



## **G. Testing Guidelines**

### 1. Credentials Phase

- 1.1 Upon receipt of all transcripts and references, the Administrative Office will forward the application documents to the Credentials Committee Chairman. The Chairman will send copies of the application to each Committee member no later than ten (10) working days after receipt of the application. The Credentials Committee will review the application for the sole purpose of determining whether the applicant meets the general requirements for certification.
- 1.2 The Credentials Committee will submit its recommendation to the Chairman no later than fifteen (15) working days after receipt of the application. Votes may be cast or information transmitted or requested by telephone, fax, commercial or government mail or e-mail at this or any step in the testing procedures.
- 1.3 The Credentials Committee Chairman will send a letter to the candidate concerning the decision of the Committee no later than ten (10) working days of receipt of all ballots pertaining to paragraph 1.2 (above). Copies of this letter will be sent to the President, Secretary, Administrative Office, and, in the event of an affirmative vote, the Testing Committee Chairman.
- 1.4 An applicant who is unsuccessful may appeal the decision per section 5. Appeals Process.

### 2. Written Test Phase

- 2.1 Upon successful completion of the Credentials Phase, the Testing Committee Chairman will contact (either by telephone or in writing) the candidate no later than ten (10) working days of notification by the Credentials Committee Chairman, outlining the testing procedure (as set forth herein and elsewhere) and requesting a desired date to begin the testing process. All candidates will be advised that they normally have two and one-half (2½) years after approval of their application to complete the examination process. The Testing Committee Chairman shall closely monitor satisfactory progress towards certification. Time periods longer than two and one-half (2½) years shall be closely scrutinized, with termination of the certification process as an option. Upon recommendation of the Testing Committee Chairman to the Board of Directors, a 2/3-majority vote of the Board of Directors is required to terminate a candidate for unsatisfactory progress. The candidate will be advised of the initiation of this procedure and provided an opportunity to provide input to the Board of Directors prior to their vote. A member of the Board of Directors may recuse him/herself from voting at this or any phase of the testing procedures, and the vote computation will then be based upon the remaining members of the Board of Directors.



- 2.2 The written examination may be offered at least twice a year and will be administered by a member of the Testing Committee or other member of the Board of Directors at a meeting or event determined by the Board. If another member of the Board of Directors is needed to Proctor the written test, that member will be given a copy of the *ABFDE Testing Committee Guidelines for Written Test Evaluators* document and a **Proctor's Declaration form** to return with the graded test(s). The written test consists of 100 multiple choice questions. Specific dates for testing will be posted periodically on the ABFDE website at [www.ABFDE.org](http://www.ABFDE.org). In accordance with applicable local, state, and federal laws, reasonable accommodations shall be made for candidates with an identified disability. It is the responsibility of the candidate to notify the Testing Committee Chair of any specific needs.
- 2.3 The Testing Committee Chairman or Proctor in charge of giving the written test in the place of the Testing Committee Chair, will grade the written test. The Testing Committee Chairman will inform the candidate of the test results no later than ten (10) working days after receipt of the test. A minimum passing score of 70% is required. The scoring of the written test must be verified by a second Director, preferably a member of the Testing Committee.
- 2.4 A candidate who is unsuccessful in passing the Written Test Phase may re-enter after six (6) months at the written test phase of testing.
- 2.5 A candidate who is unsuccessful may appeal the decision per section 5. Appeals Process.
3. Practical Test Phase
- 3.1 Upon successful completion of the Written Test Phase, the candidate will receive a set of five (5) practical tests from the Testing Committee Chairman. Practical tests will consist of exercises that are designed to represent typical FDE casework. The candidate is allowed forty-five (45) days upon receipt of the material in which to complete the practical tests. Extensions may be granted on a per-case basis. Extensions should be liberally considered, as these procedures have been enacted for the primary benefit of the candidate. The original practical examinations must be returned, with or without the completed report and notes, within forty-five (45) days.
- 3.2 Upon return of all practical tests, notes and results, the Testing Committee Chairman will submit copies of the results, along with a copy of the *ABFDE Testing Committee Training Guidelines for Test Evaluators* document, to each Testing Committee member no later than fifteen (15) working days after receipt of the material.
- 3.2.1 If for some reason the original Directors assigned to this Committee are unavailable to fulfill their duties, other suitable Directors or



- Diplomates may be assigned, as determined by the President and/or Testing Committee Chair.
- 3.2.2 Hereinafter, all original Directors from the Testing Committee and/or any alternate Directors or Diplomates will be referred to as *Practical Test Evaluators*. These alternate evaluators will be provided with one set of the candidate's work product and the *ABFDE Testing Committee Guidelines for Practical Test Evaluators* document, to be read, signed and returned to the Testing Chair,
- 3.3 Each *Practical Test Evaluator* will review the conclusions and test notes to determine whether they meet the *Essential Findings* and/or cover the *Other Elements* specified for each practical test. The outcome for each Practical Test will be determined as follows:
- 3.3.1 **Pass:** If all *Essential Findings* are satisfied in the practical test answer/notes, then the candidate passes that practical test.
- 3.3.2 **Failure:** If all *Essential Findings* are not satisfied in the practical test answer/notes, then the candidate fails that practical test.
- 3.3.3 *Other Elements:* If all *Essential Findings* are satisfied but the *Other Elements* are not, in the practical report and/or case notes, the candidate must be questioned on the missing *Other Elements* during the Oral Board Examinations. (Note: The Candidate must be able to cover the information and/or theory listed as missing under the *Other Elements* as part of the Practical Evaluation, during his/her Oral Panel. If the Candidate is unable to fulfill this requirement, then the Candidate fails his/her Oral Board.)
- 3.4 All *Practical Test Evaluators* will submit their recommendations to the Testing Chairman who will determine the outcome of the Practical Test Phase as follows:
- 3.4.1 If all five (5) practical tests are recommended as "Pass", the Testing Chairman will conclude that the candidate has passed the Practical Test Phase.
- 3.4.2 If one (1) practical test is recommended as a "Failure," the Testing Chairman will conclude that the candidate has failed the Practical Test Phase and must wait a minimum of six (6) months to re-enter the testing process at the Practical Test Phase and will be issued five (5) new practical tests. The candidate's original two and one-half (2½) years termination date will remain in effect.
- 3.5 The *Practical Test Evaluators* are required to reach a unanimous decision. In the absence of a unanimous decision, all the *Practical Test Evaluators* will meet,



either in person or by telephone, with the Testing Chairman in order to resolve the discrepancy.

- 3.6 If the discrepancy cannot be resolved; the President shall form an ad hoc committee, consisting of three (3) Directors and/or Diplomates, to review the practical test, test criteria and evaluator comments in order to determine the cause of the discrepancy and a final resolution.
  - 3.7 The Testing Committee Chairman shall notify the candidate in writing regarding the *Practical Test Evaluator's* results no later than fifteen (15) working days following receipt of all *Practical Test Evaluators'* recommendations.
  - 3.8 After the candidate's testing process is successfully completed, including the Oral Board Phase, all Testing Committee members that evaluated the tests are duty bound to destroy all copies of answers/notes to practical tests submitted to them.
  - 3.9 The Testing Committee Chairman will keep all copies of answers/notes to practical tests with the records of the candidate, including those who withdraw or fail any phase of the testing process. The candidate's entire file will be maintained for a period of two (2) years by the Testing Committee Chair.
  - 3.10 A candidate who is unsuccessful may appeal the decision per section 5. Appeals Process.
4. Oral Boards Phase
    - 4.1 Upon successful completion of the Practical Test Phase, the Testing Chairman will contact the candidate and provide the option of having the Oral Boards take place at a meeting or an event at which a minimum of three Directors are expected to attend. Oral Boards will be offered at least twice a year.
    - 4.2 The Testing Committee Chairman shall inform the candidate in writing at least fourteen (14) days in advance of the oral examination as to the necessary preparations. The letter shall also set out the date and location of the examination and the name of the Director responsible for coordinating it.
    - 4.3 The panel for the Oral Boards shall be composed of three Directors, if they are available. Whenever possible, a member of the Testing Committee shall sit on all panels. If three Directors are not available at an Oral Board destination, Diplomate(s) may be chosen to conduct the Oral Board examination(s). Whenever possible, a Director shall sit on all panels. The Testing Committee Chair may also choose instead to pay for the necessary number of Directors to attend the Oral Boards.



- 4.4 All panel members should be familiar with the practical tests being reviewed. Whenever possible, the actual practical tests should be available during the Oral Board.
- 4.5 All panel members should be familiar with the candidate's results. Whenever possible, each member should be provided a copy of these results for review prior to the examination. (All copies disseminated to panel members must be returned to the Director or Diplomate coordinating the Oral Board at its conclusion.)
- 4.6 The Oral Board should be conducted in a conference room or other suitable setting. Reasonable audiovisual requests of the candidate should be provided.
- 4.7 In order to maintain the highest degree of professionalism, all panel members should be properly attired and conduct themselves accordingly. All members should offer their undivided attention during the Oral Board, and all distractions should be kept to a minimum. If an interruption is unavoidable, the examination should be adjourned for a brief recess.
- 4.8 The Oral Board should last between 60 and 90 minutes. Additional time should be taken for critique and evaluation. All members should be provided with an evaluation form to be completed for each of the three (3) Oral Board presentations.
- 4.9 The purpose of the Oral Board is to assess the candidate's reasoning, methodology, and underlying knowledge of the field of forensic document examination. As such, all candidates should be afforded the opportunity to properly present their findings, and all questions posed should be probative and constructive. Examples of sample questions that may be used during the oral boards are listed in the *ABFDE Testing Committee Standards for Evaluation of Candidate Tests*.
- 4.10 At the conclusion of the Oral Board, the candidate is excused from the room while the panel deliberates and reaches a consensus. Strengths and weaknesses of the candidate's performance should be discussed.
- 4.11 The candidate is then called back into the room, and a constructive critique of his/her performance is conducted. The panel is then permitted to convey to the candidate what their recommendation to the Testing Committee Chairman will be. It should be emphasized that it is a recommendation, and before a candidate is certified, a full vote of the Board is required.
- 4.12 At the conclusion of the oral examination, all copies of testing materials, answers, and demonstrative aids should be collected from the candidate, as well as from the panel, by a member sitting on the oral panel. This member will have agreed, prior to the oral boards convening, that s/he will be in charge of



destroying the documents properly. This is to ensure the continued integrity of the examination process.

- 4.13 The panel will make their recommendation to the Testing Committee Chairman no later than five (5) working days of convening.
- 4.14 The Testing Committee Chairman shall notify the Board Secretary of the Committee's recommendation. The Secretary will then transmit ballots to the Board of Directors. All ballots are to be returned to the Secretary no later than ten (10) working days after receipt.
- 4.15 The Secretary will send a letter to the candidate regarding the results of the Board vote no later than five (5) working days following receipt of the last ballot. Copies of this letter will be sent to the President, Testing Committee Chairman, and Administrative Office. The Secretary will make arrangements for the issuance of the ABFDE Certificate in a timely manner.
- 4.16 In the event of a candidate's failure or withdrawal, the Testing Committee Chairman will forward a letter of a candidate's failure or withdrawal to the Administrative Office.
- 4.17 A candidate who is unsuccessful in completing the Oral Boards Phase may re-enter after six (6) months at the Practical Test Phase.
- 4.18 A candidate who is unsuccessful may appeal the decision per section 5. Appeals Process.

## 5. Appeals Process

An applicant or candidate who is unsuccessful may appeal the decision of the appropriate committee (i.e., Credentials or Testing) as follows:

- 5.1 The appeal request must be submitted to the President no later than forty-five (45) days from the date that the applicant/candidate received the decision letter from the appropriate committee.
- 5.2 The appeal may be submitted in writing or presented orally to a quorum of the Board.
- 5.3 If the appeal is submitted in writing, the President will forward copies of the appeal correspondence under confidential cover to the appropriate committee chairman (i.e., Credentials or Testing).
  - 5.3.1 The appropriate committee chairman will provide copies of correspondence and documents to be evaluated to those Directors who did not conduct the initial evaluation. A ballot will accompany each set of photocopies.



- 5.3.2 All ballots and associated paperwork must be provided to the evaluators no later than fifteen (15) working days of receipt of the appeal letter to the Directors for a vote.
- 5.3.3 The Directors will submit their vote to the President no later than fifteen (15) working days after receipt of the material. An appeal override vote must be by a 2/3 majority of the Directors.
  - 5.3.3.1 A Director may recuse him/herself from voting at any phase of the testing procedures, and the vote computation will then be based upon the remaining Directors.
  - 5.3.3.2 A physical vote may be taken if a Directors' meeting is scheduled within forty-five (45) days of receipt of the appeal request, at the discretion of the President.
- 5.3.4 The President will send a letter to the applicant/candidate regarding the results of the vote no later than ten (10) working days after receipt of the results. The President will provide the results and original materials to the appropriate committee chairman.
- 5.4 Should the applicant/candidate request to make an oral presentation, the President will make arrangements for the earliest opportunity that a quorum of Directors can be physically present. The Board has the option of holding a special meeting to hear the presentation.
  - 5.4.1 The oral presentation cannot be made by a person other than the applicant/candidate. As this is a procedural matter, rather than a legal proceeding, no legal counsel or other agent may be present. Should either party request a recording of presentation, the party requesting this action will bear the entire cost of this service and provide the other side (at no cost) with a complete copy of all recorded information including transcripts.
  - 5.4.2 At the conclusion of the presentation, the applicant/candidate is excused from the room while the Directors deliberate. The President will then call for a vote. A minimum of two-thirds (2/3) of those in attendance must vote in favor of the appeal, otherwise the appeal will be dismissed.
  - 5.4.3 The applicant/candidate is then called back into the room, and the President will convey the results of the vote and the options that the applicant/candidate has available. The applicant/candidate will be provided with an opportunity to ask questions and receive clarification of the decision.





- 5.4.4 At the conclusion of the proceedings, all copies of testing materials, answers, and demonstrative aids should be collected from the applicant/candidate. This is to ensure the continued integrity of the examination process.
- 5.4.5 The appropriate committee chairman will send a letter to the candidate detailing the results of the vote and the applicant's/candidate's options no later than fifteen (15) working days following the presentation. Copies of this letter will be sent to the President and Administrative Office.

## 6. Subsequent Test Failure

- 6.1 If a candidate fails any phase of testing a second time, the candidate may agree to spend six (6) months with a mentor to address the identified area(s) of deficiency. This mentor will be selected by the ABFDE BOD. Both the mentor and the candidate will agree to devote a minimum of 80 hours to this process over the six month period. During the mentorship period the mentor will provide, and the candidate will complete, a maximum of four mentoring cases in the identified area(s) of deficiency to assess the candidate's progress.. At the end of the six months, if the mentor verifies in writing the candidate has made significant progress in the specified area(s), the candidate will re-enter the testing process and be issued five new practical examinations. If the mentor does not verify the candidate has made significant progress, the candidate's original two year waiting period will resume minus the time spent in the mentorship program. The candidate's original two and one-half (2½) years termination date will remain in effect. This mentorship option is available only once during a candidate's testing process.
- 6.2 If the candidate chooses to decline this option, the candidate will be required to wait a minimum of two years before being allowed to test again. After a waiting period of two (2) years the candidate will have to re-submit an application and will begin the process at the Credentials Phase (beginning). There is no limit to the number of times that a candidate may re-enter the testing process after the two year waiting period. The candidate will continue the testing program with the same anonymous candidate number s/he was originally assigned.

## 7. Candidate Records

The records of a candidate who withdraws from or fails any phase of the testing process will be maintained for a period of two (2) years by the Testing Committee Chairman. These records will then be retained for three (3) years in digital form by the Testing Committee Chairman and in original form by the Administrative Office.