



## The ABD Certification Examination: Facts, Fiction, and Fantasy

### Derivation of the Examination Questions

The American Board of Dermatology certification examination is assembled annually from a bank of questions specifically designated for exclusive use in that test. New questions are created each year by committees composed of directors of the ABD and non-director test committee members. The non-director test committee members are all clinicians who see and care for dermatology patients and they represent various areas of expertise.

The examination itself consists of 160 image associated questions, 132 written (non-image associated) questions, and 36 glass slides (Table 1). The content grid of the examination is shown in Table 2.

TABLE 1 2010	
Non-Image Qs	132
Image Qs	160
DP Slides	36
Total Qs	328

TABLE 2 2010	
Content Area	% of Examination
General Dermatology	55%
Dermatopathology	15%
Procedural Dermatology	20%
Basic Science	10%

For purposes of equating the examination from one year to another, up to 20% (approximately 65) of the questions are derived from previous examinations. These are **rarely** taken from the examination administered the previous year.

### Scoring

After the examination is administered, each question is individually analyzed by the National Board of Medical Examiners (NBME) for various performance factors. Questions that perform poorly (e.g. questions that did not discriminate the high group from the low group of candidates, or questions in which less than 30% answered the question correctly) are flagged by the NBME and are reviewed by the directors responsible for the examination. This group of directors then decides to delete or retain each flagged question in that examination.

The examinations are then scored. Standard setting exercises are frequently performed to assess minimal competency for passing that examination. The subsequent data is compiled and the directors convene by conference call with the psychometrician at the NBME to define the appropriate passing score. The passing score is determined independently for every certifying examination administered. The failure rate for the past 3 years is shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3 Overall Failure Rates			
	2007	2008	2009
Reference Group*	9.3%	4.9%	4.5%
Total Examinee Group**	13.6%	8.7%	8.6%

\*Reference Group: Includes candidates who took the examination for the first time the year they completed residency training.

\*\*Total Examinee Group: Includes candidates repeating the examination and candidates who delayed taking the examination.

### Fact:

- Content is updated annually.
- 20% of the material is from examinations administered over the past 10 years, typically *excluding* the previous year's examination.
- 80% of the material is unused, newly created questions.

### Fiction:

- A predetermined passing rate is set.
- Questions from the In-Training Examination are mixed with questions from the Certifying Examination.

### Fantasy:

- "Airplane" notes from friends will give a candidate an advantage over applied studying during three years of residency.

## CHECKLIST FOR MARCH 25, 2010 IN-TRAINING EXAMINATION

As a reminder, below is a checklist to help you prepare for the upcoming in-training examination. Some should already be checked off and some are forthcoming.

- Reserve testing center.
- Cancel clinics.
- Contact IT department to arrange for assistance with workstation certification (instructions sent to program directors via email week of March 8) and CD installation (mailed week of March 15).
- Week of March 15: Workstation certification.
- Week of March 22: CD installation.
- March 24 (day before examination): Contact IT department to re-check workstations.
- March 25 (day of examination): IT staff in testing center one hour prior to start of examination.
- At the end of the examination, take a deep breath, relax and take the residents out to lunch or dinner!

## Survey Re: ABD Certifying Examination Testing Methods and Content

Last fall, the American Board of Dermatology surveyed the program directors regarding the testing methods and content employed in our certifying examination. We heard from 49 of you. Below are the questions we asked and your responses.

	Yes	No	Not Sure
Do you feel that the certifying examination represents the broad range of knowledge in dermatology?	82%	18%	
Do you feel the examination tests judgment relating to patient management?	43%*	51%	
Would you be in favor of having a section of the examination that is designed to assess clinical judgment using case presentations?	96%	2%	
Most of the ABMS boards have a section of their certifying examination that is focused on testing clinical judgment. Which of the following formats used by these boards would you prefer? (Please note that their oral examinations do not use live patients)			
--Computer-based vignettes.	90%	2%	2%
--Oral examination.	24%	47%	18%
--Essay examination (used in Canada).	33%	41%	14%
--Prefer not to have a clinical judgment section of the examination.	2%	53%	2%

## ABD Survey Re: Ethics Questions on In-Training Examination (ITE)

Last year, we sent you two ethics questions to discuss with your residents following the in-training examination. We then surveyed you to find out the value of this exercise. We received feedback from 44 of you. Below are your responses.

	Yes	No
Did your residents answer the ethics questions?	95%	5%
If so, did you find the ethics questions useful?	82%*	16%
Did you discuss the questions after the ITE?	50%	50%
If not, do you plan to discuss them at a later date?	59%	0
Would you like to see questions such as these on future in-training examinations?	77%	18%

\* Note that the percentages don't always add up to 100% because some questions were left unanswered.

## ACGME AND RRC NEWSLETTERS

The ACGME and RRC publish periodic newsletters that contain items of interest for dermatology residency program directors, such as changes in program requirements and RRC visit regulations.

Contact Jenny Blomgren at [jblomgren@acgme.org](mailto:jblomgren@acgme.org) to receive the ACGME e-Communication, and below is the link to recent RRC Dermatology newsletters: [www.acgme.org/acWebsite/RRC\\_080\\_News/080n\\_Index.asp](http://www.acgme.org/acWebsite/RRC_080_News/080n_Index.asp).

**DO YOU HAVE A QUESTION YOU WANT TO ASK THE BOARD OR AN IDEA FOR AN ARTICLE FOR A FUTURE NEWSLETTER?**

Email your questions or ideas to [abderm@hfhs.org](mailto:abderm@hfhs.org).

**American Board of Dermatology**  
1 Ford Place, Detroit, MI 48202-3450  
Phone: 313-874-1088 - FAX: 313-872-3221  
Website: [www.abderm.org](http://www.abderm.org)