

NCARB Live Follow-Up: The New Break Policy

Watch the video on [YouTube](#).

Jared Zurn [00:00]: Welcome everybody to another video in the NCARB answering questions from the latest NCARB Live. So this video is going to address a lot of questions around the new exam navigation and what it means to take a break. So I'll kick it off by saying, first question is:

Is the new break policy just for online exams or does it apply to in-person tests too?

So the new break policy does apply to both online and on-site exams. As we have said in some of our other videos, it's going to be the same test with the same tools, regardless of where a candidate takes it. And so if the policy applies to one, the policy applies to the other.

Michelle Cohn [00:43]: Okay. Our next question:

Can you confirm that viewing any question, even case studies, will mean that question is locked after a break?

And yes, I can confirm that if you view a question, you will not be able to view it again after you've taken a break. Now, for case studies, what this means is that if you have seen all of the questions in a case study, then all of those questions will be locked when you come back from the break. However, if you answer just a few of your case study questions, say for case study one, you get through the first few questions, you take a break, you come back, those first few questions that you saw will be locked. But the other questions in that same case study would not be locked because you hadn't viewed them yet. So that means you would still be able to access the resources for that case study because they are attached to those specific questions. So you would still be able to complete the rest of the questions in that case study for any questions that you had not seen prior to taking your break.

Jared Zurn [01:46]: So the next question is:

If I experience a technical problem and my exam is paused, will that lock my previously viewed items?

And the answer is no. So if a candidate's exam is paused due to a technical issue, it stops the exam timer, that does not put the candidate into break. That just simply pauses the exam, sitting on whatever question the candidate is on. When the exam is restarted, it will be on that question and the candidate can continue testing and go back and view previously viewed items just like if the technical issue had never happened. The items are only locked if the candidate goes on break.

Michelle Cohn [02:25]: All right, our next question:

Why are you extending the breaks so much if taking a break locks the previous questions on the exam?

Well, again, the break policy there is really designed for maximum flexibility for the candidate. If you don't want to take a break, you by no means have to. You could do the entire exam in one sitting, just get it done, and then you get back that extra time that's built into your testing time. If you do want to take a break, remember you don't have to take all of that break time at once. So I know it seems like in PPD and PDD, a 45-minute break, maybe as a candidate, you're thinking, "That's crazy. Why is that break time so long?"

Remember, it's there if you need it. If you don't need the 45 minutes, take as short a break as you want. Maybe you just need five minutes to just stretch a little bit, take a drink of water and sit back down again, that's fine too. Know that the questions that you saw before your break will be locked whether you take a five-minute break or a 45-minute break, but the break time itself, it's really up to you how much of that time you want to use.

Jared Zurn [03:37]: So our next question is:

Will candidates be able to view the references in a case study after the break, even if they saw all the questions in that case study?

So in that situation, the answer would be no, the candidate would not be able to go back and do the references available in a case study when they come back from break. Because once you viewed all the items in a case study, you go on break. When you come back, those items are going to be locked, which means there's really no way to get back in and look at those references.

Michelle Cohn [04:11]: Next question:

Why can't candidates add unused break time to their available testing time?

Well, so the answer here is about maintaining fairness across all candidates, taking those same tests. So the testing time, which you can see in the guidelines, it's laid out there, you can see the amount of time that you're given within the test to answer the questions. And then there's an additional amount of time for the break, and that adds up to the total amount of time that you're given for that particular testing appointment. So if that unused break time was added back into the testing time, then it might mean that some candidates would actually have more time to answer questions than other candidates, which would not be fair. So really, it's about maintaining a consistent amount of testing time for all candidates. And the thing that varies is how candidates might use that break time during their exam.

Jared Zurn [05:13]: So our next question:

Is NCARB concerned that the new break policy may cause candidates to not take breaks?

I do think NCARB is going to be monitoring this. I think some candidates may choose to not take a break if they feel like they want to just keep answering questions and go back and review all

of them at once. I do think other candidates are going to adapt their testing strategies to go in and really take the exam more in sort of a rhythm of, "Let's answer 20 questions. Let's make sure I've got all those questions answered, and then I'm actually going to go on break and lock them because I know I don't want to think about them anymore." And allows the candidate to then move on to the next set of questions they want to answer again and not worry about those previous 20. But we will be monitoring this to see if candidate behavior does shift in one direction or another.

Michelle Cohn [06:04]: Many candidates like to quickly preview all the items when they start an exam. If we just view an item, will it be locked after a break?

And the answer there is yes. If you view an item, regardless of whether or not you click on an option in the multiple choice or type in a response in a fill in the blank, if you just view the item, it will be locked when you return from break. So as Jared was just mentioning, this may cause a shift in strategy for some candidates in terms of how they approach the test during their testing session. And perhaps as a candidate, you might, instead of previewing all of the items, if that's been your strategy in the past, perhaps you just mentally think about this as being an exam in several sections. And maybe you preview just the first 30 items, respond to those, take your break, and then you preview the next 30 items. If that's a strategy that you've used, you might want to think about ways to just shift that to make sure that the break isn't going to trip you up with locking items.

Jared Zurn [07:07]: So our next question is:

If candidates don't take a break at any point in their test, can they review all the questions at the end of their appointment?

And the answer is yes, you will be able to review all previously viewed questions up until the point where a candidate goes on break.

Michelle Cohn [07:25]: Okay. Next question:

How do you take a break if you're testing online?

So that is a great question. And we will be having some videos that talk about specifically how these tools are used. But the long and the short of it is that in your testing session, you'll see the same test as a candidate would in the test center where there's going to be a button that says break. So it's going to be in the upper right corner. I think many of you might be familiar with that if you've already been testing in the test center, or if you have experienced the demo exam through your NCARB Record. So you'll be clicking that break button, the software will then give you a quick summary view of what items you've seen and what items you haven't seen. So kind of a reminder of, "Hey, make sure that if you want to look at these items again, you do it now before you go on your break." You'll then have the option to confirm that, "Yes, indeed. I do want to go on a break."

Now, the added thing that you'll need to do if you are testing through an online proctored appointment is you'll need to now let your online proctor know that you're taking a break. And that'll be really easy. You can actually just speak out loud because you do have that audio and video connection, or there's going to be a chat tool in the online proctoring software. So either way, you'll just want to let your proctor know that you're taking a break so that he or she doesn't think you're just walking away from the camera.

When you're done with your break, just like in the test center, you will need to go back through an online security check-in process. So you'll want to make sure that you allow a little bit of time. As part of your break, you want to allow a few minutes to go through that check-in process just as if you were in the test center. Once you're checked back in, again, you'll be back in your software and you will say, "end break," and you'll be back into your exam and you can navigate to the next question that you want to answer.

Jared Zurn [09:18]: So our next question is:

How much break time will candidates have after the online proctoring launch?

So the new break times are going to be 30 minutes for most of the divisions, except for the two large divisions, PPD and PDD, they will have 45 minutes of break time each.

Michelle Cohn [09:39]: Okay. **Can candidates still mark items for review?**

Yes, absolutely. The mark items feature is still going to be available within your testing platform. And again, it just comes back to maybe shifting your strategy in terms of how you review marked items of wanting to make sure you review them before you go on your break. When you come back, you will not be able to view them again, even if you had marked them previously.

Jared Zurn [10:04]: So the next question:

Has NCARB considered emergency situations that may warrant an unintended break, which would result in someone being unable to finish those questions?

So again, an emergency situation at a test center, let's say all of a sudden the fire alarm goes off and you're in the middle of testing. That is not a break. So what would happen in that situation is if the fire alarm goes off, the TCA (the test center administrator) would administratively pause the exam. And I believe we mentioned earlier in this video that if an exam is paused, that's not a break. When the candidate returns, they would still be on that same question, would still be able to go back and review items. It's only when the candidate implements the break feature that the candidate is on break and those items are locked when they return.

Michelle Cohn [10:54]: Okay. Next question:

Does a locked item mean that it will not be able to be viewed again or only that it cannot be answered or modified?

So both of those things, if an item is locked, that means you cannot view it and you cannot modify or change the answer that you had previously selected for it. So if you viewed an item but haven't answered it yet, you won't be able to view it again and answer it. So you want to make sure that you answer all of those questions before you go on your break.

Jared Zurn [11:32]: So the next question:

Does the five-hour appointment time for PDD include the 45-minute break?

Yes, it does. The five-hour appointment time is the total appointment time, which is four hours and five minutes of testing time, the 45 minutes of break time, as well as 10 minutes for some intro and exit screenings while testing.

Michelle Cohn [11:54]: Next question:

If I access the first question of the case study before a break, are all questions within that case study, then blocked after my break?

All right, so we spoke about case studies a few minutes ago, so just reiterating here that the other questions within that case study would be available to you after you come back from your break. That first question sounds like you view that before your break, that one is going to be locked, you won't be able to go back to it. But remember, the resources for a case study are viewable within every item within that case study, meaning you won't lose any access to any of those case study resources, you would just not be able to see whichever case study item you had looked at before your break.

Jared Zurn [12:37]: So our next question says:

If I want to take an informal break and use the restroom without clicking the break button, will I have the opportunity to review previously viewed items?

The first thing we need to point out is that there is no such thing as an informal break. Candidates, when they do get up and walk away from the workstation, whether they're in a test center or whether they're online testing from home or some other remote location, must execute the break function before they get up and leave the chair. If they do not, the test center administrator is going to consider that the candidate has abandoned their exam appointment. And so it's really critical that every candidate, if you're going to leave the workstation, that if you're online, you notify the proctor in advance that you're going to take a break. The proctor is going to verify that you have entered the break screen. If you're at a test center and you get up from the workstation and go to check out of the room, the proctor at the test center is going to verify that you have executed the right function on the computer.

Michelle Cohn [13:37]: All right. So our next question:

How does this new break policy comply with test takers who have other immune disorders, might be diabetic, et cetera, conditions where they might need to take breaks suddenly and urgently and not be able to take time to review all of their unviewed questions?

And so I think what candidates should remember is that NCARB has always had an accommodations process, and that we will continue to have an accommodations process. So if you have a medical condition or a temporary condition, something that might affect your ability to test according to standard policies, then by all means reach out to NCARB's customer service departments. The information about that is included in the *ARE Guidelines*. And our team can work with you to determine what sort of accommodation might be useful and appropriate for you so that we can implement that prior to your taking your tests.

Jared Zurn [14:35]: So our next question says:

If I skip ahead to do the case studies first, will it mark all previous questions as incomplete and thus unable to be reviewed after taking a break?

It will not. So what you would want to do in that case is you will be at the exam summary screen, you will want to then click the first case study question, and it will automatically jump you to the first case study question. All of the previous items are still going to remain in the unviewed state. So the key is use the exam summary screen to do that navigation. Do not click the next button rapidly, because if you do that, you are actually then loading each question and they would be considered viewed.

Michelle Cohn [15:17]: All right, related to that, our next question is:

Taking the exam now, I am able to look at the exam summary and select questions to answer out of order. With the new break system in place, will we not be able to do this? Do we have to answer all the questions in order?

So echoing some of what Jared said, from that exam summary screen, you can absolutely just jump to whatever questions you want to answer. I'm not sure if the person who submitted this question was literally saying, "I just like to kind of jump to different questions, not necessarily to the case studies," but in either case, you will be able to see that exam summary screen before you even see question one. So you'll be able to select which questions you want to answer first.

And the other thing that will be really critical then is that when you go back to your exam summary screen, you'll see pretty clearly there which questions you have answered, which questions you've looked at but not answered and which questions you haven't even looked at yet. And so that'll give you that guide to know of which questions are going to be locked when you come back from break. So if you need to review any, you can be sure to go back to those questions before you take your break.

Jared Zurn [16:32]: So the next question says (it's a "for instance"):

If I finish answering all of my questions and then take a break, when I come back from break, will I be able to review my questions again and edit answers?

And the answer to this is no. So if you answer all the questions, that means you have viewed all of them. If you then go on break, when you return, all of those questions would be locked.

Michelle Cohn [16:59]: Okay. Similar question here:

Can we go back and provide the answers to incomplete questions after the break or are they locked and therefore, automatically wrong since they are incomplete if you don't answer before a break?

So yes, as Jared mentioned, those questions are going to be locked when you come back from the break, if they are incomplete before you go on a break. And again, incomplete is something that you have looked at, but have not yet answered. So if you haven't answered them, then you don't have the potential of scoring a point. So again, this goes back to a previous video where we talked about scoring and every question being worth one point.

And so if you view a question, you don't answer it, you go on break, you come back, those questions are locked. That is now a whole bunch of points that you're not going to be able to earn. And so that's really a missed opportunity there to score questions on the exam. So it is really important to make sure that you don't leave a lot of those incomplete questions when you go on break, because they will be locked and thus not eligible for points when you come back from your break.

Jared Zurn [18:14]: So our next question says:

Since we aren't allowed to change previously viewed questions after break, are we allowed to access study materials during the break?

And the answer is yes. And you're going to be allowed to access your cell phone and things like that. It's actually one of the benefits of this new policy, is that today, candidates basically have to go into the test center, kind of fall into a black box. They're not able to reach out and check with their childcare providers or their office, even in the middle of a long exam. With the new policy in place, candidates are going to have full access to their locker. You'd be able to check your cell phone. If you want to look at a study guide, you could. If that's how you want to approach taking the test. That would be an option.

Michelle Cohn [19:00]: All right, next question:

Will the case study references be available and unlocked after a break?

In the current version of the exam, you can only look at those case study references while you have a case study question open, and that question would now be locked after a break. So going back to some of our previous questions about case studies earlier in this video, it is correct that if you look at the case study question before a break, when you come back from the break, that question is going to be locked. So if you have, and I think what this person was

mentioning here, if you've looked at all of the case study questions before a break, when you come back from the break, those questions are locked. And so all of the references that are part of that case study, therefore will not be viewable or accessible when you come back from the break. Remember that all of the case study resources are really part of each of the questions within the case study. So once those questions are locked, then those resources cannot be accessed either.

Jared Zurn [20:06]: And again, I think we have another clarifying question on the same, locking of items. It says:

Can I view questions seen before a break even if I can't change the answer?

And the answer is no, you will not be able to even go see the question. So let's say you have viewed question number one, and you answered it. And let's say, you did that for questions one through 20, you answered all those questions. When you go on break, when you come back, questions one through 20 will be locked. And what locked means is that you literally have no way of accessing those questions anymore. You can't click on them to jump to them directly, you can't use the next or the previous button to get to them. Those items are truly locked and will be no longer visible during that testing appointment.

Michelle Cohn [20:51]: Okay. Next question, moving off of our locked and unlocked questions here:

Can candidates exit the room they're testing in during the online proctor delivery to take a bathroom or a snack or water break?

And the answer is yes, for sure. That is what the break is for. So we talked earlier in this video about the process for taking a break. So once you have selected the break button within your testing platform, you've notified the proctor that you're going on a break, by all means you can leave your secure testing area, do what you need to do within your allotted break time. Remember that when you come back into your secure testing area, you notify the proctor that you're ready to access your test again, you will go back through that secure check-in process and then you will be able to access your exam.

Jared Zurn [21:42]: So the next question says:

Will we have a warning of what questions have not been answered or be locked prior to logging off for the break?

And the answer is absolutely. The way the function of the software is going to work is that when you click on that break button, it's actually going to bring you to the exam summary screen, and you have not started your break. The exam summary screen is what shows you which questions have been completed, it shows you which answers you may have left incomplete, and it also shows you any items you marked for later review.

So the expectation would be that you would go back, and any item that was incomplete, you would go and complete it. Or any item that you had marked for review, you would go and maybe check that if you wanted to. And then from the exam summary screen, there's the button, the bright button changes to take my break. When you click that, then you officially are on break and all of those previously viewed items would be locked. So you're going to definitely get a warning. You're going to have the opportunity to navigate back and make any changes that you would want to be for taking a break.

Michelle Cohn [22:48]: Our next question:

Does the new break rule mean we will be able to leave the testing center?

So again, the answer here is yes. So this goes back to Jared's points just a few minutes ago about being able to access cell phones, access study materials if you need to. Again, the items are going to be locked when you come back from break, so from a security concern, we're okay if you need to leave the testing center, maybe you need to check something in your car, maybe you just need to get some fresh air. So if you do need to leave the testing center, just keep track of your break time, make sure you come back and then you'll be able to get back into the testing center.

Jared Zurn [23:29]: Okay. So the next question:

Say we are taking one of the exams with a 45-minute break. Can we separate the breaks up to smaller chunks, for example, three 15-minute breaks?

Absolutely. You're given a total amount of break time, so in this example, 45 minutes, you can actually take as many breaks as you want. You could take three 15-minute breaks if you wanted to, at which point you will run out of break time. You could still take a fourth break if you need it. The difference there is that when you take that fourth break, it is going to count against your overall testing clock.

Michelle Cohn [24:03]: All right. So our next question here:

Can you stand up and stretch without taking an official break?

So the answer here is yes. And I can certainly relate to that, sometimes you're sitting at your computer for a while, you just need to roll away, just kind of wiggle a little bit, stretch your arms. Totally understand that. Candidates should just know that that might cause the proctor to suddenly ask, "Hey, what's going on?" while you're doing that.

So if you are in a test center and you suddenly stand up from your chair and just stretch a little bit, that test center administrator on the other side of the window is probably going to pop into the room, want to talk to you, see what's going on. So you can sit back down and start testing again, just know you're probably going to have that conversation. If you were in the online proctored delivery, similar thing is, you want to make sure that you stay within the frame of your camera. So if I'm stretching, I don't want to move off camera to the side, I want to kind of

stretch on camera. And in fact, I might take the opportunity to actually notify the proctor ahead of time through that chat tool, or just by speaking out loud, and you'll say, "Hey, I just need to stretch for 30 seconds."

Stay within the view of your camera. Maybe don't do that over and over again, that will start to raise some alarms. But certainly letting the proctor know what's happening there and staying within view. And that is a reasonable thing to do during your test.

Jared Zurn [25:37]: So, Michelle, I think I'll follow up a little bit on that. You had mentioned earlier about testing accommodations. I think there's normal stretching, which we all do, and you'll see me shift in my chair, just like you had said, and you can kind of stretch your back and your arms a little bit. But if you're someone who has a medical condition that needs to do true stretching and more frequently while taking a test, that is the perfect time to get an accommodation that allows for additional break time. So you could just take an official break. You don't have to worry about being on camera, and you could do it that way. So remember the testing accommodations are in place for candidates who need to do additional stretching exercises. I know we have some of those approved today for some of our candidates.

And now, I'll bring us to our last question on this video, which is:

Do we have full access to our lockers then since we can't go back to previously answered comments?

And similar to the question answered earlier, absolutely. If you're at the test center and you go on break, you have full access to your locker. If you are testing in an online environment and you're on break, you can certainly get up, leave the room, go to your refrigerator, do what you need to do, or go to the refrigerator in the office, have your beverage, take your break, and then come back, go through the check-in process and then get back into testing.

So thank you very much for watching this video. We do know there are a lot of questions on the navigation and break changes that are coming with ARE 5.0. We hope you found these answers helpful and really clarified the situation. When we do launch the demonstration exam, you're going to have an opportunity to experience exactly what the flow is like as far as taking a break, as Michelle had described. I think once you're able to do that, you'll see how easy this is going to be for you. As well as again, adjusting a little bit of your testing strategy to make sure that you take those breaks at an appropriate time, that you're checking your work as you go, and then sort of just moving on from those questions and then not worrying about them. So thank you very much.