

NEC 2026 Code Changes

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The 2026 National Electrical Code is the first new cycle since 2023. These are the changes most likely to appear on the journeyman exam. **Code adoption is state-by-state** — confirm which NEC edition your exam uses before you study. Many states still test the 2020 or 2023 NEC in 2026.

Topic	2023 NEC	2026 NEC
Load calculations	Article 220	Moved to new Article 120
Dwelling general lighting load	3 VA / sq ft	2 VA / sq ft (feeder & service)
Continuous loads in load calc	Ambiguous	NOT × 125% in the calc step
125% factor for sizing	Applies	Still applies to conductors & OCPD

Worked example — general lighting load

For a 2,000 sq ft dwelling: **2023 NEC** = $2,000 \times 3 = 6,000$ VA. **2026 NEC** = $2,000 \times 2 = 4,000$ VA (before demand factors). That is a 2,000 VA reduction on lighting alone — watch for square-footage questions where the old 3 VA answer appears as a distractor.

Why the lighting load dropped

A Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory study of 896 occupied U.S. homes found a median general lighting and receptacle density of about 2.3 W/sq ft — far below the old incandescent-era 3 VA assumption — after the widespread shift to LED lighting.

Exam-day reminders

- Study the NEC edition YOUR state exam uses — not automatically the newest one.
- If your exam is on the 2026 NEC, re-tab every load-calculation page from Article 220 to Article 120.
- On continuous-load questions, decide first: are you totaling the calculated load, or sizing the conductor / breaker? The 125% factor only applies to the second.
- Tab the workhorse tables: 310.16 (ampacity), 250.66 and 250.122 (grounding), Chapter 9 + Annex C (conduit fill).

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