

Preparing for the American Board
of Pathology (ABPath)
Examination of Fundamental
Knowledge and Skills

Forensic Pathology

Content Specifications



Overview:

Forensic Pathology Content Specifications

This guide outlines the content that may appear on the American Board of Pathology’s Forensic Pathology Subspecialty exam. It provides a framework based on the knowledge and skills typically covered in Fellow-level training, along with applicable Core and Advanced Resident topics from residency training that the trainee is expected to know or be able to perform.

Key to Designations:

C = Core/Foundational Knowledge

AR = Advanced Resident Knowledge

F = Fellow/Advanced Practitioner Knowledge

The exam assesses the knowledge, judgment, skills, and abilities necessary to identify specific entities, properly process specimens, and diagnose and monitor diseases using methods common in the practice of Forensic Pathology. The specific diseases, tests, and concepts listed in this document are important for candidates to know, but it is not possible to create a fully comprehensive list of all the material needed for certification and effective practice. Candidates should use this guide as a reference for preparing for certification and professional practice.

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1. Natural Deaths C

2. Pediatric Deaths

a.	Deaths Associated with Prematurity	C
b.	Congenital Anomalies, Common	C
c.	Placental Disorders Associated with Intrauterine Fetal Demise	C
d.	Estimation of Gestational Maturity	AR
e.	Birth-related Injuries	AR
f.	Congenital Anomalies, Complex	AR
g.	Central Nervous System, Normal Anatomy & Variations	AR
h.	Cardiovascular System, Normal Anatomy & Variations	AR
i.	Respiratory System	AR
j.	Hepatic, Gastrointestinal, Pancreatic System	AR
k.	Hematopoietic / Lymphatic System	AR
l.	Genitourinary System	AR
m.	Endocrine System	AR
n.	Skin	AR
o.	Bones and Joints, Normal Anatomy & Variations	AR
p.	Bleeding Diathesis / Thrombotic Disorders	AR
q.	Immune Deficiency Disorders	AR
r.	Nutritional Deficiencies	AR
s.	Infectious Disease/ Microbiology	AR
t.	Neoplastic Conditions	AR
u.	Genetic Diseases	AR
	i. Stillbirth versus Livebirth	F
	ii. Placental Injuries	F
v.	Fluid and Electrolyte Disturbances	F
w.	Unnatural Deaths in Childhood	
	i. Feticide	F
	ii. Neonaticide	F
	iii. Child Abuse / Non-accidental Injuries	F
	iv. Blunt Trauma	F
	v. Retinal hemorrhages	F
	vi. Patterned Injuries	F
	vii. Bite Marks	F
	viii. Thermal Injuries	F

- ix. Poisoning F
- x. Forensic Imaging F
- xi. Neglect F
- xii. Malnourishment F
- xiii. Asphyxia, including smothering suffocation, choking, wedging) F

3. The Cardiovascular System

- a. Normal Anatomy C
- b. Atherosclerosis C
- c. Myocardial Infarction C
- d. Hypertensive Cardiovascular Disease C
- e. Valvular Diseases C
- f. Aortic Dissection C
- g. Aortic Aneurysm C
- h. Vasculitides AR
- i. Myocarditis AR
- j. Sarcoidosis AR
- k. Dilated Cardiomyopathy AR
- l. Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy AR
- m. Tumors AR
- n. Congenital Diseases AR
- o. Amyloid AR
- p. Pericardial Diseases AR
- q. Nonatherosclerotic Coronary Artery Diseases/Anomalies F
- r. Arrhythmogenic Cardiomyopathy F
- s. Aortopathy F
- t. Sudden Cardiac Death F
- u. Cardiac Dysrhythmias F

4. Chronic Alcoholism

- a. Steatosis C
- b. Cirrhosis C
- c. Esophageal Varices C
- d. Steatohepatitis AR
- e. Cardiomyopathy AR
- f. Coagulopathy AR
- g. Infectious Complications AR
- h. Mallory Weiss Tear F
- i. Cerebellar Vermal Atrophy F
- j. Alcohol Withdrawal and Sudden Death F
- k. Nutritional Complication F
- l. Fluid / Electrolyte Disturbances F

5. The Central Nervous System

- a. Cerebrovascular Disease C

b. Aneurysms	C
c. Hypertensive Intracerebral Hemorrhage	C
d. Meningitis	C
e. Normal Anatomy and Variations	AR
f. Malformations	AR
g. Neoplasms	AR
h. Vascular Malformations	AR
i. Encephalitis	AR
j. Pituitary Disorders	AR
k. Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies	AR
l. Demyelinating Diseases	AR
m. Degenerative Diseases	AR
n. Phakomatoses	AR
o. Toxic and Acquired Metabolic Diseases	F
p. Seizure Disorders	F
6. The Respiratory System	
a. Pulmonary Infections	C
b. Pulmonary Thromboembolism	C
c. Diffuse Alveolar Damage	C
d. Tobacco & Vaping-Induced Lung Damage	C
e. Emphysema	C
f. Pneumothoraces	AR
g. Pneumoconioses	AR
h. Hypersensitivity Pneumonitis	AR
i. Pulmonary Hypertension	AR
j. Sarcoidosis	AR
k. Pulmonary Hemorrhage Syndromes	AR
l. Neoplasms	AR
m. Interstitial Lung Disease	AR
n. Asthma	F
o. Drug-Induced Lung Disease	F
7. The Genitourinary System	
a. Obstructive Uropathy, including Prostate and Calculi	C
b. Congenital Anomalies	AR
c. Glomerular Diseases	AR
d. Tubulointerstitial and Renal Cystic Diseases	AR
e. Thrombotic Microangiopathies	AR
f. Neoplasms	AR
g. Genital Tract Disorders	AR
h. Bladder Diseases	AR
i. Infections	AR
8. The Hematopoietic/Lymphatic System	
a. Leukemia / Lymphoma	AR
b. Hemoglobinopathies	AR

c. Bleeding Diathesis / Thrombotic Disorders	AR
d. Amyloidosis	AR
9. The Hepatic, Gastrointestinal, and Pancreatic System	
a. Gastric / Duodenal Ulcers	C
b. Bile Duct / Gallbladder Disorders	C
c. Pancreatitis	C
d. Diabetes Mellitus	C
e. Enterocolitis	AR
f. Vascular Disorders	AR
g. Inflammatory Bowel Disease	AR
h. Neoplasms	AR
i. Hepatitis	AR
j. Inborn Errors of Metabolism	AR
10. The Endocrine System	
a. Pituitary Disorders	AR
b. Thyroid Disorders	AR
c. Parathyroid Disorders	AR
d. Adrenal Diseases	AR
11. The Skin and Nails	
a. Stasis Changes and Pressure Ulcers	C
b. Cutaneous Manifestations of Therapy	AR
c. Cutaneous Manifestations of Systemic Disease	AR
d. Common Neoplasms	AR
e. Common Infections	AR
f. Cutaneous Manifestations of Substance Abuse	F
12. Bones, Joints, and Soft Tissue	
a. Degenerative Diseases	AR
b. Metabolic Diseases	AR
c. Pathologic Fractures	AR
d. Primary and Metastatic Neoplasms	AR
e. Common Infections	AR
f. Common Inflammatory Conditions	AR
13. Peripheral Nerve and Skeletal System	
a. Specimen Procurement and Preparation	C
14. Infectious Disease / Microbiology	
a. Specimen Procurement and Preparation	C
b. Bacterial Infections	C
c. Mycobacterial Infections	C
d. Viral Infections	C
e. Fungal Infections	C

f. Parasitic Infections	AR
g. Zoonoses	AR
15. Immune Deficiency Disorders (Primary & Secondary)	AR
16. Obesity	C
17. Medicolegal Investigation of Natural Deaths	F
18. Mechanisms of Traumatic Death (e.g., Types of Shock, Blood Loss, Neurogenic, Embolic)	F
19. Blunt Trauma	
a. Abrasions, Contusions, and Lacerations	AR
b. Epidural Hematoma	AR
c. Subdural Hematoma	AR
d. Subarachnoid Hemorrhage	AR
e. Herniation	AR
f. Fat Emboli	AR
g. Dating of Injuries	F
h. Patterned Injuries	F
i. Defensive Injuries	F
j. Skull Fractures	F
k. Cerebral Contusion	F
l. Cerebral Laceration	F
m. Traumatic Brain Injury	F
n. Sequelae of Traumatic Brain Injury	F
o. Neck Injury	F
p. Vascular Injury	F
q. Spinal Cord Injury	F
r. Commotio Cordis	F
s. Visceral Injuries	F
t. Fractures	F
u. Healing of Fractures	F
v. Medical Complications of Injuries	F
w. Fat Embolization Syndrome	F
x. Human Bite Marks	F
y. Animal Bite Marks	F
20. Asphyxia	
a. Hanging	AR
b. Suffocation	F
c. Choking	F
d. Manual Strangulation	F
e. Ligature Strangulation	F
f. Positional, Mechanical, and Traumatic Asphyxia	F

g. Asphyxia by Gases	F
h. Petechiae	F
21. Firearm-Related Injuries	
a. Entrance Wounds	AR
b. Exit Wounds	AR
c. Contact Wounds	AR
d. Wound Ballistics	F
e. Atypical Entrance Wounds	F
f. Graze Wounds	F
g. Shored Exit Wounds	F
h. Range of Fire Estimation	F
i. Intermediate Target Ballistics	F
j. Near-Contact Wounds	F
k. Close/Intermediate Wounds	F
l. Soot/Stippling/Bullet Wipe	F
m. Intermediate (Distant) Wounds	F
n. Ricochet Wounds	F
o. Handgun-Related Injuries	F
p. Rifle-Related Injuries	F
q. Shotgun-Related Injuries	F
r. Airgun-Related Injuries	F
s. Delayed Firearm-Related Deaths	F
t. Ammunition	F
u. DNA of Tissue on Bullets	F
v. Retained Bullets	F
w. Lead Poisoning	F
x. Less Lethal Ammunition	F
y. Nail Gun Injuries	F
z. Privately Made Firearms (e.g., Zip guns, 3D printed guns, etc.)	F
aa. Detection of Gunshot Residue	F
bb. Radiography of Gunshot Wounds	F
22. Bombs and Explosions	
a. Mechanical Injuries	F
b. Atmospheric Blast Injuries	F
c. Classification of Blast Injuries	F
23. Sharp Injuries (Cutting & Stabbing)	
a. Stab Wounds	AR
b. Incised Wounds	AR
c. Incised Wounds of the Neck	F
d. Defensive and Hesitation Injuries	F
e. Chop Wounds	F
f. Sharp Injury caused by objects other than a knife	F
g. Patterned Injuries-Sharp	F
h. Toolmark Identification	F

i.	Antemortem versus Postmortem Wounds	F
j.	Dismemberment	F
24.	Electrical and Lightning Injuries	
a.	Basic Concepts of Electricity	F
b.	Alternating Current Related Deaths	F
c.	Direct Current Related Deaths	F
d.	Low and High Voltage Electrocutation	F
e.	Lightning-Related Deaths	F
f.	Cutaneous Manifestations	F
g.	Conducted Energy Device (e.g., TASER)	F
25.	Anaphylaxis Related Deaths	
a.	Gross and Microscopic Findings	F
b.	Laboratory Diagnostics	F
26.	Deaths due to Change in Atmosphere (i.e., Barotrauma)	F
27.	Environmental Exposure Deaths	
a.	Hypothermia	F
b.	Hyperthermia	F
c.	Heat Stroke	F
28.	Fire / Thermal/ Burn Injuries	
a.	Carbon Monoxide	AR
b.	Identification of Fire Victims	F
c.	Smoke and Fume Inhalation	F
d.	Thermal Burns	F
e.	Scalding Injuries	F
f.	Thermal Artifacts	F
g.	Arson Investigation	F
h.	Self Immolation	F
i.	Flash Fires	F
j.	Chemical Burns	F
29.	Radiation Exposure	F
30.	Forensic Toxicology and Postmortem Chemistry	
a.	Specimen Types, Collection, and Storage	AR
b.	Ethanol	AR
c.	Common Illicit Drugs (e.g., heroin, fentanyl, cocaine, methamphetamine)	AR
d.	Alcohols other than Ethanol	F
e.	Body Packing	F
f.	Stimulants	F
g.	Hallucinogens	F

h. Novel Psychoactive Substances	F
i. Over the Counter Drugs	F
j. Prescription Drugs (e.g., Insulin, Digoxin)	F
k. Opioids/Opiates	F
l. Sedatives/Hypnotics	F
m. Synthetic Cannabinoids	F
n. Mixed Drug Toxicity	F
o. Herbal Remedies	F
p. Inhalants	F
q. Carbon Monoxide	F
r. Ethylene Glycol	F
s. Poisons (e.g., Arsenic, Cyanide)	F
t. Anesthetics	F
u. Acids and Bases	F
v. Vitreous Chemistry	F
w. Entomotoxicology	F
31. Toxicologic Analytic Methods	
a. Methodology	F
b. Screening Tests	F
c. Confirmatory Tests	F
32. Interpretive Toxicology	
a. Postmortem Redistribution	F
b. Drug Interactions	F
c. Metabolism and Pharmacogenetics	F
33. Environmental and Industrial Toxicology	
a. Organophosphate Toxicity	F
b. Volatile Organic Compounds	F
c. Aromatic Halogenated Compounds	F
d. Metals	F
e. Agricultural Poisons (e.g. pesticides, fungicides, herbicides)	F
34. Identification of Human Remains	
a. Fingerprints	F
b. Tattoos	F
c. Forensic Radiology	F
d. Dental Identification	F
e. Disaster Victim Identification	F
f. Missing and Unidentified Persons	F
g. Dental Age Estimation	F
h. DNA Identification	F
i. Unique Physical Characteristics	F

35. Postmortem Changes and Artifacts

- a. Rigor Mortis C
- b. Livor Mortis C
- c. Algor Mortis C
- d. Common Postmortem Artifacts AR
- e. Time of Death/Postmortem Interval F
- f. Postmortem Insect Activity F
- g. Postmortem Animal Activity F
- h. Postmortem Trauma F
- i. Chemical Changes in Body Fluids F
- j. Forensic Entomology F
- k. Collection of Entomological Evidence F
- l. Embalming F
- m. Exhumation F
- n. Cremations F
- o. Decomposition, including but not limited to: F
 - i. Putrefaction F
 - ii. Adipocere F
 - iii. Mummification F
 - iv. Skeletonization F

36. Forensic Anthropology

- a. Human Osteology F
- b. Gender Determination F
- c. Age Estimation F
- d. Ancestry Assessment F
- e. Stature Estimation F
- f. Trauma Effects and Tool Mark Analysis F
- g. Taphonomy of Fire F
- h. Animal Scavenging F
- i. Nonhuman Remains F

37. Elder Abuse

- a. Neglect F
- b. Blunt Trauma F
- c. Drug Toxicity F
- d. Malnutrition F
- e. Dehydration F
- f. Pressure Ulcers F
- g. Sexual Abuse F

38. Pregnancy-Related Deaths

- a. Pulmonary Artery Thromboembolism AR
- b. Amniotic Fluid Embolism AR
- c. Coronary Artery Dissection AR
- d. Preeclampsia/Eclampsia/HELLP Syndrome AR
- e. Coagulation Disorders AR

f. Utero-Placental Hemorrhage	AR
g. Infection	AR
h. Venous Air Embolism	F
i. Peripartum Cardiomyopathy	F
j. Acute Fatty Liver of Pregnancy	F
39. Sex-Related Deaths	
a. Sexual Assault	F
b. Trace Evidence	F
c. Bite Marks	F
d. DNA Analysis	F
e. Criminal Abortion	F
f. Autoerotic Deaths	F
g. Special Procedures (e.g., Dissection & Evidence Collection)	F
h. Drug-Facilitated	F
40. Complications of Diagnostic and Therapeutic Procedures	
a. Resuscitation Artifacts	AR
b. Surgical/Medical Complications / Intervention Artifact	AR
41. Water-Related Deaths	
a. Natural Deaths while in Water	F
b. Drowning	F
c. Near Drowning	F
d. S.C.U.B.A related	F
e. Injuries Sustained in the Water	F
f. Dangerous Aquatic Life	F
g. Bodies Found in Water	F
42. Acute Stress-Related Deaths	
a. Acute Psychotic Episodes	F
b. Excited/Agitated States	F
c. Stimulant Drug Toxicity	F
d. Physical Altercations/Restraint Related	F
e. Stress-Related Sudden Death	F
43. Mental Illness-Related Mortality	
a. Schizophrenia	F
b. Depression/Bipolar	F
c. Eating Disorders	F
d. Medical Management Complications	F
e. Substance Use Disorder	F
44. Jurisprudence and Certification of Death	
a. Death Certification	C
b. Immediate Cause of Death	C

c. Proximate Cause of Death	C
d. Contributory Conditions	C
e. Mechanisms of Death	AR
f. Manner of Death	AR
g. Death from Remote Events	F
h. Undetermined Manner of Death	F
i. Forensic Pathologist as Expert Witness	F
j. Degrees of Certainty for Manner Determination	F
45. Criminalistics	
a. Chain of Custody	AR
b. Crime Scene	F
c. Scene Integrity	F
d. Blood Stain Pattern Interpretation	F
e. Biological Evidence on the Body	F
f. Trace Evidence	F
46. Bioterrorism and Chemical Agents	F
47. Molecular Pathology	
a. Thrombophilias	AR
b. Hemoglobinopathies	AR
c. DNA for Identification	F
d. Sudden Unexplained Deaths	F
e. Preservation of Samples	F
48. Transportation Related Deaths	
a. Scene Investigation	F
b. Pedestrian Deaths	F
c. Motor Vehicle Deaths	F
d. Determination of the Driver	F
e. Ejected or Entrapped Occupant	F
f. Run Over by Vehicle	F
g. Seat Belt and Airbag Related Injuries	F
h. Motor Vehicle Fires	F
i. Motorcycle-Related Deaths	F
j. Bicycle-Related Deaths	F
k. Train-Related Deaths	F
l. Aircraft	F
m. Aircraft Crash Scene	F
49. In-Custody Deaths	F
50. Postmortem Radiology	
a. Plain Film Radiography	F
b. Computed Tomography	F

- c. Documentation of Injuries F
- d. Decedent Identification F
- e. Foreign Body Identification F
- f. Pediatric Skeletal Surveys F
- g. Stillborn versus Live Born Imaging F

51. Selected Topics/Management in Forensic Pathology

- a. Medicolegal Autopsy Report F
- b. Administration and Management F
- c. Quality Assurance F
- d. Autopsy Hazards F
- e. Regulations and Safety F
- f. Mass Disasters F
- g. Organ/Tissue Procurement F

52. Autopsy Procedures

- a. Evisceration Techniques AR
- b. Leg Vein Dissection AR
- c. Spinal Cord Removal, Anterior and Posterior AR
- d. Layered Anterior and Posterior Neck F
- e. Orbital Exenteration F
- f. Vertebral Artery F
- g. Facial Tissue Dissection F
- h. Posterior Subcutaneous Examination F
- i. Middle Ear Dissection F
- j. Cardiac Conduction System F
- k. Medical Device Evaluation F