



# ASPPB

Association of State and  
Provincial Psychology Boards

---

## The Examination for Professional Practice in Psychology (EPPP Parts 1 and 2) Frequently Asked Questions

### What is the EPPP?

In January 2020, the EPPP will become a two-part psychology licensing examination. The EPPP Part 1 is currently used throughout the U.S. and Canada to assess the foundational knowledge of psychology deemed necessary for entry-level licensure. In January 2020 the EPPP Part 2 will be added, and will assess the practice skills in psychology deemed necessary for entry-level licensure. The EPPP has been in use for over 50 years, providing information to psychology licensing boards to assist them in making determinations regarding the readiness of licensure candidates to practice independently. For a number of years the profession of psychology has moved towards a “culture of competence”, and based on this change in the culture of the profession, feedback from ASPPB Members, and a number of other factors, the ASPPB Board of Directors decided that it was time to develop an assessment of practice skills, the EPPP Part 2.

### What will the EPPP Part 2 look like?

The EPPP Part 2 will be a computer-based examination designed to assess the skills needed for the independent practice of psychology. It will be an enhancement to the current EPPP which assesses the core (knowledge) of the profession, the EPPP Part 2 will assess a candidate’s ability to apply that knowledge in a practical sense (skills). Together, the two parts of the EPPP will increase a licensing board’s ability to establish their candidates’ readiness for independent practice. Beginning in January 2020, the EPPP will be accessible as a two-part exam.

### Why did ASPPB decide to develop the EPPP Part 2 now?

ASPPB’s primary mission is to assist U.S. and Canadian psychology licensing boards in meeting their mandate of public protection. Licensing boards have the responsibility to ensure that the professionals they license are competent to practice. Competence is the integrated and consistent use of the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values of a profession. Although ASPPB has been successfully assessing the core knowledge of the profession for over 50 years with the EPPP, psychology licensing boards have had to rely on supervisor ratings for information about licensure candidates’ practice skills. Research suggests, that due to their conflicting roles, supervisors have had difficulty accurately evaluating their supervisees competency when their evaluations will be used by others in their decision-making process. To further complicate the issue of assessing competency is the significant variability among the training models that are used to prepare students for entry into the psychology profession. Those differences in training models are reflected in variable pass rates on the EPPP, ranging from 100% of students passing from some accredited programs to 13% of students passing from other accredited programs. There is also significant variability in the type, quality and quantity of practicum experiences required by accredited programs, not to mention that many jurisdictions license graduates from non-APA or CPA accredited programs. The issues of variability and lack of standardization in training and supervised experience make it more complicated to ensure candidate competency for independent practice simply based on the program attended and whether or not it was accredited.

As stated previously, the profession of psychology has entered into a “culture of competence”. There is now agreement among key professional groups in the U.S. and Canada (e.g., American Psychological Association’s Commission on Accreditation, Canadian Psychological Association, Association of Canadian Psychology Regulatory Organizations, and Association of State and Provincial Psychology Boards) regarding the necessary competencies to practice independently. This agreement was a necessary precondition to initiating the development of a skills examination. The technology to assess skills via a computer-based examination is now available. In light of these factors, ASPPB concluded that now was the appropriate time to develop a **standardized** examination to assess the skills necessary for independent practice as a psychologist. With the enhanced EPPP, licensing boards will have available to them an examination that will offer a standardized, reliable and valid method of assessing both the knowledge (EPPP Part 1) and the skills (EPPP Part 2) necessary for independent practice.

### **How will the EPPP Part 2 differ from the EPPP Part 1?**

The EPPP Part 2 will provide an examination of the core practice **skills** one needs to enter independent practice as a psychologist. The skills that will be assessed by the EPPP Part 2 are based on the “*ASPPB Competencies Expected of Psychologists at the Point of Licensure*” model that was validated by the ASPPB 2016 Job Task Analysis. These skills include Scientific Orientation to Practice; Relational Competence; Assessment and Intervention; Ethical Practice; Collaboration, Consultation, and Supervision; and Professionalism. On the other hand, the EPPP Part 1 measures the foundational **knowledge** required for the independent practice of psychology in the domains of Biological Bases of Behavior; Cognitive and Affective Bases of Behavior; Social and Cultural Bases of Behavior; Growth and Lifespan Development; Assessment and Diagnosis; Treatment, Intervention, Prevention and Supervision; Research Methods and Statistics; and Ethical, Legal and Professional Issues.

### **How will the EPPP Parts 1 and 2 be implemented?**

Once the enhanced EPPP is available in January 2020, it will have two-parts and there will be an **Early Admittance** option for the knowledge portion of the exam (EPPP Part 1) for those who are being trained in APA or CPA accredited programs. Eligible students and trainees will be able to take the EPPP Part 1 before they have finished their degree, but after they have completed all academic coursework (excluding research, practicum or internship). ASPPB will register those who want to take the EPPP Part 1 pre-degree. All others (e.g., applicants from programs in general applied areas of psychology, international applicants, those who do not want to take the EPPP Part 1 pre-degree, and those who come from academic programs that are not consistent with the *ASPPB Model Act and Rules*) may register for the exam once they are candidates for licensure in their home jurisdictions. The EPPP Part 2 can only be taken post-degree, once an applicant is a candidate for licensure in a jurisdiction and has passed the EPPP Part 1. Each jurisdiction will be responsible for approving candidates to register for the EPPP Part 2. Since it is a skills examination, ASPPB recommends that the EPPP Part 2 be taken after all supervised experience requirements for licensure have been completed. It will be up to each jurisdiction whether it will accept the Early Admittance Option exam score for the EPPP Part 1. Candidates should check with the jurisdiction where they would like to become licensed for the licensing requirements that apply in that jurisdiction regarding the Early Admittance Option.

**What if I am a candidate for licensure in a jurisdiction, and have passed the EPPP Part 1, but have not completed all my supervised experience requirements before January 2020? Will I have to take the EPPP Part 2?**

ASPPB is recommending to jurisdictions, that if a candidate for licensure has passed the EPPP prior to January 2020 but has not completed their postdoctoral supervision or other licensure requirements, that the candidate will **NOT** have to take the EPPP Part 2. The EPPP changes in January, 2020 from an examination with one part to an examination with two-parts and becomes an enhanced two-part psychology licensing examination. Candidates should check with the jurisdiction where they would like to become licensed for the licensing requirements that apply in that jurisdiction regarding supervised experience.

**Will the EPPP Part 1 and Part 2 be a computer-based examination?**

Yes, both parts of the EPPP will be computer-based. The EPPP Part 1 is a traditional multiple-choice examination. The EPPP Part 2 will contain both “innovative item types” (i.e., vignettes, avatars, vignettes with multiple parts and levels, use of exhibits that accompany questions, items with multiple correct responses) and traditional multiple-choice items.

**Will the EPPP Part 2 add to the assessment of competence? Will it be valid, reliable, and legally defensible?**

Yes, the EPPP Part 2 will add to the comprehensive assessment of competence. By providing an examination that measures both knowledge and skills, it will provide jurisdictions with a valid, reliable, standardized and legally defensible measure of the knowledge and skills needed to practice independently.

In 2016, ASPPB conducted a Job Task Analysis to revalidate the blueprint for the EPPP Part 1 (knowledge) exam, as well as to validate the competency model that is foundational to the development of the EPPP Part 2 (skills) exam. ASPPB, assisted by our test vendor Pearson VUE, followed the most current test development standards for the revalidation of the EPPP Part 1 and the development of the EPPP Part 2. Similar Job Task Analyses have been periodically conducted over the past 50 years for the EPPP according to the most accepted test development standards each time. More details about the validity of the EPPP Part 2 is available at the end of this document.

**Is the EPPP Part 2 just for Health Service Psychologists or is it for all psychology service providers?**

The EPPP Part 2, like the current EPPP, will be designed for all psychology service providers (i.e., Health Service Psychologists and General Applied Psychologists) who must be licensed in order to practice independently as psychologists.

**Will the EPPP Part 2 also be for those taking the examination under a Master’s license requirement?**

Yes, just as jurisdictions currently use the EPPP as a requirement for independent licensure regardless of degree level, the EPPP Part 2 will be used for that purpose as well. Jurisdictions that license at the Master’s level of training for independent practice will use both parts of the EPPP (Part 1 and Part 2) to assess their Master’s level candidates. (Some jurisdictions also license at the Master’s or pre-doctoral level for supervised practice. The EPPP Part 2 will be required for those individuals as well.)

## **Is the EPPP Part 2 going to be used for already licensed psychologists when they renew their licenses?**

The EPPP Part 2 is being developed for entry-level licensure. It has not been conceptualized, nor is it being developed for use in assessing maintenance of competence for already licensed psychologists. The current EPPP is not used to assess maintenance of competence for already licensed psychologists, and likewise the EPPP Part 2 is being developed to assess entry-level competence to practice at the independent level. Therefore, **ASPPB recommends that the EPPP Part 2 not be administered to any psychologist who has been licensed prior to January 2020.** During the transition phase, ASPPB is recommending to jurisdictions, that if a candidate for licensure has passed the EPPP before January 2020 but has not completed postdoctoral supervision or other licensure requirements, that candidate will **NOT** have to take the EPPP Part 2.

## **What will the EPPP Part 2 cost?**

The fee for each part of the EPPP will be \$600 U.S., due when candidates are ready to take each part of the exam, respectively. ASPPB is sensitive to the financial stresses of those entering the profession and has been committed to keeping costs as low as possible. Developing a high stakes exam, particularly one that will use computer-based simulations, scenarios and vignettes, and avatars, requires considerable up-front and ongoing costs. ASPPB will continue to operate the program in a cost-efficient manner that will maintain the program in the years ahead.

## **Will the EPPP Part 2 include essay questions?**

The EPPP Part 2 is being designed to include a number of innovative question types, such as the use of avatars, the review of test protocols, and multiple-choice questions requiring that multiple correct answers be selected. Since the examination will be delivered and scored by computer, it will not include essay questions.

## **Will candidates receive their examination results unofficially at the examination site?**

Yes, candidates will receive results at the examination site. The results, however, will not be official until they have been confirmed by the jurisdictional licensing board.

## **In my jurisdiction, the board requires an oral examination. Will I still be required to take it if I am taking the EPPP Part 2?**

The determination of requirements for licensure is the domain of the jurisdictional licensing board where a candidate applies for licensure. The EPPP Part 1 and Part 2 are tools that licensing boards will have available to them for use in their determination of the eligibility of candidates for licensure as psychologists. The licensing board in each province/state/territory will decide if an oral examination will be required.

## **Will there be accommodations for those with identified disabilities?**

A candidate must be approved for accommodations. Requests for examination accommodations will be considered if the U.S. candidates meet the terms outlined in the Americans With Disabilities Act and if Canadian candidates meet the terms of the Human Rights legislation in their home provinces. Requests for accommodations must be sent in writing to the jurisdictional licensing board (or to ASPPB directly in the case of the Early Admittance Option for the EPPP Part 1). It must include the accommodations requested and medical/professional documentation supporting the request. Reasonable requests that do not impact the validity or the security of the examination will be considered.

## **Will there be a limit on how many times I can take the EPPP Part 2?**

This lifetime number of attempts allowed is being reviewed by ASPPB and its member jurisdictions. Information about the lifetime number of times the EPPP can be taken will be posted as soon as a decision has been made. Jurisdictions determine the number of opportunities allowed to take each part of the exam for licensure. Candidates should check with the jurisdiction where they would like to become licensed for the licensing requirements that apply in that jurisdiction regarding the number of times the EPPP examination is allowed to be taken.

## **How much time will be allowed to take the EPPP Part 2?**

The amount of time that will be allowed to take the EPPP Part 2 will be 4 hours and 15 minutes, which is the same amount of time as that allowed to take the EPPP Part 1.

## **Can I take the EPPP Part 1 or Part 2 before I apply for licensure?**

Once the EPPP Part 2 is available in January 2020, there will be an Early Admittance option for the Part 1 (knowledge) exam. Eligible pre-degree students and trainees from APA and CPA accredited doctoral programs will be able to take the EPPP Part 1 before they have finished their degree or applied for licensure, but after they have completed all academic coursework (excluding research, practicum or internship). However, other candidates for licensure may take the EPPP Part 1 post-degree once they are candidates for licensure in a jurisdiction; to take the EPPP Part 2, candidates must be approved by a jurisdictional licensing board to take the EPPP Part 2 in accordance with established ASPPB policies. ASPPB is recommending that the EPPP Part 2 be taken after all supervised experience requirements are completed. Jurisdictions will determine if they will accept Early Admittance Option exam scores for the EPPP Part 1 and when the EPPP Part 2 can be taken. Candidates should check with the jurisdiction where they would like to become licensed for the licensing requirements that apply in that jurisdiction regarding when each of the part of the EPPP can be taken.

## **How will you know if the EPPP Part 2 is a valid exam? Will there be studies addressing predictive, incremental, or concurrent validity?**

Questions have been raised about the validity of the enhanced EPPP as a tool to assess the knowledge and skills necessary for independent licensure. The enhanced EPPP will be one component of the assessment of an applicant's readiness for independent licensure as a psychologist. The accepted standard of validity for credentialing and licensing exams is content validity, which is determined through a job task analysis. According to the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* "validation of credentialing tests depend mainly on content-related evidence, often in the form of judgments that the test adequately represents the content domain associated with the occupation or specialty being considered" (AERA, APA & NCME, 2014, p. 175).

The content of the EPPP has been validated through job task analyses for the last 50 years. The most recent job task analysis, completed in 2016, was conducted to address the validity of both the content and structure of the EPPP Part 1 and Part 2. Based on data from more than 2,700 licensed/registered psychologists across the United States and Canada, the 2016 study refined the ASPPB Competency Model and developed the blueprint for the EPPP Part 2. This Blueprint (and a more detailed description of the job task analyses from 2010 and 2016) can be found on the ASPPB website on the "EPPP Part 2" page <http://www.asppb.net/page/EPPPPart2>.

Other types of validity, such as predictive validity are not appropriate for licensure examinations. The reason for this stems from the nature of the licensure process. Although questions such as:

“Would an applicant’s score on the EPPP predict the likelihood of that person being disciplined by a licensing board?”, “Would the EPPP score predict improved patient outcomes?”, or “Does a higher score predict that one is more competent than one with a lower score?” all sound like reasonable questions, but they are not answerable by a licensure examination. Licensure examinations are a special type of selection exam where the goal is to separate test takers into those who pass and those who fail. Unlike other forms of assessment, the discriminatory power of the exam is at the pass point. Scores above and below the pass point are not relevant to the question of readiness for independent licensure. A score that greatly exceeds the pass point does not indicate greater competence than a score that is just above the pass point; both scores are passing scores. In order to examine predictive validity questions, it would be necessary to compare an adequately sized and demographically similar sample of individuals who have passed both parts of the EPPP and individuals who have failed both parts of the EPPP. In this situation, both groups of individuals would be allowed to practice autonomously for a number of years so that their EPPP scores could be related to whatever criterion is selected to be the standard of “competence” (e.g., patient outcomes, no disciplinary complaints, etc.). An empirical investigation of predictive validity such as this is not feasible because it would depend on a sample of licensing boards allowing people who have been deemed to be unqualified to practice to actually practice autonomously. Since such a scenario could involve potential harm to the public, it is hard to imagine that any licensing board would consent to take part in such a study.

In light of the pending inclusion of the EPPP Part 2, questions have been raised about the incremental validity of Part 2 over Part 1. Incremental validity addresses the question of whether an additional means of assessment (i.e., EPPP Part 2) adds anything to an existing measure’s (i.e., EPPP Part 1) ability to predict the standing of test takers on an established criterion variable (Hunsley, 2003). The type of analysis necessary to evaluate incremental validity would not be consistent with the decision-making process used in a licensure context. This is because it is not simply a matter of whether a new piece of information accounts for significant additional variance in the predicted variable (even if an appropriate criterion variable could be identified). Instead, licensing boards have several requirements for licensure, all of which must be met before a license for independent practice is given. So, first, educational requirements must be met, followed by completion of EPPP Part 1 and Part 2, possibly a state or provincial jurisprudence exam, positive supervisor ratings, and possibly an oral exam. Most of the requirements are sequential in nature so, as examples, one cannot take EPPP Part 1 without appropriate academic qualifications, and one cannot take EPPP Part 2 until EPPP Part 1 has been passed. In a licensure context, the data from these various evaluations should not be subjected to an incremental validity analysis because each discrete measure assesses an essential component of the ultimate decision to grant the license (J. Hunsley, personal communication, December 7, 2017).

In the case of the enhanced EPPP, each part (the EPPP Part 1 and the EPPP Part 2) are designed to assess different essential components (knowledge and skills respectively) of the overall construct of professional competence. The introduction of the EPPP Part 2 will enhance a licensing board’s ability to determine readiness for independent practice by measuring a key element (skills) that previously had not been evaluated or was evaluated in a less standardized manner (e.g., supervisor ratings) (Johnson et al, 2008).

Finally, some individuals have inquired about concurrent validity studies; that is, studies that examine whether scores on the EPPP are correlated with other measures of competence. One of the confounding issues in conducting such validation studies is the question of the accuracy of those other measures of competence. For example, supervisor ratings of competence are widely

used in academic and training environments, as well as by licensing boards, to assist in determining the competence of trainees. However, there are many questions about the objectivity of supervisor ratings due to the multiple roles that supervisors play (i.e., supervisor/mentor and gatekeeper) (Johnson et al., 2008). Although it remains necessary for licensing boards to continue to use supervisor ratings for some aspects of the evaluation of candidate readiness for independent practice (specifically for some aspects of interpersonal relationship competence), the introduction of the EPPP Part 2 provides a psychometrically sound, objective, standardized measure of the many skills needed. Licensing boards are tasked with answering the ultimate question about those they license as psychologists: “Is this individual safe (competent) to practice independently?” Training supervisors are not responsible for that final approval, or for answering that ultimate question. The EPPP Part 2 will provide an objective, standardized and appropriately validated measure of professional skills to enhance a licensing board’s ability to answer that question.

**How is the issue of potential bias of the EPPP in terms of ethnicity being addressed? Can you provide any assurances that the EPPP is a fair and nondiscriminatory exam and will continue to be so with the addition of the EPPP Part 2 in January 2020?**

The ASPPB Examination Program is committed to providing valid, reliable, and fair assessments of candidates for licensure. ASPPB adheres to guidelines of the American Psychological Association, the Joint Commission on Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, and the American Educational Research Association in the development of, and maintenance of the Examination Program.

Potential item bias is addressed at each phase of test development and review. The initial step in the test development process consists of a large survey of psychological practice called a Job Task Analysis. The psychologists included in the sample reflect the racial, ethnic, cultural, gender, and geographic make-up of the profession. The analysis of survey results provide the areas that are to be assessed on each examination, resulting in the test specifications, or a test “blueprint”.

Subject matter experts who are members of item and exam review committees and/or item writers, all of whom volunteered to help create the EPPP, represent a diversity of racial, ethnic, geographic, gender, and practice characteristics. The item writing training that item writers receive involves, among other things, consideration of cultural and linguistic issues. Each item that is written is reviewed by members of the Item Development Committee, which is comprised of a group of content experts who together cover each domain area. Each potential exam item is reviewed for clarity, language, correctness, bias, and relevance for entry-level practice. The reviewers either return items to the writers for changes or approve them to go to the Examination Committee for review.

The Examination Committee is comprised of psychologists who represent various demographics, specialty areas, and expertise in each of the domain areas assessed on the examination. The Examination Committee reviews each new item and must reach consensus on the item’s sufficiency before it is pretested on a form of the examination. The reviews are similar to those carried out during the item-writing process and provide an additional check on each item before it is pretested. As such, this committee provides another layer of review regarding fairness and relevance.

All items are pre-tested before they are used as operational (scored) items. For the EPPP Part 1, there are currently an additional 50 pre-test questions included with the 175 operational items. The pre-test items are distributed among the operational items throughout the exam. When an item is being pre-tested, that item appears on the examination, but does not count toward the candidate's exam score. An item is approved for use as a scored item only if its statistical performance is acceptable to members of the Examination Committee based on Item Response Theory. Thus, the item must show itself to be a consistent, valid, and fair measure of the test-taker's knowledge (EPPP Part 1) or skills (EPPP Part 2) in a particular domain. This system of pre-testing questions currently protects examination candidates by using those questions that have proven effective in testing relevant entry-level knowledge; and beginning in January 2020, by testing relevant entry-level skills. Additionally, all candidate comments are reviewed, and items that candidates have reported as problematic are again reviewed by content experts to ensure fairness of each item.

After pre-testing, items that meet established statistical criteria are once again reviewed by the Examination Committee before being placed on an exam as an operational item. Collectively, ASPPB incorporates these multiple layers of analyses to provide assurance to the extent possible that each question is free from bias. As a result of the safeguards that have been put in place, the EPPP Part 1 is viewed as a fair and nondiscriminatory examination of the knowledge necessary to practice psychology independently. Item development for the skills portion of the EPPP Part 2 will follow the same process to insure a bias free examination.

The question of ethnic bias in the enhanced EPPP has been raised during our discussions with various psychology groups. Those who comment about issues of bias typically cite Sharpless and Barber (2009, 2013) who reported that they found differences on scores and pass rates on the EPPP based on ethnicity. However, the authors were clear that their study design did not allow them to state definitively that the differences they found reflected an ethnic bias as opposed to being an artifact of the training program attended. They concluded that it was "...unknown whether minority applicants fare less well on the EPPP, or whether programs with higher percentages of minority students tend to have applicants of all ethnicities who pass at lower rates" (p.8).

Currently, ASPPB does not collect ethnicity information from candidates who register to take the EPPP. Historically these data have not been collected due to legal prohibitions against collecting such data in most ASPPB member jurisdictions. ASPPB is in the process of reviewing this position with our membership. For the benefit of the public, and for those seeking to enter the profession of psychology, ASPPB is consistently working to ensure that the enhanced EPPP is a fair and nondiscriminatory examination.

## References

- American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association & National Council on Measurement in Education (2014). *Standards for educational and psychological testing: 2014 Edition*, Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Hunsley, J. & Meyer, G. (2003). The incremental validity of psychological testing and assessment: Conceptual, methodological, and statistical issues. *Psychological Assessment*, 15, (4), 446-455. doi: 10.1037/1040-3590.15.4.446
- Johnson, W. B., Elman, N. S., Forrest, L., Robiner, W. N., Rodolfa, E., & Schaffer, J. B. (2008). Addressing professional competence problems in Trainees: Some ethical considerations. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 39, 589 –599. doi:10.1037/a0014264
- Sharpless, B. A., & Barber, J. P. (2009). The examination for professional practice in psychology (EPPP) in the era of evidence-based practice. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 40, 333–340. doi:10.1037/a0013983
- Sharpless, B. A., & Barber, J. P. (2013). Predictors of Program Performance on the Examination for Professional Practice in Psychology (EPPP). *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1037/a0031689