

American College of Veterinary Pathologists

Certifying Examination  
Candidate Handbook

Updated November 1, 2017

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## Introduction

The American College of Veterinary Pathologists (ACVP) *Certifying Examination Candidate Handbook* is a resource for trainees/candidates, sponsors, and training programs throughout the world. The *Candidate Handbook* should be consulted by new trainees at the beginning of a training program, whenever a change in training is considered, during training to ensure that eligibility requirements are being met, and again near the end of training in order to prepare to apply, prepare, and sit for the ACVP certifying examination. The *Candidate Handbook* is updated as requirements or examination details change, and the “Exam” section of the ACVP website should always be referenced for the most current version. Links are provided to the ACVP website or to specific documents, especially to documents or information that is most likely to be updated within the year.

## Contact Information

Questions regarding the ACVP certifying examination or eligibility criteria should be sent to [exam@acvp.org](mailto:exam@acvp.org).

## Certifying Examination

The ACVP certifying examination is a two-phase process that candidates must pass in order to be certified as Diplomates in either veterinary anatomic or clinical pathology.

The content for the certifying examinations is based on the results of Job Task Analyses (JTA) for Clinical Pathology and Anatomic Pathology conducted in 2016 and approved by ACVP Council in 2017. The final product of each JTA is a blueprint (key tasks and species, organ system and process/topic breakdowns) used for mapping Certifying Examination content (including the 2017 Phase II Examination in Tampa and the 2018 Phase I Examination). The Blueprint documents and JTAs for AP and CP are at the links below.

[Job Task Analysis Clinical Pathology Blueprint](#)

[Job Task Analysis Anatomic Pathology Blueprint](#)

[Job Task Analysis Clinical Pathology](#)

[Job Task Analysis Anatomic Pathology](#)

## Phase I Examination

The Phase I examination is a 2-hour examination composed of 100 multiple choice questions, covering all aspects of veterinary general pathology. The Phase I examination tests knowledge of mechanisms fundamental to disease in animals such as principles of cellular injury, inflammation and repair, hemodynamic disorders, physical and chemical injury, neoplasia, congenital and genetic diseases, molecular pathology, and infections. The mechanisms tested in this section are “general” in that they relate to most animal species and exclude entities in single species. The Phase I examination must be passed in order to be eligible to take the Phase II certifying examinations in veterinary anatomic or clinical pathology.

The [Phase I examination dates](#) are updated yearly on the ACVP website. Consult the ACVP website for the [Phase I Reading List \(PDF\)](#), [Phase I Sample Questions \(PDF\)](#), and the [passing point \(cut-score\)](#) for the most recent Phase I examination.

### Administration of the Phase I Examination

The Phase I examination is administered in partnership with Castle Worldwide Inc. (Castle), a certification and licensure testing company. Castle utilizes more than 500 testing locations throughout the United States and Canada, as well as more than 225 international testing centers. Testing centers usually are located in commercial areas of cities so that public transportation and restaurants are typically available. All sites offer accessibility to disabled individuals. The internet-based test delivery system (PASS) is easy to use and requires no previous computer experience. The PASS demonstration, available to all candidates via the internet prior to the examination, guides candidates through all system features and functionalities and allows candidates time to become familiar with the system prior to beginning the examination.

Candidates will receive a notice by email to schedule at a testing center about 45 days prior to the testing date for the Phase I examination. The notice to schedule will provide candidates with a unique username/password and the URL address to access Castle's online test scheduling system to select a testing location, based on seating availability within Castle's network of test sites. Additional information about the Phase I examination is available at the following link: [Phase I/Castle FAQs \(PDF\)](#)

## Phase II Examination

The Phase II examination is a one-day examination in veterinary anatomic pathology or veterinary clinical pathology. It is composed of written essays and multiple choice questions assessing the skills

and knowledge that a minimally competent pathologist should possess (see [Examination Content Development Guidelines \(PDF\)](#)). Although the Phase I Examination is organized in three modules- Microscopy, Interpretation, and Knowledge- it is scored as a single pass/fail examination. While the Phase II Examination cannot be passed in parts, candidates who fail the examination will be provided feedback on how they performed on each part of the examination. More detail regarding the organization and composition of the examination can be found at the links below under Anatomic Pathology Resources and Clinical Pathology Resources.

[Phase II examination dates](#) are updated yearly on the ACVP website.

### **Administration of the Phase II examination**

The Phase II examination is administered at the American Board of Pathology's (ABP) testing facility in Tampa, FL. The facility is located 5 miles (10 minutes) from the Tampa International Airport and is connected to the Westshore Grand Hotel (formerly InterContinental Hotel.) Details regarding the Tampa ABP Examination Center can be found at <http://www.abpath.org/index.php/taking-an-examination/examination-centers>, including information on location, courtesy shuttle use, and nearby restaurants.

Consult the [illustrated guide to the ACVP Phase II certifying examination in Tampa](#) for additional details and a visual guide to the examination. Refer to the [ACVP Computer Examination Instructions](#) for information on the practice test; answering or changing multiple choice questions; flagging questions; viewing and enlarging images; essay questions; calculator function; time remaining notices; and other test details. A copy of the [computer examination instruction screens](#) may also be reviewed for general information such as breaks, scratch paper, items not allowed in the testing room, the honor code statement, and other general test information.

### **Anatomic Pathology Resources:**

[Phase II Anatomic Pathology Reading List \(PDF\)](#)

[Scope of the ACVP Certifying Examination \(Phase II\)-Anatomic Pathology \(PDF\)](#)

[Phase II Anatomic Pathology Schedule and Scoring \(PDF\)](#)

## Clinical Pathology Resources:

[Phase II Clinical Pathology Reading List \(PDF\)](#)

[Scope of the ACVP Certifying Examination \(Phase II\)-Clinical Pathology \(PDF\)](#)

[Phase II Clinical Pathology Schedule and Scoring \(PDF\)](#)

## Sponsor and Training Route Requirements and Definitions

**Sponsor:** All applications require a sponsor. The sponsor who endorses the application must be the person most responsible for the candidate's training in veterinary pathology. Occasionally, circumstances dictate that a sponsor is not the principal mentor, in which case the ACVP Credentialing Committee and Council require an explanation/justification at the time of application.

**Phase I Examination sponsors:** Phase I sponsors do not need to be ACVP or ECVF Diplomates if the candidate is training via the Alternate Route for the Phase II examination. However, for the 12 months of Phase I training to be applied to the 36 months of Standard Route Phase II Training, the sponsor must be an ACVP Diplomate (or ECVF Diplomate as noted below for Phase II sponsors).

**Phase II Examination sponsors:** The sponsor for the Phase II examination must be an ACVP Diplomate (or an ECVF Diplomate as noted below). The Diplomate must have membership in good standing with their college and have been a Diplomate for at least the period of claimed sponsorship (generally 3 years or more).

- Anatomic pathology Diplomates of the ECVF, who were elected to the ECVF by examination, may act as sponsors for anatomic pathology candidates. Only ACVP clinical pathology Diplomates may act as sponsors for clinical pathology candidates for the Phase II examination.
- For Alternate Route Training, in which the principal mentor is not a Diplomate, co-sponsorship by a Diplomate must be obtained, which signifies that the training has been reviewed for adequacy and is consistent with the requirements of the College.

**Dual certification:** Diplomates certified in either Veterinary Anatomic Pathology or in Veterinary Clinical Pathology may seek certification in the other discipline. These Diplomates are not required to repeat the Phase I examination.

For 2018-2019, candidates for dual certification (i.e. a candidate that is ACVP certified in one of the two disciplines: clinical pathology or anatomic pathology) can sponsor themselves when applying to sit the ACVP certification examination in the second discipline.

Effective in 2020, Candidates for dual certification must adhere to the following training requirements prior to attempting the relevant certification examination:

- 12 months, at the equivalent of 40 hours per week, of training under the mentorship of an ACVP diplomate who is certified in the discipline sought.
- The 12 months of training may be obtained over a period of 1 to 5 years.  
A minimum of 50% of the training time should be in person with the ACVP certified mentor. Following the training, the ACVP certified mentor will sign the sponsorship form attesting to the readiness to attempt the certification examination (i.e. testable competencies) and also training and mastery of the non-testable competencies.

**Phase I Training:** For Phase I examination eligibility, candidates must have 12 months of training in veterinary pathology under the direction of a sponsor as above (Phase I Examination Sponsor). At the time of applying for the Phase I examination, the candidate must declare whether they are training under the Standard Route or Alternate Route of Training for Phase II.

**Standard Route of Training for the Phase II Examination:** Supervised training acceptable to ACVP Council is directed by a Diplomate and takes place in an institution that trains veterinary pathologists as one of its primary functions. The training should engage trainees in the broad spectrum of the practice of veterinary pathology. The candidate must complete a minimum of 36 months of such training subsequent to graduation from veterinary school and all 36 months should be in the field in which certification is sought (Veterinary Anatomic Pathology or Veterinary Clinical Pathology). If the 12 months of training in Phase I was under the supervision of a Diplomate, then these 12 months can be applied to the 36 month requirement. If the 12 months was not under a Diplomate, then the candidate will need 36 months training with a Diplomate or train under the Alternate Route of Training (see below).

Training conditions that do not satisfy both Standard Route criteria (directed by a Diplomate and a program that trains veterinary pathologists as one of its primary functions) constitute Alternate Route Training, which is subject to approval by the Credentialing Committee and ACVP Council.

**Alternate Route of Training for the Phase II Examination:** Training is considered an alternate route if any part of the training takes place under a sponsor who is not a Diplomate, or occurs at an institution that does not train veterinary pathologists as one of its primary functions. The Alternate Route requires a minimum of 48 months of training subsequent to graduation from veterinary school. Twelve of the 48 months must be spent in training under the supervision of a Diplomate, in the same institution, or in a program that trains veterinary pathologists as one of its primary functions. All 48 months must be in the field in which certification is sought (Veterinary Anatomic Pathology or Veterinary Clinical Pathology).

## Eligibility

### Credentialing Requirements for All Examinations

For all examinations, candidates must provide one of the following documents as part of the application:

- A photocopy of a diploma from an [AVMA-accredited](#) school or college of veterinary medicine
- A photocopy of an Educational Commission for Foreign Veterinary Graduates (ECFVG) certificate
- A photocopy of a state, provincial or territory license to practice veterinary medicine (United States, Canada or other country)
- A photocopy of a faculty license or other umbrella license from your institution
- A document stating that a license to practice is not required in your position at your institution  
**\*Update:** This option has been since clarified to be an option for candidates who do not have a diploma from an AVMA-accredited institution, ECFVG certification, or a license to practice veterinary medicine. For the 2017 examination, we will accept all forms of documentation for this option. However, for the 2018 examination application, this option will require a copy of the candidate's diploma from any veterinary school or college in addition to documentation that a license is not required for the candidate's job, state, province or country.

**Documentation must be in English or include an English translation by an independent translation service that is notarized.**

### Criteria to Take Phase I Examination

- A candidate must have completed 12 months of veterinary pathology training prior to the Phase I examination date and must have approval from a Sponsor.
- A candidate must complete the on-line application and pay the Phase I examination fee by the application date.
- A candidate must declare, at the time of application for the Phase I examination, if they will be training under the Standard or Alternate Route for the Phase II examination.

### Criteria to Take Phase II Examination

- All candidates are required to pass the Phase I examination prior to taking the Phase II examination. A candidate may elect to take the Phase I and Phase II examinations in the same year if they meet the eligibility requirements for both examinations, and pass the Phase I examination prior to taking Phase II.
- **Candidates intending to take both the Phase I and Phase II examinations in the same year must register for each examination by the respective deadlines.** Candidates who do not pass

the Phase I examination will have their registration fee for the Phase II examination refunded within 30 days of receiving their Phase I examination results.

- A candidate must have completed 36 months (Standard Route) or 48 months (Alternate Route) of veterinary pathology training prior to the Phase II examination date and must have approval from a Sponsor.
- A candidate must complete the on-line application and pay the Phase II examination fee by the application date.

### **Criteria to Take Phase II Examination for Dual Certification**

For 2018-2019, candidates for dual certification (i.e. a candidate that is ACVP certified in one of the two disciplines: clinical pathology or anatomic pathology) can sponsor themselves when applying to sit the ACVP certification examination in the second discipline.

Effective in 2020, Candidates for dual certification must adhere to the following training requirements prior to attempting the relevant certification exam:

- 12 months, at the equivalent of 40 hours per week, of training under the mentorship of an ACVP or ECVP diplomate for anatomic pathology or an ACVP diplomate for clinical pathology.
- The 12 months of training may be obtained over a period of 1 to 5 years.
- A minimum of 50% of the training time should be in person with the ACVP or ECVP certified mentor as described above.
- Following the training, the ACVP or ECVP certified mentor will sign the sponsorship form attesting to the readiness to attempt the certification exam (i.e. testable competencies) and also training and mastery of the non-testable competencies.

### **Criteria to Repeat Failed Examinations**

- If a candidate fails the Phase I examination, they are eligible to repeat the examination the following year. There is no limit on the number of attempts or years a candidate may repeat the Phase I examination.
- After passing the Phase I examination, candidates will have 4 attempts over the next 9 years to pass the Phase II examination. If a candidate has not passed the Phase II examination after 4 attempts, or has exceeded their 9 year limit, they must reapply as a new candidate and will be required to retake and pass the Phase I examination prior to retaking the Phase II examination.
- The 4 attempts that a candidate has to pass the Phase II examination will be calculated as the sum of attempts that occur in Ames (traditional examination) and Tampa (new examination).

# Application

## Application Deadlines

Candidates must apply separately for the Phase I and Phase II examinations. Application periods for each examination (the date applications open and the application deadline) are updated yearly on the ACVP website list of [Important Examination Dates](#) and on the [Application](#) page. Application deadlines are subject to change from year to year, and candidates should ensure that they check the dates each year in order to meet deadlines.

The [application](#), [Sponsor Verification Form](#), [Terms of Agreement for Admission to the Examinations \(PDF\)](#) and detailed application steps are available on the [Application](#) page of the [ACVP website](#).

## Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Requests

The ACVP complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended by the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendment Act of 2008 (the “ADA”) by providing reasonable accommodations. If you have a disability/impairment which may require special accommodation(s) in order to take an examination, you must complete the applicable section of the examination application form.

Accommodation cannot be granted retroactively, so that if a candidate informs ACVP of an impairment or disability after the examination has been completed, there can be no changes made in that candidate’s examination results or changes in how that candidate’s examination is graded in comparison to other candidates.

To support a request for test accommodations the following materials must be submitted by February 1 of the examination year for either or both the Phase I and II examinations. The request form and details are found in the links below:

[Test Accommodations Request Form \(PDF\)](#)

[ADA Requests \(PDF\)](#)

## Application Process and Withdrawal

- Once an application is received, an email message acknowledging receipt of the application will be sent to the applicant and Sponsor. This message does not constitute acceptance to sit the examination. The Sponsor will be requested to respond to this message to confirm sponsorship.
- A recommendation for acceptance, provisional acceptance, or rejection to sit the examination is made by the Credentialing Committee and is reviewed and approved by ACVP Council. A message from the ACVP Executive Office indicating acceptance, provisional acceptance or rejection will follow ACVP Council review.

- If the applicant's credentials are not accepted, or if a candidate's request to withdraw from the examination is received by the [withdrawal deadlines listed on the ACVP website](#), fees are refunded, except for a processing charge. No withdrawal refunds are made after this date and no fees may be carried over to apply in subsequent years.
- If a candidate applies for both the Phase I and Phase II examinations and fails the Phase I examination, they automatically will receive a full refund for the Phase II examination. No request for withdrawal from the Phase II examination is necessary for these candidates.
- Withdrawal prior to the examination, or failure to appear for the examination, will not constitute an attempt to sit the examination. A candidate's illness during preparation for, or during the actual examination, will not be considered a valid reason to waive the rules of the College. In the event a candidate starts, but is unable to complete the examination, results will be reported and will constitute an attempt to sit the examination.
- Individual candidates will be identified only by the unique Identification Numbers assigned them by the ACVP office at the time they apply until the results of the examination are approved by the ACVP Council.

## Reporting of Results and Reverification Requests

Written notification of the results of the examinations will be sent by email to candidates within 45 days from the date of the examination.

### Procedure for Reverification After Examination Failure

#### Phase I

Scores from Phase I will not be reverified. Results for the automated multiple choice item scoring process are statistically and psychometrically analyzed, items with specific scoring criteria are assessed, re-analyzed, and then results are reported.

#### Phase II Reverification

The automated multiple choice item scoring process for the Phase II examination is subject to similar quality assurance as Phase I, and scores will not be reverified. Essay scores from the Phase II examination are verified twice before examination score reporting. If a candidate requests essay score reverification after receiving their score ([reverification of examination scores \(PDF\)](#)), the essays are not regraded, but score transfers and final score are verified. Requests for reverification must be accompanied by a fee and must be received by the ACVP Executive Office within 30 days of the receipt of test results.

## ACVP Honor Code for Certifying Examination Candidates

All candidates are expected to accurately represent their credentials. Additionally, all examinations are taken under an honor system ([Honor Code PDF](#)) and the test items are copyright protected. If a candidate is found to have misrepresented any portion of their credentials, to have received outside assistance on an examination, to have cheated on an examination, to have misrepresented their work on an examination, to have violated the confidentiality or copyright protection of the examination or to have behaved unethically in any other way during the credentialing or examination process, their credentials may be rejected, they will receive a failing grade on the examination, they will forfeit their fees for the examination, and they will be subject to any other disciplinary action deemed appropriate by the ACVP Council. These actions may include denial of permission to retake the examination in future years and/or denial of the ability to attain certification.

### Appeals

Adverse decisions by ACVP that may be appealed include, but are not limited to, denial of credentials to take the examination, denial of certification due to failure of examination and cancellation of certification by disciplinary action. Reverification of scores after failure of the Phase II examination is a different process (see above). All appeals will be considered by the ACVP Appeals Committee whose sole responsibility is to determine whether proper procedures were followed in decisions made by the ACVP Council, Secretary/Treasurer, Executive Director, Credentialing Committee, or Examination Committee that may be considered adverse by a Diplomate or candidate for certification.

Appeals from candidates for denial to take the examination or for denial or cancellation of certification must be submitted in writing to the ACVP Executive Director. Appeals should consist of a brief letter summarizing the reason for the appeal, along with any supporting documents. Appeals, including all supporting documents, must be received from the candidate by the ACVP within thirty (30) calendar days of the candidate's final notification by ACVP of the decision being appealed. Candidates must redact all supporting documents to retain anonymity of the appellant and ACVP members who may be involved in the case.

## Preparation, Validation and Scoring of the Examinations

Preparation and validation of the certifying examination begins with selection of the Examination Committee members and proctors ([EC members PDF](#), [Proctor Application form](#)). Members and proctors are selected on the basis of experience, expertise, areas of interest, and access to examination materials. Employment sector (academia, diagnostics, industry) is also considered in selection of Committee members. Separate Examination Committees prepare the Veterinary Anatomic Pathology and the Veterinary Clinical Pathology Phase II examinations. Both committees participate in preparation of the Phase I examination.

Each year, Examination Committee members and proctors compose written questions and submit microscopic and chemistry cases for consideration in the examination. Submitted questions and cases are reviewed for accuracy, clarity and relevance. All written questions are referenced. A pool of approved questions and cases is selected to produce a balanced examination in accordance with the ACVPs Job Task Analysis. This pool may include questions and cases of proven quality and discrimination from previous examinations to ensure overall balance.

Grading of multiple-choice questions is automated. The computer-generated item analysis, including the discriminatory and difficulty coefficients of each question is considered by the committee before final determination of candidate scores. Microscopic and case essays are graded by committee members and proctors using a grading key. All responses to a given case are assigned to one committee member to ensure uniformity of grading.

During the entire examination process, candidates are identified only by number. Scoring calculations are checked at least twice before they are accepted as final. Examination committee members never learn the names of candidates that correspond to candidate numbers.

The passing point (cut score) is determined prior to grading of the examination using the Angoff method (for objectively scored questions) and the Extended Angoff method (for subjectively scored questions). For both methods, a panel of ACVP diplomates reviews every test item during a standard setting study. With the Angoff method, each expert determines if a competent entry-level candidate should be able to correctly answer each question, and estimates the percentage of the minimally acceptable candidate group that would answer the question correctly. These estimates, made independently by each expert, are then combined across all experts and questions to produce the minimally acceptable score.

In order to ensure that examinations are of comparable difficulty, regardless of the year in which they were administered, an equating process is used to compare the difficulty of examinations given in

different years and to adjust scores to reflect any differences in difficulty. These adjusted scores are used to determine if candidates pass or fail the examination based on the pre-established cut score.

For more detailed information concerning passing points and examination equating, please see the following: [Cut Score and Equating \(PDF\)](#)

[Responsibilities of Candidates, Sponsors and Training Institutions \(PDF\)](#)