

# The American Board of Forensic Anthropology Board Certification (D-ABFA)

Edited February 2021

ABFA board certification is the highest recognized level of professional qualification in the field of forensic anthropology within the U.S. Diplomate certification is based upon a personal and professional record of education and training, experience, and achievement and is granted through successful review of casework and passing of the ABFA board exam.

## How to Become a Diplomate (D-ABFA)

### Eligibility Requirements

- Ph.D. in Biological/Physical Anthropology, or related field with BoD approval
- Permanent resident of the U.S., Canada or associated territories

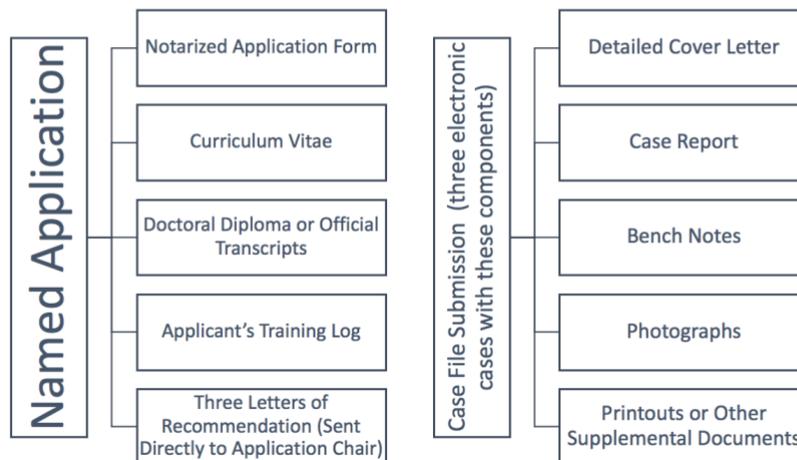
### Required Materials to Submit to the ABFA (submitted electronically)

- Completed Named Application (see components below)
- Completed Case File Submission (see components below)
- Application fee (non-refundable)

**See the ABFA Policy and Procedure Manual, ABFA Applications Packet Instructions, and Case File Submission Evaluation Rubric for specific application and case file requirements.**

#### **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*



### Major milestones and due dates on the path to ABFA Board Certification

1. **Contact** the ABFA **Applications Chair** to express intent to apply and obtain an application form and random identifier to ensure impartiality
2. **Submit** the application materials to the ABFA Application Chair by **April 1**.
3. **Pay** application fee by **April 1**.
4. **Receive** decision regarding ability to sit for ABFA exam by **August 1**.
5. **Notify** the ABFA **Vice-President** of intent to sit for exam by **December 1**.
6. **Sit** for ABFA exam (date, time & location provided by Vice President)

7. **Receive** notification of exam results within 45 days of taking exam component.

## **ABFA Case File Submission**

Applicants for ABFA board certification are required to submit three case files. Case file submission demonstrates the applicant's involvement in forensic activities and preparation to sit for the ABFA Board Certification Examination. Cases must be recent (within last 5 years) or mock cases. The use of mock cases is encouraged, particularly in situations where agency reports may not include all items requested by the ABFA to best evaluate competencies.

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### **General Application Preparation Suggestions**

- **Choose** cases that contain nearly complete or complete skeletal/fleshed remains and that include a full array of analyses, including: age at death, sex, ancestry, stature, perimortem trauma, antemortem conditions, and postmortem/taphonomic modifications.
- **Prepare** the application packet by carefully paying attention to the Case File Submission Evaluation Rubric. Use proper grammar and proofread thoroughly. Choose past or present tense and be consistent. Keep all descriptions brief, direct and objective. Avoid jargon, slang, vernacular or colloquial terms and non-specific language such as "tiny" or "large".
- **Ensure** that reports are **professional**—organized, concise, clear, and factual, with a quality commensurate with the level of education and experience attained.
- **Cite** current and appropriate references. If report format requirements preclude reference citations, note that in the cover letter and provide a supplementary document that lists the references used.
- **Describe** specific methods, their criteria, and relevant observations carefully and with detail, either in the report or accompanying bench notes.
- **Apply** correct and appropriate standards.
- **Avoid** over-interpretation of evidence (e.g., with regard to trauma and PMI interpretations).
- **Document** all methods with photographs which clearly match the written descriptions.
- **Ensure** that all photographs, diagrams, and illustrations are clear and readable. A legend clearly outlining the symbols used must accompany all diagrams, if applicable. Ensure in whatever format the photographs are submitted (ppt, pdf, zipped folders, etc.) that it is clear to which case they are associated.
- **Explain** any inconsistencies or irregularities in the case report or case file submission (e.g., co-signing of reports, inconsistencies in bench notes and the report) in the cover letter.

Additional elements to be included in the case file submission include specific information regarding skeletal inventory, biological profile, postmortem interval and modifications, trauma, and interpretations/conclusions and are described more fully in the "ABFA Application Packet Instructions" and the accompanying rubric.

### **Additional Suggestions for Case File Submission**

- **Skeletal Inventory** should include a complete listing of all remains by element when possible (e.g., each rib is a separate element and should be sided and seriated when possible). Inventory can be listed as "all present" or "all absent" depending upon the case and individual style. Reference only to a diagram or photograph is not an acceptable replacement.

- **Sex** estimation based on morphological traits should describe the presentation of these traits (e.g., non-projecting mastoid process) and be accompanied by supporting photographic evidence for each trait used.
- **Ancestry** estimation supported by morphological traits should describe these traits and be established through appropriate citations. Include supporting photographic evidence of various views of the cranium or skull. Statistical programs (e.g., Fordisc) and current analytical methods must be used and interpreted appropriately. Associated statistical values must be documented in the case report or bench notes. Do not use a blanket statement such as “Fordisc indicates that this is a White individual”.
- **Age** criteria and skeletal elements used must be stated (e.g., right 4<sup>th</sup> rib sternal end with a deep V-shaped pit) and accompanied by supporting photographic evidence. Appropriate references should be cited. Age estimation methods should be the most probative available given the condition and completeness of the remains. Synthesis of the results from multiple tests should be clear and rational.
- **Stature** conclusions should be solidly based on appropriate use of standards and references and appropriate interpretation of results. In the absence of information regarding sex and ancestry, a justification for the stature model(s) selected should be provided.
- **Trauma** documentation (report or bench notes) must include measurements, appropriate interpretation, and photographic documentation. All defects should have their location within the skeleton clearly described (e.g., using measurements from at least two anatomical landmarks). Type of trauma should be stated, if appropriate (e.g., consistent with blunt force, sharp force, or projectile/GSW). Trauma descriptions should be succinct. Methods of evaluation should be stated (e.g., radiographic, gross, microscopic). Do not make statements outside the scope of forensic anthropology and avoid over-interpretation of data.
- **Postmortem Modifications** statements and interpretations must be supported with proper taphonomic terminology. Avoid over-interpretation of data.
- **Postmortem Interval** estimation is not required as part of the application process, but if included must be supported by evidence and appropriate citations. Contextual data and/or bone preservation data should be included. The environment from which the remains were recovered should be clearly described. Note: if the case was analyzed without knowledge of the field context, then this should be noted in the report or in the cover letter.
- **Conclusions** should summarize the overall findings in the report, be appropriate to the evidence presented, and be supported through careful documentation. No conclusions should be drawn or analysis performed outside of the expertise of the analyst or the field of forensic anthropology.

**See the ABFA Policy and Procedure Manual ([www.theabfa.org](http://www.theabfa.org)),  
ABFA Applications Packet Instructions, and Case File Submission Evaluation Rubric  
for specific application and case file requirements.**

## The ABFA Certification Examination

The ABFA Certification Examination is designed to test the examinee's breadth and depth of knowledge in the field of forensic anthropology. It consists of a multiple-choice exam and practicum.

### A. Multiple Choice Exam

- **Literature Review:** The examinee must be familiar with the forensic anthropology literature which includes, but is not limited to, pertinent forensic journals and texts that are applicable to the practicing forensic anthropologist (a suggested reading list is provided by the Vice-President). While the examinee must be well-versed in current literature, seminal works should not be ignored.
- **Multiple choice questions** cover, but are not limited to, the following areas:
  - Methods to establish the biological profile
  - Trauma interpretation and biomechanical principles
  - Anatomy, bone growth and development, osteology, and bone histology
  - Pathology and anomalies
  - Postmortem alterations; human vs nonhuman classification and medicolegal significance
  - Individualizing skeletal characteristics; identification; statistical analyses
  - Taphonomy and postmortem interval
  - Scene processing; evidence handling, court procedures and legal concerns
  - Standards and guidelines related to the practice of forensic anthropology (e.g., SWGANTH, OSAC)

### B. Practicum

- **Hands-on stations** comprise the practical portion of the examination and assess the examinee's ability to apply his or her specific body of knowledge and skills to actual skeletal and dental material and, in some instances, radiographs.
- **Equipment and standards** necessary to complete each station are provided (including magnifying glasses, penlights, and reference standards). Examinees are not permitted to bring reference materials or analytical aids (such as hand lenses, calipers, or lights) to the examination. A list of standards and materials is available from the Vice-President upon request.
- **Exam instructions** should be read carefully. Examinees should address all station components, but do only what each station asks. The examinee will demonstrate critical reasoning abilities and appropriate methods and experience to reach an organized, substantive answer to each question.
- **Stations of the practical portion of the examination** may cover, but are not limited to, the following areas:
  - Biological profile (age, sex, ancestry, stature)
  - Osteology; craniometrics
  - Minimum number of individuals
  - Trauma recognition and interpretation
  - Pathological conditions (providing a differential diagnosis)
  - Human vs nonhuman bone differentiation
  - Analytical programs (e.g., Fordisc, MophoPASSE, hu(MAN)ID)
  - Taphonomy
  - Radiographic assessment

The exam may include these examples but is not limited to them.

*Additional information, including the reading list and potential practical station list will be provided to those approved to sit for the ABFA Certification Examination by the ABFA Vice President well in advance of your scheduled examination.*

**Information regarding the ABFA Certification Examination Committees can be found in the ABFA Policy and Procedures Manual on the ABFA Website ([www.theabfa.org](http://www.theabfa.org)).**