

**ABFA Application Packet Instructions**  
**Updated 8 Feb 2021**

1. Thoroughly review the *ABFA Policy and Procedure Manual* section regarding Applications.
2. Applicants should include the following information as part of the application packet:
  - a. Named Application – Applicant’s name and affiliation should be included on this part of the packet
    - i. Named Application part of the packet should include:
      1. A completed, **notarized** application form;
      2. A photograph/scan of the applicant’s doctoral diploma or official transcripts indicating doctoral degree conferral
      3. A copy of the applicant’s current *curriculum vitae*;
      4. A copy of the applicant’s training/case log (a record of the case work performed during training and professional career);
      5. Three (3) letters of recommendation;
        - a. At least one recommender must be a Diplomate of the ABFA, and the recommenders must be from at least two different institutions.
        - b. Each recommender must send a letter of recommendation directly to the Application Committee Chair of the ABFA. Email correspondence is preferred.
      6. The following item is recommended to include in the packet, but is not mandatory:
        - a. A copy of the applicant’s proficiency testing log (a record of the successful proficiency tests that the applicant has taken during training).
      7. Named Application related files, such as the CV, diploma, etc. should be submitted electronically. These items may be incorporated in a single file or separate files. **They should not be included in the same file as the Case File Submission documents.**
    - ii. Case File Submission – Only the applicant’s unique identifier (provided by the Application Chair) shall be used on this part of the packet. Individual names and affiliations as well as any other information making the cases directly identifiable as belonging to the applicant shall be redacted from any case file submission documents.
      1. Case File Submission will demonstrate the applicant’s involvement in forensic activities and his/her/their preparation to sit for the ABFA Board Certification Examination. The three (3) submitted case files will serve to demonstrate the applicant’s overall skill level. They allow the ABFA Board of Directors to evaluate the applicant’s abilities in the subspecialties within forensic anthropology as well as confirm their professional involvement in the discipline. We recommend that applicants choose the cases carefully and take the time to prepare the application packet.

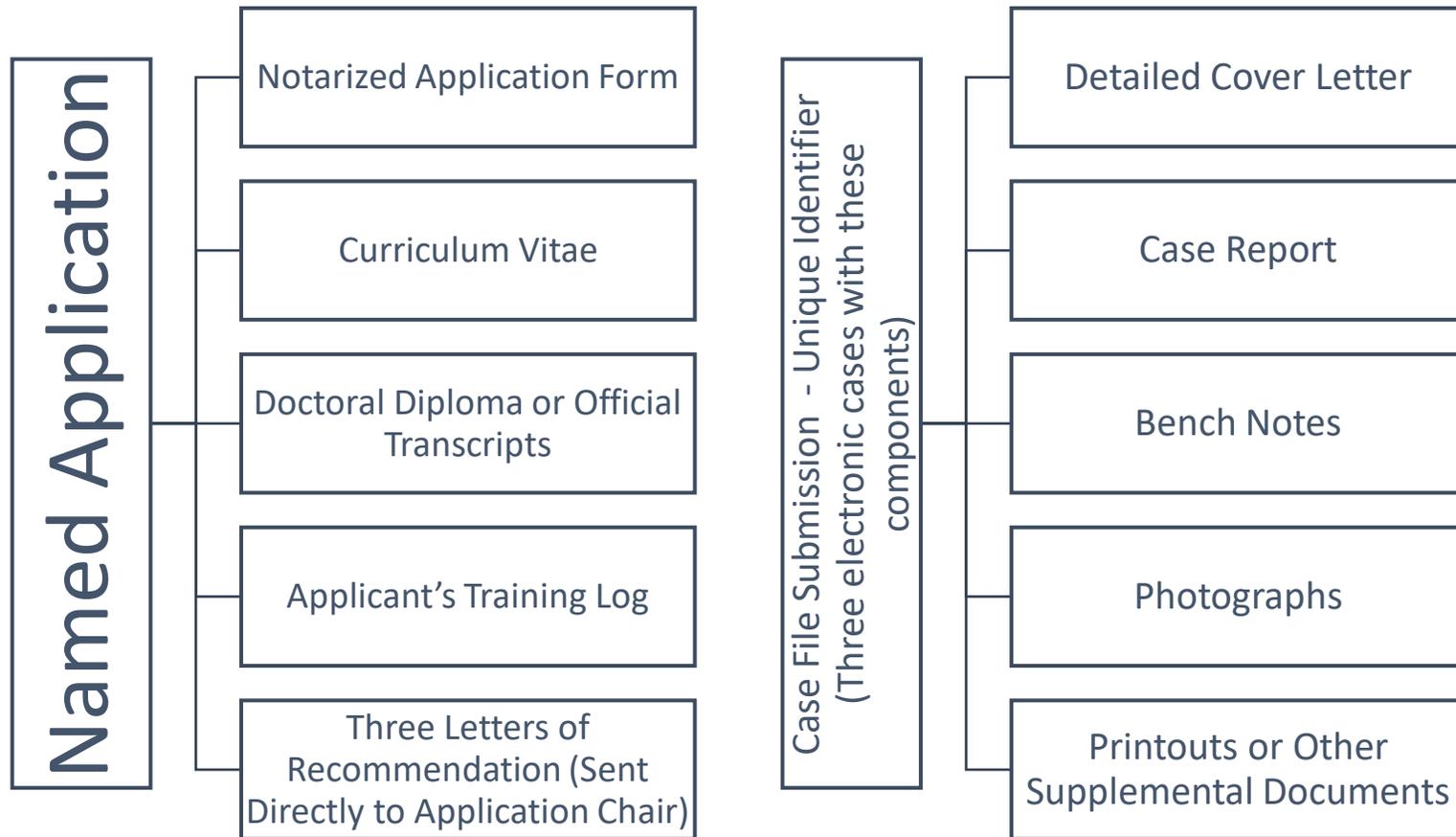
2. The Case File Submission should include:
  - a. Electronic versions of three (3) redacted forensic anthropology case files with case reports and supporting documents/bench notes. Cases must be recent (within last five years) or consist of mock cases. Across the three cases, the applicant must show competency in each the following areas: biological profile (all areas), skeletal trauma, and antemortem skeletal changes/pathology. Only one case report may be trauma-only.
    - i. Each redacted case file shall include:
      1. A cover letter for each case file. Briefly outline case details, and also use this document to explain when the actual report varies from the expectations set forth by the ABFA Case File Submission Evaluation Rubric. Explain circumstances such as co-signed reports or the absence of chain of custody information, scene and investigative information, and/or forensic analyses.
      2. The written case report as it was issued by the applicant to their agency.
        - a. Submitted reports should reflect work done solely (or primarily) by the applicant. Anything not completed by the applicant should be explained in the cover letter.
      3. Bench notes for each case submitted.
      4. Photographs for each case submitted. All photographs should be of good quality and should be labeled and/or captioned. Provided photographs must include an overview of the remains, multiple views of the skull, and views of any other elements/features used to draw case interpretations. Lateral cranial/skull photographs should be in the Frankfort horizontal plane.
      5. Printouts from software and statistical analyses (e.g., *FORDISC*), when applicable, demonstrating appropriate use of the program/method and interpretation of results should be submitted.
3. All materials for a given case, including the cover letter, photos, bench notes, figures, printouts, chains of custody, and other supporting documents, must be submitted as a **single .pdf file** (i.e., one .pdf file for Case 1, one .pdf file for Case 2, etc.). Each

applicant, therefore, should submit a total of three (3) .pdf files, each containing all information relative to a given case.

3. It is strongly advised that the applicant review the ABFA Case File Submission Evaluation Rubric provided with this instructions document as the application packet is prepared, to ensure that the submission meets the grading criteria. Any submissions that fail to pass the initial administrative review (as outlined in the rubric) will be returned to the applicant. Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit their applications well in advance of the application deadline.

**ABFA Application Packet Required Components:**

*Each applicant should submit a Named Application and a Case File Submission as part of their completed ABFA Application Packet*



## **FAQs:**

### **How should I select my case files for submission?**

The goal of the ABFA Board of Directors' review of your case files is to assess your ability across the spectrum of analyses utilized in forensic anthropology. It is recommended that you choose cases that include a full array of analysis. Do not submit more than one case dealing solely with trauma analysis (i.e., that does not include a biological profile or other components). Preferably, submit cases that contain nearly complete or complete skeletal/fleshed remains.

### **Can I submit co-signed reports?**

If you work in a large agency or laboratory that has protocols for co-signing, this must be explained in the cover letter (e.g., an internal peer-review process in which the reviewer co-signs the final document, or a signature from a supervisor signifying an administrative review). Remember that submitted case files should reflect work done solely (or primarily) by you. Should any part of the case notes or reports be completed by someone other than you, this information should be clearly noted in the cover letter accompanying that case file.

### **Can I submit mock cases?**

The submission of mock cases is encouraged. A mock case could be a forensic case that has been previously assessed by another forensic anthropologist, or they could be cases from a documented skeletal collection. When assessing a mock case, you should have no prior knowledge about, and you should be assessing the case for the first time. Your cover letter should reflect that the case is a mock case and if not mentioned in the written report, include information regarding the date of recovery of remains and investigative circumstances of the case in the cover letter. If you have questions regarding whether a specific case can be used as a mock case for the application process, please contact the applications chair and co-chair.

### **Does the report format need to be modified from the format used by my agency?**

The written case report and supporting documentation are carefully scrutinized to ensure that you are able to clearly, concisely and accurately relay the above information. The ABFA recognizes that case report formats differ according to jurisdictional requirements. That said, all submitted case files must have all the required case submission elements, including supplemental documentations. If an agency report does not contain the required elements in the actual report, they should still be easily identifiable in the submitted bench notes. If you are concerned that the agency reports and supplemental materials will not meet the eligibility requirements, we encourage the use of mock cases completed with this application in mind.

## **What photographs should be included with the case file submission?**

Each case must be accompanied by photographs, regardless of whether your agency includes photographs as part of the case report. The inclusion of photographs will assist the ABFA Board of Directors (BoD) in assessing your abilities of assessment and interpretation. The ABFA BoD requests at least one view of the complete set of remains from an anterior view, as well as any photographs of the elements or features used to assess the biological profile (including multiple views of the skull/cranium), postmortem interval, postmortem modification, and trauma (e.g., close-up photographs of the pubic symphyseal face, sternal rib end, and auricular surface).

Note: It is recognized that some or all of these photographs may not be part of the original report. All photographs that are not part of the original case submission must be labeled with descriptions. When preparing photographs as part of the case file submission, you may find it useful to organize photographs into a PowerPoint, Word document, or PDF with descriptive captions, labelled with your assigned case identifier and case number (i.e., 1, 2, or 3), especially if photographs were not originally part of the original case file. Remember to redact any case numbers or identifiers. Note that you are not required to submit ALL case photographs taken; but we ask that photographs of all elements/features used to make any forensic anthropological interpretations in the report be provided to facilitate the review.

Photographs should clearly match written descriptions in the case notes or case report. Photographs must be in focus. When applicable, photographs should contain a clearly visible scale. Diagrams, photographs and illustrations should be clear and readable. A legend clearly outlining the symbols used must accompany all diagrams, if applicable.

## **Are citations required as part of the case file submission?**

Citation of current and appropriate references are required in either the case notes or the case report. (Note: If the report format requirements preclude reference citations, note that in the cover letter and provide a supplementary document that lists the references utilized.)

## **What needs to be included with “bench notes”?**

Bench notes must be included in the application (information which could identify you or an institution should be redacted). You should be the sole author of bench notes. Discrepancies between the bench notes and reports must be explained in the cover letter. Statement of the methods used along with specific criteria should be either in the report or accompanying bench notes (e.g., pubic symphysis phase with a description of the relevant criteria and the reported mean or interval). Standards must be correctly applied and must be the most appropriate standards for the case. Redact initials, logos, and other identifiers from photographs and bench notes. Diagrams, photographs and illustrations should be clear and readable and contain the assigned case number used for submission. A legend clearly outlining the symbols used must accompany all diagrams, if applicable.

**Where should chain of custody and background/provenience information be included?**

If not mentioned in the written report, include information regarding “chain of custody” and legal authority for the examination in the cover letter. If not mentioned in the written report, include information regarding the date of recovery of remains and investigative circumstances of the case in the cover letter.

**Is interpretation of postmortem taphonomy a required section of the case file submission?**

While a specific “taphonomy” section is not required as part of the case file submission, any taphonomic interpretations described in the description of remains, post-mortem interval, trauma analysis or other areas of the case report will be assessed for accuracy of interpretation.