

Board of Forensic Document Examiners



Application

Information Pages

These pages are provided for your information.
Please read before completing the required forms.

January 2010

Prerequisites for applying for Board Certification

The following constitutes the prerequisites used by the Board of Forensic Document Examiners to evaluate an applicant for a seat to test for board certification.

- (1) A baccalaureate degree or higher from an accredited university.
- (2) Basic training in forensic document examination.

Applicants must provide evidence of training as defined in the applicable ASTM Standard for the year in which they completed training and of continuing education endeavors to bring their education to a current level of knowledge in the subjects of services offered by their employer laboratory or in their private practice. See ASTM Standards E 444-72, E444-79, E444-94, E444-98 (titles discussing the Scope of Work for Forensic Document Examiners) for training completed prior to September 14, 2005. Training should be under the direction of a practicing forensic document examiner(s) with trial experience. After September 14, 2005, training should be in compliance with ASTM E 2388-05 *Standard Guide for Minimum Training Requirements for Forensic Document Examiners*. The examiner must have continued to work in the profession on a regular basis.

- (3) Be proficient in the use of and own or have unlimited access to microscopes and other optical aids; photographic and other imaging devices, alternative light sources including ultraviolet and infrared, appropriate filters, an electrostatic detection device, and a library containing standard reference materials.
- (4) Be of good moral character.
- (5) Agree in writing to abide by the Board of Forensic Document Examiners Code of Ethics and Code of Professional Responsibility.
- (6) Satisfactory completion of a background check, including professional ethics. An individual having a criminal record is not eligible for this program..
- (7) Submit two letters of recommendation from individuals who are familiar with the applicant's ethics and work (e.g. supervisor, professional associates, colleagues).
- (8) Sign a release permitting the Board to verify all information submitted and a release permitting any accrediting agency of the board to audit the applicant's file pursuant to its quality system review process, if the file is selected in a random sampling of applicants.
- (9) The applicant must read the polices and procedures of the certification program and agree in writing that he/she understands the procedures and requirements as written.
- (10) Provide all information requested in the application packet and any additional material requested.
- (11) Satisfactory verification of the data provided to the Board.

Definitions of terms as applied to training history

The Board acknowledges that prior to the passage of ASTM Standard E 2388-05 there was a lack of standardized training in the profession of document examination, although most training consisted of the areas specified in ASTM E444. According to an article published in the Journal of Forensic Sciences, a survey of 124 laboratories found that some agencies had a formal training program and others did not, and there were "widely disparate view of what constituted a formal training program....Thus the content of a training program often closely mirrors the type of casework handled by the agency...."¹

The founders of the profession were all self-trained individuals who met in groups and continued to learn from one another. While this is not an acceptable the method today, many individuals in the private sector who trained decades ago trained under the direction of an experienced examiner(s), through group association, coupled with independent study. Depending on the scope of services offered, training may have ranged from 15 months to several years.

It is, therefore, the position of the BFDE that prior to 2005 an agency trained examiner must (a) document a training program as required by the laboratory where he/she was employed at the time of training, and (b) establish that he or she has kept current in the profession by regularly attending conferences; and, a privately trained individual must (a) identify a mentor(s), (b) establish what constituted his/her training with the scope and length of training being relevant to the time period that training occurred, and (c) establish that he or she has kept current in the profession by regularly attending conferences.

The following terms are frequently used to describe training. For the purpose of the BFDE application process, the Administrator will accept the following terms as they are defined in this document. It is highly recommended that applicant's training descriptions conform to the definitions provided below to avoid any misunderstanding about the applicant's training history. If the applicant's training history contains terms other than the terms defined herein, the applicant should provide definitions, so that the information is clearly understood by the Administrator. All statements in the application are subject to verification.

Apprentice: The applicant/apprentice was a full time student under the auspices of a FDE whose favorable reputation was established in the profession. The apprentice worked almost daily with the teacher in his/her laboratory/office. The apprentice may or may not have been a salaried employee. The teacher determined when the individual was sufficiently trained to begin working on his/her own and may or may not have followed that individual's case work for a period of time.

Mentor: An individual who worked regularly with a student examiner/trainee, providing guidance, reading assignments, hands-on projects, and sample cases. Training may have been conducted in-person, via mail and telephone, via Internet, or a combination thereof. The mentor monitored the process of the student examiner/trainee and advised when the individual was ready to begin accepting cases on his/her own and generally reviewed the individual's case work for a period of time.

Tutor: The same definition as a mentor.

Seminar instruction: The person learned from a competent FDE or an individual in an allied profession who provided information relevant to forensic document examination through the presentation of professional papers, workshops or hands-on classes. A document examiner's entire base of knowledge cannot be based on attendance at seminars. The proper application of the knowledge obtained is essential, and this must be monitored by a professional.

Professional paper: A paper delivered at a professional conference, generally from 20 minutes to one hour in length

¹ "The Status of Training for Questioned Document Examiners in the United States", James E. Behrendt, M.F.S. (USPS), Vol. 34, No. 1, March 1989. pg 367.

Workshop: A period of learning, generally at a conference, that provides in-depth material in one specific subject. A workshop may comprise several hours, half a day, or an entire day(s).

Hands-on Training: A workshop which includes audience participation of practical nature. Examples would be demonstrations of latent imaging where attendees practice developments techniques, digital imaging instruction where attendees work on their own computers and apply the applications being discussed, and testifying as an expert in a mock trial. Hands-on training also includes such procedures done in private consultation with a qualified document examiner.

Seminar, Symposium, Conference: A scheduled event sponsored by a professional association at which professional papers, workshops and/or hands-on classes are presented by colleagues, professionals in allied fields, related business professionals and others.

Continuing education: Knowledge gained after one completes his/her training period through attendance at scheduled events sponsored by professional associations, agencies, universities, or other entities; keeping abreast of current technologies and research through reading professional journals; participating in research; and other events that further ones knowledge and skills in the profession.

Certification Examination and Certification Renewal Process

The following information is provided so that the applicant fully understands all of the procedures, requirements and processes involved in the certificate award.

Base of knowledge required for the examination

- (a) The testing curriculum constitutes the knowledge the Board has determined relevant for practicing forensic document examination. The Board acknowledges that it is a practitioner's right to choose to practice in specific areas of the discipline only and that an agency may not offer the services in all areas of document examination, but all applicants must acquire the defined base of knowledge in order to pass testing. Also see ASTM Standard E444-09, *Scope of Work of a Forensic Document Examiner*.
- (b) A board certified document examiner must possess the minimum basic knowledge necessary to render accurate opinions in case work and be able to recognize when a situation requires knowledge beyond his/her capability, seek appropriate assistance, or refer the case to a qualified professional.

Written examination

- (a) The written examination is a proctored test of discipline-specific knowledge consisting of approximately 250 multiple choice questions.
- (b) The test is administered and graded by a testing agency retained by the Board.
- (c) Examination questions cover the body of knowledge which is used on a daily, weekly, monthly or yearly basis by a forensic document examiner.
- (d) An outline of the curriculum on which test questions are based is included in this packet. See the *Forensic Document Examiners: Task Inventory for Examination Questions*.
- (e) A study guide will be provided to all accepted applicants in .pdf format.
- (f) Test questions are drawn from a database of questions, with a specific number of questions from each of the curriculum (task inventory) areas included in the examination.
- (g) Based on standard testing calculations, it is anticipated that the test can be completed within four hours. Four hours will be the maximum time allotted for this portion of the examination.
- (h) A passing score for each curriculum area is predetermined using standard cutting score procedures. The applicant must pass each area, meeting or exceeding the score to pass the examination.
- (i) Failing the test. See Provisions for retaking the examination.

Performance examination

- (a) The performance examination requires applying discipline specific knowledge and experience to cases routinely handled by document examiners.
- (b) Case subjects may be drawn from any of the categories listed in the testing curriculum.
- (c) The applicant should bring a magnifier and individual light source (battery operated preferred). Any other necessary equipment will be provided.
- (d) Four hours will be allowed for the performance examination portion of the test.
- (e) All examinations are proctored and all case material, including any notes made by the test taker, must be returned to the proctor before leaving the testing room.
- (f) Security measures require that each time a performance examination is generated, the cases be drawn from a rotating database.
- (g) Grading is conducted by a testing agency retained by the Board.
- (h) The correct answer for each case is predetermined. All case work must be correct to pass the performance test.
- (j) Notification of the applicant's score is provided to the applicant and, if requested by the applicant, it shall be provided to the BFDE Administrator.

Provisions for retaking the examinations

- (a) An applicant failing the examination may apply to retake the examination after at least 30 days but not more than eighteen months have elapsed from the date of the previous examination.
- (b) Application shall be made to the test administration agency and shall include the appropriate testing fee.
- (c) The applicant is only required to retake that section of the test that was failed (e.g. retake the entire section as defined in the curriculum) or re-examine a specific kind of document problem.
- (d) The fee is determined by the number of sections and whether a performance examination is being retaken.
- (e) If the applicant fails to take the re-examination within the stated period, he/she must reapply for testing, updating the application information, fulfilling any amended requirements since the date of the initial application, pay a new examination fee, and take the entire examination.
- (f) The time allowed for the examination will depend on the number of sections.
- (g) An individual failing the examination or part of the examination three times, may not take the examination for a period of three years, after which he/she may reapply.

Granting board certification

- (a) Board certification is granted only after the applicant has passed all examinations and completed any other requirements set forth in the program guidelines.
- (b) Certification is granted for a five-year period at the end of which time the individual must renew his/her certification status through participation in the current certification renewal program.
- (c) The Board bestows certification based on objective, unbiased testing and evaluation. Testing is voluntary and open to individuals who meet basic requirements. By certifying an individual, the Board is attesting to the fact that the individual possessed the knowledge required to pass testing at the level stated on the certificate. The Board makes no representation as to the individual's work product, opinions or skills in providing expert testimony. It is the responsibility of the retaining party to interview the examiner, review his/her curriculum vitae and be satisfied that the individual is qualified for the assignment offered.

Certificates

- (a) The certificate is issued for a five year period whereupon it expires unless the individual has completed the requirements for renewal as stated in Section 12 of the ABFDE Polices & Procedures Manual.
- (b) A new certificate will be issued upon completion of the renewal requirements.
- (c) Certificates remain the property of the Board and must be returned to the Board upon its request.
- (d) A certificate may be suspended or revoked pursuant to action taken under the Grievance Procedures given in Section 17 of the Polices and Procedures Manual or upon documentation of a conviction of a crime.

Certification renewal program *(also recognized as recertification or certification maintenance)*

- (a) Renewal is required every five years.
- (b) All requirements must be fulfilled prior to the date of certificate expiration.
- (c) Individuals are responsible to track their own renewal dates, request current forms from the Secretary for submission of credits and comply with the requirements.
- (d) Certificate holders will be notified of any changes in requirements within 30 days of said changes being adopted.
- (e) Verification documents must be received by the Vice-President no less than 60 days prior to the date the certificate expires.
- (f) A renewal fee must accompany the application for renewal.

The components of five-year certification renewal

- (a) Sixty credits of continuing forensic education. Fifty minutes of continuing education equals one credit. Sources of continuing education credit are listed in another document in this packet. Sources not listed may be considered on an individual basis.
- (b) Participation in proficiency testing shall be required twice within the five year period. Testing shall be conducted through Forensic Expertise Profiling Laboratory, La Trobe University, Victoria, Australia or the Collaborative Testing Service (CTS).

A certificate holder employed in a laboratory which subscribes to Collaborative Testing Services (CTS) and who is required to participate in CTS testing annually, shall be considered to have fulfilled the proficiency requirement upon submission of a letter from the laboratory directory stating the examiner's proficiency results in the CTS program were satisfactory.

The Vice-President will review the proficiency test results with the certificate holder and has the authority to recommend remedial work, if appropriate.

- (c) Professional participation/contributions to the profession.

Activities include: publishing research, technical papers or case studies in a professional journal; presenting a paper at a professional conference; attending the ASTM questioned documents subcommittee meetings; participation in a research project. Recognition of other activities may be considered on an individual basis. One activity is required within a renewal period.
- (d) Audit. This is quality system check that is required if a certificate holder opposes a document examiner who is certified by an FSAB accredited board more than five times within the certification renewal period.
- (e) An affidavit of continued employment in the profession of document examination.
- (f) Reconfirmation in writing of adherence to the Board of Forensic Document Examiners Code of Ethics and Code of Professional Responsibility.
- (g) An Individual who does not comply with this program shall not have his/her certificate renewed.
- (h) An individual who has not fulfilled renewal requirements as of his/her renewal date shall be listed in the records as *non-complaint with certification requirements* and *not in good standing*. This information is subject to public disclosure upon proper written inquiry.
- (i) An individual shall be given a 30 day grace period to bring the non-compliant status into compliance. If the grace period passes and the individual remains non-compliant, certification shall be not be renewed and the reason so stated in the individual's file and this information is subject to public disclosure upon proper written inquiry. (Major medical or catastrophic circumstances will be considered on an individual basis for an extended grace period.)
- (k) An individual whose certificate has not been renewed shall receive a new certificate only after reapplying, fulfilling the current prerequisites, paying the current testing fee, and successfully passing certification testing.

Forensic Document Examiners: Task inventory for examination questions

- A. DEMONSTRATING DOCUMENT EXAMINER FOUNDATION SKILLS**
 - 1 Demonstrate Knowledge of Handwriting Methodology
 - 2 Demonstrate Knowledge of Handwriting/Hand Printing Identification
 - 3 Demonstrate Knowledge of Inks
 - 4 Identify Various Writing Instruments
 - 5 Demonstrate Knowledge of Fonts and Type Styles
 - 6 Demonstrate Knowledge of Paper
 - 7 Demonstrate Knowledge of Printing Devices
 - 8 Demonstrate Knowledge of Forms and Letterhead (case relevant)
 - 9 Demonstrate Knowledge of Comparative Analysis Techniques
 - 10 Demonstrate Professionalism

- B. GATHERING EVIDENCE**
 - 11 Maintain Chain of Custody (evidence handling)
 - 12 Collect Standards of Comparison (handwriting/signature)
 - 13 Collect Standards of Comparison (other media)
 - 14 Verify Accuracy of Document Data
 - 15 Analyze Document Formatting

- C. ANALYZING HANDWRITING**
 - 16 Examine Cursive Writing (including signatures)
 - 17 Examine Hand Printing (alpha and numeric)
 - 18 Recognize Influences on Handwriting Skills
 - 19 Identify Letter Design Influences
 - 20 Recognize Disguised Handwritten Images
 - 21 Examine Graffiti
 - 22 Determine Line Sequence and Direction of the Writing Movement

- D. ANALYZING FALSIFIED DOCUMENTS**
 - 23 Determine Document Altering Techniques
 - 24 Identify Counterfeited/Fabricated Documents

- E. ANALYZING FEATURES OF PAPER AND MEDIA**
 - 25 Identify Watermark Characteristics
 - 26 Identify Types and Characteristics of Paper
 - 27 Identify Physical Characteristics of Paper
 - 28 Assess Production Characteristics of Paper
 - 29 Assess Physical Condition of Paper (current)

- F. ANALYZING IMPACT AND NON-IMPACT IMAGES**
 - 30 Analyze Copy Machine Images
 - 31 Analyze Latent Images
 - 32 Analyze Fax Images
 - 33 Analyze Printer Images
 - 34 Analyze Typewriter Images
 - 35 Analyze Imaging Devices (i.e., rubber stamps, auto pens, embossing seals)
 - 36 Analyze Non-Impact Pre-Print Images
 - 37 Analyze Credit Card/Check Security Features

- G. USING LAB INSTRUMENTS**
 - 38 Use Microscope and Magnifiers
 - 39 Use Videospectrum Devices (such as infrared and ultraviolet - including filters)
 - 40 Use Electrostatic Detection Device
 - 41 Use Photography (Polaroid, digital, and 35mm)
 - 42 Use Light Sources (including various filters)
 - 43 Use Digital Image Equipment
 - 44 Use Photocopier
 - 45 Use Measuring Devices
 - 46 Other Equipment (applicable to document problems)

- H. EVALUATING EVIDENCE AND PRESENTING CASE FINDINGS**
 - 47 Evaluate Results of all Analyses Performed
 - 48 Express Opinion/Assign Level of Certainty (e.g. know levels per ASTM standard)
 - 49 Prepare Reports (verbal and written)
 - 50 Prepare for Testimony (including exhibits)

- I. DEMONSTRATING KNOWLEDGE OF LEGAL PROCEDURES**
 - 51 Define Legal Terminology
 - 52 Demonstrate Knowledge of Types of Legal Proceedings
 - 53 Recognize Legal Precedents (regarding document examination issues)

CERTIFICATION RENEWAL

Sources for continuing education hours, publishing articles and presenting papers. Organizations and journals are listed alphabetically, and sequence of listing does not imply preference or importance.

CONTINUING EDUCATION

Symposiums, conferences and workshops and sponsored by:

- American Academy of Forensic Sciences, Questioned Document Section
 - American Academy of Forensic Science workshops on related topics
 - American Society of Questioned Document Examiners
 - Association of Forensic Document Examiners
 - International Association of Forensic Sciences, QD Section
 - International Association for Identification, QD related subjects
 - International Association for Identification (State Chapters), QD related subjects
 - International Graphonomics Society, Motor Skill and Forensic applications
 - Midwest Association of Forensic Science, QD related subjects
 - National Forensic Science Technology Center
 - Puerto Rico Association of Forensic Sciences, QD related subjects
 - Southeast Association of Forensic Document Examiners
 - Southwest Association of Forensic Document Examiners
- Additional sources include legal seminars discussing related issues, digital imaging workshops, evidence photography courses, workshops/classes, technical visits, workshops sponsored by the paper industries, seminars sponsored by the Rochester Institute of Technology, related course work sponsored by a college or technical school, in-service training, etc.

PUBLICATIONS

- *Forensic Science International*
 - *Journal of Forensic Document Examination*
 - *Journal of Forensic Science*
 - *Journal of the American Society of Questioned Document Examiners*
 - *Journal of the Forensic Science Society*
- Additional sources: forensic, legal, medical, journal, law enforcement journals. The guideline used to consider the article is whether it is equivalent to those published in the listed journals.

PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS

- Papers presented at any of the above listed organizations
- City, county, state or national bar associations seminars (CLE credit)
- City, county, state or national law enforcement agency seminars
- Security associations seminars
- Banking corporations and associations training seminars
- College/university legal and criminal justice in class instruction

Sources for continuing education or professional development that are not include on this list may be requested. Credit at the discretion of the BFDE.