

# Master Respiration Counting for CNA Testing

Master the "stealth" counting technique that prevents breathing pattern changes. This checklist solves the discreet observation challenge that causes student anxiety and test failures.

## Lost Count Recovery Strategy

If you lose count mid-way, continue from your best estimate rather than restarting. Maintain professional demeanor and avoid obvious restart behaviors that signal problems to evaluators.

## Why Stealth Matters

"Their breathing will change if they know you're counting." Research proves conscious awareness of breathing monitoring alters natural patterns. Stealth observation = accurate measurements.

## Common Patient Responses & Professional Scripts

Patient: "Why are you watching me like that?" Response: "I'm checking your vital signs to make sure you're doing well." Never mention: breathing, respirations, or counting.

## Critical Accuracy Standard

$\pm 2$  breaths tolerance across ALL providers. Count of 18 when evaluator measures 16 = Pass. Count of 19 when evaluator measures 16 = Fail. Every breath matters for certification.

## Most Common Failure Points

Avoid these mistakes: Alerting patient to breathing observation, using 30-second shortcuts, losing count without recovery strategy, recording outside  $\pm 2$  breath tolerance, or obvious restart behaviors during counting.

## Professional Scripts That Work

"I'm checking your vital signs" • "Making sure you're comfortable" • "Just taking your pulse" • Never mention breathing or respirations directly to maintain stealth.

## Step 1: Positioning for Clear Observation

- Position yourself where chest movement is clearly visible
- Stand or sit at patient's side, not directly in front (less obvious)
- Ensure good lighting to see subtle chest movements
- Alternative observation points: shoulders or abdomen if chest view is limited

## Step 2: Discreet Hand Positioning

- Hold patient's wrist as if taking pulse (classic stealth technique)
- Maintain natural, relaxed arm position for patient comfort
- Look at your watch occasionally to simulate pulse timing
- Keep hand contact gentle - avoid pressure that suggests pulse measurement

## Step 3: Defining Complete Respiration Cycles

- Count one full inhale-exhale cycle as ONE respiration
- Watch for complete chest rise and fall pattern
- Don't count inhale and exhale as separate breaths
- Focus on rhythm recognition - establish pattern before formal counting

#### **Step 4: 60-Second Timing Protocol**

- Use watch second hand for precise 60-second timing
- Start timing when second hand reaches clear position (like 12)
- Announce "starting respiration count" to evaluator (Headmaster requirement)
- Never use 30-second count doubled - full minute required by all providers
- Announce "ending count" when 60 seconds complete (Headmaster only)

#### **Step 5: Maintaining Natural Demeanor**

- Keep casual, relaxed facial expression throughout counting
- Engage in light conversation if patient expects interaction
- Avoid obvious staring at patient's chest area
- Use peripheral vision to observe breathing while appearing to focus elsewhere
- Explicitly avoid giving patient breathing cues (Prometric scoring point)

#### **Step 6: Handling Challenging Situations**

- For moving patients: shift observation angle without showing difficulty
- For patient questions: "I'm checking your vital signs" (avoid mentioning breathing)
- For irregular patterns: count each complete cycle regardless of rhythm
- For complaints about "staring": respond with "Making sure you're comfortable"

#### **Step 7: Documentation and Recording**

- Record count immediately after completing 60 seconds
- Perform hand hygiene before writing (infection control protocol)
- Verify count is within normal range (12-20 respirations per minute)
- Complete provided documentation form with required format (Prometric)
- Double-check recorded number for mathematical errors

#### **Step 8: Workflow Integration Strategies**

- Transition smoothly from pulse to respiration while maintaining wrist contact
- Use BP cuff inflation time for respiration counting when appropriate
- Plan hand hygiene timing between measurements efficiently
- Execute combined pulse and respiration measurement protocol (Headmaster)

#### **Step 9: Managing Test Anxiety**

- Practice under simulated pressure conditions before test day

- Develop mental counting strategies that prevent distraction
- Remember: evaluators are trained to observe professionally without adding pressure
- Focus on technique consistency rather than speed or perfection

## **Step 10: Final Verification Steps**

- Confirm recorded count is realistic for patient's condition
- Ensure all documentation is complete and legible
- Leave patient in comfortable position with call light accessible
- Complete any required provider-specific protocols