

The Examination for Professional Practice in Psychology (EPPP): Frequently Asked Questions

What is the enhanced EPPP?

The enhanced EPPP is a revision of the psychology licensing examination that assesses both the knowledge and applied skills of candidates for licensure. Currently the EPPP is a test of knowledge (EPPP (Part 1-Knowledge) only). The revision of the EPPP is now being developed and will be ready for use in 2020. When it becomes available, jurisdictions will have the option of using either the current EPPP (Part 1-Knowledge) or the enhanced EPPP (Part 1-Knowledge) and (Part 2-Skills) as the licensing examination for psychology.

What will the enhanced EPPP look like?

The enhanced EPPP will be a computer-based examination designed to assess the knowledge and the applied skills needed for the independent practice of psychology. The current EPPP is a traditional multiple-choice examination and will remain the same when the skills portion is added. The applied skills portion of the EPPP will contain scenarios; scenarios with multiple parts; the use of exhibits; animation of some items; items with multiple correct responses; matching items; and traditional multiple-choice items. The examination will not include essay questions. This revision of the EPPP will enhance a licensing board's ability to establish its candidates' readiness for independent practice by testing both knowledge and skills.

How will the enhanced EPPP differ from the current EPPP?

This enhanced EPPP will change the evaluation of candidates from an assessment ensuring that they possess the base level of required knowledge to one ensuring that they can apply knowledge to real world situations that they will be faced with in practice. The current EPPP (Part 1-Knowledge) evaluates a candidate's core knowledge in eight domains. The applied skills part of the EPPP (Part 2-Skills) will provide an assessment of the domains of Scientific Orientation to Practice; Relational Competence; Assessment and Intervention; Ethical Practice; Collaboration, Consultation, and Supervision; and Professionalism.

Why did ASPPB decide to revise the EPPP to include an applied skills portion?

ASPPB's primary mission is to support U.S. and Canadian psychology licensing boards in meeting their mandate of public protection. Licensing boards have the responsibility of ensuring that the professionals they license are competent to practice. Competence is defined as the integrated and consistent use of the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values of the profession. The membership of ASPPB supported a revision to the EPPP that would further enhance their ability to evaluate candidate readiness to enter into independent practice. With this revision of the EPPP, licensing boards will have available to them an examination that will offer a standardized, reliable, valid and legally defensible method of assessing both the knowledge and the applied skills necessary for independent practice.

What is the value-added by revising the EPPP to include an assessment of applied skills?

The value added when including applied skills to the evaluation process is that licensing boards will have a more complete assessment of their candidates for licensure since they will be able to assess, not only the knowledge, but the applied skills of these individuals.

Why not just require that candidates graduate from an accredited educational program?

Accreditation is valuable and provides a level of assurance that the training program in psychology has met certain standards. Evaluation for licensure must ensure that training in psychology and the degree conferred are acceptable for licensure, and also that the candidate for licensure possesses the necessary knowledge and skills for practice in the profession. Thus, accreditation is an internal and external *program* review, and evaluation for licensure is an *individual* review. The revisions to the EPPP will add to the tools used to assess the individuals who are applying to independently practice psychology.

How will the enhanced EPPP be implemented?

Each member jurisdiction will determine whether they will continue to use the current EPPP (Part 1-Knowledge) or will move to use the enhanced EPPP that uses the EPPP (Part 1 knowledge) and the EPPP (Part 2-Skills) to assess both knowledge and skills. Beta testing of the revised exam will begin once the exam is launched and will continue until at least 150 individuals have taken the exam. After beta testing data are gathered, the ASPPB Board of Directors with input from member jurisdictions, will explore the question of the consistent use of the enhanced EPPP as the licensing exam for the profession of psychology.

If I am a candidate for licensure in a jurisdiction and have passed the EPPP but have not completed all my supervised experience requirements before January 2020, will I have to take the enhanced EPPP ?

Each licensing jurisdiction will make the decision about whether the enhanced EPPP must be taken and about whether there will be any exceptions to the requirement. ASPPB is recommending to all 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 the candidate **NOT** be required to take the enhanced EPPP, *even if the jurisdiction has changed to requiring the enhanced EPPP.*

Will use of the enhanced EPPP add to the assessment of competence? Will it be valid, reliable, and legally defensible?

Use of this revised form of the EPPP will add to the comprehensive assessment of a candidate's competence. The enhanced EPPP will provide jurisdictions with a valid, reliable, standardized and legally defensible measure of the knowledge and skills needed to practice. A more thorough answer about the validity of the EPPP is provided beginning on page 4 of this document.

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

The enhanced EPPP, like the current form of the EPPP, is being 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 applied skills portion of the EPPP 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 licensure regardless of degree level, the revised EPPP will be used for that purpose as well.

Is the enhanced EPPP going to be used for already licensed psychologists when they renew their licenses?

No. Although this is a jurisdictional decision, ASPPB is not recommending use of the enhanced EPPP when psychologists renew their licenses. This exam is being developed for the assessment of candidates seeking *initial* licensure. The examination has not been conceptualized for use in assessing the competence of psychologists already licensed. The current EPPP is not developed to assess maintenance of competence for already licensed psychologists; likewise the enhanced EPPP is not being developed to assess maintenance of competence for already licensed psychologists.

What will the enhanced EPPP cost?

The ASPPB Board of Directors has set the following fee schedule:

- The current EPPP (Part 1-Knowledge) will continue to cost \$600.00 USD per sitting.
- The EPPP (Part 1-Knowledge) portion of the enhanced EPPP will cost the same \$600.00 USD per sitting.
- During the beta testing phase the fee for the EPPP (Part 2-Skills) portion of the enhanced EPPP will be \$100.00 USD per sitting. After beta testing ends, the fee for the remainder of the early adoption phase (until December 31, 2021) will be \$300.00 USD per sitting. After the early adoption phase ends in January 2022, the fee will be \$450.00 USD per sitting.

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

Yes, once the exam is beta tested, 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. During beta testing, there will be a delay before candidates receive their scores.

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

The determination of requirements for licensure is the domain of the jurisdictional licensing board where a candidate applies for licensure. The licensing board in each province/state/territory will decide if an oral examination is 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 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 licensing board and 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.

How much time will be allowed to take the applied skills portion of the EPPP?

The amount of time that will be allowed to take the applied skills portion of the EPPP will be 4 hours and 15 minutes, the same amount of time that is allowed to take the current EPPP.

Can I take both parts of the enhanced EPPP before I apply for licensure?

Once the enhanced EPPP is available, jurisdictions that are using it may allow their candidates to take the EPPP (Part 1-Knowledge) before they have finished their degree, but after they have completed all academic coursework (excluding research, practicum and internship). All candidates may take the EPPP (Part 1/Knowledge) post degree once they are candidates for licensure in a jurisdiction and have been registered by that jurisdiction. To take the EPPP (Part 2/Skills), candidates must be approved and registered by a jurisdictional licensing board that is using the

enhance EPPP in accordance with established ASPPB policies. ASPPB is recommending that the EPPP (Part 2-Skills) of the enhanced EPPP be taken after all supervised experience requirements are completed. Jurisdictions will determine whether they will accept exam scores for those individuals who took the EPPP (Part 1-Knowledge) prior to internship. Jurisdictions will also determine when the EPPP (Part 2-Skills) 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 part of the EPPP can be taken.

How will you know if the applied skills portion of the EPPP is a valid exam? Will there be studies addressing predictive, incremental, or concurrent validity?

Content Validity. Questions have been raised about the validity of the EPPP as a tool to assess the knowledge and applied 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 depends 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 current EPPP has been validated through job task analyses for the last 50 plus years. The most recent Job Task Analysis, completed in 2016, was conducted to address the validity of the content and structure of the enhanced EPPP. Based on data from more than 2,700 licensed and registered psychologists across the United States and Canada, the 2016 study refined the *ASPPB Competency Model* and validated the blueprint for the applied skills portion of the enhanced EPPP. This blueprint (and a more detailed description of the job task analyses from 2010 and 2016) can be found on the ASPPB website (<https://www.asppb.net/page/EPPPPart2>).

Predictive validity. 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?" sound like reasonable questions, 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 the applied skills portion 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.

Incremental validity. In light of the pending inclusion of the applied skills portion of the EPPP, questions have been raised about the incremental validity of skills over knowledge. Incremental validity addresses the question of whether an additional means of assessment (i.e., applied skills exam) adds anything to an existing measure's (i.e., knowledge exam) 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. First, educational requirements must be met, followed by the knowledge portion of the EPPP, followed by the applied skills portion of the EPPP, possibly a state or provincial jurisprudence exam, good ratings from supervisors, and possibly an oral exam. Most of the requirements are sequential in nature so, as examples, one cannot take the knowledge portion of the EPPP without appropriate academic qualifications, and one cannot take the applied skills portion of the EPPP until the knowledge portion 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 a different essential component of the ultimate decision to grant the license (J. Hunsley, personal communication, December 7, 2017).

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

Concurrent validity. 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-Skills) provides a psychometrically sound, objective, standardized measure of many of the 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 applied skills part of the EPPP 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-Skills)?

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 (the 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 provides 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 Development 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 pretested before they are used as operational (scored) items. For the current EPPP, there are an additional 50 pretest questions included with the 175 operational items on each exam. The pretest items are distributed among the operational items throughout the exam. When an item is being pretested, 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 (or applied skills) in a particular domain. This system of pretesting questions currently protects examination candidates by using only those questions that have proven effective and fair in testing relevant entry-level knowledge; and beginning in January 2020, in testing relevant entry-level applied skills. Additionally, any 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 pretesting, 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 analysis 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 is viewed as a fair and nondiscriminatory examination of the knowledge necessary to practice psychology independently. Item development for the applied skills portion of the EPPP is following the same process to insure a bias free examination.

The question of ethnic bias in the revision to the 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).

Beginning in 2019 for the EPPP, and in 2020 for the enhanced EPPP, ASPPB is incorporating an additional layer of review for items that, by statistical analysis, appear to be answered differentially by certain racial or ethnic groups. Those "flagged" items will be reviewed by a group of experts in cultural diversity to determine if there is anything about the item that is not fair to any particular group. If that is found to be the case, those items will be sent back for modification or rewriting and then pretested again.

In sum, ASPPB is proceeding with the development of the EPPP (Part 2-Skills) with the same level of care and thoroughness used in the development of the EPPP (Part 1-Knowledge). Our intent is to create an exam that is a standardized, objective, reliable, valid and legally defensible measure of the applied skills needed for the entry-level psychologist.

References

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