American College of Veterinary Pathologists

2021 Phase II Certifying Examination

Candidate Handbook

The mission of the ACVP is to promote excellence in veterinary pathology through our members as they protect and improve animal, human, and environmental health to benefit society.

Questions about the Phase II Examination may be addressed to certification@email.acvp.org.

Updated 14 December, 2020
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This document supersedes all previous publications of the American College of Veterinary Pathologists (ACVP) concerning its policies, procedures and requirements for certification. The admission of a candidate to the ACVP Certifying Examination is governed by the policies, procedures and requirements in effect during the current application period. The ACVP reserves the right to make changes in its fees, policies, procedures and requirements at any time, with or without prior notice.

Introduction

The ACVP Phase II Certifying Examination Candidate Handbook is a resource for trainees, sponsors, mentors and training programs interested in ACVP board certification. A separate Candidate Handbook for the 2021 Phase I Certifying Examination is available on the ACVP website. However, general information relevant to both the Phase I and Phase II Certifying Examinations is included in this handbook. Both Candidate Handbooks should be consulted by new trainees at the beginning of a training program, whenever changes in training are considered, during training to ensure that eligibility requirements are being met, and again near the end of training to prepare to apply, prepare, and sit for the ACVP Certifying Examination. Candidate Handbooks for the Certifying Examination will be updated as requirements or examination details change, and the “Exam” section of the ACVP website should always be referenced for the most current version of Candidate Handbooks.

Contact Information

Questions regarding the Phase II ACVP Certifying Examination or eligibility criteria should be sent to certification@email.acvp.org.

Certifying Examination

The ACVP Certifying Examination is a two-phase process that candidates must pass in order to be certified as Diplomates in either veterinary anatomic or clinical pathology.

Certifying Examination content is based on a blueprint of key tasks and species, organ systems and processes and distribution of topics. The blueprint documents for anatomic and clinical pathology are included in the links below. Candidates are strongly encouraged to review the blueprints for their respective examinations prior to making their study plans.

Due to the remote delivery of the 2021 Certifying Examinations in veterinary anatomic and clinical pathology, blueprint tasks related to written descriptions and interpretations will be tested in multiple choice format only. Glass slides and whole slide scans will not be utilized.
Phase II Examination

The Phase II Examination is a one-day examination in veterinary anatomic pathology or veterinary clinical pathology. The 2021 Phase II Examination is composed of 300 multiple-choice questions (MCQs) that assess the skill and knowledge that a minimally competent pathologist should possess.

Although the Phase II Examination cannot be passed in parts, candidates who fail the examination will be provided the results of how they performed on the examination.

The Phase II Examination dates are posted on the ACVP website.

Administration of the Phase II Examination

The 2021 Phase II Examination will be administered in partnership with Prometric, a certification and licensure company. The examination may be taken at a Prometric testing center or remotely by Prometric’s live online proctoring (LOP). Additional information regarding Prometric testing center procedures and policies will be made available on the ACVP website.

Anatomic Pathology Reading List

This reading list is provided as guidance for candidates. The sources are common journals and textbooks that represent the appropriate level of pathology knowledge. Candidates should feel free to utilize other equivalent sources and they should seek mentor guidance if they are unclear about source equivalency.

For the 2021 Phase II Certifying Examination, candidates should focus on journals published between 01 January 2015 to 30 June 2020. For textbooks, candidates should utilize a recent version that is representative of current pathology knowledge.

Principal Sources

- Maxie MG. Jubb, *Kennedy and Palmer’s Pathology of Domestic Animals*
- Zachary JF. *Pathologic Basis of Veterinary Disease*
- Latimer KS. Duncan and Prasse’s *Veterinary Laboratory Medicine*
- Veterinary Pathology
- Journal of Comparative Pathology
- Journal of Veterinary Diagnostic Investigation
- Clinical pathology atlas (examples include Raskin RE, Meyer DJ. *Canine and Feline Cytology* or Valenciano AC, Cowell RL. *Diagnostic Cytology and Hematology of the Dog and Cat* )
Supplemental Sources

- Terio K, McAloose, St. Leger J. *Pathology of Wildlife and Zoo Animals*
- Percy DH, Barthold SW. *Pathology of Laboratory Rodents and Rabbits*
- Noga EJ. *Fish Disease: Diagnosis and Treatment* (Chapters 4, 5, 7-15)
- Abee C, Mansfield K, Tardif S, Morris T. *Non-Human Primates in Biomedical Research: Diseases* (2012, Chapters 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15)
- Fox JG, Marini RP. *Biology and Diseases of the Ferret* (2014; Chapters 14-24)
- *Avian Disease Manual*. Am Assoc Avian Pathol
- *Toxicologic Pathology* (pertinent review articles)

Anatomic Pathology Scoring and Item Distribution

The 2021 Phase II Examination will consist of 300 MCQs, administered in 3 sections of 100 questions each. Each section will contribute equally to the final score.

Questions may include, but are not limited to, core concepts; identification and interpretation of macroscopic conditions; identification, description and interpretation of microscopic changes; selection of interpretation and integration of clinicopathologic data; selection and interpretation of appropriate ancillary tests; knowledge related to the pathophysiology, progression and diagnosis of disease in animals; and current literature.

Species Distribution

- 50 – 70% Domestic animals
- 20 – 30% Laboratory animals
- 10 – 20% Non-domestic animals

Clinical Pathology Reading List

This reading list is provided as guidance for candidates. The sources are common journals and textbooks that represent the appropriate level of pathology knowledge. Candidates should feel free to utilize other equivalent sources and they should seek mentor guidance if they are unclear about source equivalency.

For the 2021 Phase II Certifying Examination, candidates should focus on journals published between 01 January 2015 to 30 June 2020. For textbooks, candidates should utilize a recent version that is representative of current pathology knowledge.
Principal Sources

- Stockham SL, Scott MA. *Fundamentals of Veterinary Clinical Pathology*
- DiBartola SP. Fluid, *Electrolyte and Acid-Base Disorders* (Sections I, II, III)
- Raskin RE, Meyer DJ. *Canine and Feline Cytology*
- Valenciano AC, Cowell RL. *Diagnostic Cytology and Hematology of the Dog and Cat*
- Weiss DJ, Wardrop KJ. *Schalm's Veterinary Hematology*
- Veterinary Clinical Pathology

Supplemental Sources

- Cowell RL, Tyler RD. *Diagnostic Cytology and Hematology of the Horse*
- Kaneko JJ, et al. *Clinical Biochemistry of Domestic Animals*
- Osborne CA, Stevens JB. *Urinalysis: A Clinical Guide to Compassionate Patient Care*
- Thrall MA. *Veterinary Hematology and Clinical Chemistry* (non-domestic animal chapters)
- Campbell TW, Ellis CK. *Avian and Exotic Animal Hematology and Cytology*
- Veterinary Pathology
- Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association
- Journal of Veterinary Internal Medicine

Clinical Pathology Scoring and Item Distribution

The 2021 Phase II Examination will consist of 300 MCQs, administered in 3 sections of 100 questions each. Each section will contribute equally to the final score.

Questions may include, but are not limited to, core concepts; interpretation and description of microscopic lesions (hematology, bone marrow, cytology and histopathology); interpretation of visual test results (e.g. hematology cytograms, flow cytometry plots, electron micrographs, special and immunochemical stains, method comparison charts, quality control data); interpretation of clinicopathologic data; selection and interpretation of appropriate ancillary tests; knowledge related to the principles of commonly used laboratory equipment and methods; knowledge related to the fundamental principles of laboratory medicine (e.g. test properties, quality assurance and quality control, reference interval determination); knowledge related to the pathophysiology, progression and diagnosis of disease in animals; and current literature.

Species Distribution

- 70 – 80% Domestic animals
- 10 – 20% Laboratory animals
- 5 – 10% Non-domestic animals
Responsibilities of Candidates, Sponsors, and Training Institutions

Responsibilities of the Candidate

The level of responsibility on trainees for their own education is high and demands extensive independent study of textbooks and journals, and consultation with pathologists, clinicians and other specialists. Supplementary participation as a student in lectures or participation in seminars may be useful. However, this should not be the major emphasis of the training. The Certifying Examination is the culmination of years of intensive preparation involving a wide range of animal species. A final phase of concentrated study can generally be successful only if the preceding training has been suitable in breadth and depth.

Responsibilities of the Sponsor

The sponsor’s endorsement of a candidate’s application certifies that the candidate has had training adequate to permit sitting for the examination. Sponsorship of a candidate is not to be taken lightly because the ACVP Board of Directors and Credentialing Committee puts considerable trust in sponsors in determining the preparedness of a candidate. A sponsor’s endorsement clearly does not guarantee success for the candidate, but it should guarantee that the candidate fulfills the minimum requirements and has been thoroughly prepared. As the principal mentor, the sponsor must be intimately involved with the training of the candidate. The sponsor, if not the main instructor, must know in some detail of what is being done for and by the candidate, and should serve as a counselor who reviews all aspects of the candidate’s training and progress on a regular basis. A sponsor must not have a conflict of interest with the candidate as viewed by an objective outside observer.

Responsibilities of the Training Institution for the Phase II Examination

Training should include daily participation in, and responsibility for, some portion(s) of pathology service, training or research. The training should offer academic studies designed to provide adequate understanding of the basic principles of pathology and provide facilities and case materials for the trainee to gain practical experience in performing professional duties. These should include the application of all standard methods and procedures of pathology to any given case, to demonstrate the pathogenesis and cause of the existing disease process and make a diagnosis. For veterinary anatomic pathology, this usually relates to performance and interpretation of gross, histologic, histochemical, immunohistochemical, molecular biological and ultrastructural examinations, and correlating results with clinical findings and clinical laboratory data. For veterinary clinical pathology, this usually relates to interpretation of hematologic, cytologic, biochemical, immunological and molecular biological examinations of blood, urine, body fluids, and other specimens obtained from the animal, as well as histologic evaluation of surgical biopsy specimens. Interpretation includes correlating test results with clinical findings. While the pathologist need not be technically proficient in the performance of laboratory procedures, thorough familiarity with the methods, uses, limitations, and applications of such tests, and the ability to supervise the performance of these procedures, and interpret the results are required.
Training institutions should provide library resources that include current journals and reference textbooks commonly used by veterinary pathologists, and access to computerized literature searches. In addition, archival case materials or organized study sets containing case materials should be made available. The ACVP does not credential training programs at this time.

If candidates have questions about their training program and its acceptability for training, they can contact the ACVP and the program/arrangement will be assessed on a case-by-case basis in consultation as needed with one or more of the following depending on the issues: the Credentialing Committee, the ACVP Board of Directors and the Certifying Examination Board.

References for Training


Sponsor and Training Route Requirements and Definitions

Sponsor

All applications require a sponsor. The sponsor who endorses the application must be the person most responsible for the candidate’s training in veterinary pathology. Occasionally, circumstances dictate that a sponsor is not the principal mentor, in which case the ACVP Credentialing Committee and Board of Directors require an explanation/justification at the time of application.

If an ACVP, ECVP or ECVCP Diplomate is not the person most responsible for a candidate’s training, then the Sponsor Verification Form must be co-signed by the principal mentor. The Diplomate will complete all portions of the form relevant to the Sponsor, whereas the principal mentor will sign as the Co-signing mentor (co-sponsor).

Phase II Examination Training

After graduation from a veterinary college or school, candidates must be trained in veterinary anatomic pathology if they are seeking certification in veterinary anatomic pathology, and in veterinary clinical pathology if they are seeking certification in veterinary clinical pathology. Candidates must complete training under one of the following program scenarios prior to taking the Certifying Examination:

Standard Route

If a training program, such as a residency in veterinary pathology, is specifically designed to train veterinary anatomic or clinical pathologists as one of its primary functions, and is supervised and directed by a
Diplomate of the ACVP or ECVCP for clinical pathology candidates, or by a Diplomate of the ACVP or ECVP (by examination) for anatomic pathology candidates, then training must include at least 36 calendar months of active supervision and direction, primarily in the field which certification is sought (veterinary anatomic pathology or veterinary clinical pathology).

Alternate Route

If a program does not meet the criteria above, then training must consist of at least 48 months of relevant experience in veterinary anatomic or clinical pathology, with at least 12 of the 48 months spent under the supervision and direction of an ACVP Diplomate at the same institution and in a program specifically designed to train veterinary pathologists as one of its primary functions.

Dual Certification

Diplomates certified in either veterinary anatomic pathology or veterinary clinical pathology may seek certification in the other discipline. Training must consist of at least 12 months, at the equivalent of 40 hours per week, in the discipline sought. At least 50% of the training must be completed in person with the sponsor who is board certified in the discipline sought. Anatomic pathology sponsors may be either ACVP or ECVP (by examination) Diplomates, and clinical pathology sponsors may be either ACVP or ECVCP Diplomates. The 12 months of training may be obtained over a period of one to five years and may be either done pre- or post-certification in the first discipline, but should be distinct from the training used toward eligibility requirements in the first discipline.

Eligibility

Credentialing Requirements for Phase II Examinations

ACVP must examine only veterinarians who have a degree necessary for the practice of Veterinary Medicine from a veterinary college in some state, province, territory or possession of the United States or Canada, or from an American Veterinary Medical Association-listed veterinary college.

For all examinations, candidates must provide a photocopy of their veterinary diploma from a college fulfilling the above criteria. Documentation must be in English or include a notarized English translation by an independent translation service.

Criteria to Take Phase II Examination

- All candidates are required to pass the Phase I Examination prior to taking the Phase II Examination.

- A candidate may elect to take the Phase I and Phase II Examinations in the same year if they meet the eligibility requirements for both examinations and pass the Phase I Examination prior to taking the Phase II Examination. Candidates intending to take both the Phase I and Phase II Examinations in the same year must register for each examination by the
respective deadlines. Candidates who do not pass the Phase I Examination will have their registration fee for the Phase II examination refunded within 30 days of receiving their Phase I Examination results.

- A candidate must have completed 36 months (Standard Route) or 48 months (Alternate Route) of veterinary pathology training prior to the Phase II Examination date and must have a signed approval form from a sponsor.
- A candidate must complete the online application and pay the Phase II Examination fee by the application date.

Criteria to Take Phase II Examination for Dual Certification

Candidates seeking dual certification must adhere to the following training requirements prior to attempting the relevant certification examination:

- Twelve months, at the equivalent of 40 hours per week, of training under the mentorship of an ACVP Diplomate who is certified in the discipline sought. If a mentor is not an ACVP Diplomate, then he or she must be an ECVP Diplomate (for anatomic pathology candidates) or an ECVCP Diplomate (for clinical pathology candidates).
- The 12 months of training may be obtained over a period of one to five years, and may be either done pre- or post-certification in the first discipline, but should be distinct from the training used towards eligibility requirements in the first discipline. A minimum of 50% of the training time should be in person with the ACVP (or ECVP or ECVCP) certified Diplomate (mentor).
- Following the training, the ACVP (or ECVP or ECVCP) certified Diplomate will sign the sponsorship form attesting to the readiness to attempt the certification examination (testable competencies) and training and mastery of non-testable competencies.
- For dual certification eligibility, one must be boarded in one discipline before applying for the Phase II Examination in the second discipline (necessitating Phase II testing in separate years for anatomic pathology and clinical pathology) except in a case where a candidate meets full eligibility requirements for both disciplines in the same examination year (if a candidate had both 36/48 months of training in anatomic pathology and 36/48 months of training in clinical pathology, met other eligibility requirements, and wished to apply for and take both Phase II examinations in the same year).

Criteria to Repeat Failed Examinations

After passing the Phase I Examination, candidates will have four attempts over the next nine years to pass the Phase II Examination. If a candidate has not passed the Phase II Examination after four attempts, or has exceeded their nine-year limit, they must reapply as a new candidate and will be required to retake and pass the Phase I Examination prior to retaking the Phase II Examination. (NOTE: The Phase II
examination was not held in 2020 due to COVID-19; therefore, 2020 will not count toward the nine-year limit.) The four attempts that a candidate is given to pass the Phase II examination will be calculated as the sum of attempts that occur in Ames (past traditional examination), Tampa (in person traditional examination) and remotely (2021 Phase II Examination).

**Application**

**Application Deadlines**

Candidates must apply separately for the Phase I and Phase II Examinations. Application periods for each examination (the date applications open and the application deadline) are updated yearly on the ACVP website and on the application page. Application deadlines are subject to change from year to year, and candidates should ensure that they check the dates each year in order to meet deadlines.

**Important Examination Dates**

The application, Sponsor Verification Form, Sponsor Verification Form for Dual Certification, Terms of Agreement for Admission to the Examination and detailed application steps are available on the application page of the ACVP website.

**Exam Application Page**

**Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Requests**

The ACVP complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended by the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendment Act of 2008 (the ADA) by providing reasonable accommodations. If a candidate has a disability or impairment which may require special accommodation(s) to take an examination, they must complete the applicable section of the examination application form.

Accommodation cannot be granted retroactively, so that if a candidate informs ACVP of an impairment or disability after the examination has been completed, there can be no changes made in that candidate’s examination results or changes in how that candidate’s examination is graded in comparison to other candidates.

To support a request for test accommodations the following materials must be submitted by February 1 of the examination year for either or both the Phase I and II Examinations. The request form is found in the link below.

**Test Accommodations Request Form**

**Application Process and Withdrawal**

Candidates pay the examination fee at the time of filling out the application. The applicant and sponsor will receive an email message once the Credentialing Committee has reviewed the documentation and approved the applicant to sit for the examination. A recommendation for acceptance or rejection to sit for
the examination is made by the Credentialing Committee and is reviewed and approved by the ACVP CEB and Board of Directors. A message from the ACVP Executive Office indicating acceptance or rejection will follow the ACVP Board of Directors review.

Candidates may appeal the decision if rejected to take the Certifying Examination. Additional information regarding this process is included in the Appeals section below.

If the applicant's credentials are not accepted, or if a candidate's request to withdraw from the examination is received by the withdrawal deadlines listed on the ACVP website, fees are refunded except for a processing charge. No withdrawal refunds are made after this date and no fees as a result of withdrawal may be carried over to apply in subsequent years.

If a candidate applies for both the Phase I and Phase II Examinations and fails the Phase I Examination, they will automatically receive a full refund for the Phase II Examination. No request for withdrawal from the Phase II Examination is necessary for these candidates.

Withdrawal prior to the examination, or failure to appear for the examination, will not constitute an attempt to sit for the examination. A candidate's illness during preparation for, or during the actual examination, will not be considered a valid reason to waive the rules of the College. In the event a candidate starts, but is unable to complete the examination, results will be reported and will constitute an attempt to sit the examination.

Individual candidates accepted to take the examination will be identified only by the unique identification numbers assigned them by the ACVP office until the results of the examination are approved by the ACVP Board of Directors.

**Preparation, Validation and Scoring of the Phase II Examination**

Test items for the Phase II Examination are written and assembled by ACVP Diplomates who are members of the Test Item Writing Group (TIWG) and the Examination Assembly and Administration Group (EAAG), respectively. Members of these groups are selected based on experience, expertise, areas of interest, access to test items and employment sector (academia, diagnostics, industry). There are separate TIWGs and EAAGs for anatomic pathology and clinical pathology.

The TIWG composes or submits test items for consideration for the Phase II Examination. Submitted test items are reviewed for difficulty, accuracy, clarity, and relevance. Following a rigorous review process, test items are entered into a database for use on subsequent examinations. Each item in the database is accompanied by metadata, including Job Task Analysis and Examination Blueprint Categories and performance data from previous examinations. This information is used by EAAG members when assembling an examination.

EAAG members prepare the Phase II Examination. Test items are selected from the database by the EAAG to produce an examination that is aligned with the ACVP Job Task Analysis and Examination Blueprints (see above). A number of test items with performance established in previous examinations are included for equating purposes (see below).
Grading of multiple choice questions is automated. The computer-generated item analysis, including the discriminatory and difficulty coefficients of each question, is considered by the committee before final determination of candidate scores. During the entire examination process, candidates are identified only by number.

To pass an examination, a score of equal to or greater than the passing point (cut score) must be achieved. The cut score will be established by ACVP Diplomates in consultation with a psychometrician via a Standard Setting Study prior to the 2021 Phase II examination. The cut score, once determined, will be posted on the ACVP website.

In order to ensure that examinations are of comparable difficulty, regardless of the year in which they are administered, an equating process is used to compare the difficulty of examinations given in different years and to adjust scores to reflect any differences in difficulty. These adjusted scores are used to determine if candidates pass or fail the examination based on the pre-established cut score.

Additional information regarding establishment of the cut score and the equating process are available on the ACVP website.

**Cut Scores and Equating**

**Reporting of Phase II Examination Results**

Written notification of the results of the examination will be sent by email to candidates and sponsors within 45 days from the date of the examination.

Scores from the Phase II Examinations will not be reverified. Results for the automated multiple choice item scoring process are statistically and psychometrically analyzed, and items with specific scoring criteria are assessed and re-analyzed prior to final results being reported.

**Appeals**

Members and those seeking to gain membership through passing the Certifying Examination may appeal and adverse decision by a College entity. Such decisions may include, but are not limited to, denial of adequacy of credentials prior to examination for Certification, denial of Certification, and cancellation of Membership or Certification by disciplinary action. All appeals will be considered by the ACVP Appeals Committee, whose purpose is to review any decision by the College that adversely affects a person seeking to gain, continue, or reinstate membership in the College, upon the request of eligible persons.

Appeals from candidates for denial to take the Certifying Examination or for denial or cancellation of Certification must be submitted in writing to the ACVP Executive Director within 30 calendar days of such person’s notification of the adverse decision being appealed. Appeals must include a statement of justification for the appeal with supporting documentation, if any. When an appeal is received, the Executive Director shall submit the appeal materials to the Chair of the Appeals Committee and to the Chair of the ruling entity that made the original decision. Within 14 days of receiving these materials, the Chair of the ruling entity that made the original decision shall submit any documentation relevant to the appeal and
a statement of justification for its original decision to the Appeals Committee Chair. Within 14 days of receiving these additional materials, the Appeals Committee Chair shall convene a meeting of the Appeals Committee to review all documents relevant to the appeal and determine the validity of the appeal. Within 14 days of this meeting, the Appeals Committee Chair shall submit the results of that determination to the Executive Director who shall inform the appellant of the Appeals Committee’s decision. If the appeal is denied, no further appeal procedure shall be undertaken by the College.

ACVP Honor Code for Certifying Examination Candidates

All candidates are expected to accurately represent their credentials. All examinations are taken under an honor system. Candidates are required to read and sign an honor code statement at the time of application and at the time of examination. Test items are copyright protected. If a candidate is found to have misrepresented any portion of their credentials, to have received outside assistance on an examination, to have cheated on an examination, or to have misrepresented their work on an examination, to have violated the confidentiality or copyright protection of the examination, or to have behaved unethically in any other way during the credentialing or examination process, their credentials may be rejected, they will receive a failing grade on the examination, they will forfeit fees for the examination, and they will be subject to any other disciplinary action deemed appropriate by the ACVP Council. These actions may include denial of permission to retake the examination in future years and/or denial of the ability to attain certification.

Honor Code

Maintenance of Certification (MOC)

All veterinary specialties recognized by the AVMA, including the ACVP, are required to implement a mandatory program for maintenance of certification (MOC). The MOC program for ACVP Diplomates certified in 2016 and thereafter have time-stamped certificates which expire every 10 years. Regular documentation of defined continuing education and scholarly activities, maintenance of professional proficiency, and efforts in professional organizations are required for renewal. The MOC web-based portal is designed to efficiently facilitate ACVP members in maintaining their certification. The interface, accessible through the ACVP website, allows members to clearly communicate, track, and report MOC credit activities according to the basic guidelines delineated by the AVMA.