can pull the engine through a compression stroke and start it. Disconnecting the spark plug wire after the engine has stopped, and keeping it away from the plug, prevents an accidental start while hands are near the blade; mower manuals require this before any cleaning, adjustment or blade work. Title 8 §3314(c) likewise requires equipment to be stopped and its power source de-energized or disengaged during cleaning and servicing. The fuel line, throttle cable and air filter do not stop the engine from firing.
6	**C**	Government Code 4216.2(b) puts the duty on the excavator, defined in §4216 as the person or company that digs with its own employees or equipment. The excavator marks out the dig area and notifies the regional notification center (811) at least two working days, and no more than 14 calendar days, before starting. The owner, the inspector and the utility do not make the call for the contractor.
7	**D**	Gas blowers are loud enough that a full day of use can exceed an 8-hour average of 85 decibels, which causes permanent hearing loss over time. Title 8 §5098 requires employers to provide hearing protectors at no cost to employees exposed at or above that level and to make sure they are worn when required. Safety glasses and a dust mask guard against debris and dust and are also worth wearing, but hearing loss is the lasting injury.
8	**C**	Title 8 GISO §3423(a) requires tree workers to be trained to treat lines and equipment as energized with potentially fatal voltage, and notes that a shock can come through indirect contact with an energized tree limb, tool or other object that gives the current a path to ground. Green wood holds moisture and conducts electricity, dry bark does not make a limb safe, and no voltage threshold makes a limb in contact with a line safe to touch.
9	**C**	A deciduous tree is in leaf during the hot months, blocking the afternoon sun on the west side, and drops its leaves in autumn, so winter sunlight reaches the wall and windows. Evergreen trees, broadleaf or conifer, shade all year and are better used as windbreaks, and a palm casts little shade (U.S. DOE Energy Saver, Landscaping for Energy-Efficient Homes).

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#	ANSWER	WHY
10	**D**	Find the lawn area, then divide by the coverage of one roll: 9,600 × 0.65 = 6,240 sq ft of lawn, and 6,240 ÷ 10 = 624 rolls. 960 rolls would cover the whole yard, 336 rolls covers only the 35% that is not lawn, and 6,240 is the lawn area itself, not a number of rolls.
11	**D**	Zoning ordinances regulate land use and where structures may go, including fence and wall heights in front, side and rear yards, setbacks and corner visibility. Street tree, parking and noise ordinances deal with other matters. A fence over 7 ft high also needs a building permit (CRC R105.2), and pool barriers follow the building code.
12	**A**	Friction loss is given per 100 ft, so convert the length to hundreds of feet and multiply: P = dfracL100 × f = dfrac325100 × 3.20 = 10.40 psi where L is the pipe length in feet and f is the loss per 100 ft. Using 3.25 alone ignores the loss rate, adding 3.25 + 3.20 mixes two different quantities, and 104 psi comes from dividing the length by 10 instead of 100.
13	**C**	A French drain is a gravel-filled trench, usually with a perforated pipe at the bottom, that intercepts groundwater and carries it by gravity to a safe outlet. A dry well is a buried gravel pit or chamber that stores runoff piped or drained into it, often through a surface inlet, and lets it soak into the ground; it does not intercept groundwater along a foundation. A catch basin collects surface runoff through a grate, and a grassy swale carries surface water in a shallow vegetated channel.
14	**C**	Voltage drop builds up along the run in proportion to the cable's resistance and the current it carries, so when the cable is too small for the run's length and load, each fixture gets a little less voltage than the one before it and the last ones are dimmest. The fix is heavier cable, a shorter or split run, hub or loop wiring, or a higher transformer tap. An overloaded transformer dims every fixture at once or trips; fixtures wired in series share the supply voltage, so the whole string is dim and goes out if one fixture fails, rather than dimming fixture by fixture along the run; parallel connection is the normal method.
15	**B**	Standard irrigation controllers have a transformer that supplies about 24 volts AC to the valve solenoids; each station wire and the shared common carry this low voltage to energize the solenoid and open the valve (Rain Bird design manual). The controller itself is powered from 120 volts AC, and 9-volt DC latching solenoids are used with battery-operated controllers, not plug-in ones.
16	**C**	Roots that circle a container keep circling after planting and can girdle the plant or leave it poorly anchored. Loosening them outward and cutting the ones that cannot be straightened makes new roots grow into the surrounding soil. A wide hole is good practice, but by itself it does not stop the circling. Washing off all the soil dries and damages the fine roots, and circling roots do not straighten on their own.
17	**A**	A sunken area usually means the aggregate base under the bedding sand has settled. The pavers and bedding sand are removed, base material is added and compacted back to grade, a uniform layer of bedding sand about 1 in thick is screeded over it, and the pavers are relaid, compacted and joint-sanded; if lifting the pavers shows bedding sand washing away through an edge or a drain opening, that leak is sealed too. Building up the low spot with extra bedding sand leaves a thick, unstable layer that settles again, and cement under sand-set pavers forms a rigid layer that cracks and traps water. A drain helps only where water is the cause, and it does not restore the base.
18	**D**	The final cut is made just outside the branch bark ridge and the branch collar, the swollen area at the base of the branch, so the collar is left intact. The collar's tissue closes over the wound and limits the spread of decay into the trunk. A flush cut removes that protective zone and leaves a larger wound, while a long stub dies back and decays instead of closing.

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#	ANSWER	WHY
19	**B**	Most of a tree's absorbing roots grow near the surface and spread to the drip line and beyond. A fence at or outside the drip line creates a tree protection zone that keeps equipment, foot traffic, stockpiled material, grade changes and trenching off those roots; compacted or cut roots are a common cause of tree decline after construction. The fence does not mark pruning, utilities or lawn areas.
20	**A**	A fiber roll is straw, coconut fiber or wood excelsior bound into a tight tube. Set along the contour of a slope in a shallow trench and staked, it intercepts runoff, slows it, spreads it out as sheet flow and holds back the sediment it carries (Caltrans Construction Site BMP Manual, SC-5 Temporary Fiber Rolls). Fiber rolls are not used to hold irrigation, feed wildlife or mark grades.

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