



## Oral Examination Information for Candidates

### General Information about the Examination

The Examination is conducted virtually using Zoom. It is a closed-book oral examination. No external aids, pre-existing notes, or pre-existing reference materials (written or electronic) may be consulted during the examination. You are asked to ensure that your immediate workspace is clear of such materials and that any additional electronic devices are turned off for the duration of the examination. Recording in any form is strictly prohibited, and the content of the examination is confidential.

### Your Examiners

Your examination will be conducted by three Examiners drawn from the NSRP roster of approved Oral Examiners. The Examiners are appointed under the NSRP Oral and Transfer Examiners Policy and are registrants of NSRP in good standing.

Once your Examiners have been confirmed, the Office of the Registrar will contact you with the names of the Examiners and the date and time of the examination.

One of the three Examiners will serve as the Examination Chair, with responsibility for the procedural integrity of the examination and the completion of the examination report.

The Examiners will review your candidate file prior to the start of the examination.

### The Format for the Examination

The Examination Chair will introduce all parties and explain to you the four possible outcomes. These are Pass, Pass with Conditions, Fail, or Referral to a Second Oral Examination (see below for more details). At this point you will be given the opportunity to ask questions.

The Examiners conduct a semi-structured interview. You are expected to recite the four principles of the Canadian Code of Ethics. You are not expected to be able to recite the many standards that make up the Code, but you are expected to be familiar with them. **You are also expected to be able to apply the ethical decision-making process to a hypothetical ethical dilemma or scenario that will be provided to you by the Examiners.** You may take up to five minutes to make notes or to think about your response to the ethical dilemma or scenario provided during the examination. If necessary, the Examiners will let you know when you have one minute remaining. You will be asked to discuss how you would approach and resolve the ethical dilemma or scenario, along with identifying which aspects of the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists are under consideration in the specific ethical situation

provided to you. You will also be expected to respond to questions involving familiarity with public policy related to your work, such as the Children and Family Services Act.

This examination will generally take 1.5 hours. At the conclusion of the examination, you will be asked to leave the room so that the Examiners can deliberate. After they have reached a decision, you will be invited back into the room. You will be informed about the results of the examination, and the Examination Chair will generally inform you of the rationale for the decision reached.

## **The Outcomes**

- Pass
- Pass with Conditions
- Fail
- Referral to a Second Oral Examination

### **Pass**

The Examination Chair and the other Examiners will provide you with feedback. You will be welcomed to the Practising Register.

### **Pass with Conditions**

The Examiners may determine that you have passed the Oral Examination and that there are specific areas where additional work or restrictions would be appropriate. The nature of the response depends on what the Examiners identify — for example, additional supervision on specific topics, or restrictions on certain aspects of practice. The Examiners will identify the areas, and the Office of the Registrar will determine how to give effect to their recommendation. The specific arrangements will be set out in a follow-up letter to you, and you will have the opportunity to ask questions about them.

### **Fail**

Should you fail, the Examiners will discuss this decision with you and give you the opportunity to ask questions. They will summarize the examination results and refer you forward for a Second Oral Examination. The Office of the Registrar will provide you with the date and time that this will take place. It generally occurs within the next month or two, as the intent is to serve as a reliability check with respect to the first result rather than to provide you with additional preparation time.

At the Second Oral Examination, the second group of Examiners has three decisions available: Pass, Pass with Conditions, or Fail. If they confirm the failure, you will generally not be allowed to re-take the Oral Examination until you have completed some form of remedial process. A remedial plan is developed on an individual basis to meet your specific needs. The Office of the Registrar will provide you with additional information should this be the outcome of your examination.

After completing the period of remediation and any other conditions, your third Oral Examination will be arranged. Should you fail on your third attempt, you will be given one more attempt through a fourth Oral Examination. Should the fourth Oral Examination confirm the failure, you may be removed from the Conditional Register under the Psychology Regulations and the NSRP Bylaws for failing to meet a condition of your candidacy.

### **Referral to a Second Oral Examination**

In the rare event that the Examiners cannot reach consensus about their decision with respect to a Pass, Pass with Conditions, or Fail, you will be referred for a Second Oral Examination. You will subsequently be informed of the date and time that this will take place. It generally occurs within the next month or two.

### **Revisions**

Revision June 2026 (RHPA alignment) — superseding previous version effective July 1, 2022, and all prior revisions

# Criteria for Evaluating Candidates

## General

Candidates must be able to:

- identify the four basic principles of the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists, how they are ordered, and why they are ordered;
- demonstrate awareness of the ethical decision-making process and recognize what constitutes an ethical dilemma or scenario;
- demonstrate an awareness of the types of issues most likely to occur within their practice setting;
- apply the ethical decision-making process to a hypothetical ethical dilemma or scenario that will be provided by the Examiners;
- explain what is meant by limits of competence and provide an example of a limit that applies with respect to them;
- provide a summary of their practice and identify their knowledge of theory and best practice in each of the core competency areas;
- identify what access they have to other psychologists for the purposes of workplace consultation; and
- identify legislation relevant to their area of practice.

## Application of the Code of Ethics

In addition to knowing the four principles, the candidate should be able to:

- articulate that all four principles are taken into account and balanced in ethical decision-making, and that the principles are ordered according to the weight each generally should be given when they conflict, while recognizing that the complexity of ethical conflicts precludes a firm ordering of principles;
- apply the ethical decision-making process to a hypothetical ethical dilemma or scenario provided by the Examiners, and clearly articulate which principles were in conflict and why, how they balanced the four principles, and the basis for their chosen decision;
- give evidence of an understanding of all aspects of the ethical decision-making process, although it is not necessary to identify the steps in the process by name; and
- list two or more areas within their practice where ethical dilemmas or scenarios are possible and state what form of proactive decision-making might help prevent problems in the two areas identified.

## **Limits of Competence**

A candidate should be able to:

- describe in their own words what is meant by the phrase “limits of competence”;
- define their limits of competence, including populations served; and
- give an example from their area of practice that demonstrates awareness of a competence boundary.

## **Knowledge of Best Practice and Theory in the Core Competency Areas**

In addition to knowledge of the Code of Ethics and the ethical decision-making process as it applies to a candidate’s setting, candidates should also be able to describe their practice as it relates to each of the other core competency areas. This includes:

- knowledge of the standard assessment approaches and tools for their area;
- an understanding of how scientific method is used in the assessment process;
- knowledge of standard interventions used in their area;
- ability to describe the report writing process;
- ability to identify some of the key research questions being explored in their area; and
- awareness of the importance of boundary issues and the ability to provide an example of a boundary crossing.

## Ethical Issues Versus Ethical Dilemmas

(Originally published in *NS Psychologist*, Spring 2016)

In the Oral Examination, candidates are asked to describe an ethical dilemma. It has been our experience that most candidates are well prepared for this aspect of the examination. Of course, some candidates struggle with their ethical dilemma, and when there is a struggle, it is most often with regard to perceiving a dilemma when none exists.

Although it may seem like a matter of semantics, the distinction between an ethical issue and an ethical dilemma is an important one, and has significant implications for practice. As psychologists, we face an enormous diversity of situations in which we must call upon our knowledge of the Code of Ethics. Ethical situations can be expected to arise as a matter of routine in our practice, and the great majority of them are fairly straightforward; we can usually make correct decisions easily and quickly, because the “right” answer is clear.

An ethical situation presents what may be called an ethical “issue” when it is possible to ascertain the answer by simply adhering to a clear-cut guideline in the Code of Ethics. As an example, a psychologist who is asked by her hairstylist if she can take him on as a client can easily and readily come to the conclusion that the answer must be “no,” in adherence with the standard of avoiding dual relationships (Principle III: Integrity in Relationships). The ethical decision-making process for an ethical issue such as this should occur quickly, leading to an easy resolution, since there is no conflict between principles.

Typically, an ethical dilemma exists when two or more ethical principles or standards are conflicting with each other. The situation above would become an ethical dilemma if, for example, the psychologist lives in a remote area and is the only psychologist available. In such a case, another principle becomes relevant, namely Principle II: Responsible Caring. This principle is now competing with the psychologist’s need to avoid the dual relationship. Because Principle II trumps Principle III, in accordance with the hierarchy of the principles, the psychologist must find a way to *manage* the dual relationship rather than avoid it. Perhaps, for example, the psychologist will need to take on her hairstylist as a client and find a new hairstylist to ensure that the best interests of the hairstylist-client are protected.

To perceive an ethical “dilemma” when the issue is clear-cut and there is no conflict between principles is neither correct nor efficient in practice. In the case of such a misperception, an easily-resolved ethical situation can instead become needlessly complicated, and moreover, it can lead to the possibility of the psychologist acting unethically. In the above example, if the psychologist perceives the simple ethical issue as a dilemma, she may, for example, perceive that she has an obligation to provide treatment to her hairstylist when she does not. Perhaps, to complicate matters, her hairstylist has indicated that he feels comfortable with her, and has heard her talk about the type of therapy she conducts, and he sees her as the only psychologist he would ever trust. Even so, no ethical dilemma exists, as the psychologist must still avoid the dual relationship, despite the hairstylist’s wishes. Even though the psychologist may *feel* conflicted, or experience a *personal* dilemma about a situation, a true ethical

dilemma does not exist, as there is no conflict between principles.

Of course, this is but one of an infinite number of possible ethical issues and dilemmas psychologists may face, but it exemplifies the importance of being proficient at distinguishing between an ethical issue and an ethical dilemma.

Nancy Bartlett, Ph.D.

Psychologist

*(Originally published as Board Chair, NSBEP, Spring 2016)*