

## BEFORE EXAMS

**SITUATION:** A future candidate learns from a past candidate that, “Your NBEO exam will have both multiple choice and the new multiple response kind of items. I think there were a little over 100 questions on each session.”

WHEN ACCEPTABLE	WHEN NOT ACCEPTABLE	DECISION TIME
OK: Candidates are welcome to discuss any information that is found on the NBEO website, including the TYPES of items used on the various exams.	NOT OK: If the conversation goes beyond exam format and the past candidate begins to describe exam questions and answers to the future exam-taker, a breach of ethics has occurred.	As long as the conversation is limited to public information that anyone can read on the NBEO website, such as exam format and style of item presentation, there is no problem. However, the past candidate should refrain from sharing specific exam content with the future candidate to protect not only the past exam-taker but also the future one. The NBEO’s perspective toward the sharing of exam material is fully explained in the NBEO Ethics Policy and the Candidate Exam Conduct and Exam Security Agreement, both available to all concerned on the NBEO website.

**SITUATION:** A future candidate is in his Ocular Anatomy class when the professor announces, “Everyone pay attention to this example. It came from an NBEO Part I ABS exam. It will show up on another exam someday soon.” Later that morning, the optics lecturer shared that, “This formula is something that does pop up on Boards so I think it’s worthwhile to know it. There was a question on the last set of Boards that asked about this.” In the last class of the day, the Path prof insisted that, “This is ALWAYS guaranteed to be a Board question, probably more than 1 Board question. This works nicely for the ABS Board as well as the PAM exam. This is one concept that you don’t want to forget.”

WHEN ACCEPTABLE	WHEN NOT ACCEPTABLE	DECISION TIME
NEVER: There is no acceptable circumstance in which it is OK for an educator to offer to any class or audience any item or material directly linked to any NBEO exam.	NOT OK: Since all NBEO exam material including all items (questions and answers) is copyrighted, it is illegal for anyone to reproduce and use National Board items in any manner whatsoever. Candidate exposure to NBEO exam items is legally and ethically limited to candidates’ time spent taking National Board examinations. Sample items available on the NBEO website are not active items and may be shared.	When future NBEO exam candidates are presented with any items that are identified as having been taken from an NBEO exam or come across any items that candidates suspect are NBEO items, it is in their best interest to access the NBEO website, click on the Ethics tab, pull up the subsection Report an Ethics Violation, and describe the circumstances they have experienced. All candidates should be aware that unsolicited classroom exposure to NBEO exam material may result in cancellation of their own exam scores and/or may lead to being barred from taking National Boards for a specific time interval. It also should be remembered that new exam items constantly are being generated and can deal with any topic on the NBEO Content Outline. It is always best to study to learn everything possible since the NBEO examination items change for every administration.

**SITUATION:** A future candidate seeks out a past candidate and asks, “How many glaucoma questions were on the exam? How many about conjunctivitis? Do I really need to know about antibiotics?”

WHEN ACCEPTABLE	WHEN NOT ACCEPTABLE	DECISION TIME
OK: Candidates are welcome to discuss any information that is found on the NBEO website, including the number of items used on the various exams.	NOT OK: All future candidates are invited to review the topics that likely will be included on any specific NBEO exam. Those topics are found in each exam’s topic outline, accessed on the NBEO website. It is unethical for future candidates to try to find out additional information from past candidates.	When a future candidate asks a past candidate to share anything about specific NBEO items (questions and/or answer options), the ensuing discussion violates both the NBEO Ethics Policy and the Candidate Exam Conduct and Exam Security Agreement. This situation is easily handled by past candidates by referring the inquisitive future candidate to the NBEO website where all public, appropriate information is available. The past candidate might consider warning the future candidate about the consequences of improper exposure to NBEO copyrighted exam items at any time except during exams.

## BEFORE EXAMS (CONT.)

**SITUATION:** A future candidate is told by a past candidate that, “You might want to dress in layers on Test Day in case the test center’s air conditioner is set too low or the heat is set too high. I was way too cold all through my exam.”

WHEN ACCEPTABLE	WHEN NOT ACCEPTABLE	DECISION TIME
<p>OK: Since the past candidate is merely describing the testing environment, this information is acceptable to share with future candidates. No copyrighted NBEO exam material would be compromised in a discussion of this nature.</p>	<p>NOT OK: It is never OK if the commentary veers from a description of the test venue environment during an exam to comments about specific NBEO items, which if discussed, become exposed and cannot be used in future exams; the re-use of exposed items prevents the generation of credible NBEO exam scores.</p>	<p>If NBEO’s items or answer options are shared, the candidates sharing them may become involved in an NBEO ethics investigation with resulting substantial NBEO penalties (such as score cancellation and bar from taking future exams) and possible legal action.</p>

**SITUATION:** A future candidate is starting to study for her Part I ABS exam. She bought the new study guide that everyone says is the best one to use to prepare for the exam. Though it makes no mention of the inclusion of NBEO items, a classmate shared that “somebody told me there are some good NBEO ABS items in the guide that might be used again when we take the exam.”

WHEN ACCEPTABLE	WHEN NOT ACCEPTABLE	DECISION TIME
<p>OK: The use of board exam study guides is OK providing there is no claim or indication that NBEO exam items are included within the guide. However, the BEST preparation for NBEO board exams is achieved by excellent classroom and clinic attendance, with diligent study of class notes and avid attention to detail, patients, and procedures in the clinic.</p>	<p>NOT OK: When future NBEO exam candidates run across any study guides that are presented with the claim that items within the guide were taken from an NBEO exam, or if candidates have any reason to believe that study items are recycled NBEO items, an ethics problem exists.</p>	<p>The NBEO does not produce study guides for its exams. It is not affiliated with nor does it endorse any study guide production entities. Since all NBEO exam items are copyrighted, no use of any National Board exam material is authorized or willingly permitted in any board exam study guide. To report any inappropriate use of NBEO items by producers of study guides, the National Board highly recommends that candidates access the NBEO website, click on the Ethics tab, access the Report an Ethics Violation section, and share any possible misuse of copyrighted items. Candidates exposed to NBEO exam material contained within commercial study guides ultimately may suffer cancellation of their exam scores and/or temporarily may be barred from taking National Board exams.</p>

## DURING EXAMS

**SITUATION:** During an exam, a candidate notices another exam-taker squirming around in her seat and doing a lot of neck stretches. He quickly realizes that her neck manoeuvres are a means to disguise her peeks at his answer sheet. Since he knows that NBEO scores are criterion-referenced, her use of his knowledge won't affect his score. He decides to let her use his answers if she wishes. It seems like a nice thing to do to help out a fellow student.

WHEN ACCEPTABLE	WHEN NOT ACCEPTABLE	DECISION TIME
NEVER: There is no situation in which it is acceptable for a candidate to ALLOW another exam-taker to cheat by copying responses from his/her answer sheet.	NOT OK: Candidates who notice that another exam-taker is copying answers from their worksheets sometimes feel honored that another exam-taker would copy their responses. Some also feel that since the exam group's criterion-referenced scores are not affected by how individual candidates perform, it is just a nice thing to do to give a fellow exam-taker a break.	Any candidate who feels that another exam-taker is cheating by copying answers from his/her answer sheet is obliged to discretely approach an exam proctor to alert the proctor to the possibility that cheating may be occurring. The proctor will then carefully and frequently observe the exam-taker suspected of copying and will document any suspicious activity. If the candidate whose answers are being copied fails to report the potential cheating to the proctor, it is possible that the proctor independently may notice the suspicious activity and report BOTH candidates to the National Board as collusive copying in which both parties are willingly participating in cheating. This copying by collusion may result in score cancellation for BOTH candidates, including the copier and the one who permitted the copying to take place.

**SITUATION:** While taking the ABS exam, a candidate decides to take a restroom break and signals the proctor that she needs to leave the exam room. As she makes her way into the restroom, she notices that the proctor is busy conversing with another candidate and is ignoring her. She decides to quickly text her friend, who's already passed this exam, and try to confirm tetracycline's mechanism of action before she goes back to the exam room to resume her Part I.

WHEN ACCEPTABLE	WHEN NOT ACCEPTABLE	DECISION TIME
NEVER: It is never acceptable for candidates to keep cell phones with them during an NBEO exam, for many reasons, including the potential for cheating through texting.	NOT OK: Cell phones and all other electronic devices are prohibited from exam rooms. It has become possible for exam integrity issues to surface as a very few test-takers choose to cheat through phone calls, texts, email access, etc. To avoid these occurrences, candidates are required to leave electronic devices in the storage areas designated in their test venues.	Candidates are well-advised to follow the Test Day exam conduct rules posted on the NBEO website and leave all cell phones and other electronic devices where candidates are asked to store them during the exam. A candidate who decides to keep her cell phone with her while testing risks cancellation of her exam score and a bar on future testing. The NBEO, at its sole discretion, is entitled to withhold a score and impose a bar simply because a cell phone rings in a candidate's pocket. A ringing phone is a phone that is turned ON, and thus could have been used, for example, for texting during the exam or for taking photographs of the exam itself if the exam proctors became preoccupied with other candidates. The National Board has a zero-tolerance policy toward cheating and will take the steps necessary to neutralize unfair testing circumstances.

**SITUATION:** A candidate has taken the ABS exam several times and failed to pass the test. In desperation, he brings a large rectangular pencil eraser with him this time around and surreptitiously begins to fill it up with notes as he re-takes the exam. His intent is to create his own mini-library of ABS items from which to study in the future should he fail the exam this time.

WHEN ACCEPTABLE	WHEN NOT ACCEPTABLE	DECISION TIME
NEVER: Candidates are never allowed to copy any exam material while they are taking an NBEO exam, whether future use would be limited to that candidate only, or to only a few candidates, or to many candidates.	NOT OK: Copying NBEO exam items is not allowed under any circumstances, by any candidate. Direct copying from the exam is but one way to recreate these copyrighted items; any method of reproduction of exam items, in any manner, with or without the intent to share the stolen items, is strictly prohibited.	A candidate caught copying National Board exam items will find that his exam score is cancelled, and that he may be barred for some time interval from registering for and re-taking THAT exam, or potentially ALL NBEO exams. Though the exam score will be cancelled, a score of 0F* will be recorded on this candidate's NBEO Score Report. The reporting of 0F* may also result for candidates found to have engaged in other forms of cheating or violation of NBEO ethical rules. The "0F" score designates a failing score of zero, and the "*" indicates that this candidate was involved in some type of cheating or irregular behavior. This score is available to any state board that enquires about this individual's NBEO score history. The circumstances behind the 0F* score will be shared with the state board upon request. Candidates are advised not to attempt to copy exam items during an NBEO exam, or at any time thereafter.

## AFTER EXAMS

**SITUATION:** A candidate recites from memory an NBEO exam item, question and answers, to a professor and complains that this item’s material wasn’t taught in class. The candidate claims that, “I hadn’t heard anything about this topic before and think you need to add it to your lectures so that your students are better prepared for the exam.”

WHEN ACCEPTABLE	WHEN NOT ACCEPTABLE	DECISION TIME
NEVER: There is NO acceptable circumstance in which the reciting of an NBEO exam item to anybody is acceptable. However, it is OK for a candidate to make a professor aware of a particular subject matter topic that was missed in the curriculum and needs to be added, as long as the exam item itself is not described in any detail whatsoever.	NOT OK: It is never OK to quote an NBEO copyrighted item (question and/or answer options) to anyone, including optometry school staff, faculty, or administrators, even as a means to share that the scope of instruction needs to be broadened.	Candidates are expected to read the NBEO Ethics Policy on the NBEO website and then must pledge to agree and abide by the Candidate Exam Conduct and Exam Security Agreement prior to registering for any NBEO exam. They then are obliged to re-read a condensed version of this Agreement on Test Day, on the exam booklet. In this Policy and in these Agreements, it is clearly explained that candidates may not share exam items before or after the exam; the NBEO requires that candidates abide by these Agreements. Failure to do so may result in an ethics investigation, score cancellation, a bar from taking future exams, and/or legal action.

**SITUATION:** Several candidates leave the test site and collectively agree that the exam seemed awfully long for the time allowed; “Sure wish we’d had another half hour to finish up. I didn’t have nearly enough time to go back and check my answers as much as I wanted.”

WHEN ACCEPTABLE	WHEN NOT ACCEPTABLE	DECISION TIME
OK: Candidates discussing exam difficulty among themselves is fine as long as nobody brings up any specific exam questions and/ or answers for discussion.	NOT OK: NBEO considers “item theft” to be occurring if candidates compare recollections about specific copyrighted exam questions and answers. Though it is tempting for candidates to reconstruct exam items after the exam, candidates must be aware of the ethical prohibitions against doing so.	By the time candidates have registered for and taken NBEO exams, they have been requested to read the NBEO Ethics Policy on the NBEO website and then must have read and signed the Candidate Exam Conduct and Exam Security Agreement. Both documents clearly prohibit candidates from sharing exam material with anyone, at any time. NBEO expects all candidates to abide by their signed pledges to protect NBEO exam security. Those candidates who choose to discuss, share, or reproduce NBEO items (questions and/or answer options) may face serious consequences.

**SITUATION:** An optometry school faculty member sends out an email to all 3rd-year students inviting them to the annual After-ABS Meet-Up with faculty and administration members as the students leave Session 4 of their Part I exam next Wednesday. The gathering is always held at a restaurant near the school; the published party agenda is to celebrate the completion of the exam. Another of the school professors is widely known as a real champion of the student body and often reminds the students to “come to the restaurant after the exam and tell us about your exam experience.”

WHEN ACCEPTABLE	WHEN NOT ACCEPTABLE	DECISION TIME
OK: An interested query by compassionate staff, faculty, or administrative personnel asking about candidates’ general impression of the exam is expected; “I thought the exam was pretty hard but I probably passed it. It was really challenging to have to concentrate that hard for 2 days straight! I’m glad it’s over and can’t wait to get my score!”	NOT OK: It is NEVER OK for a school or college of optometry to sponsor a post-exam event specifically or unintentionally to interact with students to solicit NBEO exam questions and answers from the students. The NBEO prohibits all institutional staff, faculty, and administration members and all candidates from engaging in any sharing of exam items, images, cases, scripts, or any other exam material before or after an NBEO exam.	If any school/college representatives, such as staff, administrators, professors, or instructors approach candidates and request that candidates give them exam questions and/or answers, candidates are advised not to engage in this activity and should immediately report any such activities to the National Board on the NBEO website under the Ethics tab, Report an Ethics Violation section. Likewise, all school personnel are obliged to stop any candidate who wishes to share any copyrighted exam content, as sharing exam material may result in an ethics investigation with its potential consequences. All candidates who register and take NBEO exams will have read and signed the NBEO Ethics Policy and the Candidate Exam Conduct and Exam Security Agreement and will be held accountable for any theft of NBEO exam materials. There is no plausibility to a candidate’s claim that “I didn’t know it’s wrong to talk about board exam questions!” since it is not possible to register for an NBEO exam without having agreed to abide by the many ethical issues clearly defined within the NBEO Ethics Policy .

## AFTER EXAMS (CONT.)

**SITUATION:** After an NBEO exam, candidates discuss with other candidates the items they did not know how to answer. Candidates work together to recreate questions they thought were difficult to understand or to figure out what was being asked on certain items.

WHEN ACCEPTABLE	WHEN NOT ACCEPTABLE	DECISION TIME
<p>OK: Though there is no acceptable scenario in which it is OK to reconstruct an NBEO exam item with others, it is an excellent idea to individually research a subject matter topic after an exam to learn what was not known before the exam.</p>	<p>NOT OK: It is never acceptable, under any circumstance, to quote an NBEO copyrighted item (question and/or answer options) to anyone, including other candidates, even in an attempt to learn new material following an NBEO exam.</p>	<p>Candidates are required to read the NBEO Ethics Policy on the NBEO website and then must sign the Candidate Exam Conduct and Exam Security Agreement before registering for any NBEO exam. A condensed version of this Agreement is printed on each exam booklet to serve as a reminder of the ethical behavior required during NBEO exams and must be re-read by candidates before taking their exams. In this Policy and in these Agreements, it is clearly established that candidates may not access exam items before or after the exam. The NBEO expects candidates to abide by these Agreements. Failure to do so may result in serious consequences that may delay the professional licensure process.</p>

**SITUATION:** Two CSE candidates with morning exam slots finish the exam and leave the NCCTO. They stop at the Overstreet Mall McDonald's for a burger and run into two of their classmates who will take Part III that afternoon. One morning candidate says to the afternoon candidates, "My male patient had blonde hair, looked about 35 years old, had an Rx OU of +1.25 x -0.50 x 085, and IOPs of 15. His script said he had diabetes. Maybe you'll have the same patient."

WHEN ACCEPTABLE	WHEN NOT ACCEPTABLE	DECISION TIME
<p>NEVER: There is no acceptable situation in which it is OK for CSE candidates to share Part III patient information or any Part III details not presented on the NBEO website.</p>	<p>NOT OK: It is unethical for candidates who have completed the clinical exam to reveal standardized patient information to future CSE candidates. This prohibition includes, but is not limited to, sharing any case history details, scripts, lensometry findings, IOPs, blood pressure measurements, or any other patient data with other candidates.</p>	<p>Candidates who have finished their Part III Clinical Skills Exam are required to maintain strict patient confidentiality practices toward NCCTO standardized patients. Ethical interpersonal encounters are always the standard in every facet of pre-licensed and post-licensed professional optometric behavior, including the CSE. It is expected that all unpublished parameters and details of the Part III exam remain confidential at all times.</p>