

PROFESSIONAL BOARD FOR PSYCHOLOGY



GUIDELINES TO PREPARE FOR THE NATIONAL BOARD EXAMINATION FOR NEUROPSYCHOLOGY

This guideline is written for trainee Neuropsychologists who are obliged to write the National Board Examination to demonstrate their command of the competencies of Neuropsychology. The guideline is divided into four parts as follows:

1. Preparing for the National Board Examination for Neuropsychology
2. The Scope of the Examination Paper
3. Recommended Reading
4. Writing the Examination

In addition to this guidance, please ensure that you familiarise yourself with the [Examination Policy for Psychologists, Registered Counsellors and Psychometrists \(Form 255\)](#).

Preparing for the National Board Examination for Neuropsychology

It is important that you take time to prepare for the National Board Examination and not simply rely on your learning from your academic and internship years.

To prepare adequately for the Board Examination for Neuropsychology, you should be able to demonstrate a good understanding of professional identity of Neuropsychology and demonstrate that you can apply your professional knowledge as a Neuropsychologist to relevant cases in an ethical manner.

The format of the paper, therefore, is usually in the form of one or more written case studies followed by a variety of questions that require you to demonstrate that you can appropriately apply your knowledge. You may be required to describe and resolve any ethical issues, provide a diagnosis and/or case formulation, and discuss how you would intervene as a Neuropsychologist. There may be other questions that test your knowledge of the scope and professional identity of Neuropsychology.

The Scope of the Examination Paper

The scope of the examination paper is determined by the Board's definition of Neuropsychology and list of competencies of Neuropsychology.

The definition of neuropsychology, which should always inform your approach to psychological assessment, diagnosis, formulation and intervention, is as follows:

Neuropsychology is a specialist category within professional psychology concerned with the assessment, diagnosis, evaluation and rehabilitation of people of all ages with neurological problems, including traumatic brain injury, stroke, toxic and metabolic disorders, tumours and neurodegenerative disease.

The Board for Psychology's mandate to protect the public means that the emphasis of the Examination should be on the areas that involve direct contact with vulnerable clients. Therefore, of the various areas of competency, the examination will be confined to (1) Neuropsychological Assessment, (2) Neuropsychological Diagnosis, (3) Professional Practice and (4) Ethics and Legislation. (For a complete list of competencies, please consult the document, [Minimum standards for the training of Neuropsychology](#)) available on the HPCSA website.

Neuropsychological Assessment

Neuropsychologists should have the ability to use neuropsychological assessment to conceptualise, diagnose, plan and monitor psychological disorders caused by neurological conditions, by:

- a. Using a range of psychometric and other neuropsychological procedures, including systematic interviewing to establish the presence of clinical signs and symptoms of neuropathology/neuropsychological dysfunction.
- b. Assessing the neuro-cognitive, neurobehavioural and emotional functioning of children and adults with central nervous system dysfunction.
- c. Differentiating neuropsychological disorders caused by neurological conditions and distinguishing these from other mental and non-organic disorders.
- d. Communicating effectively neuropsychological findings to a variety of recipients in different formats.
- e. Performing neuropsychological psycho-legal assessments
- f. Recognizing the need for further investigations and referring to other disciplines.

Neuropsychological Interventions

Neuropsychologists should have the ability to develop theoretical and aetiological formulations in order to:

- a. Apply neuropsychological interventions to people (individuals, groups, families) with central nervous system dysfunction.

- b. Perform a range of psychological interventions with individuals and groups, including adults and children.
- c. Identify psychological emergencies and intervene with appropriate interventions or referrals.
- d. Enhance mental health functioning of individuals, groups, families and communities with central nervous system dysfunction.
- e. Work in different contexts e.g. medical or mental health and community, settings and implement appropriate evidence-based interventions.
- f. Treat and rehabilitate the psychological disorders of people suffering from CNS dysfunction.

Professional Practice

Neuropsychologists should:

- a. Adhere to their minimum standards for education and training, and where indicated and refer patients/clients to relevant professionals accompanied by appropriate referral reports.
- b. Be able to identify and liaise with locally available resources and facilities for patients/clients with particular needs.
- c. Have the ability to conduct various aspects of neuropsychological practice and research in a manner that is cognizant of and sensitive to diversity (e.g. socioeconomic status, language, culture, race, gender, disability, sexual orientation).
- d. Understand and apply relevant aspects of legislation.
- e. Perform psychological practice and research in various contexts related to clinical, health psychology and neuropsychological matters.
- f. Have competence in the management of patients/client information.
- g. Establish protocols and contracts with patients/clients (individuals, groups, organizations, government departments).
- h. Have knowledge of psychopharmacology and basic non-invasive clinical skills.
- i. Communicates clearly using verbal and written skills in a professional context, demonstrates clear understanding and use of professional language which will also be used in a court of law.
- j. Demonstrate knowledge of neuropsychological assessment for forensic purposes.
- k. Work in a multi-disciplinary team by way of making neuropsychological contributions in the discussions.
- l. Demonstrate familiarity and knowledge of medical terminology and first aid.
- m. Demonstrate knowledge in the planning, establishment, and management of a business practice.

Ethics

- a. Neuropsychologists have a thorough knowledge of the code of professional ethics of the HPCSA and the Professional Board for Psychology.
- b. Neuropsychologists have the ability to conduct all aspects of neuropsychological practice and research in accordance with guidelines for professional practice of the HPCSA and the Professional Board for Psychology

Legislation

- a. Knowledge of relevant legislative frameworks which impact on psychological practice and research.
- b. Ability to conduct research and practice in accordance with these legislative parameters.

Recommended Reading

The following list is not exhaustive. It is recommended that you consult both national and international readings that will help you to prepare adequately for the National Board Examination and demonstrate knowledge of the core competencies identified above:

- [Lezak, M.D., Howieson, D., Bigler, E.D., & Tranel, D. \(2012\). Neuropsychological assessment \(5th ed.\). Oxford: Oxford University Press](#)
- [Kolb, B., & Whishaw, I. Q. Fundamentals of human neuropsychology \(6th ed.\). New York: Worth.](#)
- [Watts, A.D., & Shuttleworth-Edwards, A.B. \(2016\). Neuropsychology in South Africa: confronting the challenges of specialist practice in a culturally diverse developing country. The Clinical Neuropsychologist, 30\(8\), 1305-1324.](#)
- [Lucas, M. \(2013\). Neuropsychological assessment in South Africa. In S. Laher & K. Cockcroft \(Eds.\), Psychological Assessment in South Africa: Research and Applications \(pp. 186-200\). Johannesburg: Wits University Press.](#)
- [Wilson, B. A., & Gracey, F. \(2009\). Towards a comprehensive model of neuropsychological rehabilitation. In B.A. Wilson, F. Gracey, J.J. Evans & A. Bateman \(Eds.\), Neuropsychological Rehabilitation: Theory, Models, Therapy and Outcome \(pp. 1-21\). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.](#)

To practice ethically in South Africa, you should be able to demonstrate sound knowledge of the relevant HPCSA policies. These include the following:

- The ethical code for Psychologists. This includes two documents: The first is the [Ethical Rules of Conduct for Practitioners Registered under the Health Professions Act, 1974](#) that applies to all registered health professionals, and the second is [Annexure 12 - Rules of Conduct Pertaining Specifically to the Profession of Psychology](#).
- It is essential that you make sure that you are familiar with the ethical code to practice ethically in South Africa. The ethical readings can and should be complemented but never replaced by other sources. Good complementary readings include the work of Alfred Allan and others (E.g., [Allan, A. \(2016\). Law and Ethics in Psychology: An International Perspective \(3rd Ed.\). Place: Inter-Ed\).](#)

- You should also be familiar with the [List of Classified Tests \(Form 207\)](#), and understand the purpose of test classification, which is described in the [Policy on the Classification of Psychometric Measuring Devices, Instruments, Methods and Techniques \(Form 208\)](#).
- Other important HPCSA policies that could be covered in the Exam include the revised [Policy Document on Business Practices](#).
- As Neuropsychologists, you should understand and appreciate the mental health and psychological implications of the HIV pandemic and be familiar with the [HPCSA Good Practice Guide \(HIV\)](#).

Ethical practice should also comply with the laws of the country in which you will work. Candidates should familiarise themselves with the relevant sections of the following National legislation:

- [Chapter 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 108 of 1996](#). This chapter is the Bill of Rights that enshrines the rights of all people in our country and affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom. Psychological Acts must always be conducted in a manner that is consistent with the Bill of Rights.
- Also relevant is the [National Health Act, 61 of 2003](#) that provides a framework for a structured uniform health system within the Republic, taking into account the obligations imposed by the Constitution and other laws on the national, provincial and local governments with regard to health services.
- It is advisable that you familiarise yourself with the [Health Professions Act, 56 of 1974](#) that established the Health Professions Council of South Africa and the Professional Boards to provide for control over the education, training and registration for and practising of registered Health Professions.
- [The Children's Act, 38 of 2005](#) governs all the laws relating to the care and protection of children and is therefore very relevant to the practice of Neuropsychology. Similarly, the [Child Justice Act, 75 of 2008](#) specifies the laws that apply to accused children.
- All practising Psychologists should understand the legal aspects with regard to mentally ill offenders in South Africa, and so you should be familiar with the relevant sections of the [Criminal Procedure Act, 51 of 1977](#).
- [Section 8 of the Employment Equity Act, 55 of 1998](#) refers to psychological testing in the workplace, which you should know. Though written for the workplace, the requirements are applicable in many other contexts. Indeed, make sure that you appreciate the use and potential abuse of psychological instruments in our multicultural, post-apartheid era.
- The influx of competency examination requests for sexual abuse complainants, in accordance with the [Criminal Law \(Sexual Offences and Related Matters\) Amendment Act 32 of 2007](#), necessitates that Neuropsychologists should be familiar with this Act.

There are many readings that you may want to consult to prepare yourself to answer questions on psychometric assessment. The following text is a good resource and freely available:

- [Psychological Assessment in South Africa: Research and applications](#), edited by S. Laher & K. Cockcroft (Eds.) and published by Wits University Press in 2013. The text is open access and can be freely downloaded <http://oopen.org/search?identifier=1004362>

You should be able to demonstrate good knowledge of the major diagnostic systems:

- The Fifth Edition of the [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders \(DSM-5\)](#) (you should know too that this is one of two systems, and in practice you should also be familiar with the [International Classification of Disease, Eleventh Revision \(ICD-11\)](#), particularly where it deviates from the DSM-5). Neuropsychologists are expected to have particular expertise in dealing with mental and behavioural disorders.

Case studies form an important part of the National Board Examination and bring life to the clinical disorders that you may encounter in your practice. Questions will elicit your ability to integrate theoretical, clinical, ethical and legislative knowledge in the assessment, diagnosis, formulation, treatment and rehabilitation of neuropsychological problems.

Diagnostic questions will be formulated to elicit your understanding, knowledge of the diagnostic criteria and the distinction between different neurological disorders, which may include some of the following: (i) Traumatic brain injury; (ii) Various dementias; (iii) Cerebro-vascular pathology; (iv) Substance-induced disorders; (v) Infectious diseases; (vi) and Mood Disorders and Psychotic Disorders.

You will need to be able to consider and demonstrate the relevant social, cultural, political and economic factors involved in neuropsychological *diagnosis*, and in the *selection* and *interpretation* of neuropsychological assessment-results.

The format of the paper, therefore, is usually in the form of one or more written case studies followed by a variety of questions that require you to demonstrate that you can appropriately apply your knowledge, canvassing a broad range of basic theoretical and clinical topics, relevant to the field of neuropsychological, including aspects of neuroanatomy, brain-behaviour relationships, clinical syndromes and disorders, imaging and psychometric issues.

Writing the Examination

Though you will by now have successfully written many exams in your life, it is always good to approach the paper carefully and systematically. Arrive early, so that you do not put yourself under any unnecessary stress. Check that you have been given the correct paper (it has happened that candidates have written the paper for another category). Make sure that you read the instructions, case studies and the questions very carefully. Examinations are stressful, and it is easy to misread a question or miss an important detail in the case study.

Manage your time carefully. Often when candidates fail the exam, it is because they did not manage to complete all the questions. Allocate time to each section according to their proportional values; If, for

example, a question is worth 25 marks out of 100, you should spend no more than a quarter of your time on it, which for a three-hour exam, is 45 minutes.

Spend a few minutes to structure your answers rather than immediately responding and always try to leave enough time at the end to review your answers carefully.

Good luck.

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