

# THE ORAL EXAMINATION IN FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY

AMERICAN BOARD OF FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY, INC. (ABFP)

**Following is a general outline of procedures and other considerations regarding the Oral Examination in Forensic Psychology.<sup>1</sup> For additional information and more specific details, please contact the ABFP National Chair of Examinations.**

## **A. Oral Examination Preparation**

- (1) The Chair of Practice Sample Reviews notifies the National Chair of Examinations (NCE) that the Practice Samples comport with both ABFP and ABPP submission requirements.
- (2) The NCE informs the Candidate of the decision to proceed to Oral Examination, instructs the Candidate to pay to ABPP the Oral Examination fee, and schedules the Candidate for the next round of Oral Examinations.
- (3) Exams schedules are established about three months before the examinations occur. Candidates will be scheduled for the next available examination period and will not forego the next available examination period without approval of the NCE. Candidates will therefore have three to nine months from the notification of Practice Sample approval until the Oral Examination occurs. Failure to complete the Oral Examination within one year of notification will result in the Candidate being required to submit new Practice Samples.
- (4) At the time of scheduling the Oral Examination, the Candidate will be provided with a list of potential examiners and asked to identify any of these persons whose participation on the Oral Examination Committee might constitute a conflict of interest. ABFP is not restricted from having an examiner serve on the examination panel for a new work sample from a previously failed Candidate. Prior failure of a Candidate at oral examination is not routinely construed as a potential conflict of interest.
- (5) The NCE impanels a three-member Oral Examination Committee (consisting of a Chair and two Co-Examiners), and informs the Candidate of its composition, as well as the specific date and time on which the Oral Examination is to be conducted. ABFP aspires to include at least one of the faculty reviewers who reviewed and approved at least one of the current Practice Samples for Oral Examination. ABFP will not include any faculty reviewer on an Oral Examination panel who reviewed and did not approve any element of a current Practice Sample.

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- (6) The NCE instructs the Candidate to mail by a certain date and address one *spiral-bound* copy of *each* Practice Sample to *each* member of the Oral Examination Committee. The copies *must be* the very same and unaltered Practice Samples submitted for review. If *any* changes are made to the Practice Samples, they must be first approved by the NCE. The NCE will maintain documentation of these changes. Failure to obtain authorization from the NCE to alter any part of the Practice Samples may result in a failure of the Oral Examination. Candidates must also bring to the Oral Examination an *unmarked* copy of the spiral-bound examination booklets mailed to the Committee members.

## **B. Conducting the Oral Examination**

- (1) The Oral Examination is designed to determine the Candidate's quality of practice and forensic knowledge in areas exemplified by the Practice Samples, as well as to determine the Candidate's understanding and application of ethical standards—in particular, the most recent versions of the *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* and the *Specialty Guidelines for Forensic Psychology*.
- (2) The Oral Examination Committee seeks to determine that Candidates possess a high level of professional competence and maturity, with the ability to articulate an explicit and coherent rationale for their work in forensic psychology. Successful Candidates will demonstrate the requisite knowledge, skills, attitude, and values detailed within the ABFP document entitled “Core Competencies in Forensic Psychology” (see [www.abfp.com](http://www.abfp.com)). In addition, successful Candidates should be those who act with constant alertness to the ethical issues involved in forensic practice. One implication of the Oral Examination Committee's recommendation to award certification is that its members would also feel comfortable in recommending successful Candidates to those soliciting the expertise in question.
- (3) The Oral Examination Committee will typically include at least one member of the ABFP Board of Directors. Other Practice Sample reviewers and other ABFP Board members may observe, without participation, some or all of the Oral Examination, as long as they have not been identified by the Candidate as subject to a conflict of interest.
- (4) The Oral Examination is recorded for purposes of helping to resolve appeals by failed Candidates. Candidates are *not* authorized to obtain recordings of their examination for any purpose. Oral Examinations last approximately 2½ to 3 hours, with the first half generally devoted to questions concerning one Practice Sample, and the second half generally devoted to questions concerning the other Practice Sample. There is a break between sessions. Candidates may not use this time to consult notes or for any other purpose of preparation for the second session.
- (5) Except for ethical standards as described in B.6 *infra*, a Candidate is considered responsible only for practice and knowledge reasonably related to areas exemplified by the two Practice Samples. For example, a Candidate submitting

Practice Samples concerning “competency to stand trial” and “criminal responsibility” would not expect to be examined on “child custody.”

- (6) An exception to this primarily Practice Sample-focused approach concerns the Candidate’s understanding and application of ethical standards and guidelines. During both halves of the Oral Examination, it is permissible for inquiries based in the Practice Samples to evolve into discussion of other aspects of professional psychological ethics. For example, in (5) above, a candidate might be asked to consider questions of ethics regarding the Candidate’s own qualifications to perform child custody evaluations. The intent here is to ensure that exploration of this core aspect of professionalism is not hampered by an artificially narrow view of the roles and obligations of the forensic psychologist.
- (7) At the end of the Oral Examination, the Candidate is thanked for participating, and is reminded not to contact any member of the Oral Examination Committee prior to receiving formal notification from ABPP of the outcome of the Oral Examination. Until notification of outcome, the Candidate will restrict *all* communication with ABFP or ABPP to the ABFP President.

### **C. Reporting the Results of the Oral Examination**

- (1) Immediately following the departure of the Candidate, the Oral Examination Committee rates the Candidate on three elements concerning ethical standards, quality of practice, and knowledge of forensic areas. If the Candidate is not outright passed or failed based on this first rating, the Committee deliberates and discusses relevant aspects of the examination. The Committee then rates the Candidate on a second ballot to arrive at a recommendation concerning the outcome of the Oral Examination, which is then communicated to ABFP. The scoring forms used by the Oral Examination Committee are at [www.abfp.com](http://www.abfp.com).
- (2) Based upon its review of the Oral Examination Committee’s recommendation, ABFP determines whether the Candidate has passed or failed the Oral Examination. This decision is typically communicated to the Candidate by ABPP within 4 weeks of the Oral Examination. The Oral Examination Committee Chair will generate a letter to Candidates documenting the Committee’s comments about the strengths, weaknesses, and conformity to core competencies of forensic psychologists. The letter is generated *after* the decision about passing or failing by ABFP. The letter is **not** the basis of determination about passing or failing—the scoring form is the document that is the basis for determinations about passing or failing.
- (3) Any inquiries from the Candidate, after the communication of ABFP’s decision, should be directed only to the ABFP President.
- (4) Candidates who are passed at Oral Examination become Specialists of ABFP, Specialists of the American Board of Professional Psychology, and, upon payment of dues, Fellows of the American Academy of Forensic Psychology.

- (5) Candidates who fail the Oral Examination for the first time may resume the ABFP certification process by submitting two new Practice Samples within one year of the communication of ABFP's decision. They are not required to retake the Written Examination before doing so.
- (6) Candidates who fail the Oral Examination a second time may resume the ABFP certification process after a minimum one-year waiting period. The written examination passing score is valid for four years. Candidates with passing scores older than that must re-take the Written Examination.

**D. Appeals of Failures at Oral Examination**

- (1) Candidates wishing to appeal a failure in the Oral Examination must notify the ABFP President within 30 days of that decision. Failure to notify the ABFP President of an intention to appeal may serve as the basis to deny an appeal.
- (2) The basis of appeal must be that ABFP did not follow its procedures during the examination *and* that the failure to follow procedure resulted in an egregious error that was directly related to the decision to fail the Candidate. Disagreements about the outcome of the examination or disagreements about examiner comments are not to be construed as procedural lapses or egregious error. The appeal must be that ABFP failed to follow its procedures.
- (3) All appeals are reviewed for potential merit by the President of ABFP. The President will deny appeals that are without merit. For appeals with potential merit, the President, within 30 days of receipt of the appeal, will convene an appeals committee of three Specialists in Forensic Psychology who have experience with the Practice Sample and Oral Examination process and criteria. Once convened, the President will provide the Committee with the Candidate's Practice Samples and appeal letter, the Oral Examination Committee's scoring forms, and a recording of the Oral Examination. The Committee will review the materials and conclude whether the appeal is granted.
- (4) Candidates whose appeals are granted may be scheduled for re-examination on the same Practice Samples by a different Oral Examination Committee at the next time the NCE creates a schedule of oral examinations. The Candidate will not be charged a fee for this examination. Under no circumstances can the Appeals Committee approve that a failed Candidate passed the Oral Examination.