ABNS 2020 VIRTUAL ORAL EXAM GUIDE

Abstract
This guide will answer the who, what, where, when, how and why of the 2020 Virtual Oral Exam
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Feel free to send a comment or question about the contents of this guide to:
abns@abns.org

Table of Contents

✓ Scope of Examination
✓ Administration Assignment Process and Test assignment Changes
✓ Virtual Oral Exam Administration
✓ Examination Specifications
✓ Examination Scoring Criteria
✓ Exam Administration and Session Assignment
✓ Candidate Requirements
✓ Equipment and Internet Speed Requirements
✓ Exam Day Equipment
✓ Interrupted Test/Technical Issues
✓ Preparing for Check-in and Security (test day)
✓ Trouble Shooting
✓ Quality Control
✓ Examinations
✓ Interacting with Examiners and Staff
✓ Scheduled Breaks
✓ Disclosures, Disclaimers and Policies
✓ Non-Disclosure Policy
✓ Examination Irregularity Policy
The broad aim of The American Board of Neurological Surgery is to encourage the study, improve the practice, elevate the standards and advance the science of neurological surgery and thereby serve the cause of public health.

Due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on travel and in-person meetings, the ABNS will administer one oral exam in 2020, virtually. The dates of the exam are Friday, October 30th, Saturday, October 31st and Sunday, November 1st. The virtual Oral Examination, hereinto referred to as the Oral Exam, will preserve the original case/question-based format of the face-to-face oral examination but will be administered online.

The entire exam takes approximately three hours to complete and is divided into three rotations; one on general neurosurgery, another on questions specific to the sub-specialty area identified prior by the candidate, and the third focuses on the candidates own cases. Each rotation will consist of 5 questions over the course of 45 minutes. The candidate will be examined by 2 examiners per rotation. Each candidate will be examined by 6 different examiners by the conclusion of the three sessions. Each examiner will grade the candidates answer, independent of the other examiner, on a scale of 1-4 (4 being the best).

Scope of Examination
The Oral Examination includes clinical scenarios specific to neurosurgery. The ABNS has detailed information available on our website specific to the content of the Oral Examination. CLICK HERE to navigate to this information. The information covered describes the spectrum of examination topic areas. Candidates are encouraged to use this resource to prepare for the Oral Examination. As an independent testing organization, the ABNS does not recommend any specific study products for its examinations. This is done to prevent any conflicts of interest in the process of exam development and administration.

Administration Assignment Process and Test Assignment Changes
Due to the complexities of scheduling candidates for the virtual examination, we are unable to make changes to candidate exam assignments once the assignments have been issued. Additionally, we will not take any requests for a specific date or time for candidate assignments.

Candidates will receive the date and time of their examination the week of September 14th via email.

Cancellations after September 18, 2020 are not refundable.

Virtual Oral Exam Administration
Every candidate registered for the fall oral exam must attend at least one drop-in session prior to exam administration. The drop-in sessions will review the technical requirements, environmental considerations and clarify any outstanding issues.

Drop-in sessions will be offered on Wednesday, September 30th, October 7th, 14th and 21st.
Examination Specifications

Each exam rotation is administered by two examiners, all of whom are experienced practitioners and ABNS diplomates. Examiners are not compensated for their role in the Oral Examination and provide their time and expertise out of a deep commitment to the mission of board certification, the practice of neurosurgery and commitment to public safety. Every examiner and candidate are assigned to an ABNS staff as their primary contact throughout the entire process of the examination (planning, scheduling, and execution). Their main role is to guide the candidates through the examination and ensure that examiners are administering a fair and consistent examination as it relates to the use of technology. The ABNS staff is not making any assessment specific to the content discussed during the exam rotations.

To begin the examination, candidates will join a virtual meeting room via ZOOM and participate in an orientation with the other candidates being examined. An ABNS staff member will move candidates to each exam “room” from the main meeting room at the start of each hour until they have completed all three exam rotations that make up the Oral Exam. Candidates will transition back to the main meeting room after each exam rotation for an approximately 15-minute scheduled break. Candidates are required to remain connected to the zoom meeting with camera on during the breaks.

Lead examiners will control the presentation of materials to candidates.

All exam materials (PDF only) will be accessible to examiners prior to the first day of testing.

Examination Scoring Criteria

The Oral Examination is designed to simulate how candidates care for patients in a clinical/surgical setting. Candidates are assessed on their knowledge and judgment which typically includes questions regarding the preoperative evaluation, intraoperative technical and judgmental issues and post-operative management, including appropriate treatment of complications.

Candidate case submissions will be presented with the information taken from the ABNS POST system according to the below:

✓ History and Presentation
✓ Past Medical History
✓ Physical Examination
✓ Evaluation/Images (pre, post, intraoperative)
✓ Diagnosis, Treatment, Management
✓ Course

Oral Exam results will be provided as pass/fail only. All three sections must be passed in order to pass the oral exam. The score required to pass the Oral Exam is determined by a rigorous psychometric analysis.

The result of the exam will be shared approximately 4 weeks following the exam.

Candidates are responsible for keeping the ABNS office apprised of any changes to contact information during this time.
Exam Administration and Session Assignment
Candidates will be assigned to one session; three rotations per session. There will be three sessions on Friday, three on Saturday and two on Sunday. All session assignments are final and cannot be changed for any reason. Candidates will receive email notification of their test date and time approximately 4 weeks prior the exam administration. This notification will include instructions for scheduling an equipment and internet testing appointment. A few days prior to the examination, candidates will receive a final email notification confirming the examination date and time they are schedule with the link(s) to use when accessing the exam on test day.

Candidate Requirements
You will not need to travel to a test center, but you will need to identify a quiet, distraction-free room in your home or office where you can participate in the examination.

You will need a laptop or desktop computer with a webcam and a reliable internet connection. Technical specifications are detailed further in the following sections and will be reviewed with you during the drop-in sessions.

Prior to the drop-in sessions the free ZOOM application must be downloaded and installed on the device that will be used during the exam. (Zoom Client for Meetings). Be sure to use the e-mail address associated with the exam registration information. Zoom link(s) to access the exam will be emailed. You will not be asked, nor should you, download or operate any additional online platforms or exam delivery software prior to or during the exam.

Equipment and Internet Speed Requirements
The virtual oral examination relies on the use of functional equipment and adequate internet access.

All candidates are required to test their equipment, operating system, and internet speed with the ABNS before the examination. Any candidate who does not conduct a test with the ABNS office will forfeit their registration for the exam without refund. This equipment test should take approximately 15 minutes and can be done during the drop-in sessions.

Equipment need for day of exam
- Skull model
- Spine model
- Desktop or Laptop device with audio and video capability

Supported Operating Systems
- macOS X with macOS 10.7 or later
- Windows 10 - Note: For devices running Windows 10, they must run Windows 10 Home, Pro, or Enterprise. S Mode is not supported.
- Windows 8 or 8.1
- Windows 7
- Windows: IE 11+, Edge12+, Firefox 27+, Chrome30+
- Mac: Safari 7+, Firefox 27+, Chrome30+
- Linux: Firefox 27+, Chrome30+

Supported Processor and RAM Processor
- Single Core 1Ghz or higher at minimum.
- Dual Core 2Ghz or higher recommended (i3/i5/i7 or AMD Equivalent) RAM

Internet speed of 35 Mbps or higher
- An internet speed test can be conducted at Speedtest.net
Must be the same device used during the drop in session

- No phones or tablets
  - Strong internet connection
  - Charger

To ensure an optimal exam experience, ABNS suggests that no other devices be drawing on the internet connection during the assigned three-hour period.

A wired connection would provide the most ideal experience but is not necessary.

Audio and Video

Candidates and examiners may use the built-in camera and audio from the computer. External audio and video options such as a headset, USB-connected microphone, or camera can be used. Accessing the exam by phone or tablet is prohibited. The camera should be placed as close to the display as possible.

Interrupted Test Appointments Technical Issues

The ABNS understands that technical issues may occur for both candidates and/or examiners. If technical problems occur on test day that cannot be remedied, the lead examiner and the ABNS staff will have the authority to terminate the examination. The technical issues will be documented, and the candidate will be contacted by ABNS staff that day to discuss next steps. Candidates who have interrupted exams due to power outages or internet failure will be allowed to re-take the examination at another time without penalty. Documentation of a power outage and/or internet failure must be submitted to the ABNS office prior to a retake being scheduled.

The ABNS understands that unexpected distractions and interruptions may occur at times during an examination. Distractions and interruptions include, but are not limited to, background noise that interferes with the ability to conduct the exam. The lead examiner, in consultation with a member of the ABNS oral exam committee or executive committee and ABNS CAO, will determine if the distraction or interruption can be handled or if the exam must be terminated. The latter consequence will be considered an interrupted exam rotation. The reasons for the interrupted exam rotation will be documented and the candidate will be contacted by ABNS staff that day to discuss next steps.

The ABNS will offer examination retests for candidates who are unable to test due to documented technical issues (power outage or internet failure) that prevent the full administration of the examination. The candidate will be responsible for sending along documentation specific to the technical issue(s) encountered. ABNS staff will contact the candidate to discuss next steps.

Preparing for Check-In and Security

Candidates are required to participate in several steps to ensure the security of the examination.

1) Identification

At the beginning of the exam session an ABNS staff member will require each candidate to present a valid, U.S. or Canadian (in English) government-issued form of identification (such as a driver’s license or passport) that includes a photograph and signature. This identification must match their first and last
name as it appears on their oral exam registration. The only acceptable difference is the presence of a middle name or middle initial.

2) Room Check

Prior to the start of the examination, to ensure no unauthorized items are in the candidate’s test environment, the ABNS staff member will ask the candidate to use their webcam to display a 360-degree view of the test environment and desktop/table. The ABNS staff or examiner may also instruct the candidate to share his/her screen and/or open the Task Manager to demonstrate that there are no other applications or programs running. For the duration of the examination and break times, candidates may not use pen and paper, access written materials, or operate phones, tablets, or other electronic devices. Doing so compromises the security of the examination and may result in termination of the exam, invalidation of the candidate’s score, and exclusion from the board certification process. These policies are designed to protect the integrity of the examination.

3) Eyes on the Screen

Candidates will be instructed to keep their eyes on the computer screen at all times during the exam rotations and to look at the examiner who is currently speaking to them. Non-compliance with this requirement can lead to the termination and/or failure of the exam.

4) Candidate Acknowledgements

Candidates must have signed off on the state that they are adhering to the ABNS’s agreement for examination integrity and understand the consequences of non-compliance.

The Candidate Agreement states:

As candidates are being checked in for the exam session, ABNS staff will read the pledge below. All candidates must verbally agree to abide by the details of the pledge.

Candidate Agreement for the Virtual Oral Examination

I hereby apply to the American Board of Neurological Surgery for the issuance of board certification in neurological surgery and for examinations relative to that certificate, all in accordance with and subject to the Rules and Regulations of the ABNS. A complete copy of the Rules and Regulations is available on the ABNS website. By electronically signing this Agreement and verbally agreeing on test day to the ABNS, I agree to be legally bound by and to abide by all of the terms and conditions of this Agreement and the Rules and Regulations of the ABNS. I agree that upon the issuance to me a board certification, I shall become bound by the Bylaws of the ABNS and shall remain bound by the Rules and Regulations of the ABNS as they may be amended from time to time.

I hereby certify that I have read and accept the terms and conditions of this examination set forth in the Rules and Regulations of the ABNS. I understand and agree that the virtual oral examination is supervised by examiners, staff, and others who are responsible to the ABNS and are empowered by the ABNS to ensure that the examination is conducted securely, appropriately and in accordance with the Rules and Regulations of the ABNS.
(i) The ABNS will verify my identity before I take the examination. I certify that all sources of identification I provide to the ABNS for these purposes are true and accurate representations of my identity.

(ii) I am responsible for ensuring that I am able to participate in the full 3-hour examination session in a quiet, distraction-free setting.

(iii) I am responsible for supplying and using my own testing equipment, including a computer, webcam, microphone, internet access, and required software. I understand that this equipment must meet the technical requirements specified. I am required to test my equipment with the ABNS prior to the examination. If I do not complete this equipment test before the examination, I waive my ability to test on the assigned date and time.

(iv) The ABNS is not responsible for technical issues that may prevent the administration of the examination on the scheduled day or time. This includes equipment malfunctions and internet disruption. The ABNS will not penalize for examination administration failures on the part of the ABNS.

(v) My examiners, in consultation with ABNS leadership and staff, may terminate my examination, without appeal, if:
   a. they determine, in their sole discretion, that my testing environment is not suitable for the examination; and/or
   b. they are concerned about the examination security or my behavior regarding examination security, the integrity of the examination, and/or professional conduct.

(vi) Examinations that are terminated prior to completion of the required number of questions being answered (partial examination) will not be scored, regardless of the reason.

(vii) For the duration of the examination and break times, I may not access written materials, record the examination in any manner, consult with other individuals, or operate phones, tablets, or other electronic devices.

(viii) Any irregular behavior before, during, or after the examination, such as copying answers, sharing information, using outside resources, or otherwise giving or obtaining any unauthorized information or aid, evidenced by observation or otherwise, on any portion of the oral examination is cause for immediate termination of the examination, will be reported to the ABNS, and constitutes grounds for the ABNS to bar me permanently from all future examinations, to terminate my participation in the examinations, to invalidate the results of my examinations and any prior examinations, to withhold my scores or certificate, to revoke my certificate, and/or to take any other appropriate action, including legal action.

(ix) The ABNS may withhold my scores and may require me to retake the oral examination or other assessment if the ABNS is presented with evidence demonstrating to the ABNS, in its sole discretion, that the security of the examination may have been compromised, notwithstanding the absence of any evidence of my personal involvement in the compromising activities.

(x) The materials and questions utilized in the oral examination are copyrighted as the sole property of the ABNS and must not be removed from the test area or recorded, copied or reproduced in any way.
I have read and I understand the Copyright Notice and Agreement and the Non-Disclosure Agreement below. Copying, recording, or reproducing copyrighted material, in whole or in part, is a federal offense and also constitutes grounds for the ABNS to take one or more of the actions listed in (viii) above.

(xi) The decision as to whether my grades and other performances on the ABNS’s examinations qualify me for a certificate of qualification rests solely and exclusively in the ABNS, and that its decision is final.

I hereby waive and release and shall indemnify and hold harmless the ABNS and persons in their capacities as the ABNS’s directors, members, officers, committee members, employees, and agents from, against and with respect to any and all claims, losses, costs, expenses, damages, and judgments (including reasonable attorney’s fees) alleged to have arisen from, out of, with respect to or in connection with any action which they, or any of them, take or fail to take, any examination conducted by the ABNS which I apply to take or take, the grade or grades given me on the examination and, if applicable, the failure of the ABNS to issue me a certificate or the ABNS’s revocation of any certificate previously issued to me.

5) Test Environment/Professional Appearance Requirements

All participants must have access to a quiet, suitable space for the three-hour examination session.

The space must be well-lit, avoid backlight from bright windows.

The test environment/or camera view of the test environment should be clear of personalized information (e.g., academic degrees, family photos, etc.).

Virtual backgrounds are not permitted.

Desk should be free of any clutter/unnecessary materials.

Only the candidate/examiner can be in the test environment. Other persons, including children, are prohibited, as are pets.

Candidates will need to have a model spine and skull available to them during the examination. These will not be provided by the ABNS.

All participants must be dressed in professional business attire.

Troubleshooting

Both candidates and examiners will have the ability to request support to assist with technical issues during the exam by requesting help via ZOOM or by calling the cell phone number of the ABNS staff person assigned as a primary contact.

Quality Control

ABNS personnel may join an exam in progress to ensure all parties remain connected throughout the entire exam, without issue.
Examinations
The oral exam consists of three 45-minute exam rotations. Following a brief orientation, the ABNS staff member will admit each candidate to his/her first exam room per the exam schedule. The first exam rotation of each session will begin with the security protocols defined previously. There are two examiners, asking five questions total. The ABNS staff person may join an examination room to ensure things are running smoothly. Candidates are encouraged to focus on the examiner who is asking the question.

Candidates will be brought back to the main zoom meeting room by an ABNS staff for each 15-minute breaks. At the conclusion of the third exam appointment, candidates will be brought back to the main room for final announcements and then released.

Interacting with Examiners and ABNS staff
Examiners will introduce themselves to the candidate. The lead examiner will present the material by screen sharing. Examiners may ask additional questions or prompt candidates to provide additional information. Candidates should expect to interact with the examiner for each question/case.

Scheduled Breaks
Fifteen-minute breaks are scheduled between exam rotations. Candidates will return to the main meeting room during this time and are required to leave their camera, computer, and audio on during the entire break. These breaks are scheduled for candidates to use the restroom, get a snack, and move around. During breaks, use of tablets/cell phones, using the computer on which the examination is being administered, and reviewing or taking notes is prohibited.

Disclosures, Disclaimers and Policies
Participating in a pre-exam drop-in session with an ABNS staff member is required for all candidates.

The ABNS believes in the premise “trust but verify.” We trust that in the pursuit of board certification, you will conduct yourself with respect for the certification credential, your professional reputation, and your patients. However, we also will ask you to comply with basic security and identity verification measures to ensure fairness for all candidates and to protect the integrity of the exam.

It is a violation of federal law to reproduce, in whole or in part, ABNS examination content in any way. Candidates who share or receive ABNS examination content also risk the lifetime loss of eligibility for board certification. Of note, there is no advantage to providing content to or receiving content from other candidates.

We have taken into account the potential challenges of online exam delivery and have adjusted our policies and processes accordingly.

Candidate Agreement for the Virtual Oral Examination
I hereby apply to the American Board of Neurological Surgery for the issuance of board certification in neurological surgery and for examinations relative to that certificate, all in accordance with and subject to the Rules and Regulations of the ABNS. A complete copy of the Rules and Regulations is available on
the ABNS website. By electronically signing this Agreement and verbally agreeing on test day to the ABNS, I agree to be legally bound by and to abide by all of the terms and conditions of this Agreement and the Rules and Regulations of the ABNS. I agree that upon the issuance to me a board certification, I shall become bound by the Bylaws of the ABNS and shall remain bound by the Rules and Regulations of the ABNS as they may be amended from time to time.

I hereby certify that I have read and accept the terms and conditions of this examination set forth in the Rules and Regulations of the ABNS. I understand and agree that the virtual oral examination is supervised by examiners, staff, and others who are responsible to the ABNS and are empowered by the ABNS to ensure that the examination is conducted securely, appropriately and in accordance with the Rules and Regulations of the ABNS.

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(ii) I am responsible for ensuring that I am able to participate in the full 3-hour examination session in a quiet, distraction-free setting.

(iii) I am responsible for supplying and using my own testing equipment, including a computer, webcam, microphone, internet access, and required software. I understand that this equipment must meet the technical requirements specified. I am required to test my equipment with the ABNS prior to the examination. If I do not complete this equipment test before the examination, I waive my ability to test on the assigned date and time.

(iv) The ABNS is not responsible for technical issues that may prevent the administration of the examination on the scheduled day or time. This includes equipment malfunctions and internet disruption. The ABNS will not penalize for examination administration failures on the part of the ABNS.

(v) My examiners, in consultation with ABNS leadership and staff, may terminate my examination, without appeal, if:

a. they determine, in their sole discretion, that my testing environment is not suitable for the examination; and/or

b. they are concerned about the examination security or my behavior regarding examination security, the integrity of the examination, and/or professional conduct.

(vi) Examinations that are terminated prior to completion of the required number of questions being answered (partial examination) will not be scored, regardless of the reason.

(vii) For the duration of the examination and break times, I may not access written materials, record the examination in any manner, consult with other individuals, or operate phones, tablets, or other electronic devices.

(viii) Any irregular behavior before, during, or after the examination, such as copying answers, sharing information, using outside resources, or otherwise giving or obtaining any unauthorized information or aid, evidenced by observation or otherwise, on any portion of the oral examination is cause for immediate termination of the examination, will be reported to the ABNS, and constitutes grounds for
the ABNS to bar me permanently from all future examinations, to terminate my participation in the examinations, to invalidate the results of my examinations and any prior examinations, to withhold my scores or certificate, to revoke my certificate, and/or to take any other appropriate action, including legal action.

(ix) The ABNS may withhold my scores and may require me to retake the oral examination or other assessment if the ABNS is presented with evidence demonstrating to the ABNS, in its sole discretion, that the security of the examination may have been compromised, notwithstanding the absence of any evidence of my personal involvement in the compromising activities.

(x) The materials and questions utilized in the oral examination are copyrighted as the sole property of the ABNS and must not be removed from the test area or recorded, copied or reproduced in any way. I have read and I understand the Copyright Notice and Agreement and the Non-Disclosure Agreement below. Copying, recording, or reproducing copyrighted material, in whole or in part, is a federal offense and also constitutes grounds for the ABNS to take one or more of the actions listed in (viii) above.

(xi) The decision as to whether my grades and other performances on the ABNS’s examinations qualify me for a certificate of qualification rests solely and exclusively in the ABNS, and that its decision is final.

I hereby waive and release and shall indemnify and hold harmless the ABNS and persons in their capacities as the ABNS’s directors, members, officers, committee members, employees, and agents from, against and with respect to any and all claims, losses, costs, expenses, damages, and judgments (including reasonable attorney’s fees) alleged to have arisen from, out of, with respect to or in connection with any action which they, or any of them, take or fail to take, any examination conducted by the ABNS which I apply to take or take, the grade or grades given me on the examination and, if applicable, the failure of the ABNS to issue me a certificate or the ABNS’s revocation of any certificate previously issued to me.

Non-Disclosure Policy
As noted above, all ABNS examinations and Examination Materials are confidential and are protected by copyright law. The Examination Materials are made available to examinees solely for the purpose of becoming certified or maintaining certification in the specialty of Neurosurgery. I am expressly prohibited from disclosing, publishing, reproducing, or transmitting any ABNS examination or Examination Materials, in whole or in part, in any form or by any means, verbal or written, electronic or mechanical, for any purpose.

Examination Irregularity Policy
Engaging in any conduct that subverts or attempts to subvert the integrity of the examination or the ABNS certification process is sufficient cause for the ABNS to:

• Bar the candidate from the examination and/or future examinations;
• Terminate the candidate’s participation in the examination;
• Withhold and/or invalidate the results of the candidate’s examination;
• Withhold the candidate’s certificate;
• Revoke the candidate’s certificate;
• Require the candidate to pay the costs of the ABNS’s investigation; and/or
• Take other appropriate action against the candidate, including legal action.

The ABNS reserves the right to take whatever measures are necessary to protect the integrity of its examinations.

Acknowledgement/Cooperation Agreement

In the event that I am aware of an examination irregularity or the ABNS investigates a potential examination irregularity, I agree to report that information to the ABNS and/or cooperate fully with the ABNS and to provide all relevant information in my possession to the ABNS. I understand and agree that the failure to cooperate fully with the ABNS will subject me to the disciplinary sanctions set forth above.

I have read the policies of this Application and Agreement carefully and I understand, agree to, and accept the obligations that the policies and the Application and Agreement impose on me.

Note: These policies are subject to change without notice at the discretion of the American Board of Neurological Surgery