

*Saskatchewan College of Psychologists*

*Oral Examination  
Handbook for Candidates*

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## Purpose of the Oral Examination

The Oral Examination is a formal process conducted by a panel of psychologists to assess whether a Candidate demonstrates **a minimum standard of competence** in the core competency areas outlined in the Mutual Recognition Agreement (i.e., Interpersonal Relationships, Assessment and Evaluation, Intervention and Consultation, Research, and Ethics and Standards) within the individual's intended area of practice and Authorized Practice Endorsement (APE) (if applicable).

The oral examination, by asking key relevant questions, is used to determine a Candidate's readiness for the autonomous practice of psychology. Failures in the oral examination process are generally quite rare. They are, however, in some cases an unavoidable component of the process. The overriding responsibility of the Saskatchewan College of Psychologists is to serve and protect the public.

## Fee

As of January 14, 2006, Council passed a motion approving the levying of an oral examination fee. This fee will partially recoup College costs associated with the exam process. The fee is non-refundable and must be submitted in advance of taking the examination. The fee is levied each time an examination is taken. This motion comes into effect for new oral examination candidates as of Spring 2006.

## Content Areas for the Oral Examination

### **Interpersonal Relationships**

This content area is designed to examine the Candidate's ability to form and maintain constructive relationships with clients and families. Essential is for the Candidate to: 1) form respectful, helpful, professional relationships; 2) develop working alliances; 3) deal with conflict; 4) maintain appropriate professional boundaries; and, 5) incorporate an understanding of diversity in the practice of psychology. Relationships with colleagues also fall within this domain including providing and receiving feedback from colleagues and other professionals.

### **Assessment & Evaluation**

This content area is designed to assess the Candidate's ability to gather and integrate information (tests, observations, clinical interviews, collateral sources and contexts) to evaluate the patient's functioning as well as the outcome of psychological services. The Candidate should demonstrate an understanding of populations served, multiple assessment methods, and psychometric theory. The Candidate should be able to integrate findings, formulate hypotheses and action plans, explain any apparent inconsistencies in the clinical data and present a comprehensive description of the patient. The Candidate should also have knowledge about the nature and impact of diversity on the assessment process.

### **Intervention & Consultation**

This content area is designed to test the Candidate's ability to plan and implement a course of treatment that is: consistent with the case formulation; sensitive to the patient's background, needs and values; theoretically based; empirically justified; and, designed to resolve the problem(s). The Candidate should have knowledge of a variety of interventions and select appropriate interventions from these. The Candidate should demonstrate the ability to respond to critical clinical situations. The Candidate should demonstrate the ability to integrate/coordinate services from other care providers and community resources into an overall intervention plan. Furthermore, the Candidate should be able to evaluate the progress and outcome of interventions.

### **Research**

This content area is designed to examine a core research knowledge base, and training in accessing and applying research knowledge in clinical practice. Clinical practice in all health-care fields is based on accumulating research knowledge and using good judgment in applying this knowledge. The Candidate should have basic knowledge of research methods and critical reasoning skills.

### **Ethics, Standards & Law**

This content area is designed to test the Candidate's knowledge of professional ethics and the ability to integrate ethics and standards into professional conduct and practice. The Candidate should demonstrate thorough knowledge of the CPA ethical principles, standards, and guidelines. The Candidate should be able to identify potentially conflicting principles, and use the CPA ethical decision-making process to resolve ethical dilemmas.

This content area is also designed to test the Candidate's knowledge of laws and regulations related to professional practice. The Candidate should demonstrate the ability to identify situations that may require action mandated by law. The Candidate should demonstrate the ability to practice within his/her scope of education, training, skills, knowledge and experience. The Candidate should demonstrate awareness of personal and professional limitations that hinder clinical judgment and methods of resolution.

### **Authorized Practice Endorsement (APE)**

Under the Psychologists Act 1997, Section 23, the communication of a diagnosis is a protected practice. Individuals wishing to convey diagnoses in their practice must be declared competent to diagnose. This content area, therefore, is designed to assess the Candidate's ability to use assessment and evaluation to apply a diagnosis and to utilize relevant data to reach differential diagnoses. The Candidate should have a thorough understanding of classification systems. Individuals must be assessed to be competent to diagnose in general and not just within a particular area.

## The Examination Panel

The Examination Panel is traditionally comprised of three registered members of the Saskatchewan College of Psychologists all of whom must have practiced as Full Practice members for a minimum of one year. One member of the panel will be designated as the Chair. All members of the panel will have similar responsibilities, but the Chair will be asked to provide a written report outlining the panel's final decision. The Saskatchewan College of Psychologists - Oral Examination Committee will select the Examination Panel and arrange the examination date and location. In choosing an Examination Panel, every attempt will be made to ensure that at least one member of the panel claims expertise in the Candidate's declared area of specialized practice. If it is not possible to find a panel member who shares the Candidate's declared area of practice competency, panel members will be chosen based on their prior knowledge, training and experience in the Candidate's declared areas. For an APE-only examination all panel members must have the endorsement on their license. For combined competency/APE examinations the majority (2/3) of the examination panel members must have the APE designation on their license. The Candidate does have the right to refuse a panel due to the fact that no panel member shares the exact same declared practice competencies. Doing so, however, may result in a delay of the examination until an acceptable panel can be configured. In assigning Candidates to examining teams, efforts will also be made to avoid conflict of interest, or the perception of a conflict of interest, for individual examiners.

## Candidate's Responsibilities Prior to Examination

1. Candidates will be asked to **submit** the following for the Panel's review prior to the exam (deadline for submission will be established by the SCP office):

a) **Professional Statement:** Five copies of a 1 to 3 page double-spaced, typewritten document outlining the Candidate's:

- professional training;
- clinical experience;
- current employment activities;
- area(s) of specialization and any limitations to his/her scope of practice;
- theoretical orientation that guides his/her professional work.

This document will serve as a basis for discussion and evaluation throughout the oral exam.

b) **Assessment Sample:** Five copies of one current assessment report which includes the following information:

- Non-identifying Descriptive Information
- Presenting Problem
- Brief History
- Assessment Procedure, Rationale & Results
- Clinical Impressions and Case Formulation
- Diagnosis (if applicable)\*
- Recommendations and Next Steps

\* must be included if the Candidate is applying for APE

c) **Intervention Sample:** Five copies of a 5 to 8 page, double-spaced, typewritten document which provides a summary of one current intervention that the Candidate has conducted in his/her clinical practice. The summary should include:

- Non-identifying Descriptive Information
- Presenting Problem
- Diagnosis (if applicable)\*
- Brief History
- Number & Nature of Sessions Including Rationale for Interventions Used
- Outcome and Evaluation of Intervention

\* must be included if the Candidate is applying for APE

d) **Submit oral examination fee, and APE application fee, if applicable.**

**----Please note that both the Assessment Sample and the Intervention Sample must be current (within 6 months) and must be cosigned by supervisor---**

2. In preparation for the exam, Candidates should review and be familiar with the following:

a) Ethics:

- Canadian Code of Ethics 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (2000)
- Companion Manual to the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (2001)
- The list of standard questions pertaining to Ethics and Professional Issues presented in Appendix A. The Examination Panel is also provided with this list of questions and will ask some or all of these questions during the exam.

b) Legislation

- The Psychologists Act, 1997 (proclaimed March 2002 – amended 2004)
- Practice Guidelines for Providers of Psychological Services (Updated, 2001)
- Record Keeping Guidelines, 1993 (APA)
- Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (APA)
- Saskatchewan College of Psychologists Registration Policy and Procedures (2007)
- The Freedom of Information and Privacy Act
- The Local Authority Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act
- The Privacy Act
- The Hospitals Standards Act
- The Mental Health Services Act
- The Child and Family Services Act
- The Mentally Disordered Persons Act
- The Adult Guardianship and Co-Decision Making Act
- Guidelines for Custody and Access Assessment (OPA)
- Guidelines for Child Custody Evaluation in Divorce Proceedings, 1994 (APA)
- The Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA)
- Canadian Human Rights Act, 1985

c) Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) <http://www.cpa.ca/MRA.pdf>

d) Diagnostics (if applying for APE)

- DSM-IV
- DSM-IV Made Easy, Morrison, 1995
- DSM-IV-TR Handbook of Differential Diagnosis, First et al., 2002
- Study Guide to DSM-IV, Fauman, 2002

## Panel Responsibilities Prior to Exam

Prior to the scheduled exam, the Examination Panel will be expected to:

- 1) Review the Candidate’s Professional Statement and Work Samples and prepare questions pertaining to core competencies for professional practice and APE (if applicable). Sample questions to evaluate MRA Competencies and APE can be found below.

<i>Sample Questions</i>	<i>Examiner’s Acceptable Answers</i>
<p><b>Interpersonal Relations</b>                      What diversity issues were relevant to this case?                      What, if any, personal or professional limitations do you think could potentially affect your work with this client?</p>	
<p><b>Assessment and Evaluation</b>                      What areas were not fully assessed?                      What assessment tools would you consider?</p>	
<p><b>Intervention and Consultation</b>                      What methods of intervention would work with this client?                      What other professionals might you have to work with to best help this client?</p>	
<p><b>Research</b>                      What research is there to support your intervention?                      What research is there to support your choice of assessment tools?</p>	
<p><b>Ethics, Standards &amp; Law</b>                      If issues of self-harm arose during this assessment how would you deal with this?                      If the client’s employer/teacher contacted you to ask about the client, what would you do?</p>	
<p><b>APE (if applicable)</b>                      What diagnoses did you have to rule out for this client?                      What additional information do you need from this client to confirm a diagnosis?</p>	

- 2) Prepare **one** vignette, accompanying questions and expected answers, which will permit the Candidate to demonstrate competence in the five core competency areas and APE (if applicable). The vignette should be written with the Candidate’s intended area(s) of specialization in mind. A sample vignette is presented below, along with sample questions pertaining to the evaluation of core competencies and APE.

<p><b>Sample Vignette:</b>  <i>Deborah is a 34-year-old woman who self referred for counselling/therapy. Deborah was divorced three years ago and has custody of her two children, a girl 8, and a boy, 6. She came in because she has been having difficulty sleeping, feels exhausted, and is unable to control feelings of sadness and tearfulness. She reported that last week she burst into tears when her supervisor at work criticized her for misplacing a message. She has not worked since this episode. She has been short tempered with her children and fears that she may be hurting them with her anger. Deborah feels that her life is miserable and empty. She cannot remember the last time she had fun. She reported feeling embarrassed about the incident at work, and that her children are a burden. She also reported she feels like running away.</i></p>	
<b>Sample Questions</b>	<b>Examiner’s Acceptable Answers</b>
<p><b>Interpersonal Relations</b>                  Discuss considerations in developing a therapeutic relationship with this client?</p>	
<p><b>Assessment and Evaluation</b>                  What assessment tools might you use with this client?</p>	
<p><b>Intervention and Consultation</b>                  What theoretical model would you use to plan treatment?</p>	
<p><b>Research</b>                  What research would be relevant to this case?</p>	
<p><b>Ethics, Standards &amp; Law</b>                  If during the course of treatment, you had begun to suspect that Deborah’s anger was being expressed by hitting her children, what would you have done?</p>	
<p><b>APE (if applicable)</b>                  What diagnoses would you have to rule out for this client?</p>	

- 3) Review standardized examination questions and answers pertaining to ethics and professional issues (Appendix A). Time may not permit asking all of these questions. Some questions may be more important depending on the area of practice. Some questions may be answered through the work sample and vignettes.
- 4) Each member of the Examination Panel will be required to meet, in person, with all other members of the panel 30 minutes prior to the scheduled exam to review work sample questions/answers, vignette questions/answers, and the standardized ethics questions.
- 5) Panel members must be in agreement regarding what constitutes an “Acceptable” versus “Marginal” versus “Unacceptable” response for each question prior to the exam.

## Oral Examination Process

- 1) Panel members should allow for 30 minutes both prior to and following the exam for discussion.
- 2) The examination process is expected to take approximately 90 minutes (APE-only examinations should take approximately 60 minutes – **\*\* please note that it is at the discretion of the Chair of the Panel to extend the examination if deemed necessary**). Panel members should attempt to follow the pace and sequence of topics proposed below in order to ensure Candidates do not receive differential treatment.

Summary Schedule for Exam	
Panel Meets and Organizes	30
Panel Greets Candidate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviews Examination Process</li> <li>• Begins Audio/videotape</li> <li>• Review Professional Statement</li> </ul>	5-10
Questions on Professional Work Samples	40
Questions Related to the Vignette	20
Examination on Ethics/ Professional Issues	20**
Panel Discussion and Recommendation	30

- 3) At the discretion of the Chair, the Candidate may be allowed to take a short break during the examination to use the washroom, get a drink of water, etc.
- 4) Candidates are not allowed to bring any materials to the examination. Any materials needed (i.e., written vignette, copy of work samples) should be provided during the exam. All written material should be collected from the Candidate at the end of the exam.
- 5) In order to control for bias, the use of prompts and/or follow-up questions should be limited during the exam.
- 6) Candidate’s questions during the exam should be limited to ensure that responses are indicative of the Candidate’s current level of competence and to prevent Candidates from using information obtained in questioning to formulate a response.
- 7) Panel members should take turns asking questions in a sequence determined during the meeting prior to the examination.
- 8) Panel members should be very familiar with the rating system. After each question, examiners should independently evaluate the Candidate’s demonstrated competency in each of the applicable core competency areas, APE (if applicable) and on the standardized ethics questions. Some questions may pertain to more than one area of competence and APE. The Candidate’s overall responses in each area of competency should be rated as either:
  - 3 = Acceptable Response/ Meets level expected for independent practice
  - 2 = Marginal Response/ Somewhat below level expected for independent practice
  - 1 = Unacceptable Response/Much below level expected for independent practice

## Evaluation of the Candidate

- 1) Each panel member will be responsible for independently rating the Candidate's performance during the exam. At the end of the exam, the Candidate's performance will be discussed and reviewed by the entire panel in each area of competency and APE (if applicable). The panel is expected to arrive at a consensus rating in each competency area and APE (if applicable). **Any ratings of "Marginal" and "Unacceptable" assigned to responses to questions during the exam should be carefully reviewed.**
- 2) When Candidates produce an unacceptable response to any question in an area, a decision must be made if the unacceptable response is such that it should ultimately result in a failure. For example, although a candidate may produce acceptable responses in general within the area of ethics and standards, if one of the responses within this domain is unacceptable (e.g., indicates that sleeping with clients is acceptable), it may be given greater weight and result in a failure of that domain.
- 3) When there is a lack of unanimity, a maximum of 30 minutes will be allowed for reaching a consensus, failing which, a decision will be made by a majority vote.
- 4) The Chair of the panel records the final consensus ratings within each area on an evaluation form to be submitted to the Saskatchewan College of Psychologists.

A **PASS** is given if a Candidate receives a consensus rating of "Acceptable" (i.e., a score of 2-3) in **all** of the MRA competency dimensions (i.e., interpersonal relations, assessment/evaluation, intervention/consultation, research, ethics and standards).

A **FAIL** is given when an examining team gives a consensus rating of "unacceptable" (i.e., a score of 1) in one or more of the dimensions on the rating form.

**APE** is given if the candidate passes the exam, **and** receives a consensus rating of "acceptable" on the APE portion of the exam. Note that an individual can pass the competencies and receive a full practice license, but not obtain the APE endorsement, meaning they can not communicate a diagnosis.

- 5) The Chair of the Oral Examination Panel informs the Candidate of the results of the oral examination immediately following the examination.
- 6) The results of the examination along with any comments relevant to the decision-making process and/or the ultimate consensus score reached must be recorded and submitted to the College. In addition, a copy of the specific questions asked of the Candidate and the audio or videotaped recording of the examination must be forwarded to the College following the exam.

- 7) Permission may be sought to provide feedback to supervisors regarding concerns that arise out of the examination process. All examination results must be confirmed by the Registration Committee of the SCP in writing before they are considered official – the candidate will receive a letter from the Registrar on behalf of the Committee.

## Failures

Applicants who fail the entire exam or the APE only exam will receive an automatic review of their examination by an independent 3 person panel constituted by the Registration Committee. The review panel may recommend to the Registration Committee that the failure be upheld, overturned or that it be set aside and a new oral is recommended. If the candidate is not satisfied with the outcome of the automatic review they have an opportunity to appeal the decision to Executive Council or be re-examined. If the candidate chooses to appeal their examination result they must submit a written request in writing within 30 days of the date of the letter informing them of the result of the automatic review and the appeal must be based on a problem with the process of examination. Procedures to be followed are available from the Saskatchewan College of Psychologists. Panel members should be familiar with this policy prior to the oral examination.

## Appendix A

### Standardized Ethics & Professional Issues Questions

Consistent with the document *Oral Interview: Review and Recommendations* prepared by Joanne Shymkiw (March 2004), the importance of ethical decision making will be emphasized throughout the oral examination process. In addition to assessing ethics and standards within the context of the work sample and vignette, examiners will likely find that it is necessary to ask additional standardized questions in order to feel they have adequately covered this area.

A list of 19 standard questions pertaining to Ethics and Professional Issues is presented below. Candidates should be prepared to answer any or all of these questions during the exam process.

Question
1. What situations do you feel unprepared to handle and how would you deal with these types of situations?
2. What is the role of the Saskatchewan College of Psychologists under professional legislation?
3. Identify some of the more important ethical or legal dilemmas you might face in your practice, and describe how you would manage them.
4. Describe the four key principles of the Canadian Code of Ethics and the implications for your practice.
5. Describe the ethical decision-making process described in the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists.
6. Identify the legal statutes relevant to your area(s) of practice, and explain their relevance to your area(s) of practice.
7. What does "duty to protect" and "duty to report" mean?
8. What would you do if you thought a client required involuntary confinement?
9. What are the requirements for informed consent for services and how do you practice/ implement these?
10. What are the requirements and limits for maintaining client confidentiality?
11. What special issues related to consent and confidentiality are there in working with minors and other dependants?
12. What implications are there for confidentiality when there is a third party referral and/or payment?
13. What implications are there for confidentiality when you are dealing with multiple clients?
14. What are the requirements for record keeping as a psychologist?
15. What are your clients' rights of access to files kept on them?
16. What personal limitations do you have which may affect the type or quality of psychological service you provide? How do you handle this?
17. If you were contemplating an extension or change in your area(s) or competence, how would you go about doing this?
18. What plans do you have for maintaining and upgrading your level of competence?
19. What is an Authorized Practice Endorsement?