

ARBORIST



Study and Self-Assessment Guide

2026

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FORWARD

This study guide was developed by the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency (NSAA) in collaboration with input from industry experts and instructors. Its purpose is to help apprentices and trade qualifiers strengthen their skills and prepare effectively for certification.

The guide focuses on the following key objectives:

- to provide relevant resources and supports for exam preparation
- to identify tasks performed by skilled workers
- to supply apprentices and trade qualifiers with trade-related assessments to identify learning gaps
- to facilitate the success rate of apprentice and trade qualifier certifications

Any questions, comments, or suggestions for changes, corrections, or revisions to this study guide or any of its related products may be forwarded to:

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INTRODUCTION

In Nova Scotia to be recognized as a certified Arborist, you must have one of the following:

- a **certificate of qualification** (CofQ),
- have a **certificate** recognized by the Director

By successfully completing all certification requirements as an apprentice or trade qualifier including passing your certification exam and meeting the required hours of on-the-job experience, you will receive your **Certificate of Apprenticeship** and/or **Certificate of Qualification**, confirming you are qualified to do the work of an Arborist in Nova Scotia.

About this Study Guide

This Study Guide was created by the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency to help you prepare and study for the **Arborist certification examination** as an apprentice or trade qualifier.

This guide is designed to help you:

- Understand the skills and knowledge covered on the exam
- Help you identify your strengths and areas of opportunity
- Assist you in organizing content areas into manageable pieces
- Provide you with additional resources to help you successfully complete certification

The Arborist certification exam is based on the trade activities, skills and knowledge outlined by industry experts in the [Arborist Nova Scotia Occupational Standard](#).

The assessments, study plans, resources and references in this guide are designed to help you prepare you for your certification exam. By reflecting on your current understanding of the trade, identifying knowledge gaps and applying effective study strategies while reviewing relevant materials, you can position yourself for success on exam day.

ARBORIST



An Arborist is a trained specialist in the care, management, and maintenance of trees and other woody plants. Their work includes planting, pruning, removal, and applying treatments to support plant health and address pests, diseases, and structural issues.

Arborists operate in residential, commercial, and municipal environments, often working near utilities and buildings while using equipment such as aerial lifts, chainsaws, climbing systems, woodchippers, and stump grinders. They also provide professional assessments and recommendations for property owners, businesses, and government agencies.¹

Key attributes of those in the Arborist trade are:

- Manual dexterity and physical mobility
- Problem-solving
- Environmental stewardship
- Hand-eye coordination
- Outdoor enthusiast

¹ Nova Scotia Occupational Standard Arborist

Trade Qualifier



As a trade qualifier you have significant experience within the Arborist trade but are not a registered apprentice or currently certified in the trade.

To qualify to write your certification exam:




- ✓ You have over **8,100** hours experience
- ✓ You have two people who can **attest to your skills** in the trade
- ✓ You're **ready to challenge the exam**

This study guide is designed to help you prepare to take the provincial certification exam while you are waiting for the paperwork and exam date. You may have extensive working experience; however, you will be tested on the full scope of your trade during the certification exam. This study guide and resources will help guide your exam preparation, ensuring your level of comprehension encompasses the knowledge and skills of the entire trade.

To access the guidelines and process for the [Trade Qualification Program](#) in Nova Scotia, use this link or visit the [NSAA website](#).

Arborist Certification Exam

The Arborist certification exam has **100 multiple choice questions**. There are three types of questions you will see on the exam: **knowledge & recall; procedural & application and critical thinking**. Below are examples of each type of question.

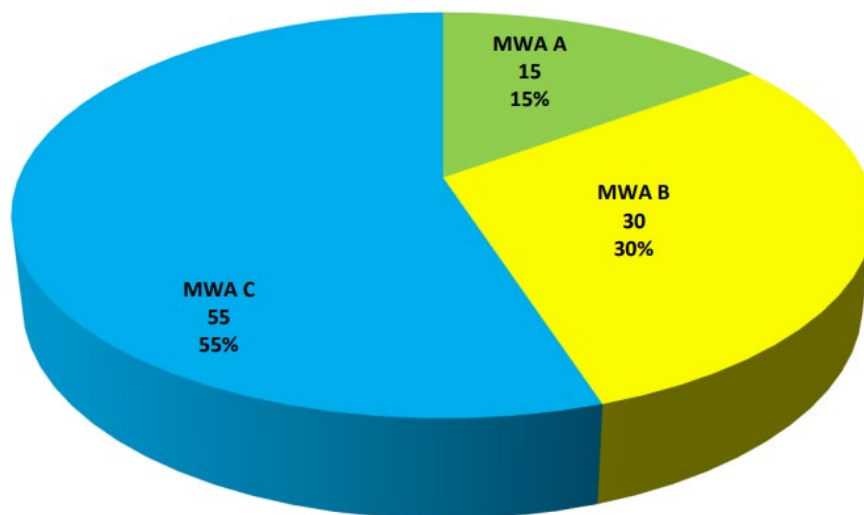
	Testing	Example Question
Knowledge & Recall 	Tests your ability to recall and understand definitions, facts and principles .	What does a sonic tomograph measure? A) Tree age. B) Wood density. C) Tree health. D) Moisture content.
Procedural & Application 	Tests your ability to apply your knowledge of procedures to a situation.	What is the procedure to maintain a respirator after use? A) Disassemble, inspect, clean, reassemble, then store. B) Clean, inspect, disassemble, store, then reassemble. C) Inspect, clean, disassemble, reassemble, then store. D) Store, disassemble, clean, inspect, then reassemble.
Critical Thinking 	Tests your ability to interpret data, solve problems and arrive at valid conclusions .	A scaffold has a maximum load of 300 kg. Two workers weigh a total of 200 kg and the tools weigh 70 kg, how much additional load can be added? A) 20 kg B) 30 kg C) 40 kg D) 50 kg

Certification Exam Weightings – Arborist

The Arborist trade consists of three Major Work Activities (MWA):

- **MWA A** Performs common occupational skills (15%)
- **MWA B** Performs routine work practices (30%)
- **MWA C** Performs tree work and maintenance (55%)

This pie chart represents the percentage (%) of questions on the certification exam based on each of the MWAs. Percentages are based on the collective input from Arborist representatives across Nova Scotia.²



By understanding the percentage of questions for each of the major work activities, you can begin to assess the areas to focus your studying based on your level of knowledge and experience.

In the following chart, each MWA is broken down into the performed tasks with the number of exam questions per task listed based on a 100-question exam.




You are asked to consider each task and rate your own understanding and experience. This assessment is designed for you to determine your strengths and weaknesses based on the content so you can prioritize your approach to studying.

² Nova Scotia Occupational Standard Arborist

Assess Your Knowledge

When determining exam readiness, it is important for you to assess your current level of understanding of the content. Below are the tasks defined in the [Arborist Nova Scotia Occupational Standard](#). These are the tasks outlining the trade activities, skills and knowledge required to be proficient in the trade.

Review each task carefully and determine your level of understanding and experience in the column at the end of each task:

 LOW	I have no or very little understanding or experience in this activity
 MEDIUM	I understand this activity and have some experience doing it in limited situations
 HIGH	I have a very good understanding of this activity and am fully competent in doing it in many situations

At the end of each Major Work Activity (MWA) section, note the areas of improvement.

Aligned with each task are applicable trade resources vetted by industry. You can review the applicable resources to expand your understanding and confidence of the content for when you write your certification exam.

There is also the [Arborist practice exam](#) that you can use to practice writing the certification exam and help gage your understanding.

Area of Competency Trade Skills by Task/Subtask		# of Questions out of 100	Level of Understanding LOW MEDIUM HIGH	Resources
MWA A – Performs common occupational skills (15%)				
<i>Task A-1 Performs safety-related functions</i>				
1.01	Uses personal protective equipment (PPE) and safety equipment	5		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Forest Professional • The Tree Climber's Companion • ANSI A300 Tree Care Standards
1.02	Maintains safe work environment			
<i>Task A-2 Uses tools and equipment</i>				
2.01	Uses hand tools	5		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Forest Professional • The Tree Climber's Companion • ANSI A300 Tree Care Standards
2.02	Uses power tools			
2.03	Uses measuring equipment and testing devices			
2.04	Uses trailers			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulations - Motor Vehicle - Trailer Couplings and Other Safety Devices • Guide-to-Nova-Scotia-Trucking-Rules.pdf
<i>Task A-3 Organizes Work</i>				
3.01	Performs site assessments	5		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Tree Climber's Companion
3.02	Manages projects			
3.03	Uses documentation and reference material			
3.04	Transports materials			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motor Vehicle Act • Guide-to-Nova-Scotia-Trucking-Rules.pdf • Nova Scotia Air Brake Manual
3.05	Transport equipment			

Area of Competency Trade Skills by Task/Subtask		# of Questions out of 100	Level of Understanding LOW MEDIUM HIGH	Resources
Task A-4 Uses communication and mentoring techniques				
4.01	Uses communication techniques	0		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NSAA Mentoring Program Levels I and II
4.02	Uses mentoring techniques			
MWA B-Performs routine work practices (30%)				
Task B-5 Performs general substrate preparation				
5.01	Uses aerial lift equipment	12		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Tree Climber's Companion ANSI A300 Tree Care Standards
5.02	Uses rope access systems			
5.03	Uses ladders and scaffolding equipment			
Task B-6 Operates and maintains arborist equipment				
6.01	Use motorized equipment and attachments	12		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Forest Professional
6.02	Uses vehicles			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Motor Vehicle Act Guide-to-Nova-Scotia-Trucking-Rules.pdf Nova Scotia Air Brake Manual
6.03	Operates material and handling equipment			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Forest Professional
6.04	Uses chainsaws			
6.05	Uses pole tools			
6.06	Uses chippers			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See specific manufacturer's standards of use ANSI A300 Tree Care Standards

Area of Competency Trade Skills by Task/Subtask		# of Questions out of 100	Level of Understanding LOW MEDIUM HIGH	Resources
Task B-7 Performs aerial rescues				
7.01	Determines action plan	6		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part 7, Chapter 5: Emergency Response and Aerial Rescue - Tree Care Industry Magazine
7.02	Conducts aerial lift rescues			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pole Top/Bucket Rescue Manual • Construction Safety NS - Emergency Planning
7.03	Conducts aerial lift evacuations			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction Safety NS - Emergency Planning
7.04	Conducts climbing aerial rescues			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part 7, Chapter 5: Emergency Response and Aerial Rescue - Tree Care Industry Magazine
7.05	Conducts spar and pole-top rescues			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pole Top/Bucket Rescue Manual
MWA C-Performs work and maintenance on tress and other woody plants (55%)				
Task C-8 Plants and maintains trees and other woody plants				
8.01	Plants trees and other woody plants	14		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arboriculture: Integrated management of landscape trees, shrubs and vines
8.02	Prunes tress and other woody plants			
8.03	Manages wounds and defects of trees and other woody plants			
8.04	Manages pests, diseases and disorders of trees and other woody plants			
Task C-9 Removes trees and other woody plants				
9.01	Conducts pre-felling assessment	11		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Forest Professional • The Fundamentals of General Tree Work • ANSI A300 Tree Care Standards
9.02	Prepares work area for removal process			
9.03	Performs directional felling			
9.04	Performs sectional removal			

Area of Competency Trade Skills by Task/Subtask		# of Questions out of 100	Level of Understanding LOW MEDIUM HIGH	Resources
9.05	Performs limbing and bucking			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Forest Professional
9.06	Performs material handling			
9.07	Removes stumps			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See specific manufacturer's standards of use ANSI A300 Tree Care Standards
<i>Task C-10 Climbs trees and works at heights</i>				
10.01	Establishes work plan	11		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Tree Climber's Companion National Tree Climbing Guide
10.02	Uses knots and mechanical friction devices			
10.03	Climbs trees			
10.04	Uses tools and equipment aloft			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Tree Climber's Companion National Tree Climbing Guide The Fundamentals of General Tree Work
<i>Task C-11 Uses rigging and hoisting equipment</i>				
11.01	Determines load	14		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Fundamentals of General Tree Work
11.02	Selects rigging and hoisting equipment			
11.03	Secures area			
11.04	Sets up rigging and hoisting equipment			
11.05	Performs rigging and hoisting operations			
11.06	Controls movement of cut limbs and trunk sections			
11.07	Maintains rigging and hoisting equipment			

Area of Competency Trade Skills by Task/Subtask		# of Questions out of 100	Level of Understanding LOW MEDIUM HIGH	Resources
<i>Task C-12 Applies environmental practices</i>				
12.01	Practices environmental stewardship	5		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arboriculture: Integrated management of landscape trees, shrubs and vines • Biodiversity-Stewardship-Guide.pdf
12.02	Practices biodiversity enhancement			
12.03	Practices soil stewardship			
12.04	Practices water stewardship			

Study Plan

Now that you have assessed your level of understanding of the Arborist trade activities, skills and knowledge to be tested on the certification exam, it is important for you to develop a study plan. ***Study smarter, not harder*** is an important approach to prepare for your exam especially when you have a busy schedule.

Review the tips below:



Begin by applying for your trade qualifying date and then set a plan to complete your studies by that date.



Create a study guide by topic. Formulate questions and problems with correct answers. Create your own quiz.



Become a teacher. Say the information aloud and in your own words as if you are the instructor and you are teaching the concepts to a class – or better yet, work with a co-worker/journeyperson.



Develop flash cards to help you study and quickly check your knowledge.



Create concept maps or diagrams that explain the material and provide a visual tool for you to study.



Create scenarios which reflect applying skills, knowledge and trade activities.

We have provided a Study Guide resource template you can use, or create your own: [Study Plan Template.pdf](#)



TIP! The [Arborist NSOS appendix](#) reviews commonly used acronyms, tools and equipment, and a glossary of terms used within the trade. Taking the time to review the appendix will familiarise you with the language and terms used on the exam.

Exam Preparation

Effective preparation helps ensure a successful outcome when writing exams. Understanding where to focus your time when studying will help you study more efficiently.

The [Exam Prep Video Series for Trade Qualifiers](#) will walk you through the exam process in detail. Click on each of the links below to access the videos.



Video One: [*Intro to Examinations*](#)



Video Two: [*Exam Preparation: Self-Assessments, Study Plans & Resources*](#)



Video Three: [*Learning Strategies, Accommodations & Booking Your Exam*](#)



Video Four: [*Exam Writing & Results*](#)

On-the-job experience comprises approximately **85%** of your learning, while technical training comprises approximately **15%** of your trade's skills and knowledge. It is important to review trade related textbooks, online courses and other trade- related resources.


Remember, the exam questions are developed using the Nova Scotia Occupational Standard which outlines the skills and knowledge required to perform the full scope of your trade effectively.

In the following section, we have listed applicable resources you can access to review the knowledge, skills and experience found within the Arborist trade.

When reviewing resources, start by:

- Condensing course material into smaller amounts that are easier to remember.
- Visualize, understand and demonstrate relationships or connections around concepts and ideas.
- Create examples and apply information to 'real world' situations.

Resources

<i>Resource</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Overview</i>
	Build Your Skills - SkillPlan Learning Hub	Trade-related units (i.e. Trades Math; Managing Test Anxiety; Reading and Document Use; etc.)
<i>Arborist Nova Scotia Occupational Standard</i>	Arborist NSOS	The Occupational Standard lists the tasks a certified journeyman within the trade needs to know. This document defines what is meant by the 'full scope of the trade'.
<i>NSAA Safety at Work</i>	Safety at Work	The <i>Safety at Work</i> online, e-learning module explores the role all trades people play in creating a safe work environment as well as an overview of the principles of workplace safety.
<i>NSAA Mentoring Program</i>	Skilled Trades Mentoring Program	Mentoring plays a critical role in the apprenticeship system and serves as the cornerstone for skill development.
<i>Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS)</i>	CCOHS: Lockout/Tag out	Defines lockout/tag out, its importance, purpose, basic steps and responsibilities.

Reading Resources

A Field Guide to Forest Biodiversity Stewardship. Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources. 2017. [Biodiversity-Stewardship-Guide.pdf](#)

American National Standards Institute (ANSI). 2023. [ANSI A300 Tree Care Standards](#)

Ball, John. Tree Care Industry Magazine. Part 7, Chapter 5: *Emergency Response and Aerial Rescue*. May 2024. [Part 7, Chapter 5: Emergency Response and Aerial Rescue - Tree Care Industry Magazine](#)

Beranek, G.F. *The Fundamentals of General Tree Work*. 25th Anniversary Edition. Beranek Publications. California, USA. 1996.

Construction Safety Nova Scotia. *Guide to OHS Legislation*. 2024. [Construction Safety NS - Ladders](#) ; [Construction Safety NS – Scaffolding](#)

Harris, Richard W., Clark, James R.; Matheny, Nelda P., and Harris, Vera M. (illustrator). *Arboriculture: Integrated management of landscape trees, shrubs and vines*. 4th edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ, USA. Prentice Hall. 2004.

Jepson, Jeff. *The Tree Climber's Companion, A reference and training manual for professional tree climbers*, 3rd edition. 2014. USA.

Missouri Valley JATC. *Pole Top and Bucket Rescue Manual*. Missouri Valley Line Constructors Apprenticeship and Training Program. USA.

National Tree Climbing Guide. United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). 2015. [National Tree Climbing Guide \[2015 Electronic Edition\] | US Forest Service Research and Development](#)

Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Advanced Education. *The Forest Professional, Guidelines for the Stewards of Tomorrow's Forests*, 5th edition. 2011. [forestprofessional.pdf](#)

Nova Scotia Motor Vehicle Act. [Motor Vehicle Act](#) ; [Regulations - Motor Vehicle - Trailer Couplings and Other Safety Devices](#)

Nova Scotia Trucking Rules and Regulations, Professional Driver's Edition. [Guide-to-Nova-Scotia-Trucking-Rules.pdf](#)

Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations. *Nova Scotia Air Brake Manual*. [Nova Scotia Air Brake Manual](#)

[Workplace Health and Safety Regulations - Occupational Health and Safety Act \(Nova Scotia\)](#)

[Construction Safety NS - Emergency Planning](#)

Additional Reading:

Donzelli, Peter, S. & Lilly, Sharon, J. *The Art and Science of Practical Rigging*. International Society of Arboriculture (ISA). 2001.

