EXAM-DAY REVIEW · ONE PAGE

California Notary Public

High-yield rules from Gov. Code §§ 8200–8230 & Civil Code §§ 1185–1197 · current law as of Oct 2026

Commission · Identification · Seal & journal · Fees · Notarial acts · Prohibited & penalties

45 multiple-choice questions, closed book, proctored

70 scaled score needed to pass

4 yrs commission term, valid statewide

$15K surety bond ($15,000)

30 days the deadline for nearly everything

$15 max per signature / jurat / POA copy

5 yrs ID must be current or issued within

$0.30 per page for a journal copy

1 Who can be a notary

- 18+ and a **legal resident of California**
- **6-hour** state-approved course (first time); **3-hour** refresher allowed only if renewing an active commission
- Pass the exam + **Live Scan** fingerprint background check
- Disclose all convictions on the application; hiding one is grounds for denial

2 Oath & bond: 30 days

Within **30 calendar days** of the commission start date, file the **oath of office** and **$15,000 bond** with the **county clerk** where the principal place of business is.

Miss the deadline → commission is not valid; no notarizing until properly filed.

3 Bond vs. E&O insurance

- The bond protects **the public**, not the notary
- Surety pays victims up to $15,000, then collects it back from the notary
- Notary is **personally liable for all damages**, even above the bond
- E&O insurance (optional) is what protects the notary

4 Address & name changes

- **Address** (business or residence): notify the SOS by **certified mail within 30 days**. Willful failure: fine up to **$500**
- **Name**: file a name-change form with the SOS; new oath + bond amendment within 30 days

5 When a commission ends

Resigned, expired without renewal, revoked, or death → journals and records go to the **county clerk within 30 days**; the seal is destroyed.

Willfully keeping them = **misdemeanor** + personal liability.

6 Employer-paid notaries

- Employer may pay fees and limit on-the-clock notarizations to its business
- **Seal and journal belong to the notary** — they leave with you, even if the employer paid

7 The official seal

Required on every certificate; must be **photographically reproducible**.

Must show: State Seal, "Notary Public," your name, county, commission number, commission expiration date, manufacturer ID number.

Size: circle ≤ 2" diameter, or rectangle ≤ 1" × 2½", with a serrated or milled border.

8 The journal

- **One active sequential journal** at a time
- Kept in a **locked, secured area** under the notary's direct, exclusive control (same for the seal)
- Record **every** notarial act: date, time, type of act, character of the document, signer's signature & address, how ID was proved (ID type, number, issuer, date), fee charged

9 Journal thumbprint

Right thumbprint required for:

- Deeds, quitclaim deeds, deeds of trust & other documents **affecting real property**
- **All powers of attorney**

No right thumb → left thumb or any finger (note it). Can't give any print → explain why in the journal. Skipping it: up to **$2,500**.

10 Lost, stolen or seized

- Lost/stolen journal or seal → notify the SOS **immediately** by certified or registered mail (entry dates, commission #, expiration)
- Only a **peace officer with probable cause** may take the journal; get a receipt, start a new journal; the SOS is notified within 24 hours
- Never hand the journal to anyone else

11 Acknowledgment

- Signer **personally appears**, is identified by satisfactory evidence, and declares they signed
- Document **may be signed before** the visit
- Notary certifies the signer's identity **under penalty of perjury**
- Fee: **$15 per signature**

12 Jurat

- Signer **signs in front of the notary**
- Notary **must administer an oath or affirmation** to the truth of the contents
- Satisfactory evidence of identity required
- Fee: **$15 per person** (oath + jurat)

13 Oath vs. affirmation

Same legal weight: both are under **penalty of perjury**. An affirmation is a solemn pledge with **no reference to a deity**. The signer chooses.

14 Certificates

- Use California wording; boxed consumer notice at the top saying the notary verifies identity only, not truthfulness or validity
- **Venue** = state & county where the act happens
- Never pre-sign, pre-seal or leave blanks. Mistake → attach a new certificate; don't alter
- Notary doesn't choose the form type for the signer

15 Proof by subscribing witness

Principal doesn't appear. A **subscribing witness** appears, swears they saw the principal sign (or heard them acknowledge it) and signed as witness. The witness is identified by the oath of a credible witness.

Not allowed for grant/quitclaim deeds, deeds of trust, mortgages, other real-property documents, or anything that needs a thumbprint.

16 Certified copies

Only a **power of attorney** ($15) and your own journal entries.

Birth, death or marriage certificates and other vital records → send them to the **issuing agency**.

17 Signature by mark

Signer makes an "X." **Two witnesses** sign; one writes the signer's name beside the mark. Notary still identifies the signer; the witnesses sign the journal too.

18 Satisfactory evidence

- An acceptable ID document **or** credible witness(es)
- **Personal knowledge is NOT enough** in California
- ID must be **current or issued within 5 years**, with photo, physical description, signature and serial number

19 Acceptable IDs

- California driver's license or ID card
- U.S. passport
- Another state's driver's license or ID
- U.S. military ID
- Foreign passport
- Driver's license from Canada or Mexico
- Federally recognized tribal ID
- Inmate ID — only while in custody

20 Credible witnesses

One witness personally known to the notary, **or two** witnesses (unknown to the notary) who each show ID.

Each must personally know the signer, swear under oath, have **no financial interest** and not be named in the document; signer has no ID and can't easily get one. Witnesses sign the journal.

21 Maximum fees (Gov. Code 8211)

Acknowledgment / proof	**$15 / signature**
Oath + jurat	**$15 / person**
Certified POA copy	**$15**
Deposition	**$30 + $7 + $7**
Journal copy	**$0.30 / page**
Immigration form data entry*	**$15 / person**

FREE: vote-by-mail ballot envelopes & voting materials; veterans' benefit applications. Travel fees OK if agreed in advance. Overcharging = misconduct.

*Bonded immigration consultants only

22 Fee change ahead

AB 1597 raises the caps to **$20** on **Jan 1, 2027**. Answer tomorrow with today's law: **$15**.

23 Never do this

- Notarize your own signature, or any document where you have a **financial or beneficial interest**
- Give legal advice or pick/fill in documents (unauthorized practice of law)
- Notarize without **personal appearance**
- Proceed if the signer seems not to understand or appears pressured

24 "Notario" & foreign-language ads

Non-attorneys may not translate "notary public" as **"notario público"**. Ads in another language must post an **"I am not an attorney"** notice plus the fee schedule.

1st violation: suspension of **at least 1 year**. 2nd: **permanent revocation**.

25 Immigration

Notaries may **never give immigration advice**. Only a qualified, bonded immigration consultant may type client-provided data onto immigration forms.

26 Penalties to know

- Failing to obtain satisfactory evidence: up to **$10,000**
- Missing journal thumbprint: up to **$2,500**
- Unreported address change: up to **$500**
- Misconduct → denial, suspension or revocation; false certificates can bring criminal charges

27 Exam-day checklist

- Photo ID, course-completion certificate, 2"×2" color passport photo, completed application
- Check your admission notice for anything else
- Watch "always / never" and pick the **California-specific** rule
- No remote online notarization in CA yet (expected ~2030)

Study aid only — the official source is the California Secretary of State's Notary Public Handbook (sos.ca.gov/notary).

Good luck tomorrow.