

The Examination for Professional Practice in Psychology: The Enhanced EPPP

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Enhanced EPPP?

The Enhanced EPPP is the national psychology licensing examination that assesses a candidate for licensure's knowledge (part 1) and skills (Part 2). Currently the EPPP is an examination of a candidate's knowledge. The addition of the assessment of skills (or Part 2 of the Enhanced EPPP) is under development and will be ready for jurisdictional use in January 2020. Thus, in January 2020 the Enhanced EPPP will become available and jurisdictions will have the option of using either the current EPPP or the Enhanced EPPP as the licensing examination for psychology.

What will the Part 2 of the Enhanced EPPP look like?

The Part 2 of the Enhanced EPPP will be a computer-based examination designed to assess the practice skills needed for the independent practice of psychology. As an enhancement to the current EPPP it will assess a candidate's ability to **apply** the knowledge base in a practical sense (skills). Together, the two parts of the EPPP will enhance a licensing board's ability to establish its candidates' readiness for independent practice. Beginning in January 2020, Part 2 of the Enhanced EPPP will be available to those jurisdictions that are ready to use it.

Why did ASPPB decide to develop the Part 2 of EPPP?

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 defined as 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 primarily had to look to non-standardized methods for information about licensure candidates' practice skills. Over the past decade the profession of psychology has moved toward the establishment of a "culture of competence" recognizing the need to better ensure competency from training to licensure. There is now essential agreement among key professional groups in the U.S. and Canada (i.e., the American Psychological Association's Commission on Accreditation, the Canadian Psychological Association, the Association of Canadian Psychology Regulatory Organizations, and the Association of State and Provincial Psychology Boards) regarding the necessary competencies to practice psychology independently. This agreement was a necessary precondition to the development of a skills examination. The technology to assess skills via a computer-based examination is also now available. In light of these factors, ASPPB began researching competency assessment in 2009. After consultation with ASPPB membership, ASPPB began development of a skills assessment to be used in conjunction with the knowledge assessment starting in 2016. With the Enhanced 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 (Part 1) and the skills (Part 2) necessary for independent practice.

Why aren't supervisor ratings or program accreditation sufficient as an assessment of skills?

The research indicates that internship/residency training supervisors experience difficulty being objective in evaluating their supervisees' competency when their evaluations will be used by others in a high-stakes (i.e. internship, licensure) decision-making process. Therefore, an objective standardized measure will provide a useful tool for this purpose.

Accreditation is a useful tool for ensuring standardized training. However, the reality is that there is significant variability across training programs used to prepare students for entry into the profession. The differences in training programs are reflected in the data on pass rates on the current EPPP. Those data show pass rates from students in accredited programs ranging from 100% of students passing to 13% of students passing. There is also significant variability in the type, quality and quantity of practicum experiences required by accredited programs. In addition, many jurisdictions accept for licensure graduates from non-APA or non-CPA-accredited programs. The issues of variability and lack of standardization in training and supervised experience make it more complicated to establish candidate competency for independent practice based solely on the program attended and whether or not it was accredited.

How will the Enhanced EPPP differ from the current EPPP?

Part 2 of the Enhanced EPPP will provide an examination of core practice *skills* necessary for independent practice as a psychologist. The practice skills that will be assessed by Part 2 of the Enhanced EPPP are based on the “ASPPB Competencies Expected of Psychologists at the Point of Licensure” model that were developed by the ASPPB Practice Analysis in 2010 and were validated in 2016 through a Job Task Analysis. These skills include Scientific Orientation to Practice; Relational Competence; Assessment and Intervention; Ethical Practice; Collaboration, Consultation, and Supervision; and Professionalism. The current EPPP 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?

ASPPB expects that the Enhanced EPPP will be ready for use by psychology licensing boards in January 2020. Jurisdictions will decide if they will continue to use the current EPPP or will use the Enhanced EPPP which includes both an assessment of knowledge and an assessment of skills. Beta testing will occur at the beginning of the launch of the Enhanced EPPP and will continue until at least 150 individuals have taken the new skills exam. After several years of experience with jurisdictions using the Enhanced EPPP, the ASPPB Board of Directors will evaluate that experience and decide on future directions for the use of the Enhanced EPPP as the licensing exam. That decision will not be made in isolation and without the ongoing input of our member jurisdictions.

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 Enhanced EPPP (Part 2)?

ASPPB is recommending to all jurisdictions, that if a candidate for licensure has passed the EPPP before January, 2020, but has not completed the postdoctoral supervision or other licensure requirements, they **NOT** be required to take the Enhanced EPPP (Part 2). While this is ASPPB’s recommendation, jurisdictions will make the final decision on this issue. Please check with each jurisdiction on their requirements.

Will the current EPPP and Part 2 of the Enhanced EPPP be a computer-based examination?

Yes, both parts of the EPPP will be computer-based. The current EPPP is a traditional multiple-choice examination. The Part 2 of the Enhanced EPPP will contain both “alternative item types” (i.e., vignettes; vignettes with multiple parts and levels; use of exhibits, including animation, that accompany questions; items with multiple correct responses) as well as traditional multiple-choice items.

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

Yes, the Part 2 of the Enhanced EPPP will add to the comprehensive assessment of competence. The Enhanced EPPP will provide jurisdictions with a valid, reliable, standardized and legally defensible measure of the knowledge and skills needed to practice.

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

The Part 2 of the Enhanced EPPP like the current 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 Part 2 of the Enhanced 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 independent licensure regardless of degree level, the Enhanced EPPP (Parts 1 and 2) will be used for that purpose as well. In addition, some jurisdictions use the EPPP for supervised practice licenses. The Enhanced EPPP will be available for this use as well.

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

The Part 2 of the Enhanced EPPP is being developed for entry-level licensure. It 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, and likewise the Part 2 of the Enhanced EPPP is being developed to assess entry-level competence to practice at the independent level.

What will the Enhanced EPPP (Parts 1 and 2) cost?

The current EPPP will continue to cost \$600.00 USD per sitting. Part 1 of the Enhanced EPPP will cost the same \$600.00 USD per sitting. The ASPPB Board of Directors has set the following fee schedule for the Part 2 of the Enhanced EPPP. The fee for the Part 2 of the Enhanced EPPP during the beta testing phase in January 2020 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) of the Part 2 of the Enhanced EPPP will be \$300.00 USD per sitting. After the early adoption phase ends January 1, 2022, the fee for the Part 2 of the Enhanced EPPP will be \$450.00 USD per sitting. ASPPB is sensitive to and mindful of the financial stresses for those entering the profession and took this into account as it set its exam fees. 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

Will the Part 2 of the Enhanced EPPP include essay questions?

The Part 2 of the Enhanced EPPP is being designed to include a number of alternative question types, such as the use of animation, the review of test protocols, responding to complex vignettes, and questions requiring that multiple correct answers be selected. The examination 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 Enhanced EPPP?

The determination of the requirements for licensure is the domain of the jurisdictional licensing board where a candidate applies for licensure. The EPPP and the Enhanced EPPP are tools that licensing boards will have available to them to 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 also 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 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 Part 2 of the Enhanced EPPP?

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

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

Once the Part 2 of the Enhanced EPPP is available (January 2020), jurisdictions that are using the Enhanced EPPP may allow their candidates to take the knowledge part of the Enhanced EPPP (Part 1) before they have finished their degree, but after they have completed all academic coursework (excluding research, practicum or internship). Those jurisdictions will determine if they will allow this option. All candidates may take the knowledge examination (the current EPPP) post degree once they are candidates for licensure in a jurisdiction and are registered by that jurisdiction. To take the Part 2 of the Enhanced EPPP, candidates must be approved and registered by a jurisdictional licensing board that is using the Enhanced exam in accordance with established ASPPB policies. ASPPB is recommending that the Part 2 of the Enhanced EPPP be taken after all supervised experience requirements are completed. Jurisdictions will determine if they will accept Early Admittance Option exam scores for the knowledge part of the Enhanced EPPP (Part 1) and when the Part 2 of the Enhanced EPPP 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 Part 2 of the Enhanced EPPP 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 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 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 the content and structure of the Enhanced EPPP (Part 1 and Part 2). 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 Part 2 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 (www.asppb.net) at “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?” 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 Part 2 of the Enhanced 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 Part 2 of the Enhanced EPPP, 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., Part 2) adds anything to an existing measure’s (i.e., 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 EPPP Part 1, EPPP 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 the Part 2 of the Enhanced EPPP until the 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, the different parts (Part 1 and Part 2) are designed to assess

different essential components (knowledge and skills respectively) of the overall construct of professional competence. The introduction of the Part 2 of the Enhanced EPPP 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 Part 2 of the Enhanced EPPP 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 Part 2 of the Enhanced 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 Part 2 of the Enhanced EPPP 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 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 EPPP (Part 1), there are currently an additional 50 pretest questions included with the 175 operational items. 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 (EPPP Part 1) or skills (EPPP Part 2) 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 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 (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).

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 Part 2 of the Enhanced EPPP with the same level of care and thoroughness used in its development of the EPPP. Our intent is to create an exam

that is a standardized, objective, reliable, valid and defensible measure of the skills needed for the entry-level psychologist.

References

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