



COUNTDOWN CHECKLIST

**A TACTICAL READINESS CHECKLIST
FOR INTERN ARCHITECTS
TO PASS THE EXAC**

From registration to exam morning.



HOW TO USE THIS CHECKLIST:

Built for the November exam.

This checklist breaks your prep into four stages anchored to that date:



Work top-to-bottom inside each stage. Don't skip ahead — the earlier stages set up the later ones.

Print it. Tape it to the wall. Tick boxes by hand.

The most prepared candidates aren't the ones who study the longest — they're the ones who stay organized.

Updated for the 2026 ExAC sitting. Always confirm dates, permitted items, and rules against the current ExAC Preparation Guide and your licensing authority before registering or writing the exam.

5 MONTHS OUT

Set the foundation before the studying gets heavy.

Eligibility & registration

ACTION ITEM	DONE
Confirm intern / candidate status with your provincial regulator (OAQ, OAA, AIBC, AAA, etc.).	☐
Verify you have (or will submit) the minimum 2,800 approved experience hours before the IAP submission deadline.	☐
Register for the ExAC through your licensing authority during the 2026 registration window: June 1 to July 10, 2026 (noon local time).	☐
Confirm your exam-day language: English or French. Both versions test the same content.	☐
Request accommodations early if needed (large print, extra time, private room, transcriber).	☐
Add the 2026 exam dates to your calendar: November 2 and November 3, 2026.	☐

Reference library

ACTION ITEM	DONE
Download the current-year ExAC Preparation Guide from the ExAC website.	☐
Order or borrow the National Building Code of Canada (NBC), 2020 edition — without provincial adaptations. Paper copy only, you'll annotate it for Section 2.	☐
Order or borrow the National Energy Code of Canada for Buildings (NECB), 2020 edition. Paper copy only.	☐
Get the Canadian Handbook of Practice (CHOP) for contracts, ethics, project management — or bookmark the RAIC's website for easy digital access.	☐
Get the Internship in Architecture Program (IAP) Manual — it mirrors the ExAC objectives.	☐
Identify the resources you need nationally and provincially — or download our resource guide.	☐

4 MONTHS OUT

Build the routine that carries you to November.

Plan your prep

ACTION ITEM	DONE
Map the 4 sections across the 5 months — roughly 4–5 weeks per section.	☐
Block recurring study time in your calendar (e.g., 2 weeknights + 1 weekend morning).	☐
Tell your employer your exam dates and request the days off now.	☐
Tell your household. Get buy-in on protected study time and reduced commitments in October.	☐
Choose your study method: cohort, self-study, EXACTLI course, or hybrid.	☐
Set up your study space — desk, lighting, printed checklist, calendar visible.	☐
Decide on your tracker: paper journal, spreadsheet, app. Pick one. Stick with it.	☐

Study rhythm

ACTION ITEM	DONE
Choose the order that suits your knowledge and speed.	☐
Block roughly 4 weeks per section. Don't front-load; pace is what carries you to November.	☐
Active recall, not passive reading — use quizzes, flashcards, and short-answer practice every session.	☐
End each week with a 30-minute review of what you covered. Note what didn't stick.	☐
Track weak themes in a single document. You'll return to them in the next stage.	☐
Start tabbing your NBC and NECB now — Section 2 is open book and your tabs are half the work.	☐

1 MONTH OUT

Shift from coverage to performance.

Mock exams & weaknesses

ACTION ITEM	DONE
Take one full Section 1 mock under timed conditions. Score it. Note weakest themes.	☐
Take one full Section 2 mock using ONLY your annotated code books. Confirm your tabs work.	☐
Take one full Section 3 mock. Hand-sketch the short-answer responses.	☐
Take one full Section 4 mock. Score it. Note weakest themes.	☐
For each weak theme, do 60–90 min of targeted review. No new material — only patching.	☐
Re-take the questions you got wrong, two weeks later.	☐

Code books — final pass

ACTION ITEM	DONE
Confirm your NBC tabs: Division A definitions; Parts 3, 4, 5, 6, 9; Table 3.1.2.1 major occupancy classification; Table 3.1.17.1 occupant load; Table 3.1.3.1 major occupancy fire separations, etc.	☐
Confirm your NECB tabs: envelope tables, prescriptive vs. trade-off path, lighting power density tables.	☐
Annotations, highlighting, underlining, circling, and tabs are permitted — but added pages (extra index, table, references) are not. Strip any inserted pages.	☐
Replace any sticky tab that is curling or falling off.	☐
No marking or annotation of any kind is permitted in your code books during the exam — finalize everything before exam day.	☐

EXAM WEEK

Remove every avoidable source of stress.

Logistics

ACTION ITEM	DONE
Confirm exact test site address, room, and check-in time (arrive 30 minutes before the start of the exam).	☐
Plan your route to the test site — drive or transit dry-run if you've never been there.	☐
Plan parking, transit fallback, weather buffer (November in Canada — plan for snow, ice, delays). The exam is held regardless of weather.	☐
Confirm hotel booking if travelling. Book one night earlier than you think you need.	☐
Print your Letter of Authorization to write the ExAC. Print it twice. Without it, you will not be admitted to the exam.	☐
Confirm your photo ID is official, current, and shows your signature (passport, driver's licence, citizenship card).	☐

48 hours before

ACTION ITEM	DONE
Stop studying new material. Read your one-page summary sheet only.	☐
Light review of your code book tabs — don't add anything new.	☐
Sleep schedule — sleep at the same time both nights.	☐
Eat normal, familiar meals. This is not the week to try anything new.	☐
Hydrate. Lay off drugs and alcohol.	☐
Tell your closest people you'll be unavailable. Mute non-essential notifications.	☐

EXAM WEEK

Remove every avoidable source of stress.

Bag to pack — night before

ACTION ITEM	DONE
Official photo ID with signature (passport, driver's licence, citizenship card).	☐
Letter of Authorization to write the ExAC (printed).	☐
Annotated paper NBC, NECB 2020 edition, without provincial adaptations.	☐
Basic calculator — non-programmable, non-communicating, non-printing.	☐
HB pencils (only HB is accepted on the answer sheet).	☐
Eraser, small pencil sharpener, small ruler.	☐
Watch or silent travel clock (analog, no smart features).	☐
Water bottle, foam or rubber earplugs, and paper tissues.	☐
Layers — the exam room temperature is unpredictable.	☐

Exam day

ACTION ITEM	DONE
Wake up early enough to eat a balanced breakfast and not rush.	☐
Arrive at the site 30 minutes before check-in.	☐
Read each MCQ stem twice before looking at options.	☐
Flag uncertain questions; come back to them. Don't burn time stuck on one.	☐
For Section 2, trust your tabs. Don't read the code book front-to-back — navigate.	☐
Use breaks: stand up, water, snack, breathe. No exam-talk with other candidates.	☐
After Day 1 — do not review answers. Eat. Sleep. Day 2 is a fresh exam.	☐
After Day 2 — you're done. Walk out. Results come later. Trust the work.	☐

DO NOT BRING

Prohibited items

LEAVE AT HOME.



Dictionaries, bilingual dictionaries, or translation devices.



Books, notes, or any reference documents (other than the permitted NBC/NECB for Section 2).



Scratch paper — it will be provided onsite.



Headphones or earbuds, wired or wireless.



Food or candy, unless approved through an accommodation request.



Smart watches, phones, tablets, laptops, or any other electronic device. If brought, they must be turned off and stowed under your desk; you may not access them, even during breaks.



Pens of any colour — only HB pencils are permitted, including for written responses.



Any added pages (extra index, tables, references) inserted into your NBC or NECB. They may be confiscated.

Always confirm permitted items and current rules against the official ExAC Preparation Guide and your licensing authority.

**You've seen the shape of the work.
The rest is execution, and you don't have to do it
alone.**

01 — Download

Get your reference library in order.

Pull the current-year ExAC Preparation Guide from the ExAC website, then download the EXACTLI Resource Guide, a curated map of every official reference grouped by section, plus EXACTLI's own library.

02 — Webinar

Join an EXACTLI webinar.

Three live sessions a year: kickoff (March), mid-cycle deep dive (July), and final sprint (October). Free to attend, taught by Canadian architects who teach this material at McGill, Université de Montréal, and Cégep du Vieux Montréal.

03 — Community

Study with people who get it.

The EXACTLI community brings together intern architects from across Canada (in English and en français) to share notes, ask questions, and prep for the November exam together. The candidates who pass aren't the ones who study in isolation.

EXACTLI.CA

DISCLAIMER:

EXACTLI is an independent preparation resource. It is not approved, endorsed, or guaranteed by the Examination for Architects in Canada (ExAC) or any Canadian architectural licensing authority. No course, checklist, or study guide can guarantee a passing result.