
OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION TO ABFP

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

(REVISED 2/5/2021)

Board Certification in Forensic Psychology

The American Board of Forensic Psychology (ABFP) originated from a Specialty Certification Study Committee of the American Psychology-Law Society. Established in 1978 to protect the consumer of forensic psychological services, ABFP (also referred to as the “Forensic Board”) awards the certificate in Forensic Psychology to psychologists who satisfactorily complete the requirements for Specialty Board Certification in Forensic Psychology. The Forensic Board operates as an affiliated member of the American Board of Professional Psychology (ABPP), an organization of specialty boards recognized by the profession. Professionals who become board certified by ABFP become members of the American Academy of Forensic Psychology (AAFP), which is dedicated to promoting continuing education and early career development in forensic psychology.

The Meaning of Board Certification

Certain substantive and procedural elements are necessary to maintain integrity and quality control in a legitimate certification process in a psychological specialty. Organizations other than ABFP/ABPP have been known to offer “board certification” or some related designation in the specialty of Forensic Psychology. Psychologists seeking forensic board certification should make informed decisions before dedicating their time, energy, and money towards completing the credentialing process. The following are some elements to consider:

- *The status of the certifying body is an established entity recognized and accepted by judicial bodies and major psychological organizations.* ABFP is associated with ABPP, which is the primary overseer of credentialing for the various types of professional specialization in psychology as defined by the American Psychological Association.
- *The specialized knowledge, competence, and practice of all who receive certification have been subjected to review by board-certified Examiners.* ABFP maintains a rigorous certification process, as described later in this overview. For purposes of ABFP board certification, no psychologist is “grandparented” without this level of scrutiny.

- *Consistent with standards for board certification in other professions such as medicine and law, the certifying body should be one that restricts itself only to credentialing psychologists, not members of other disciplines.* ABFP certifies only psychologists, although it welcomes psychologists with dual disciplines (e.g., law, medicine).
- *The certifying body requires a thorough and verified credentialing process.* ABFP certification requires all of the following:
 - ☐ Strict requirements for education, licensing, and experience
 - ☐ Ethics review by contacting state psychological associations and licensing boards
 - ☐ Completion of a written examination assessing the Candidate's range of knowledge regarding the application of psychology to law, legal systems and legal process
 - ☐ Evaluation of the Candidate's work products by board-certified examiners
 - ☐ Successful completion of an oral examination conducted by a committee of board-certified examiners

Definition of the Practice of Forensic Psychology

Forensic Psychology is recognized by the American Psychological Association (APA) as a distinct specialty within psychology. APA, and therefore ABFP, defines the specialty in this way:

Professional practice by psychologists within the areas of clinical psychology, counseling psychology, school psychology, or another specialty recognized by the APA, when they are engaged as experts and represent themselves as such, in an activity primarily intended to provide professional psychological expertise to the judicial system.

One should note that this definition does not include within the specialty of Forensic Psychology *all* psychologists who apply psychology to law or legal systems. It refers to “professional practice” intended to offer expertise to “the judicial system.” The key factors in the specialty, therefore, are the psychologist’s general practice as a person who offers professional expertise to a court of law. By this definition, many psychologists might testify in courts occasionally on clinical matters regarding their patients, or might perform research about which they inform courts from time to time, yet would not be considered to be engaging in the general practice of forensic psychology requiring forensic specialization.

Moreover, the definition’s emphasis on the practice of providing information to courts does not include psychologists who primarily perform treatment duties in other parts of the legal system (e.g., jails), or psychologists whose primary activity is psychological research on legal issues (e.g., the relation of mental illness to criminal behavior), unless these psychologists also routinely offer information to courts in the course of their normal practice. (For a detailed discussion of the definition of the practice of forensic psychology, see: Packer & Grisso, *Specialty Competencies in Forensic Psychology*, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 3-8.)

The ABFP Board Certification Process

General Requirements

The general requirements for the awarding of the certificate of Forensic Psychology are:

- (1) satisfactory completion of ABPP's credential review process to establish that the applicant meets ABPP's generic eligibility requirements,
- (2) satisfactory completion of ABFP's specialty-specific credential review process, written examination, oral examination, and vote by the Board to accept the candidate into membership; and
- (3) absence of prior conduct by the candidate that in the opinion of the Board indicates serious ethical misconduct or unlawful behavior incompatible with the standards of high competence expected for board certification.

The Candidate also has an affirmative duty to notify the Board during the pendency of his or her candidacy if allegations of serious ethical misconduct or unlawful behavior have been lodged against the Candidate.

Credentials for Admission to Candidacy

The first step in pursuing ABFP board certification is to meet requirements for adequate specialized professional *experience* and *training*. This requires producing appropriate documentation for a credential review. Once the applicant has completed the credential review and paid the appropriate fees, he or she is considered a *Candidate* for the ABFP certificate.

Qualified Experience. Applicants must have accumulated 1000 hours of qualifying experience in forensic psychology over a minimum of a five-year period after the date of their doctoral degree in psychology. An earned LL.B. or J.D. degree may be substituted for two of the five years of experience; however, the requirement of a thousand hours of experience must still be met.

Qualified Training. ABFP requires one hundred (100) hours of qualifying specialized training in forensic psychology after the date of the doctoral degree in psychology. This may consist of the accumulated hours of one-on-one supervision by a qualified forensic professional, continuing education activities, and formal didactic classroom activities (beyond one's doctoral studies). When workshops presented by the American Academy of Forensic Psychology (AAFP) are used to satisfy all or part of this 100-hour requirement, each hour of AAFP credit counts for two hours.

Exemptions for Applicants with Post-Doctoral Fellowship Training. The requirement of five years of post-doctoral experience may be waived for applicants who have successfully completed one of the postdoctoral fellowship programs that have been determined by ABFP to meet specific training standards. A current list of these programs

may be found in the documents library. Instructions for fellowship training directors regarding how to apply to be added to the list may be found in the same location.

AAFP also provides stipends to assist recent post-doctoral fellows with payment of the fees associated with applying for ABFP board certification.

Rationale for the Examination Procedure

ABFP Candidates engage in an examination process, the purpose of which is to address two broad questions:

- Does the Candidate possess a sufficient depth and breadth of core knowledge in the specialty of forensic psychology?
- Does the Candidate apply psycholegal knowledge at a sufficient level of competence, proficiency, and professionalism?

To answer these questions, the Candidate must complete a written examination, submit practice samples for review, and participate in an oral examination. The written examination surveys the Candidate's breadth of knowledge pertaining to forensic psychology, broadly conceived. The practice sample review and the oral examination assess the Candidate's depth of knowledge in the Candidate's two primary areas of forensic practice and in forensic ethics.

The Written Examination

The written examination is intended to provide a uniform way to assess the Candidate's *breadth* of forensic knowledge. Therefore, the examination consists of 208 multiple choice questions focusing on seven categories of forensic psychology (e.g., landmark legal cases, child forensic matters, criminal legal issues). The standard does not require depth in each of these areas, but sufficient general knowledge to demonstrate the Candidate's broad base of knowledge within forensic psychology. (**see the documents library** for more details about the content, location, and recommended study materials for the written exam.)

The Review of Practice Samples

Candidates who pass the written exam are invited to submit two practice samples that are reviewed for their suitability for use in the oral examination. Practice samples typically are two forensic reports written by the Candidate in actual practice. The two practice samples should demonstrate the Candidate's competence in two separate and distinct areas of forensic psychology. The choice of practice sample areas will define the primary areas in which the Candidate is further evaluated during the oral examination. The practice samples are evaluated by ABFP board-certified forensic psychologists using structured criteria. If either or both of the practice samples is not appropriate for use in the oral examination, Candidates are offered a time frame in which to submit different practice samples. (**see the documents library** for details about requirements for practice samples and their evaluation.)

The Oral Examination

When the practice samples are deemed suitable, the Candidate is scheduled for an oral examination within three to nine months after practice sample approval. The ABFP National Chair of Examinations submits the practice samples to three ABFP board-certified forensic psychologists who will serve as the Candidate's oral examination committee. The oral examination focuses on the Candidate's two primary areas of forensic practice as exemplified by the practice samples, and further focuses in a more general fashion upon forensic ethics. For each practice sample, the Candidate is examined with regard to his or her forensic work product, the supporting documentation that the Candidate submitted, and a range of legal, ethical, research, and practice issues relevant for the area of practice the practice sample represents. (see **the documents library** for further details about the oral examination.)

Policy on Representation of Affiliation by Applicants and Candidates

By submitting an application for board certification all applicants and candidates agree to abide by ABFP's policy regarding representation of affiliation by applicants and candidates. ABFP does not permit applicants or candidates to represent their status in relation to ABFP/ABPP in any manner during the pendency of their application or candidacy. Applicants and candidates may not indicate publically that they are an applicant or a candidate for board certification by ABFP/ ABPP nor are they permitted to do so with their curriculum vitae or any written or oral statement of qualifications. Additionally, ABPP and ABFP do not use, authorize, or recognize the term "Board Eligible" or similar terms. Applicants and candidates may not use this term to represent any relationship or status with either Board nor may applicants or candidates represent to any outside person or entity that they have met the minimum requirements as an applicant or candidate for ABFP or ABPP. Failure to abide by these terms may be grounds to terminate an applicant's candidacy.