

THE PROFESSIONAL BOARD FOR PSYCHOLOGY

GUIDELINES TO PREPARE FOR THE NATIONAL BOARD EXAMINATION FOR REGISTERED COUNSELLOR

This guidance is written for trainee and previously registered Registered Counsellor who are obliged to write the National Board Examination to demonstrate their command of the competencies of a Registered counsellor. The guideline is divided into four parts as follows:

1. Preparing for the National Board Examination for Registered counsellor
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 Registered Counsellor

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

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

The format of the paper, therefore, is in the form of multiple choice questions that assess ethical and psychometric knowledge (Section A) and one or more written case studies followed by a variety of questions that require you to demonstrate that you can appropriately apply your knowledge (Section B). You may be asked to describe and resolve any ethical issues and discuss how you would intervene as a Registered Counsellor. There may be other questions that test your knowledge of the scope and professional identity of a Registered Counsellor.

The Scope of the Examination Paper

The scope of the examination paper is determined by the Board's definition of a Registered Counsellor and list of competencies of a Registered Counsellor, both of which have been recently updated.

Definition of a Registered Counsellor

Registered Counsellor is the entry-level category within professional psychology that offers low-intensity psychological interventions and assessment to individuals and groups to prevent and alleviate psychological challenges and /or enhance psychological functioning and wellbeing.

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.

In essence, areas of competence that need to be focused on, are highlighted for each of the critical core competency areas.

Psychological Assessment

- a) Demonstrates the ability to perform screening of psychological functions, including cognition, interests, aptitudes and personality.
- b) Demonstrates the ability to conduct primary mental status screening in order to refer clients for more specialized mental status assessment.
- c) Demonstrates the ability to perform a limited number of psychological tests in which training has been completed, excluding projective, neuropsychological and diagnostic tests. Also demonstrates the use of basic psychological assessment procedures such as structured interviews and observation.
- d) Demonstrates the ability to perform these psychological assessment activities in a variety of contexts, i.e. health, education, labour etc., at a level of delivery equivalent to primary healthcare.
- e) Demonstrates the ability to identify clients in need of more sophisticated psychological assessment, including advanced mental status assessment. The demonstration of competence to foreclose on appropriate referrals to Psychologists or other professionals for ongoing assistance and/or intervention.

Psychological Interventions

- a) Ability to conceptualize client's presenting problems within the framework of appropriate explanatory models.
- b) Ability to protect and promote the psychological well-being of communities and individuals at risk.
- c) Ability to integrate and apply the necessary components required to ensure a supportive and confidential relationship.
- d) Ability to provide preventative and developmental counselling interventions.
- e) Ability to identify clients requiring more advanced psychological intervention in order to appropriately refer these clients to psychologists and/or other professionals.
- f) Ability to apply the components and phases of basic counselling and the use of a semi-structured intervention model.
- g) Ability to appropriately select counselling interventions for the purposes of prevention and amelioration of presenting psychological challenges as well as mental health promotion.
- h) Ability to apply a range of short-term, supportive, and psycho-educational interventions.
- i) Ability to contain the presenting difficulties and support to assist in the restoration of a previous/more adaptive level of functioning.

Professional Practice

- a) Demonstrates knowledge and insight into the ecosystemic context within which people live and the determinants and risk factors associated to psychological challenges within these contexts.
- b) Demonstrates understanding of the fundamental prescriptions of the South African healthcare systems in terms of laws, policies and healthcare delivery.
- c) Demonstrates the ability to examine possible causes or sources of developmental challenges and potential reasons for disturbances in the developmental process.

- d) Demonstrates the knowledge of different theoretical perspectives and their application when addressing the psychological challenges of clients.
- e) Demonstrates understanding and application of the components and phases of basic counselling and the use of various psychological intervention models.
- f) Demonstrates awareness of and effective use of interpersonal skills that enhance therapeutic relationships in multicultural contexts, including those that involve children, adolescents and adults.
- g) Demonstrates proficiency in implementing and presenting psycho-education workshops and presentations on topics relevant to local communities.
- h) Demonstrates the ability to conceptualize clients' psychological challenges throughout the interlinking developmental phases.
- i) Demonstrates basic knowledge of basic psychological challenges and understanding of diagnostic systems relevant to psychology.
- j) Demonstrates the ability to perform these psychological interventions in a variety of sectors (Health, Education, Employee Wellness Programmes, labour etc.) at a level of delivery equivalent to primary health care.
- k) Ability to refer clients to relevant professionals in a variety of systems, including health, education, legal and labour systems.

Ethics and Legislation

- a) Recognises moral and ethical principles and legal responsibilities for the practice of Psychology.
- b) Demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the Codes of Professional Ethics of the HPCSA and the Professional Board for Psychology and international best practices.
- c) Demonstrates the ability to conduct all aspects of psychological practice and research in accordance with the guidelines for professional practice compiled by the HPCSA and the Professional Board for Psychology.
- d) Demonstrates knowledge of relevant legislative frameworks which impact on and underpin psychological practice and research.

- e) Demonstrates the ability to conduct research and practice in accordance with these legislative parameters.
- f) Understanding of the limitations and boundaries of own professional competence.

Recommended Reading

You will need to consult readings that will help you to appropriately demonstrate the competencies that are listed above. Some useful ones are described below, though the list is not and can never be exhaustive:

- Abel, E., & Louw, J. (2009). Registered counsellors and professional work in South African psychology. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 39, 99–108.
- Elkonin, D., & Sandison, A. (2006). Mind the gap: Have Registered Counsellors fallen through? *South African Journal of Psychology*, 36(3), 598-612.
- HPCSA. (2008). Practice Framework for Psychologists, Psychometrists, Registered Counsellors and mental health assistants. Pretoria: Health Professions Council of South Africa.
- Mellin, E., Hunt, B., & Nichols, L. (2011). Counselor professional identity: Findings and implications for counselling and interprofessional collaboration. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 89, 140-147.
- Pretorius, G. (2013). HPCSA: Understanding the role of Registered Counsellor in the profession of Psychology in South Africa. <http://therapistsonline.co.za/article/understanding-the-role-of-registered-counsellor-in-the-profession-of-psychology-in-south-africa>
- Rouillard, M., Wilson, L., & Weideman, S. (2016). Registered counsellors' perceptions of their role in the South African context of providing mental health-care services. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 46(1), 63 –73. doi:10.1177/0081246315591340

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 Psychological practitioners. 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](#).
- 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.](#)

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. You must of course be very familiar with your practice guidelines contained in [Form 258](#).
- [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 Registered Counsellors. Similarly, the [Child Justice Act, 75 of 2008](#) specifies the laws that apply to accused children.
- All practising Registered Counsellors 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.
- [HPCSA good practice guide \(HIV\)](#)

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 available at no cost:

- [Psychological Assessment in South Africa: Research and applications](http://oopen.org/search?identifier=1004362), 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>

Other:

- Foxcroft, C. & Roodt, G. (2013). Introduction to Psychological Assessment in the South African Context (Fourth Edition). Oxford University Press: South Africa.

Writing the Examination

Though you will by now have successfully written many exams in your life, it is always good to be reminded 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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