

Association of



*Professional
Behavior Analysts*

**Guidelines for
Evaluating Credentials in
the Practice of
Applied Behavior Analysis**

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Guidelines for Evaluating Credentials in the Practice of Applied Behavior Analysis

The Association of Professional Behavior Analysts (APBA) receives many inquiries about various types of credentials for professional and/or paraprofessional practitioners of applied behavior analysis (ABA). These guidelines are offered to help practitioners, consumers, employers, funders, and regulators evaluate credentials and credentialing programs for themselves by seeking answers to a series of questions. It is APBA's position that individuals and organizations that issue credentials should be transparent about the content, structure, and operations of the credentialing program as well as the individuals who develop and manage the program and its components, such as examinations; therefore, answers to the questions on the following pages should be readily available on the program's website and/or in other sources, such as articles published in professional journals or newsletters.

As context, note that there are distinctions among certificates like those that are issued by many colleges, universities, and other entities to signify that one has completed one or more courses; certifications in the implementation of particular assessment instruments or interventions; and professional certifications. Only the latter signify that the holder has had specified training and has demonstrated competence in the practice of a profession or occupation, typically by passing a professional examination. These guidelines pertain to those kinds of credentials.

One hallmark of credible personnel credentialing programs based in the United States is accreditation by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) of the Institute for Credentialing Excellence (ICE) or the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). Note that (a) it is credentialing programs that may be accredited, not the organizations that manage them, and (b) membership in ICE "...does not mean that ICE has accredited, approved, or otherwise endorsed a member organization or its certification program(s)" - <http://www.credentialingexcellence.org/p/cm/ld/fid=50>. Such accreditation is essential to ensure that the credentialing program complies with overarching external standards derived from case law and best practices in professional credentialing.

Another feature of credible credentialing programs is the use of job (or occupational) analysis studies to identify essential tasks for performing the duties of the occupation or profession and the content of credentialing examinations. Such studies typically entail having panels of subject matter experts develop a list of knowledge and skills required of a competent practitioner. A test construction expert uses that task list to develop a survey on which a large sample of members of the profession rate the importance of each task. The resulting data are used to determine which tasks remain on the list. The final task list is used to develop exam items, and often to help guide the development of formal and experiential training requirements. Reports describing the procedures and results of job analysis studies should be readily available from the credentialing body.

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Questions to Ask about ABA Practitioner Credentialing Programs

I. Credentialing body

- How long has it been in existence?
- Is it autonomous (i.e., independent of other organizations or entities) in making decisions about its credentialing program(s)?
- Is it a nonprofit organization? If so,
 - Are the bylaws or other governance documents available to the public?
 - Does the Board of Directors consist mostly of credentialed behavior analysts plus one or more consumers of ABA services and/or members of other professions?
 - What are the professional affiliations of the Directors?
 - How are Directors elected or appointed? By whom?
 - Are Directors paid? If so, by whom?
- Is there an Executive Director or CEO? If so, does s/he have a professional background in behavior analysis?

II. Credentialing program(s)

- Accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) or American National Standards Institute (ANSI)?
- Were job analysis studies conducted to identify the knowledge and competencies required for the credential(s)? If so,
 - What subject matter experts were involved?
 - Did a test construction expert design the job analysis surveys and analyze the data?
 - To what pool of respondents were the job analysis surveys sent?
 - Have the study methods and results been published?
 - Are job analysis studies repeated periodically?
- Is there a comprehensive outline of the knowledge and competencies (task list) resulting from the job analysis study or studies? Does the outline describe the practice of behavior analysis generally, *without restriction or reference to any particular client or service recipient populations*?

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- Is passage of an objective, valid, and reliable professional exam in the subject matter required to obtain the credential(s)? If so,
 - Is the exam content clearly derived from the outline of knowledge and competencies?
 - Who develops exam items and constructs exams?
 - Is information about procedures for evaluating the exam's validity, reliability, and passing scores available?
 - Are there procedures for assuring the security of exam items? Of exam administrations and results?
 - Are there clear eligibility requirements for taking the exam?
 - How are eligibility requirements determined, and by whom?
- Is continuing education required to maintain the credential(s)? If so, how are those requirements set, and by whom?
- Are there ethical and disciplinary standards for those who hold the credential(s)? If so,
 - How were they developed, and by whom?
 - Are they enforced? If so, by whom? By what procedures?

Adapted from Green, G. (2015). How to evaluate alternative credentials in behavior analysis, Part II. *APBA Reporter*, 55, October 2015.