



**THE AMERICAN
BOARD OF SURGERY**

Examination Volunteer Guide

The American Board of Surgery
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Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to outline the various examination volunteer roles within the ABS and provide clear, structured expectations and responsibilities for individuals serving on exam committees and examiner teams. As a comprehensive resource for both current and prospective examination volunteers, it offers guidance on participation standards and pathways to maintain good standing in service of the ABS mission.



Eligibility & Selection Criteria for ABS Examination Volunteers

Eligibility

To be eligible for an examination volunteer role with the ABS, a surgeon must:

- Hold a current ABS certificate in surgery or subspecialty
- Be actively participating in the ABS Continuous Certification Program or completed five years in the time-limited (legacy) certification program and meeting all ongoing certification requirements
- Be clinically active (age is not a determining factor)

In addition, all volunteers must abide by the [ABS Code of Ethics and Professionalism](#). Individual specialties may have additional criteria based on their specific needs (e.g., minimum number of years in practice).

Role Restrictions

There are several situations that may preclude a surgeon from being offered a volunteer role with the ABS:



Conflict of Interest: SCORE Editorial Board Members are ineligible for ABS volunteer roles to prevent any existing or perceived conflicts of interest.



Multiple Leadership Roles: ABS directors and councilors should generally refrain from holding more than one leadership role across volunteer groups (e.g., serving as chair/vice chair of a specialty board/council committee in addition to serving as chair/vice chair of an exam committee).



Mock Oral Exams: ABS consultants and directors involved in delivering an ABS Certifying Examination in any specialty are **prohibited** from participating in mock oral exams during their tenure and for three years after the appointment.

Examination Volunteer Selection

Examination volunteer selection for ABS committees involves a comprehensive evaluation process that considers a range of competencies and a commitment to diversity.

Selection criteria include:

- Clinical expertise
- Practice type
- Regional representation
- Exam development experience
- Prior ABS service
- Academic involvement, such as critical care patient volume, academic or instructor appointments, and affiliations with academic medical centers

Additionally, the ABS places emphasis on varied experience across all dimensions, including practice type, practice focus, geographic location, professional experience, and time in practice, among others, to ensure committees represent a broad spectrum of perspectives.



ABS Volunteer Opportunities and Development

The ABS's volunteer needs change frequently. As such, please note that interest in volunteering with the ABS may not always result in placement in a volunteer group. When expressing interest in volunteering with the ABS, individuals are asked to consider volunteering for more than one opportunity, as we are not always able to immediately bring on volunteers in all areas.

The ABS often recruits for opportunities such as editing and writing for our written or oral exams, which help volunteers gain an understanding of the mechanics of the programs and processes that are integral to the ABS.

The selection process for other ABS volunteer opportunities, such as councilors and specialty board directors, are independent of volunteering for ABS exams. There is no guaranteed pathway from one role to subsequent roles at the ABS. However, volunteers generally start as exam committee writing consultants, and those in good standing may have the opportunity to become exam committee chairs, vice chairs, examiners, specialty board directors, and/or councilors in the future.

Additionally, the ABS specialty boards often recruit new examiners directly from the examination committee writing consultants. Therefore, **service as a volunteer for exams is taken into consideration for other opportunities** when competencies are aligned with volunteers' skills.



Examination Volunteer Expectations

Participation Standards

The ABS deeply values the time, expertise, and commitment that volunteers dedicate to supporting its mission. To maintain respectful and productive teams, examination volunteers are expected to:

- Complete assignments on time
- Actively participate in scheduled meetings and reviews
- Maintain timely communication to facilitate collaboration

Maintaining Good Standing

Consistently fulfilling the standards listed above ensures the success of ABS initiatives. Examination volunteers unable to meet these expectations may be excused from their respective roles. Any volunteer who anticipates challenges in meeting their commitments should notify the appropriate ABS staff member so that assignments and responsibilities can be redistributed without impacting deadlines. Maintaining good standing as an exam development consultant or examiner is essential to be considered for future opportunities with the ABS.

Roles and Responsibilities

Examination Volunteer Role Overview



Exam Committee Writing Consultant

Term

- Five (5) years, renewable

Qualifications

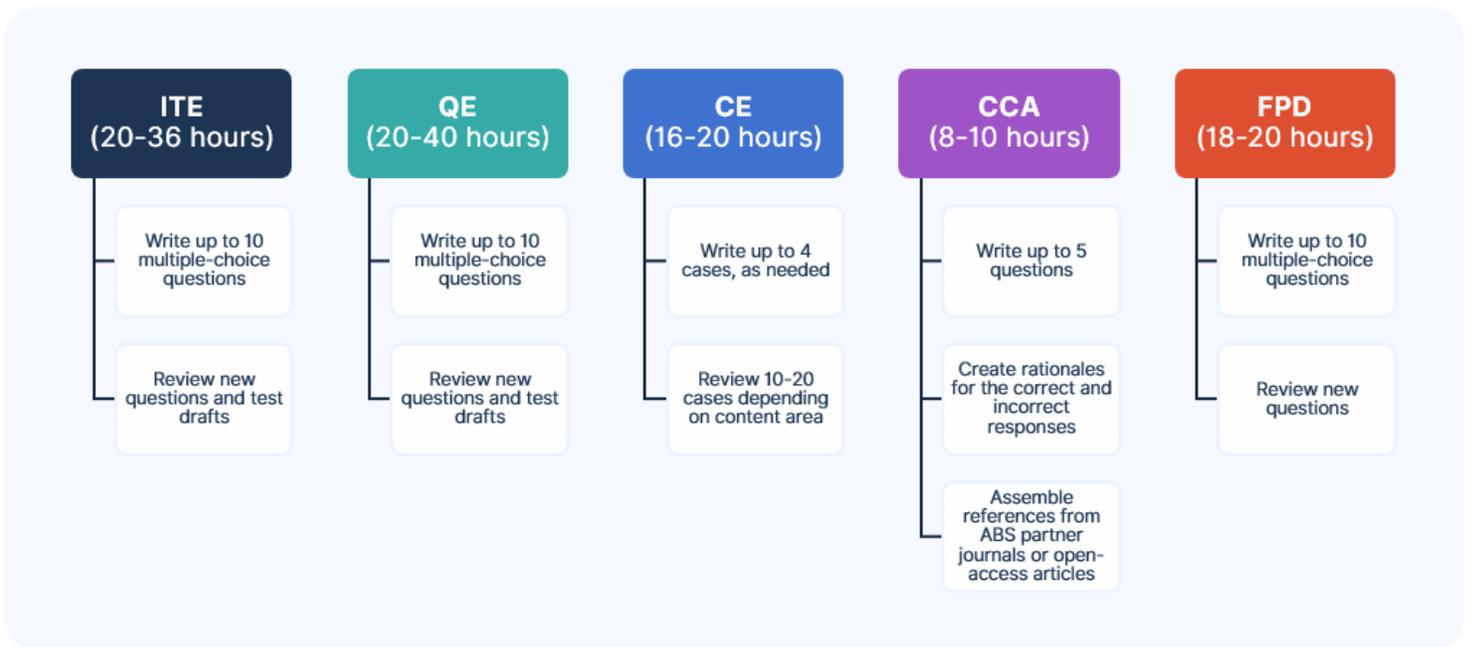
- Meet eligibility criteria as defined by the ABS (see page 4)
- Prior ABS service or experience with professional exam development is valued but not required

Role Description

- Write new exam questions or case scenarios
- Review and provide feedback on exam content authored by fellow committee members
- Update exam content to reflect the latest in surgical guidelines and practices
- Ensure exam content is fair and accurate
- Complete assignments promptly to maintain the exam development schedule and reduce schedule or assignment changes for fellow committee members
- Attend any necessary item-writing training sessions and committee review meetings (all training and review meetings typically held virtually)
- Respond to inquiries from reviewers and ABS staff in a timely manner

Variations by Exam

Note: All responsibilities listed by exam below are on an annual basis.



Exam Committee Vice Chair

Term

- One (1) year, renewable up to three (3) years

Qualifications

- Meet eligibility criteria as defined by the ABS (see page 4)
- Knowledgeable about the mechanics of exam development for the respective exam committee

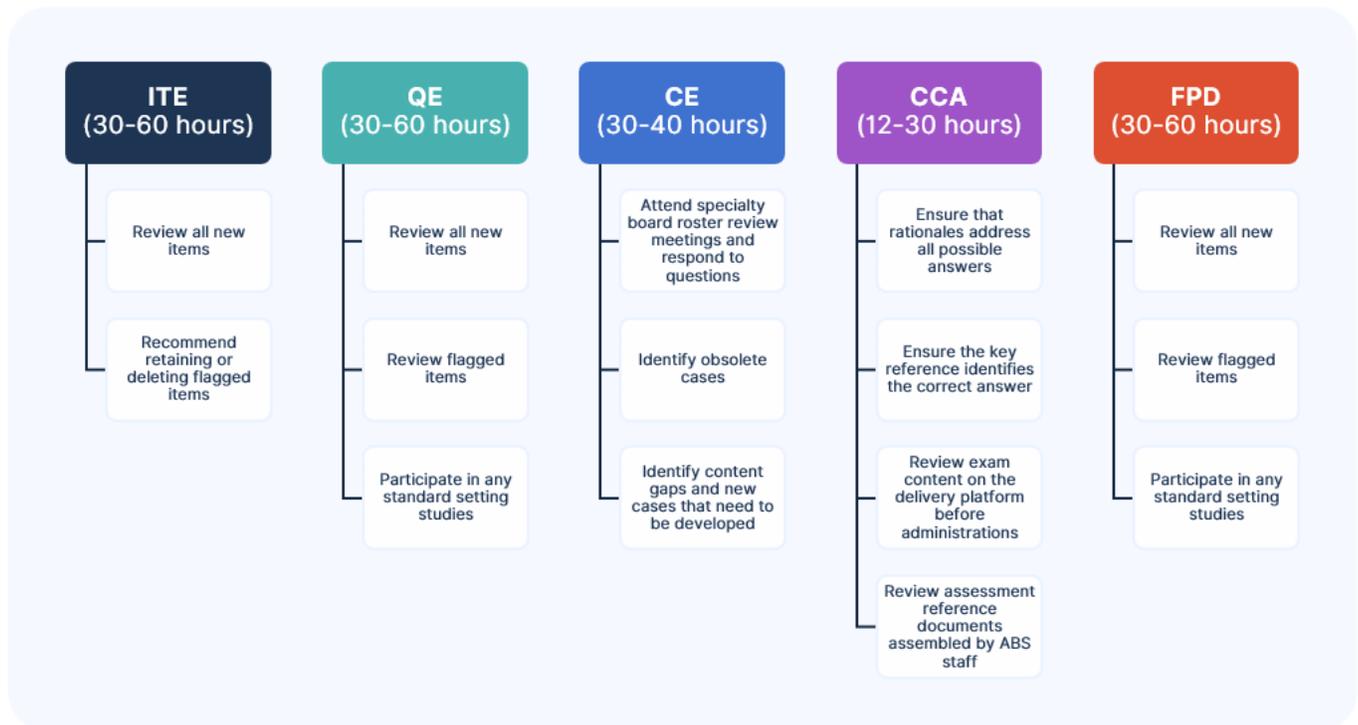
Role Description

- *Note: Experience as vice chair does not guarantee succession to chair*
- Collaborate with the exam committee chair and ABS staff exam developer to schedule review meetings

- Participate in virtual training or update session with ABS staff to effectively navigate and edit items on screen
- Attend and share screen during review meetings to facilitate updates and actively engage in content discussions
- Serve as support and backup to the committee chair by familiarizing fully with chair duties and stepping in, as needed (e.g. lead review meetings in the chair's absence)
- Assist the ABS staff exam developer, exam committee chair, and specialty board in selecting new consultants for the exam committee, as needed
- Conduct preliminary reviews of assigned questions, cases, or test drafts prior to formal review meetings
- Request revisions from committee members based on specialty board and ABS staff recommendations
- Ensure timely completion of assignments through ongoing communication with and assistance to committee members
- Review the final assembled exam, checking for accuracy, overlap, cueing, and style
- Remain available during the exam administration to review key validation with psychometricians or address urgent issues

Variations by Exam

Note: All responsibilities listed by exam below are on an annual basis.



Exam Committee Chair

Term

- Three (3)* years, nonrenewable
 - *Two (2) years for Vascular Surgery
 - For exam committee chairs entering their final year on a specialty board, an extension may be requested to complete the chair term

Qualifications

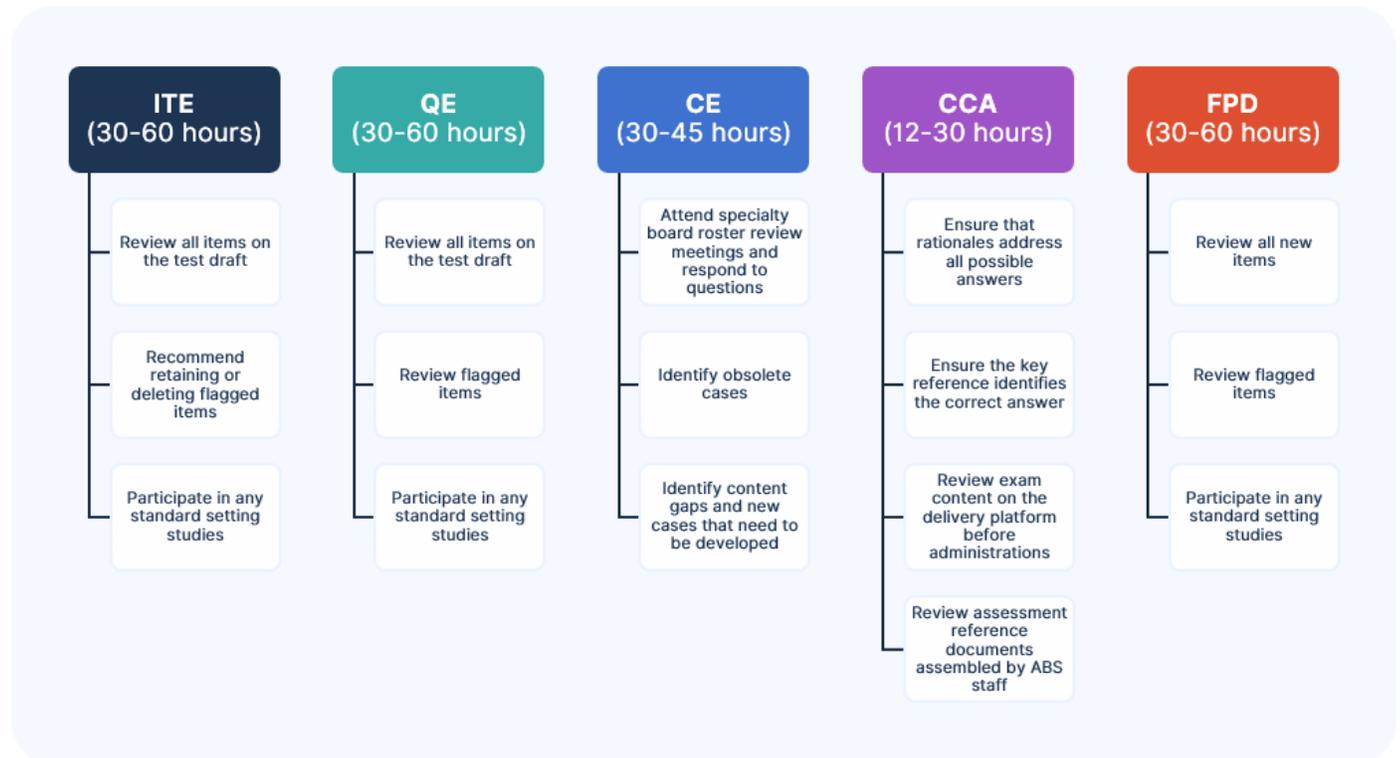
- Meet eligibility criteria as defined by the ABS (see page 4)
- Highly knowledgeable about the mechanics of exam development for the respective exam committee
 - Experience as vice chair is preferred (succession to chair is not guaranteed)

Role Description

- Set dates for review meetings in collaboration with the vice chair and ABS staff exam developer
- Assist the ABS staff exam developer and specialty board in selecting new consultants for the exam committee, as needed
- Conduct preliminary reviews of assigned questions, cases, or test drafts before formal meetings
- Request revisions from committee members based on specialty board and ABS staff recommendations
- Lead all committee and board review meetings, facilitating productive and efficient discussions
- Ensure timely completion of assignments through ongoing communication with and assistance to committee members
- Review the final assembled exam, checking for accuracy, overlap, cueing, and style
- Remain available during the exam administration to review key validation with psychometricians or address urgent content issues

Variations by Exam

Note: All responsibilities listed by exam below are on an annual basis.



Certifying Examiner

Term

- Four (4) years, renewable once (10-year maximum)
- *Note: Terms may vary by specialty*

Qualifications

- Meet eligibility criteria as defined by the ABS (see page 4)
- Experience evaluating clinical skills



Role Description

- Commit to conducting exams annually throughout the term (twice per term year for general surgery examiners)
- Attend a one-day, in-person orientation training session
- Adhere to all ABS exam policies and procedures to ensure fair and consistent evaluations
- Maintain objectivity and disclose any potential conflicts of interest with assigned candidates
- Prepare for exams by reviewing the ABS cases and assigned case roster
- Review grading criteria and procedures for inputting scores
- Meet with the co-examiner before each exam session to review the roster and strategize case presentation
- Facilitate logical progression of the case material to assess each candidate's problem-solving abilities and clinical judgment
- Take notes on each candidate's performance and assign case grades (Pass, Equivocal, Fail) according to the outlined ABS definitions, passing points, and errors
- Grade each case independently based solely on the candidate's performance
- Uphold strict confidentiality on candidate performance and pass/fail status
- Provide confidential feedback through examiner evaluations for each member of the examining team

Timeline for Examination Volunteers

	RECRUITMENT	VOLUNTEER	EXAM WINDOW
ITE	January-March	April to December <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2-4 virtual meetings • 8 weeks to complete assignments 	January-February
QE	August-October	November to June <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2-4 virtual meetings • 8 weeks to complete assignments 	July & September
CE	April-June	June to January <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2-3 virtual meetings • 6-8 weeks to complete assignments 	February-May & November
CCA	August	September to February <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3-4 virtual meetings • 4 weeks to complete assignments 	August-November
FPD	June-July	September to March <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-3 virtual meetings • 8 weeks to complete assignments 	March-April
CE Examiners	March-April	September to October <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 in-person meeting (New Examiner Orientation) 	February-May & November