CSLB C-54 Ceramic and Mosaic Tile 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/c54-ceramic-and-mosaic-tile-contractor

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Exam topic areas and approximate weights

Planning and Estimating	18%
Preparation for Tile and Stone Installation	16%
Installation and Repairs	33%
Specialty Installations	15%
Safety	18%

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Questions

1 PLANNING AND ESTIMATING

When taking off quantities, how is trim tile such as bullnose and cove base measured?

(A) By the square foot
(B) By the lineal foot
(C) By the box
(D) By weight

2 PLANNING AND ESTIMATING

On a set of construction documents, what are the written requirements for materials, workmanship and installation methods that accompany the drawings called?

(A) Specifications
(B) Submittals
(C) Quantity takeoffs
(D) Shop drawings

3 PLANNING AND ESTIMATING

One bag of grout covers 60 sq ft of tile. How many bags must be bought to grout an 18 ft × 22 ft room?

(A) 6 bags
(B) 8 bags
(C) 5 bags
(D) 7 bags

4 PLANNING AND ESTIMATING

Which surface is the poorest choice for an outdoor pool deck because it becomes very slippery when wet?

(A) Flamed granite pavers
(B) Tumbled travertine pavers
(C) Polished porcelain tile
(D) Unglazed quarry tile

5 INSTALLATION AND REPAIRS

In which direction should the grout float be pulled across the tile when spreading and packing grout?

(A) In wide arcs around the room
(B) Parallel to the grout joints
(C) Straight across the joints at 90°
(D) Diagonally across the joints

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6 INSTALLATION AND REPAIRS

The grout has been cut out around one cracked tile in a bonded floor. Where should the setter start breaking the tile out so the neighboring tiles are not chipped?

(A) At one corner, prying up under the edge
(B) In the center, working out toward the edges
(C) Along one edge, chiseling against the joint
(D) Anywhere, with hard hammer blows on the face

7 INSTALLATION AND REPAIRS

Tiles 15 inches and larger are being set into combed thin-set mortar. To collapse the ridges and get full coverage, how should each tile be moved as it is pressed in?

(A) Back and forth at a right angle to the ridges
(B) Back and forth at a 45° angle to the ridges
(C) With a twisting, circular motion on the ridges
(D) Back and forth in line with the ridges

8 INSTALLATION AND REPAIRS

A floor is being set with travertine tile delivered on several pallets. What should the setter do for the most even overall appearance?

(A) Space every tile with the same plastic spacers
(B) Blend tiles from several boxes and pallets
(C) Finish one pallet before opening the next one
(D) Set the darkest tiles around the perimeter first

9 INSTALLATION AND REPAIRS

What happens to cement grout that is mixed with more water than the bag calls for?

(A) It cures weaker, shrinks and bonds poorly
(B) It leaves no haze on the tile face
(C) It cannot be packed into the joints
(D) It becomes too hard to finish smoothly

10 INSTALLATION AND REPAIRS

A tiled exterior concrete wall has an expansion joint in the concrete. Where must the movement joint in the tile go?

(A) Within 1 ft of the concrete's joint
(B) Within 4 in. of the concrete's joint
(C) Directly over the concrete's joint
(D) Within 6 in. of the concrete's joint

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11 INSTALLATION AND REPAIRS

Wall tile is installed down to the rim of a prefabricated shower receptor. What belongs in the joint between the tile and the receptor?

(A) The same cement grout used in the wall joints
(B) A flexible, mildew-resistant sealant
(C) A high-performance polymer-modified grout
(D) Open weep gaps left to drain the wall

12 SAFETY

During the daily check, a tile setter finds that the outer jacket of an extension cord is split and the insulated conductors show. What must be done with the cord?

(A) Wrap the split with electrical tape and keep using it
(B) Take it out of service until it is properly repaired
(C) Use it only on a GFCI-protected receptacle from now on
(D) Use it only for small tools that draw under 10 amperes

13 SAFETY

A fire starts in a pail of solvent used to clean tile adhesive. Which fire class is this?

(A) Class B
(B) Class A
(C) Class D
(D) Class K

14 SAFETY

To keep respirable crystalline silica dust down when cutting tile and stone, which kind of saw should be used whenever possible?

(A) Battery-powered dry-cutting saws
(B) High-speed abrasive cutoff saws
(C) Wet saws that feed water to the blade
(D) Saws fitted with larger-diameter blades

15 SPECIALTY INSTALLATIONS

Which of these is an acceptable way to support an undermount sink under a granite countertop?

(A) Nails driven through the sink rim into the cabinet sides
(B) Shims under the rim with no fasteners or sealant
(C) Clips fastened to anchors set in the stone's underside
(D) A bead of grout between the sink rim and the stone

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16 SPECIALTY INSTALLATIONS

The walls of a kitchen are out of square and not straight. What does a fabricator need to cut a stone slab countertop to fit the installed cabinets and walls?

(A) A field template, physical or digital
(B) A tape-measured sketch made on site
(C) The cabinet maker's shop drawings
(D) The architect's dimensioned floor plan

17 SPECIALTY INSTALLATIONS

A client has chosen handmade specialty tile. Which of these should the setter not expect from one tile to the next?

(A) Differences in shade and color from tile to tile
(B) Slightly irregular edges and shapes
(C) Variation in the surface pattern
(D) Exact, uniform sizing like rectified tile

18 PREPARATION FOR TILE AND STONE INSTALLATION

Before tile goes down, which tool is used to check a subfloor for flatness?

(A) A flat pry bar
(B) A straightedge
(C) A circular saw
(D) A framing square

19 PREPARATION FOR TILE AND STONE INSTALLATION

In a tiled shower, what does a waterproof membrane under the tile do that the tile and grout alone cannot?

(A) Keeps cracks in the slab from reaching the tile
(B) Keeps water out of the substrate and framing
(C) Lets tile be bonded straight to bare wood studs
(D) Keeps the grout joints from staining

20 PREPARATION FOR TILE AND STONE INSTALLATION

Old tile is being torn out of a bathroom in an occupied home. How should a nearby bedroom that is not part of the work be protected from the dust?

(A) Close the door and seal the opening with taped polyethylene sheeting
(B) Nail a sheet of plywood over the closed door from the hallway side
(C) Run a box fan on low in the bedroom to push dust back toward the work
(D) Tape the jamb and lay a towel along the bottom of the door

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Answer key and explanations

#	ANSWER	WHY
1	**B**	Field tile covers an area and is taken off in square feet, while trim follows edges: bullnose, cove base, quarter-round and similar pieces are measured along the runs they cover, in lineal feet, and that length is then converted to the number of pieces or cartons to order. Outside and inside corner pieces are counted separately.
2	**A**	The specifications (specs) are the written part of the contract documents: they set the quality of materials and workmanship, the standards to follow and the installation methods, while the drawings show locations, dimensions and quantities. Submittals and shop drawings are what the contractor sends back for approval, and a takeoff is the estimator's count of quantities from the drawings.
3	**D**	Floor area: 18 × 22 = 396 sq ft. Bags: 396 ÷ 60 = 6.6. Grout is bought in whole bags, so round up to 7 bags; rounding down to 6 would leave the last 36 sq ft ungrouted.
4	**C**	A polished face is glass-smooth, so a film of water leaves very little friction between a bare foot and the tile. Exterior and wet areas need textured surfaces, and slip resistance is rated by the dynamic coefficient of friction (DCOF) given on the tile maker's data sheet. Flamed granite, tumbled travertine and unglazed quarry tile all have rough or open surfaces and are common choices for wet outdoor areas.
5	**D**	Hold the float at about a 45° angle to the tile face and work it diagonally across the joints. A diagonal pass packs grout into both directions of joints at once, and the float edge rides on the tile corners instead of dropping into a joint and dragging grout out. Pulling the float along a joint gouges it, and arcs or square passes leave joints unevenly filled.
6	**B**	Start in the middle of the tile, for example by drilling a few holes or scoring an X across it, and break the pieces out working from the center toward the edges. That way no prying or chisel force is applied against the edges of the neighboring tiles. Prying at a corner or chiseling along a joint levers against the adjacent tile, and heavy blows crack tiles around the one being removed.
7	**A**	ANSI A108.5 calls for the tile to be embedded by beating in or by pushing it in a direction perpendicular to the combed ridges, which folds the ridges into the valleys, pushes the air out along the channels and gives the required coverage. This matters most for large tile, where open channels and trapped air under the tile are hardest to avoid. Moving the tile along the ridges or twisting it leaves the channels open and traps air.
8	**B**	Natural stone varies in color, veining and texture from block to block, so each box or pallet may hold a different shade range. Pulling tiles from several boxes and pallets at once, and dry-laying sections where needed, spreads the variation across the floor. Setting one pallet at a time produces visible patches or bands where the shade changes. Spacers keep the joints even but do nothing for the color, and putting the dark pieces at the edges is a deliberate border, not a blend.
9	**A**	Extra water thins the cement paste: as the excess evaporates it leaves pores, so the grout shrinks, cracks, dusts and ends up weaker and more porous, with poorer bond to the tile edges and uneven color. Grout makers specify the water per bag and call for letting the mix slake, then remixing it without adding more water. A wet mix is easier, not harder, to push into joints, and it tends to leave more haze, not less.
10	**C**	TCNA EJ171 requires movement joints in the backing to be carried through the tile, so the tile joint is placed directly over the concrete's joint. If the tile joint is offset, tile and bond coat bridge the moving joint and crack along it.

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#	ANSWER	WHY
11	**B**	The tile and a prefabricated receptor are different materials that move independently, and the joint between them is a change of plane. Industry guidance calls for a flexible sealant there instead of rigid grout, and in a shower it should be mildew-resistant. Any grout, even a polymer-modified one, cracks at that joint as the receptor flexes, and an open gap lets water into the wall.
12	**B**	On construction sites, Title 8 requires cord sets and cord-and-plug equipment to be inspected before each day's use for external defects such as insulation damage, and equipment found damaged or defective shall not be used until repaired (§2405.4(d)(3)). A cord may be repaired only by a splice that keeps the insulation, outer sheath and usage characteristics of the original cord, and only hard-service cord of No. 12 or larger may be spliced at all (§2500.9). Tape does not restore the jacket, and a GFCI or a light load does not make a damaged cord safe to keep in use.
13	**A**	Fires are classified by fuel. Class B fires involve flammable or combustible liquids and gases such as gasoline, solvents, lacquers and oils, and are fought with B-rated extinguishers (dry chemical, CO_2 or foam), never a stream of water. Class A covers ordinary combustibles like wood and paper, Class C energized electrical equipment, Class D combustible metals and Class K cooking oils and fats.
14	**C**	Water fed continuously to the blade wets the dust at the point of cutting before it can become airborne. Title 8 §1532.3 Table 1 lists an integrated water-delivery system as the control for stationary masonry saws and handheld power saws, and employers that follow it for a task are treated as meeting the exposure limits for that task. Battery power, blade speed and blade size do not reduce dust; dry cutting produces the most.
15	**C**	An undermount sink hangs below the stone, so it needs mechanical support. Common acceptable methods are mounting clips screwed to anchors or inserts set (often with epoxy) in the underside of the stone, a plywood sub-top or support with corrosion-resistant brass or stainless fasteners, or a routed plywood deck that cradles the rim; the joint is sealed with silicone. Nails through the rim, loose shims or a bead of grout do not hold the sink's weight and contents, and grout cracks as the sink moves.
16	**A**	Installed cabinets are never exactly where the drawings show them, and a stone top is cut and finished in the shop, so fixing a misfit on site is slow and risky. The top is therefore cut from a field template: a full-size physical template or a digital (laser) template made on the installed cabinets, recording every wall, corner, overhang and cutout. A tape-measured sketch misses the bows and out-of-square corners between the measured points, and shop drawings and plans are fine for estimating and ordering but not for cutting the stone.
17	**D**	Handmade and other specialty tiles vary from piece to piece in size, shape, edge straightness, color and surface pattern; that variation is part of their look. The setter blends tiles from several boxes, dry-lays to plan the layout and uses grout joints wide enough to absorb the size differences. Exact, uniform sizing is a property of machine-made rectified tile, whose edges are ground after firing, not of handmade tile.
18	**B**	Flatness is checked by laying a long straightedge (commonly 10 ft, usually aluminum) across the floor in several directions and measuring the gaps under it; the result is compared with the tolerance for the tile, such as 1/4 in in 10 ft for tile with all edges under 15 in. A flat bar is used to pry up old flooring and fasteners and a circular saw to cut panels to size; both are substrate-preparation tools, but neither measures flatness. A framing square checks square corners.
19	**B**	Tile and cement grout are not waterproof: water passes through grout joints and hairline cracks. A waterproof membrane, sheet or liquid-applied, under the tile stops that water before it reaches the backer board, subfloor or framing and directs it to the drain. Isolating cracks is the job of a crack isolation membrane (some products do both), and a membrane does not make tile bondable to bare studs or stop surface stains.

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#	ANSWER	WHY
20	**A**	Demolition dust, which can include respirable crystalline silica from tile, mortar and grout, travels through door gaps and on air currents. Closing the door and taping polyethylene sheeting (such as 6-mil plastic) over the opening forms a dust barrier for rooms outside the work area. A towel or plywood leaves gaps around the door, and a fan in the clean room only stirs the air and can pull dust through gaps.

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