

PRACTICE SAMPLE GUIDELINES

THE AMERICAN BOARD OF FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY, INC. (ABFP) (REVISED 10/15/21)

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 based substantially 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, 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 centerpiece for each Practice Sample typically is a written report of a forensic evaluation. However, with the prior agreement of the Corresponding Secretary, and for good cause, an alternative submission that is primarily (and optimally solely) authored by the Candidate may be substituted for *one* of the two Practice Samples. Examples of potentially acceptable alternative submissions are:

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

Just as evaluation-based Practice Samples are intended to demonstrate a high level of professional competence, alternative submissions 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) Disability, 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.
- d) Optimally, at least one of the Practice Samples includes use of data from psychological testing and/or forensic assessments administered by the Candidate. If testing is not used in a Practice Sample, Candidates should
 - a) clearly articulate in the Practice Sample why testing was not indicated and
 - b) be prepared to address related issues in the course of an oral examination.

Note to Candidates: While test data is not a requirement per se, past experience suggests that failure to include some type of test data in at least *one* of the practice samples more commonly leads to a decision of non-acceptance. Reviewers find it difficult to ascertain Candidates’ ability to apply psychological constructs (of which test data is a cardinal component) to the legal issue at hand without such.

3. Format

A Candidate will submit two Practice Sample documents. A Practice Sample will include a Curriculum Vitae, an Introduction, a written report (or an alternative submission—see earlier definition), and Supplementary Materials. **Each Practice Sample (Introduction, Report, and Supplementary Materials) must not exceed 80 pages in length.** If psychological testing is included, each Practice Sample will be accompanied by a *separate* document containing all psychological test data.

- a) *Curriculum Vitae:* This should describe the Candidate’s background, training, and involvement in forensic psychology. It should be included as part of either one of the Practice Samples (it does not need to appear in both of them).
- b) *Practice Samples:* Each of the two Practice Samples should include the following:
 - i. *Title Page:* This should contain the Candidate’s name, address, telephone number, fax number, and e-mail address. The title should reflect the nature of the case described in the written report.

- ii. *Table of Contents*: Each section should be clearly indicated.
- iii. *Introduction*: This is intended to orient the reviewers to matters that will improve their understanding of the case and the way it was conducted. The reviewers may not be familiar with practices and procedures in the jurisdictions in which the Candidate practices. Providing such information improves their understanding. Typically, the Introduction is *no more than three* pages. The following types of information would be appropriate and may or may not apply to a given case:
 - Brief description of the Candidate's clinical and forensic practice.
 - One paragraph defining essential referral information and any jurisdictional procedures that may be unique or novel to the Candidate's area of practice.
 - Any unique ethical issues raised by or addressed in the sample.
 - Whether the Candidate conducted the evaluation completely independently or were assisted in any way and, if so, the nature of the Candidate's contribution.
 - If the Candidate had a possible conflict of interest, how it was resolved.
 - Any strategic problems encountered in doing the case, and how the Candidate resolved them.
 - Explanation of any evaluation or reporting practices in this case that were not consistent with widely-accepted standards of practice in forensic cases, but that were required because of local laws, rules, procedures, or employer demands.
 - Things the Candidate would have liked to have done but could not (and why).
 - Specifically, what the Candidate did to disguise the identity of people or places in the Practice Samples.
- iv. *Forensic Report (or Alternative Sample)*. Typically, this is the report that resulted from the forensic evaluation in question. However, if a referral question included two separate legal issues (e.g., combined evaluation addressing competence to stand trial and mental state at the time of the offense), a Candidate may choose (but is not required) to excise one of the legal questions and any associated material from the report; the Candidate must acknowledge this change in the Introduction to the practice sample. The report 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.
- v. *Supplementary Materials*. These materials are intended to offer documentation that will help the reviewers to understand relevant case data, laws, and ethics pertaining to the case. Common materials include:
 - The most relevant third-party documentation;
 - The most relevant state or federal statutes, regulations, and case law;
 - References to published research of particular relevance.

Candidates should give careful consideration to the documents included in the Supplementary Materials and should utilize the space available to them. Inclusion of these documents is essential for reviewers to assess a Candidate's ability to draw together the relevant data and apply it to the legal standard in question, that is, to judge the suitability of the samples for oral exams.

Note to Candidates: You may contact the Practice Sample Review Chair with questions about the selection and/or preparation of Practice Samples. You may contact the Corresponding Secretary to request a waiver if you feel that the 80-page space limitation prevents you from adequately presenting either of your Practice Samples.

- vi. *Psychological Test Data.* All psychological test data must be included in a **separate** document from the Practice Sample. There is **no page limit** for this document that includes only psychological test data.

4. Technical Aspects

- a) Except as noted below, all Practice Samples should be double-spaced, in 12-point font, with 1-inch margins on all sides.
- b) If deemed sufficiently legible by the Corresponding Secretary, approved alternative submissions may remain in their original published format. However, these submissions must contain a Title Page and Introduction as described above.
- c) Each Practice Sample begins with page number 1 and is numbered sequentially thereafter.
- 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 easily legible or accompanied by a typed copy.
- f) All practice samples must be submitted in English. In the case of collateral records in another language, an English translation of the document should be included.
- g) 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.
- h) Practice Samples should involve cases that have been resolved (e.g., custody has been awarded; competency has been adjudicated; a lawsuit has been settled) or ones in which the Candidate does not reasonably anticipate further involvement. The ABFP Corresponding Secretary is available should further consultation be needed.

5. Confidentiality

The Candidate should make certain in the Practice Samples, Psychological Test Data, and Supplementary Materials to obscure the identity of parties to the proceeding. This is

accomplished by either redacting or assigning fictitious identities to the case number; names of the parties, judge, attorneys, witnesses, and other professionals; and any other possible identifying information (e.g., work place, schools, treatment settings). If fictitious identities have been assigned, a statement must be provided to this effect in the Introduction. If the confidential information is obscured by blacking or whitening it out, steps must be taken to ensure that the redacted material cannot be read through the marking. Photocopying the document after names have been obscured and then scanning the photocopy into the electronic document often enhances this effect. This measure is required even if the material in question has become part of the public record.

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 (1) 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 offering a timetable for completing and submitting the Practice Samples.
- c) ***No more than two extensions may be granted, for a combined total of one (1) 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 Professional Psychology, thus starting over again with the certification process. Candidates reapplying within five (5) years of passing the Written Examination do not have to re-take the Written Examination. Those who passed the Written Examination more than five (5) years before reapplying will have to re-take it.

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 evaluation or report.
- b) A Practice Sample shall not be reviewed or critiqued by any other person, either during its composition or at any other time prior to the Oral Examination.
- c) The Candidate may request that others review or critique other examples of his or her forensic work; however, forensic work reviewed by others 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, regardless of whether 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 certificate 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 [here](#).

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 [here](#).

D. Practice Sample Submission Process

1. Practice Samples are submitted to the Chair of Practice Sample Reviews in electronic format only. Microsoft Word and PDF are the acceptable formats.
2. 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 PDF.
3. Practice Samples should be submitted to the Chair of Practice Sample Reviews via the ABPP website (on the payment page). No hard copy or e-mail submissions are acceptable.

E. Practice Sample Screening Process

1. The Chair of Practice Sample Reviews (PS Chair) coordinates the screening and review of Practice Samples to determine their sufficiency for proceeding to the Oral Examination, which will be based on the accepted Practice Samples. This screening process has two parts: Screen for Format, and Review for Suitability for Use in Oral Examination (see Section F).
2. Screen for Format
 - a) The PS Chair applies the criteria under B of the “Practice Sample Guidelines” to determine whether the Practice Samples meet the criteria for content and format stated under subsections 1 through 7 (e.g., distinct areas of practice; format; confidentiality).
 - b) The PS Chair notifies the Candidate of any deficiencies in Format (under B, subsections 1 through 7) and requests the Candidate’s revision or replacement of one or both Practice Samples before proceeding to the part two of the screening and review process (i.e., Review for Suitability for Use in Oral Examination).
 - c) Resubmissions must be made within six (6) months of notification of format deficiencies. Failure to resolve format deficiencies within that time will terminate candidacy.

F. Practice Sample Review Process

1. Review for Suitability for Use in Oral Examination
 - a) For practice samples that meet format criteria, the PS Chair submits the practice samples to two faculty members to obtain a judgment regarding their suitability for use in the Oral Examination.
 - b) The faculty reviewers independently apply a semi-structured process for identifying deficiencies in the practice samples. For each Practice Sample, they

communicate to the PS Chair their opinions regarding any deficiencies and offer a recommendation about going forward with the Practice Samples to the Oral Examination. A “recommendation not to proceed” indicates the reviewer’s opinion that the Practice Sample is very unlikely to contribute to a positive outcome at oral examination.

2. Outcome of the Review for Suitability for Use in Oral Examinations

- a) If the reviewers recommend that the Practice Samples are appropriate for use in the Oral Examination, the PS Chair notifies the National Chair of Examinations, who will inform the Candidate of the decision to proceed to Oral Examination, instruct the Candidate to pay to ABPP the Oral Examination fee, and schedule the candidate for the next round of Oral Examinations.
- b) If the reviewers recommend that either or both of the Practice Samples are not appropriate for use in the Oral Examination, the PS Chair notifies the Candidate that he or she will not be permitted to proceed to the Oral Examination.
- c) For Practice Samples that were not recommended for use in the Oral Examination, the PS Chair provides the Candidate with a summary of the strengths and weaknesses of the Practice Sample(s). The Candidate then can replace the Practice Sample(s) as described below.
 1. If one Practice Sample was recommended not to proceed to the Oral Examination, the Candidate must replace the practice sample within six (6) months of notification by the PS Chair.
 2. If both Practice Samples were recommended not to proceed to the Oral Examination, the Candidate’s candidacy is terminated. One (1) year after notification of termination, however, the Candidate may reapply to the American Board of Professional Psychology, thus starting over again with the certification process. Candidates reapplying within five (5) years of passing the Written Examination do not have to re-take the Written Examination. Those who passed the Written Examination more than five (5) years before reapplying will have to re-take it.

G. Process Subsequent to Practice Sample Approval

Upon the submission of two acceptable Practice Samples, the Candidate will be contacted by the National Chair of Examinations, who will inform the Candidate of the decision to proceed to Oral Examination, instruct the Candidate to pay to ABPP the Oral Examination fee, and schedule the Candidate for the next round of Oral Examinations.

H. Appeal Procedure

1. Candidates wishing to appeal a failure in the Practice Sample Review must notify the ABFP President within 30 days of notification of the failure. Failure to notify the

ABFP President of an intention to appeal within 30 days 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 Practice Sample Review and that the failure to follow its procedures resulted in an egregious error that was directly related to the decision to fail the Candidate's Practice Samples. Disagreements about the outcome of the Practice Sample Review or any comments provided to candidates from the reviewers are not to be construed as procedural lapses or an egregious error.
3. All appeals are reviewed for potential merit by the ABFP President. 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 Review process and criteria or current ABFP Board members. Once convened, the President will provide the Committee with the Candidate's Practice Samples, the reviews provided by each reviewer, and the candidate's appeal letter. The Committee will review the materials and determine whether the appeal should be granted pursuant to this policy.
4. Candidates whose appeals are granted may proceed to the Oral Examination at the next time the National Chair of Examinations creates a schedule of oral examinations.

A Checklist for Practice Samples

This checklist will help you make sure that your Practice Sample submission is completed in accordance with the requirements set forth in these Guidelines. Please complete this checklist and send it to the Chair of Practice Sample Reviews when you submit your Practice Samples.

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

_____ I have prepared two Practice Samples that each represent distinct and separate areas of forensic psychological knowledge and practice.

_____ Both Practice Samples meet all of the criteria outlined in these Guidelines.

_____ I have included my *Curriculum Vitae* detailing my background, training, and involvement in forensic psychology.

_____ I have submitted in full my Practice Sample fee directly to ABPP.

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

_____ *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.

_____ *Table of Contents* clearly indicating each section.

_____ *Introduction* detailing the nature of my role and involvement in generating the Forensic Work Product (see Guideline B.3(b)(iii)).

_____ *Forensic Work Product*.

_____ *Supplementary Materials* section.

_____ Each Forensic Work Product, including the Supplementary Materials section, does not exceed 80 pages.

_____ All psychological test data for each Practice Sample are contained in separate documents.

I will now ...

_____ submit all materials – i.e., Practice Samples (including Supplementary Materials), CV, and psychological test data – to the Chair of Practice Sample Reviews via the ABPP webpage.

_____ retain an electronic copy of each Practice Sample. *I understand that if my Practice Samples ultimately are approved, I will be asked to produce additional bound copies 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 per the requirements in these Guidelines.

_____ 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) Forensic psychological book chapter
- b) Forensic psychological article accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal
- c) Forensic psychological test manual
- d) 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 they a) constitute the Candidate's own independent work and b) 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 Chair of Practice Sample Reviews); and *B. Appropriateness for Oral Exam* (determined by the Practice Sample Reviewers).

A. Eligibility (for the Corresponding Secretary and/or the Chair of Practice Sample Reviews 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 ensure 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 or 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 Chair of Practice Sample Reviews and the National Chair of Examinations.
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. To qualify, it would need to specifically address the forensic psychological relevance of the developmental results (e.g., 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 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 Examination Guidelines, Part B, 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, to defend the work’s assertions, and to 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.