

# Instructions and Information for Candidates for Certifying Examinations



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## **Instructions and Information for Candidates for Certifying Examinations**

This document provides information concerning the ABP examination and certification processes. For prerequisites and requirements necessary to qualify for the examinations, the dates for receipt of applications, and other related policy see the *Booklet of Information*.

Questions remaining after review of these instructions and the Booklet of Information may be addressed to Betsy D. Bennett, M.D., Ph.D., Executive Vice President, at [bdbennett@abpath.org](mailto:bdbennett@abpath.org). Please include your ABP ID in all e-mail correspondence.

### **Message From The President**

I congratulate you on your decision to seek certification in pathology.

The American Board of Pathology (ABP) was organized and incorporated in 1936. The first examinations were given and certificates issued in the same year. The ABP is one of 24 medical specialty boards that make up the American Board of Medical Specialties. There are 12 trustees of the ABP, who serve without compensation.

The ABP offers primary certification in anatomic pathology, clinical pathology, and combined anatomic pathology and clinical pathology. The ABP issues certificates in the following subspecialty areas of pathology: blood banking/transfusion medicine, chemical pathology, cytopathology, forensic pathology, hematology, medical microbiology, neuropathology, pediatric pathology. Subspecialty certificates in dermatopathology are issued in conjunction with the American Board of Dermatology (ABD), subspecialty certificates in molecular genetic pathology are issued in conjunction with the American Board of Medical Genetics (ABMG), and subspecialty certificates in clinical informatics are issued in conjunction with the American Board of Preventive Medicine

I wish you success in your examination and in your career.

Diane D. Davey, M.D., President

### **Primary Application Processing**

Candidates are able to track the progress of their application through PATHway on the ABP Web site. Each candidate will receive an e-mail when correspondence and/or documents relevant to application and test performance are placed in their PATHway Board Correspondence page. The correspondence may be printed out by the candidate. We encourage you to check your e-mail and PATHway Board Correspondence page frequently. The procedure for processing applications includes the following steps:

1. After you finalize your online application, PATHway will acknowledge receipt of the application and fee with an e-mail. A checkmark on your PATHway Board Correspondence page indicates your 'Application and payment have been received.' At the same time, your program director will receive an e-mail that the application is available for review and the evaluation form is available to complete. If you trained in more than one program, a secondary evaluation form is made available to any previous program directors. A checkmark indicates 'Application to Program Director for review.'
2. When your program director has approved the application and submitted the evaluation, checkmarks appear in the 'Application to Program Director for review-Completed' and 'Evaluation 1 received' boxes. If you trained in more than one program, a checkmark appears in the 'Evaluation 2 received' box when that evaluation is received.

3. When the program director has completed review/submission, your application is reviewed by the Application Coordinator. Receipt of your medical license, medical school diploma, and Step 3 score will be acknowledged during this review. Please do not call or e-mail the Board office regarding the status of your application; applications are reviewed in the order in which they are received and it is possible that your application may not be reviewed for several weeks after the deadline.
4. When the Application Coordinator approves the application and documentation, a checkmark appears in the 'Application to Credentials Committee' box and the application is queued for review by the Credentials Committee. The Credentials Committee determines whether or not you will receive a period of board qualification for an examination, and the dates of the period of qualification. If your application is approved, a checkmark appears in the 'Application to Credentials Committee-Approved' box and your period of board qualification is posted to the board qualification table. The maximum period of board qualification is 3 years for candidates who complete training prior to January 1, 2008, and 5 years for candidates completing training after January 1, 2008. Each candidate completing training after January 1, 2008 will be allowed to take the examination(s) for which they are qualified a maximum of 5 times during the period of qualification. If your application is not approved, you will receive an e-mail and there will be comments noted on your PATHway Board Correspondence page. A candidate will not be admitted to an examination unless declared qualified by the Credentials Committee.

The ABP does not recognize a status of or use the term "board eligible."

### **Subspecialty Application Processing**

The process is the same as for *primary application processing* except the fellowship program director is not required to review the application.

### **Registering for Examination**

1. The registration form is completed as part of the application for first-time candidates. When you finalize your application you will be directed to the payment screen to fill in your credit card information. When the credit card information is accepted, PATHway will acknowledge receipt of the application and fee with an e-mail.
2. Candidates who have previously been declared qualified must complete the online registration form. It is not necessary to submit another application if you have a current period of board qualification. When you finalize your registration form you will be directed to the payment screen to fill in your credit card information. When the credit card information is accepted, PATHway will acknowledge receipt of the registration form and fee with an e-mail.

### **Primary Examination Date Assignments**

When all applications have been processed, the examination date assignment will be posted to the PATHway Board Correspondence page of candidates who have registered for an examination and have been declared qualified for examination by the Credentials Committee.

1. Date assignments for all examinations are made by the ABP.
2. If you are unable to accept your date assignment, you must cancel your registration for the exam session with the 'Cancel' link on your PATHway Board Correspondence page. (When you are ready to take the examination following your cancellation, complete a registration form, **not an application**, and pay the \$500 fee.)
3. If you are registered for combined APCP, you do not have the option to cancel one portion of the examination.
4. Transfers cannot be made within the same examination period.

5. Special requests for date assignments cannot be accepted.

### **Deadline for Cancellation**

The examination dates and deadlines for receipt of cancellations are available on the ABP Web site. It is the candidate's responsibility to notify the ABP of any circumstance that may affect their appearance at a scheduled examination.

### **Examination Schedule**

The current schedule is available on the ABP Web site. Times listed are the actual starting times of the examination. Please be ready to enter the examination center approximately 10 minutes before the posted starting time so you will be settled in your assigned seat and ready to begin the examination. Announcements and instructions will begin immediately. **Each candidate is to bring a picture ID.**

### **Computer Examination Instructions**

The current instructions are available on the ABP Web site.

### **Travel and Hotel Accommodations**

Candidates are responsible for their own travel and hotel arrangements and all of their expenses. The ABP will ask the hotel to make an adequate number of rooms available for assigned candidates, but does not make individual arrangements. A link to the hotel web site is available on the ABP Web site. Reservations should be made no later than 3 weeks in advance of the arrival date in order to ensure rate and availability.

### **Materials Given at the Examination Site**

At registration, the candidate will receive a card with his/her candidate number and seat assignment. Candidates are seated in the Examination Center according to their candidate number, which is temporary identification for the current examination. **The candidate will not be notified of his/her candidate number(s) prior to registration.**

### **Question Format**

All questions are multiple-choice and are in the one-best-answer format. Sample questions and a practice exam for virtual microscopy are available on the ABP Web site and should be reviewed prior to taking an examination.

### **Source of Questions**

Test development and advisory committees generate questions used in the examinations. The members of these committees are recognized experts in pathology. There are presently 13 test development and advisory committees, including Anatomic Pathology, Blood Banking/Transfusion Medicine, Chemical Pathology, Clinical Informatics, Cytopathology, Dermatopathology, Forensic Pathology, Hematology, Laboratory Management, Medical Microbiology, Molecular Genetic Pathology, Neuropathology, and Pediatric Pathology. These test development and advisory committees not only generate questions for examinations, but also review question performance and make recommendations to the ABP with respect to content of the examinations and qualification requirements.

## Preparation for Examinations

It is to the candidate's benefit to become familiar with the types of questions used, as shown on the ABP Web site.

In preparing for the examination, the candidate should be aware of the following:

1. Candidates should be familiar with the use of a computer keyboard and mouse. A calculator is provided on the computer and is available for practice on the ABP Web site.
2. Candidates should not bring any personal items to the exam center. A pen is provided at each workstation.
3. The most appropriate preparation for an examination of this kind is a thorough review of the subject, rather than selective "cramming." The examinations are designed to measure comprehensive knowledge and the ability to apply that knowledge intelligently. Anyone suitably prepared in the various subjects should have no undue difficulty with these examinations.
4. In this type of examination, no candidate is expected to obtain a perfect score. The best procedure is for the candidate to answer all questions, as a well-considered choice is more often right than wrong. Candidates must obtain a passing score on both the written and practical sections of the AP/CP examinations in the same administration in order to pass the examination. AP/CP candidates must pass both the AP examination and the CP examination in order to become certified. Passing one part (AP or CP) of the AP/CP examinations does **not** confer certification in that area.
5. At the ABP Examination Center, the ABP provides candidates with Nikon Alphaphot 2 microscopes with 10x wide-field oculars, 4x, 10x, 40x, and 100x oil immersion objectives, mechanical stages, abbe condensers, and built-in light sources. **Candidates may bring their own microscopes if they prefer.** Ancillary microscope tools (oil and/or polarizing lenses) will **not** be supplied by the ABP. Candidates should bring any ancillary microscope tools needed, whether or not the candidate brings his/her own microscope. **Oil may be used during the Hematology subspecialty examination only.**
6. It is very difficult to keep the temperature in the examination room at a level that is satisfactory to all. It is suggested that those persons sensitive to lower temperatures bring sweaters or jackets to the examination center.

## Conduct of the Examinations

1. The only personal items permitted at the workstations are jackets or sweaters, eyeglasses, microscopes, and ancillary microscope tools (oil and/or polarizing lenses). **No other personal items are permitted at the workstations. Do not bring communication devices, including pagers and cell phones, personal organizers, calculators, books, notes, or papers to the examination center.** If a candidate is found to have a cell phone or other electronic device at a workstation, the device will be removed by staff and returned at the end of the day. A written description of the incident will be provided to the trustees of the ABP, who may or may not decide to invalidate the results of that individual's examination.
2. Food (including candy), drinks, and gum are not permitted at workstations. However, drinks, candy, and medications may be stored in the storage area, and access to this area is available with proctor notification. A drinking fountain is available in the hall. Smoking is not permitted in the building.

3. **Times listed on the schedule are the actual starting times of the examinations.** The candidate is expected to be at the assigned seat and ready to take the examination at the time listed. Your computer will be logged on for you if you are not seated when the examination begins.
4. **No notes may be made during or between examinations in the examination room.** A candidate may be subject to disciplinary action should this occur. Examination instruction books may be used for calculations, etc. **All examination instruction books must be returned to the proctor at the end of the examination.**
5. **The ABP examinations and illustrative materials are copyrighted and are the sole property of the ABP. They must not be removed from the test area or reproduced, either in part or in whole. Reproduction and/or use of copyrighted material will lead to legal action.**
6. One candidate of each gender is permitted to leave the examination room at the same time for **brief restroom breaks only**. No candidate is allowed to leave for a restroom break during the last 10 minutes of a session.
7. There is to be absolutely no communication between candidates during an examination.
8. Suspected problems with your examination computer should be referred to the proctor immediately. If your computer seems to run slowly or if your monitor screen has irregular colors, please contact the proctor. Do not wait until the examination is over.
9. Candidates are expected to maintain professional conduct during the examination. Any conduct that is considered inappropriate will be documented by the proctors and reviewed by the trustees to determine appropriate action. Inappropriate behavior includes cheating, suspicion of cheating, aggressive behavior toward proctors or other candidates, disregarding examination rules, and any other behavior determined to be detrimental to the administration of the examination.

### **Irregularities**

ABP staff will supervise the examination to ensure that the examination is properly conducted in accordance with the rules of the ABP.

In the interest of protecting the integrity of the ABP and its certification examinations, irregular behavior may be sufficient to bar a candidate from future examinations, to terminate a candidate's participation in an examination, to invalidate the results of a candidate's examination, to cause the withholding or revocation of a candidate's scores or certificate, or to merit other disciplinary action by the ABP. Irregular behaviors include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. The giving or receiving of aid in the examination as evidenced either by observation or by statistical analysis of candidates' answers.
2. The unauthorized possession, reproduction, or disclosure of any ABP examination-related materials, including, but not limited to, examination questions or answers, before, during, or after the examination.
3. The offering of any benefit to any agent of the ABP in return for any right, privilege, or benefit that is not usually granted by the ABP to other similarly situated candidates or persons.
4. Possession of an electronic communication device at a workstation.

In addition, the ABP may withhold a candidate's scores and require that the candidate retake one or more portions of the examination if presented with sufficient evidence that the security of the examination has been compromised, notwithstanding the absence of any evidence of the candidate's personal involvement in such activities.

### **Queries During Examinations**

In spite of the great care exercised in the proofreading of examinations, typographical errors may occur. Most of the time, the meaning is readily apparent. Out of fairness to all candidates taking the examination, proctors are instructed not to answer individual questions, make judgments, or interpret a possible error. Candidates are asked to accept the fact that errors in typing or recording of information may occur, which requires them to exercise judgment. However, if a candidate believes that an error renders a question ambiguous or inaccurate, he/she should notify a proctor. Proctors will refer queries from candidates regarding examination questions to the appropriate committee for assessment. Please write any comments on specific examination items in your exam booklet and bring it to the attention of the proctor at the end of the exam. The ABP reviews the examination completely prior to scoring. If the ABP determines that an error affects the answer to a question, that question is eliminated from the final scoring of the examination.

### **Examination Processing and Results Reporting**

After the examination is processed, an initial evaluation is made to identify questions that did not perform within certain parameters. These questions, along with others that were queried at the time of the examination, are reviewed to determine whether they should be excluded from the final determination of pass/fail. This is done according to predetermined psychometric criteria.

A link to a letter indicating success or failure will be posted to your PATHway Board Correspondence page approximately 4 to 6 weeks after the final week of examinations. A performance report link will be included for unsuccessful candidates, giving information regarding performance on the examination. You must have Adobe Acrobat Reader installed on your computer to view either of these PDF documents. In addition, please be sure 'pop-ups are not blocked' on your web browser.

All sessions of the examination will be treated as one for marking and evaluation purposes. All ABP examination questions are copyrighted. Any violation of this copyright will be legally pursued.

The ABP will not release examination results by telephone, facsimile, or e-mail.

### **Certificates**

Engraving of the certificates takes approximately 4 months to complete. All certificates are mailed at the same time. It is ABP policy that only the title M.D. or D.O. is included on the certificate after the diplomate's name.