

THE PRACTICE SAMPLES

THE AMERICAN BOARD OF FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY, INC. (ABFP)

A. How Practice Samples Fit into the Certification Process

Successful completion of the Written Examination leads to an invitation to submit two Practice Samples of the Candidate's forensic psychological work. If the Practice Samples are deemed acceptable by the ABFP screening and review process, the Candidate proceeds to an Oral Examination that is substantially based on the Practice Samples.

B. The Practice Samples

1. Purpose and Substance

The Practice Samples assist ABFP in its attempts to ensure that the Candidate possesses a high level of professional competence and maturity, with the ability to articulate an explicit and coherent rationale for his or her work in forensic psychology. Two Practice Samples are required, with each one representing a primary area of the Candidate's practice. The Candidate's choice of Practice Samples will help to define those areas covered by the Oral Examination.

The prototype for each Practice Sample is a forensic evaluation; however, with the prior agreement of the Corresponding Secretary, and for good cause, an alternative submission, solely authored by the Candidate, may be substituted for *one* of the two Practice Samples. Examples of potentially acceptable alternative submissions are:

- (a) a forensic psychological book chapter;
- (b) a forensic psychological article accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal;
- (c) a forensic psychological test manual;
- (d) a forensic psychological treatment program or treatment protocol.

Just as evaluation-based Practice Samples are intended to demonstrate a high level of professional competence and maturity, alternative submissions, when permitted, should demonstrate a similar level of forensic psychological expertise. Criteria for evaluating and using alternative practice samples of the types (a) and (b) – book chapters and articles – in the ABFP examination process can be found in *Appendix A*.

2. Distinct Areas of Practice

Each Practice Sample should represent one of two distinct and separate areas of forensic psychological knowledge and practice. These two areas should differ in legal standards, case law applications, and methodologies.

- (a) Examples of sufficiently distinct forensic activities include:
 - i. (1) sanity/mental state at the time of the offense, and (2) competence to stand trial; or
 - ii. (1) worker's compensation, and (2) guardianship.
- (b) Examples of forensic activities that are *not* sufficiently distinct include:
 - i. (1) parenting/child custody examination involving a relocation issue, and (2) parenting child custody examination involving allegations of sexual abuse; or
 - ii. (1) personal injury examination, and (2) worker's compensation examination.
- (c) The Corresponding Secretary is available for consultation to help the Candidate clarify selection of Practice Samples, and to receive questions during the preparation of those samples for submission. Candidates are strongly advised to take advantage of this consultation.

3. Format

Candidates will submit a *curriculum vitae*, two Practice Samples, and psychological test data used in the evaluation for any Practice Sample will be appended to each Practice Sample.

A. *Curriculum Vitae* describing the Candidate's background, training, and involvement in forensic psychology is attached

B. *Each* of the two Practice Samples, including alternative submissions to a forensic psychological report, should include the following:

- (a) *Title Page* with your name, address, telephone number, fax number and e-mail address. The title should reflect the nature of the underlying case.
- (b) *Table of Contents* clearly indicating each section.

- (c) *Introduction* detailing the nature of the Candidate's role and involvement in generating the Forensic Work Product in question. The Introduction should include, in no more than one paragraph, an explanation of any unique elements, terms or practices of the jurisdiction in which the forensic evaluations, forming the basis of the practice samples, were conducted.
- (d) *Forensic Work Product*. Typically, this is the report that resulted from the forensic evaluation in question, with a maximum length of 80 double-spaced pages. The Forensic Work Product must have been composed no more than two (2) years prior to the date upon which the Candidate's credentials were initially accepted by the American Board of Professional Psychology.
- (e) *Psychological Test Data*. There is no page limit for psychological test data, which must be appended to each Practice Sample (Psychological test data does not add to the overall limit of 80 pages per Practice Sample.)
- (f) *Supplementary Materials*. When applicable to the type of Practice Sample submitted, these include the following:
 - i. the most relevant third party documentation;
 - ii. the most relevant state or federal statutes, regulations, and case law;
 - iii. ethical principles, standards, and guidelines of particular relevance; and
 - iv. references to published research of particular relevance (optional).

Essentially, Supplementary Materials consist of third party documentation that is critical for understanding your Forensic Work Product.

Neither practice sample can exceed 80 pages in its entirety, excluding psychological testing data which must be appended to each sample.

Contact the Corresponding Secretary with questions about the selection and/or preparation of Practice Samples or to request a waiver if you feel that this space limitation prevents you from adequately presenting either of your contemplated Practice Samples.

4. Technical Aspects

- (a) Except as noted below, all Practice Samples should be:
 - i. double-spaced;
 - ii. in 12 point font;

- iii. with one-inch margins on all sides; and,
 - iv. with page numbers on each page, including supplementary materials and psychological test data.
- (b) Approved alternative submissions may remain, if deemed sufficiently legible by the Corresponding Secretary, in their original published format. However, these submissions must contain a Title Page as described above.
 - (c) Each Practice Sample begins with page number 1 and is numbered sequentially thereafter, including all Supplementary Materials and psychological test data.
 - (d) Edit the Practice Sample for grammatical errors, spelling errors and typographical errors. Practice Samples may be disqualified on the basis of careless presentation.
 - (e) All pages are to be clear and legible. Any handwritten, original documents (*e.g.*, psychological test responses) must be legible. If they are not, please type them out.
 - (f) Approved alternative submissions must have been accepted for publication no more than two (2) years before the date upon which the Candidate's credentials were initially accepted by the American Board of Professional Psychology.

5. Confidentiality

- (a) *Each Practice Sample must obscure the identity of parties to the proceedings in question (e.g., defendants, parents, and children), victims, and lay witnesses.*

This is accomplished by redacting names or by assigning fictitious identities to the individuals in question.

- (b) This measure is required even if the material in question has become part of the public record. If fictitious identities have been assigned, a statement must be provided to this effect in the Introduction. If you choose to obscure confidential information by "blacking" or "whiting" it out, you should ensure that the redacted material cannot be read through the marking. This effect is often enhanced by photocopying the document after names have been obscured and then submitting the photocopy.
- (c) *Failure to protect confidentiality in this fashion may result in the rejection of a Practice Sample and termination of Candidacy.*

6. Time Frames and Extensions

- (a) Practice Samples must be received within *one year* of the date on which the Candidate received notice of passing the Written Examination.
- (b) The Candidate may request extensions for good cause, in writing, from the Corresponding Secretary, conveying the circumstances upon which the request is based and a timetable for completing and submitting the Practice Samples.
- (c) *No more than two extensions may be granted, for a combined total of one additional year.*
- (d) If this time frame (with extensions) is not met, the Candidacy shall be terminated. One year after notification of termination, the Candidate may apply to the American Board of Forensic Psychology, thus starting over again with the certification process, except that those reapplying do not have to retake the Written Examination.

7. Authorship and Review

- (a) The Practice Samples must be of the Candidate's sole authorship. Supervisory input and the participation of coworkers or assistants must be at a minimum, and must not represent substantive contributions to the Forensic Work Product in question.
- (b) A Practice Sample shall *not* be reviewed or critiqued by any other person, during its composition or at any other time prior to the Oral Examination.
- (c) Applicants may request that others review or critique *other* examples of their forensic work; however, such forensic work may not be used as any part of a Practice Sample.
- (d) Do not submit a Practice Sample for which a preponderance of the psychological testing was administered by another party, whether or not that person was functioning under the Candidate's supervision.

C. Resources

Submission of two practice samples is an important step in advancing toward obtaining a diplomate from the American Board of Forensic Psychology (ABFP). If the practice samples are accepted for use in the oral examination, the candidate can proceed to that final examination. The following two articles, reprinted with permission of Open Access Journal of Forensic Psychology, are provided as resources for candidates submitting practice samples.

Guidance for Improving Forensic Reports: A Review of Common Errors
Thomas Grisso, Ph.D. (2010)

In 2010, Thomas Grisso, Executive Director of the ABFP, examined a national sample of 62 forensic reports written by 36 forensic psychologists submitted as practice samples in their candidacy for the diplomate examination of the American Board of Forensic Psychology (ABFP). All 62 reports were not approved for use in the oral examination after review by two independent reviewers of the ABFP. All were found to contain errors or deficiencies serious enough to make failure likely if the candidate was given an oral examination on these reports. In this study, the reviewers' evaluations of these reports were used to create an inventory of all of the discrete types of "errors," "faults," or "problems" encountered in the reports--that is, the reasons that these 62 reports were not accepted. This method also provided an indication of the faults that arose most frequently. By reviewing this study, candidates can analyze their own reports to ensure that these faults are not present in any report submitted as a practice sample.

Please see this file on our website.

Forensic Report Checklist
Philip H. Witt, Ph.D. (2010)

Also in 2010, Philip Witt, a member of the ABFP examination faculty, developed a forensic report-writing checklist using Grisso's study as a roadmap to determine what issues were critical to include in the checklist. Recent work has indicated that simple checklists can reduce errors in a variety of complex processes, ranging from medical procedures to construction projects. Consequently, in an effort to guide forensic report writers, Witt took the ten most common report-writing faults found in Grisso's study and based a checklist on those faults, recasting these faults in positive terms (i.e., as items to make certain were included in the report rather than items to be avoided). He then organized these faults in a manner consistent with the flow of report writing, beginning with faults related to introductory materials, continuing with faults related to overall report style, and concluding with faults related to conclusions. By reviewing this simple checklist, candidates can make sure that they are avoiding the most common pitfalls that cause practice samples to be rejected.

Please see this file on our website.

D. Practice Sample Submission Process

1. Submission

- (a) Practice Samples are submitted to the Chair of Practice Sample Reviews, *in electronic format only*. Microsoft Word and Acrobat (.PDF) are the acceptable formats.

Formats may be combined when necessary; for example, the Candidate may choose to submit all aspects of a Practice Sample in Word, with the exception of scanned Supplementary Materials in Acrobat (.PDF).

- (b) Practice Samples should be submitted on a compact disc to the Chair of Practice Sample Reviews. No hard copy or e-mail submissions are acceptable.

2. Screening Process

- (a) The Chair of Practice Sample Reviews coordinates the screening and review of Practice Samples in order to determine their sufficiency for proceeding to the Oral Examination.
- (b) This screening and review process will result in one of the following:
 - i. notification that both Practice Samples are acceptable and that the Candidacy may proceed;
 - ii. notification that certain changes should be made to one or both Practice Samples before the Candidacy may proceed;
 - iii. notification that *one* Practice Sample is unacceptable for proceeding to the Oral Examination and must be replaced within six (6) months by an acceptable replacement Practice Sample; *or*
 - iv. notification that *both* Practice Samples are unacceptable for proceeding to the Oral Examination, and that the Candidacy is terminated.
- (c) Should any replacement Practice Sample be determined unacceptable, or should the Candidate fail to submit a replacement Practice Sample on time, then the Candidacy shall be terminated.
- (d) One year after notification of termination, the Candidate may reapply to the American Board of Forensic Psychology, thus starting over again with the certification process, except that those reapplying do not have to retake the Written Examination.

3. Process Subsequent to Practice Sample Approval

Upon the submission of two acceptable Practice Samples, the Candidate will then be contacted by the National Chair of Examinations, who will collaborate with the Candidate in obtaining ethical clearance from various psychological boards and associations, before initiating the process of scheduling the Oral Examination.

A Checklist for Practice Samples

This checklist will help you make sure that your Practice Sample submission is completed in accordance with the requirements above. Please print and complete this checklist, and send it hard copy to the Chair of Practice Sample Reviews when you submit your Practice Samples on CD.

This checklist is required and must be received before you Practice Samples may be reviewed.

- ___ I have prepared two Practice Samples that represent one of two distinct and separate areas of forensic psychological knowledge and practice. These are primary areas of my forensic work.
- ___ Both Practice Samples meet all of the criteria outlined in these Guidelines, including those for recentness and sole authorship.
- ___ I have included my *Curriculum Vitae* detailing my background, training, and involvement in forensic psychology.

For each Practice Sample (except in the case of alternative submissions to a Forensic Evaluations), I have provided the following ...

- ___ a *Title Page* with my name, address, telephone number, fax number and e-mail address, including a title reflecting the nature of the underlying case. Note: A Title Page is required of any type of submission.
- ___ a *Table of Contents* clearly indicating each section.
- ___ an *Introduction* detailing the nature of my role and involvement in generating the Forensic Work Product in question, and brief explanation of any unique elements, terms or practices in the jurisdictions where the forensic evaluations were conducted.
- ___ my *Forensic Work Product*.
- ___ a *Supplementary Materials* section.
- ___ Each Forensic Work Product, including its Supplementary Materials, does not exceed 80 pages in its entirety.
- ___ All psychological test data are appended to each Practice Sample and continue the page numbering from which the Practice Sample ended.

I will now ...

- send one copy of each Practice Sample to the Chair of Practice Sample Reviews in the appropriate electronic format (on CD).
- retain an electronic copy of each Practice Sample. *I understand that if my Practice Samples are ultimately approved, I will be asked to produce additional bound copies in due course for use in the Oral Examination.*

In addition ...

- Each Practice Sample is clear and legible.
- Each Practice Sample is separately, fully, and sequentially paginated throughout, beginning with page 1.
- Each Practice Sample is formatted according to the instructions set forth by ABFP.
- *I understand that a practice sample in which the required confidentiality measures have not been observed may result in rejection of that practice sample and termination of my candidacy.*
- *I understand that a copy of a forensic psychological report to a referral source, by itself, does not constitute a “practice sample” as described by these guidelines.*

Signature of Candidate

Date

Contact information for the Chair of Practice Sample Reviews:

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Appendix A

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING AND USING ALTERNATIVE PRACTICE SAMPLES IN THE ABFP EXAMINATION PROCESS

The ABFP rules for practice samples allow for one of the practice samples to be something other than the report of a forensic evaluation. The ABFP website offers four examples:

- (a) a forensic psychological book chapter
- (b) a forensic psychological article accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal
- (c) a forensic psychological test manual
- (d) a forensic psychological treatment program or treatment protocol

This document offers criteria for evaluating alternative samples of the types (a) and (b) above - book chapters and articles. The following criteria were adopted as ABFP policy on April 19, 2011.

The purpose for evaluating alternative practice samples is to determine that (a) they constitute the candidate's own independent work and (b) they offer an appropriate platform for generating oral examination questions that will meet the objectives of the oral examination.

Apart from accuracy and originality, *the criteria set forth below do not require a judgment about the overall quality or significance of the work for the field of forensic psychology.* The fact that the work was published (under specified conditions) is accepted as a sufficient sign of quality and significance. (To do otherwise would require a degree of subjective judgment that would be difficult to codify.)

Two sets of criteria will be applied regarding suitability of book chapters and articles for submission to the examination process: *A. Eligibility* (determined by the Corresponding Secretary and the Practice Sample Chair); and *B. Appropriateness for Oral Exam* (determined by the Practice Sample Reviewer).

A. Eligibility (for the Corresponding Secretary and/or the Practice Sample Chair to determine)

All six of the following criteria must be met for the work to be eligible for submission as an alternative practice sample.

1. **The chapter/article must have been published within two years prior to the date that it is submitted to ABFP for review.** This is to assure that the sample represents the candidate's recent professional development.

2. **If the sample is a journal article, the journal in which it appeared must have peer-review criteria for acceptance for publication.** Most professional scholarly journals will qualify. The rule excludes most newsletter articles, as well as printed reports that have not been published in professional journals.
3. **The candidate must be the sole or primary author of the chapter/article.** If there are multiple authors, the candidate must be the author listed first.
4. **The scholarly content of the chapter/article must provide a sample of the candidate's own contribution to the field.** Where the work is sole-authored, this can be assumed. When it has multiple authors, one must question whether the sample represents a sufficient degree of independence or primary responsibility of the candidate for the work's ideas and scholarly contributions. For example, if a relatively recent Ph.D. is first-author on a research paper, with his/her senior mentor as second author, this may or may not mean that the candidate performed the work with the degree of independent scholarship that would allow one to consider the substantive concepts and ideas in the work to be primarily that of the candidate. To make these judgments, the Corresponding Secretary may need to explore the nature of the specific work, and the relationships and specific contributions of the various authors, in consultation with the Practice Sample Chair and Chair of Exams.
5. **The work addresses a forensic psychological issue with relevance for practice.** This can be broadly interpreted, but the work should make reference to a forensic issue. For example, a paper that only reports on the developmental capacities of youth might be relevant for forensic clinicians, yet it might not qualify. In order to qualify, it would need to specifically address the forensic psychological relevance of the developmental results (for example, by examining youth development with a specific focus on a legal context, or engaging in substantial demonstration of the relevance of the development results for a forensic issue).
6. **The sample must include a brief Introduction provided by the candidate.** The Introduction should provide providing the complete citation where the work was published, a description of the candidate's role in the publication (if it was co-authored), and any background about the questions it addresses that may establish its significance or impact in the area it addresses.

B. Appropriateness (for the Practice Sample Reviewers to determine)

All four of the following should be considered when determining whether the alternative practice sample is appropriate for use in the oral examination. The overarching question is *whether the sample will provide a good foundation for oral examination questions.*

1. **The work must be thorough and well-researched.** The work's references to past literature must not have overlooked important previous publications in the relevant area.

2. **The work is reasonably accurate.** There must be no major misinterpretations of the facts on which the work is based.
3. **The work provides something new.** The work must not consist substantially (primarily) of observations and opinions that have been reviewed in past works by others. It must provide something new to the field, by way of data, concepts, interpretations, or implications for courts and/or forensic practice—or must do this in a significantly new way.
4. **The work has sufficient breadth to allow for the development of oral examination questions.** Oral examiners will require a foundation for developing oral examination questions that explore the candidate’s knowledge, practice, and grasp of ethics within an area. Moreover, oral examinations focus on the content area of the sample; see *Oral Examinations, Part C, point 5*, “a Candidate is considered responsible only for practice and knowledge reasonably related to areas exemplified by” a practice sample’s content. Therefore, a comprehensive published review of the nature and value of juvenile court clinics might meet this criterion; it would allow the oral examination committee to explore the history of juvenile justice, a range of juvenile forensic evaluations that are done in juvenile court clinics, systemic issues in performing such evaluations in juvenile court clinics, and ethical issues that arise in such settings. In contrast, a research report that examined whether eye contact with a jury improved experts’ credibility might be considered by practice sample reviewers to be too narrow or specific for generating oral examination questions about knowledge, practice and ethics in an area of forensic work.

C. Use of Alternative Practice Samples in the Oral Examination

When developing oral examination questions, the oral examination committee is not asked to judge the quality and significance of the alternative practice sample itself. It uses the *content area* represented in the alternative practice sample as the foundation for generating questions to evaluate the candidate’s knowledge, practice, and grasp of ethics related to the broader content area that the alternative practice sample represents.

Thus an alternative practice sample with content that focuses on competence to stand trial (even if the work focuses only on one narrow aspect of competence) opens up the full range of potential questions about the candidate’s knowledge of law and psychological theory regarding competence to stand trial, questions of practice and competency evaluation, and ethical issues encountered in such evaluations.

Questions might also use the specific content and arguments in the work to discover the candidate’s ability to think conceptually, defend the work’s assertions, and speculate about alternative interpretations. In so doing, the committee’s focus is not on the work itself, but on the candidate’s current conceptual abilities and mastery of the area within which the candidate has made the published contribution.