



# **National Board of Examiners in Optometry (NBEEO®) Ethics Policy**

## National Board of Examiners in Optometry Ethics Policy

### The Bottom Line at the Top:

NBEO has a zero-tolerance policy with respect to cheating and other improper conduct at any point before, during, or after NBEO® examinations. Cheating or improper conduct includes any conduct which subverts, contravenes or is inconsistent with NBEO's purpose of ensuring that each Candidate's exam score accurately reflects the candidate's actual knowledge base and competence. For example, such purpose would be subverted by mere short-term memorization of actual confidential exam content, or by copying from another Candidate's answer sheet.

A primary concern of the **NBEO Ethics Policy** is the confidentiality and security of exam items and materials. All NBEO exam items (such as questions, answers, case scenarios, images and Clinical Skills Examination (CSE®) patient data, scripts, or other materials) contained in past, current, or future exams are strictly confidential and are the copyrighted property of NBEO. Confidentiality of exam items is especially important because past exam items are sometimes repeated on future exams. Any Candidate access to or use, copying or sharing of any such confidential exam content for any purpose whatsoever is cheating and improper conduct.

Some examples of cheating or other improper conduct include:

- *Gaining access to any NBEO exam items used on any past, current, or future exams. All such materials are strictly confidential and are copyrighted by NBEO.*
- *Copying another candidate's answer sheet or obtaining outside assistance during the exam (such as via cell phone contact), instead of working entirely independently on the exam.*
- *Using NBEO exam items in a candidate's own preparation for an exam or to assist others in exam preparation.*
- *Copying or reconstructing NBEO exam items or distributing or sharing NBEO exam items with anyone else (whether it be other candidates, optometry school faculty or administration, commercial exam preparation entities, or otherwise) for the purpose of preparing for any current or future exam or for the purpose assisting other candidates' preparation for any current or future exam.*
- *Encountering cheating or other improper conduct of others and **then failing to report such cheating or misconduct to the NBEO.***

Everyone who participates in the exam process, including students, professors, administrators, commercial exam preparation entities, etc. has an affirmative responsibility to avoid cheating and improper conduct of any nature and to report any known cheating or improper conduct by others.

Candidates who do not accept this reporting responsibility or who otherwise do not abide by this **NBEO Ethics Policy** may be subject to serious penalties, including score cancellation and/or being barred from taking future NBEO exams

The National Board of Examiners in Optometry (“NBE0”) has adopted this **NBE0 Ethics Policy** (hereinafter called the “**Ethics Policy**”) to establish rules regarding the proper conduct of exam candidates for all NBE0 examinations and to protect the confidentiality of all National Board exam items and materials in order to ensure the validity of candidates’ test scores and of the examination as a whole. This **Ethics Policy** is accompanied by the **Potential NBE0 Examination Security Dilemmas** (hereinafter called the “**Dilemmas**”) and the **NBE0 Candidate Exam Conduct and Exam Security Agreement** (hereinafter called the “**Candidate Agreement**”). The **Dilemmas** present various student-to-student or student-to-school-official scenarios followed by candidate reactions that would be considered ethically permissible as well as reactions that would be deemed unethical. The **Candidate Agreement** is a legally binding agreement which every exam candidate must sign as a precondition to registering for and taking any NBE0 examination.

All exam candidates should thoroughly review these three documents prior to signing the **Candidate Agreement**. Violations of the **Ethics Policy** and the **Candidate Agreement** are serious matters which go to the heart of the integrity of the National Board examination process and will not be tolerated by the NBE0. Any candidate found to have engaged in Improper Conduct as defined in the **Candidate Agreement** will be subject to NBE0 penalties and possible legal action, as explained in more detail in the section below entitled “**Penalties and Legal Liability for Improper Conduct.**”

**Definition of “exam item”:** The term “exam item” is used frequently throughout the **Ethics Policy**, the **Candidate Agreement**, and the **Dilemmas**. Wherever so used, “exam item” means and includes any content or material contained or to be contained in any past, current, or future NBE0 examination, as well as any exam content under any stage of development by NBE0, including without limitation any question or stem, in whole or in part; any answer option; any case scenario; any image; and any CSE data scripts or other scoreable material. All NBE0 exam items are the confidential and copyrighted property of NBE0 and may not be obtained, reviewed, copied, shared, or used by anyone for any purpose whatsoever. “Exam item” does not include any sample item posted on the NBE0’s website or any item released by NBE0 prior to the establishment of NBE0’s item database in 1981. Such materials are not confidential and may be reviewed, copied, shared or used for NBE0 exam preparation.

Preservation of examination integrity is of the utmost importance as the National Board strives to fulfill its primary mission, which is to protect the public health and safety by ensuring competence among the candidate population that passes NBE0 examinations. There is a direct link between NBE0 scores and the protection of public health and safety. State licensing boards and other licensing bodies are charged with ensuring that only qualified candidates become licensed to practice optometry. Such licensing boards rely on the results of NBE0 exams in assessing candidates’ qualification for a professional license to practice optometry. The NBE0 has the responsibility to ensure that each candidate’s exam score accurately reflects the candidate’s actual knowledge base and competence, as it is crucial to the validity and integrity of NBE0 exams to ensure that each successful candidate passes the exam based on the candidate’s own merit and without improper assistance or unfair advantage. A candidate who copies another test-taker’s answers or takes the exam based on memorization of confidential inside information does not demonstrate independent mastery of the knowledge base or competence required of a professional optometrist. (There are certain NBE0 exams, e.g., ACOMO, CPDO, standalone TMOD and standalone Injections) which are not directed toward initial licensure but rather are given for other specific purposes. The above general principles apply to those exams as well. The third party bodies for whom such exams are given rely on the results for assessment of the exam candidates, and the NBE0 has the responsibility to ensure that each candidate’s exam score accurately reflects the candidate’s actual knowledge base and competence, and that each successful candidate passes the exam based on the candidate’s own merit and without improper assistance or unfair advantage.)

The validity and integrity of NBE0 exams is dependent upon maintaining strict confidentiality and security of all NBE0 exam items. All NBE0 multiple-choice exams will contain some exam items that

have appeared on prior exams. This re-use of a certain number of prior exam items is necessary in order to enable the NBEO to employ various statistical and equating psychometric methods to assess whether, and to ensure that, the overall examination difficulty is stable over time. In addition, the cost of developing new exam items is substantial, and NBEO has a compelling interest in protecting its investment in its exam items in light of the organization's dedication both to protect the public welfare through examination validity and to maintain reasonable candidate exam fees over time.

For these reasons, all NBEO exam items are copyrighted by NBEO and are strictly confidential. All NBEO exam items, examination booklets, answer sheets, examination materials, grading materials, unpublished clinical skills exam materials, and all processes used in the NBEO written or clinical skills examinations are the sole and confidential property of NBEO and are protected by trade secret, contract, and federal copyright laws.

In general terms, NBEO exam items and other copyrighted and confidential NBEO exam materials, in whole or in part, may not be obtained, reviewed, copied, shared, or used by anyone for any purpose whatsoever, and such prohibited purposes include without limitation:

- For a candidate's own preparation for or taking of any current or future NBEO examination.
- For use by any other candidates in preparation for or taking of any current or future NBEO examination.
- For use by anyone else for the instruction or preparation of any candidate for any current or future NBEO examination.
- For purchase, sale, or other direct or indirect financial gain of a candidate or anyone else, or for any offer for or attempt at such purchase, sale, or other financial gain.

This prohibition applies to exam candidates, board preparation course instructors, publishers of study guides and other study materials, optometry school faculty and administration, and anyone else; and it applies at all phases of the NBEO examination process, whether occurring before, during or after an examination.

More specifically, as provided in the **Candidate Agreement**, any of the following acts or omissions are considered cheating and are violations of the **Ethics Policy** and the **Candidate Agreement**, and will subject the offending exam candidate to NBEO penalties and other possible legal liability:

- Receiving, accepting, obtaining, or otherwise gaining access to or being exposed to, any NBEO exam items, in whole or in part, for any purpose whatsoever (excepting a candidate's access or exposure to exam items while taking the exam itself, which is permissible for the sole purpose of such candidate taking that exam administration).
- Any review or use of NBEO exam items or other exam materials for any purpose whatsoever.
- Any copying, reproduction, reconstruction (whether by memory or otherwise), or compilation of NBEO exam items or other exam materials for any purpose whatsoever.
- Any publication, sharing, distribution, disclosure, or discussion of NBEO exam items or other exam materials for any purpose whatsoever.
- Any attempt or offer to do any of the above-described acts.
- The failure to promptly report to the NBEO any of the above-described conduct, or threatened conduct, after learning of or having reason to believe that such conduct has occurred or is threatened.

Any such activity is prohibited regardless of the means by which it occurs. This includes, without limitation, whether written or oral, and whether in person or via internet, intranet, chat room, message board, social media, lectures, class notes, exam review course materials, email, text, phone, electronic, mechanical or other means or forums.

NBEO makes available to candidates, on the NBEO website, an exam content outline, an exam content matrix, sample exam items, Part III Candidate Guide, and other materials. Such materials

are, of course, not confidential and are permitted and recommended for use by candidates in preparing for NBEO exams. However, candidates are warned that any NBEO exam items or materials not provided by NBEO on its website are confidential and may not be accessed or used in any manner for any purpose whatsoever.

Candidates are required to conduct themselves in an appropriate manner in regard to each and every aspect of National Board testing and exam preparation. In addition to prohibited access to and use of NBEO exam items and other exam materials as detailed above, Improper Conduct includes a broad range of inappropriate behavior and activities, including but not limited to the following:

- Any cheating, collaboration, disruptive behavior, or other improper conduct during the exam, or in connection with registration for or administration of the exam, such as:
  - *Providing any false, forged or misleading information or documentation in connection with registration for or administration of any exam or at any time during the registration of examination process.*
  - *Copying answers from another candidate.*
  - *Permitting another candidate to copy answers from you.*
  - *Communicating with any other person for the purpose of giving or receiving any prohibited assistance.*
  - *Any other conduct contrary to the requirement that a candidate must pass the exam based on the candidate's own merit and without improper assistance or unfair advantage.*
  - *Taking the examination while impersonating a candidate.*
  - *Permitting or requesting an impersonator to take the examination on a candidate's behalf.*
  - *Taking any NBEO entry-level licensing examination for a purpose other than the test taker's own licensure or taking any other NBEO examination for a purpose other than the purpose(s) for which such exam is administered.*
  - *Possession of or access to prohibited materials or property.*
  - *Removal of examination materials from the exam room.*
  - *Any conduct which disrupts the examination environment or process.*
  - *Verbally or physically abusing or harming, or threatening to abuse or harm, a proctor, another candidate, test center employees, NBEO personnel or their agents, including without limitation in telephone or written communications regarding registration, scheduling, exam administration, scores, or score reporting.*
  - *Providing any false, forged, or misleading information or documentation in connection with the procurement of score reports, transcripts, or any certificates issued by NBEO.*
- *Any conduct which violates, subverts, contravenes, or is inconsistent with:*
  - the integrity or security of any NBEO examination, or
  - *NBEO's purpose to ensure that a candidate's NBEO exam score accurately reflects the candidate's actual knowledge base and competence.*
- *Any other conduct deemed by NBEO in its sole discretion to be unethical, unprofessional, inappropriate, or improper in connection with the registration, taking, administration, integrity, or security of any NBEO examination.*
- *Any attempt to commit any Improper Conduct.*
- *Collaborating with or aiding or abetting others in Improper Conduct.*
- Failure to promptly report to NBEO any Improper Conduct, or threatened Improper Conduct, after learning of or having reason to believe that such conduct has occurred or is threatened.

NBEO considers professionalism to be an essential component of all optometry candidates' character and fitness to practice optometry. The NBEO will not tolerate any unprofessional behavior of a candidate related to the NBEO examination process that comes to its attention before, during, or after National Board exams. Each candidate's obligation to comply with the **Ethics Policy** and the **Candidate Agreement** is a matter solely of the candidate's own responsibility and professionalism. It

will *not* be a defense to any allegation of Improper Conduct by a candidate that such conduct was suggested, encouraged, orchestrated, endorsed, or approved by any educator, authority figure, or anyone else, or that such conduct is purported or believed to be, or is, a common or widespread practice.

Any violation of this **ETHICS POLICY** or any “Improper Conduct” as described above or as defined in the **CANDIDATE AGREEMENT** may subject the offending candidate to NBEO penalties and possibly other legal liability as explained in more detail in the **CANDIDATE AGREEMENT** and in the Section below entitled “**PENALTIES AND LEGAL LIABILITY FOR IMPROPER CONDUCT.**”

It should be emphasized that Improper Conduct can occur during any phase or aspect of the NBEO examination and preparation process, and not just on test day. The **Dilemmas** chart provides examples of various types of candidate misconduct during an assortment of circumstances occurring before, during, and after the examination. Candidates should carefully review these examples in conjunction with the **Ethics Policy** and the **Candidate Agreement** and govern themselves accordingly.

Following is a further explanation of NBEO ethical rules as applied to the particular phases or aspects of the NBEO examination and exam preparation process.

#### 1. **CANDIDATE CONDUCT PRIOR TO ANY NBEO EXAMINATION**

Candidate conduct before NBEO examinations can be broken down into three main phases:

- *school/college-based learning activities (i.e., in regular optometry school classes);*
- *examination application and registration;*
- *studying for the examination.*

### **SCHOOL/COLLEGE-BASED LEARNING ACTIVITIES**

NBEO expects and trusts that optometry schools/colleges are faithful to the highest ethical standards and to the principles embodied in this NBEO Ethics Policy. Since a substantial amount of candidate preparation for NBEO exams takes place in the optometry school setting, this section of the Policy points out examples of the types of conduct in the school/college setting that would be violations of this Ethics Policy if they occurred.

As noted above, candidate exposure to or misuse of copyrighted National Board exam items is prohibited by law, is not permitted, and is subject to NBEO penalties and legal action. If candidates have reason to believe that they encounter any copyrighted NBEO items or examination materials in lectures, classes, coursework, study guides, teaching notes, or other settings in optometry schools/colleges, they are responsible for informing the NBEO of such illegal activity so that the NBEO is able to take action to prevent further exploitation of its proprietary property and to protect the validity and integrity of its examination. The National Board maintains a confidential process to report such information at [www.optometry.org](http://www.optometry.org) under the tab, **Ethics**, and sub-section, **Report an Ethics Violation**. In the event that NBEO discovers the illegal exposure to or misuse of its own exam items and materials, candidates who have failed to inform the NBEO of said activities may be subject to NBEO penalties and legal action for such failure to report, as well as for their own exposure to NBEO exam items.

Candidates are prohibited from engaging in any reproduction or distribution of National Board exam items among other candidates, for study or any other purposes, at their home optometry schools/colleges, or other schools/colleges of optometry, or anywhere else. Candidates are prohibited from reading, studying from, or using in any other manner, previously reproduced NBEO exam items that are provided to them by other candidates, instructors, teachers, or any faculty members at their home schools/colleges of optometry, or from other candidates or faculty members at other schools/colleges of optometry, or from anyone else. It is improper for candidates to review, study from, or be exposed to courses, materials, or lectures offered by any such educator or institution if such courses, materials, or lectures contain or purport to contain NBEO exam items or NBEO

materials (aside from information published on the NBEO website). It is also improper for candidates or anyone else to provide NBEO exam items or materials to any such educator or institution. Candidates who choose to engage in such proven disallowed activities will be subject to NBEO penalties and legal action. Further, candidates are hereby warned that if any institution, educator, or anyone else claims to be providing NBEO exam items or any other material that is held out to be, or under the circumstances is likely to be understood by the recipient, as inside information on NBEO exams, such institution or person is acting contrary to NBEO policy and in violation of NBEO proprietary rights.

School-wide pre-examination exposure to previously copied and reproduced exam items gives those candidates with access to such materials an unfair advantage over candidates from other schools that lack the opportunity to study this unauthorized exam material. For example, if an institution or an instructor improperly provides confidential exam items to students on a widespread basis, that will create substantial doubt as to whether the collective school-wide examination scores accurately reflect that school's candidates' knowledge base. A school-wide pre-examination exposure might also occur without the involvement of school personnel, such as by private collaboration of students. In deference to the concerns of the various licensing boards of optometry as they evaluate optometric licensure requirements for the protection of the public health and safety, the potential disparity between candidates' knowledge levels and their scores, following group exposure to stolen exam material, must be considered. In the event of widespread exposure to stolen NBEO exam items, the National Board may determine that the validity and integrity of the affected examination as a whole are compromised, and therefore, the resulting scores cannot be relied upon for licensing purposes. In such case, the scores of all candidates within the affected group may be cancelled. When candidates are discovered by the NBEO to have been exposed to confidential NBEO exam material, scores will not be reported to candidates or licensing boards, and candidates may be subject to other NBEO penalties and legal action.

## EXAMINATION APPLICATION AND REGISTRATION

The provision by the candidate of false or forged information during the application and registration process for any NBEO examination is prohibited and may lead to serious consequences. If and when discovered and proven, such false documentation will result in score cancellation and other possible penalties, regardless of the length of time between the exam date and the date of discovery. In addition, the NBEO, in its sole and absolute discretion exercised in good faith, may refuse to administer or provide any examination to any individual as a consequence of improper conduct in the application or registration process.

## STUDYING FOR THE EXAMINATION

As emphasized above, candidates should be aware that all exam items, examination booklets, answer sheets, examination materials, grading materials, unpublished clinical skills exam materials, and all processes used in the NBEO written or clinical skills examinations are NBEO proprietary and confidential property, are the sole property of the NBEO, and are protected by United State copyright laws. Candidates have no right to any access to any NBEO exam items or other examination materials as they study for NBEO examinations, even if such exposure is endorsed, encouraged, or committed by optometry school/college instructors, professors, faculty, administration, other authority figures, or anyone else. Any candidate who obtains, reviews, studies from, or otherwise uses confidential NBEO exam items and materials in preparation for an NBEO exam or who copies, publishes, discusses, or shares any such exam items and materials with anyone else will be subject to NBEO penalties and legal action.

Custody and control of the examination and all examination materials shall remain solely in the hands of authorized proctors or other authorized agents or employees of the NBEO. Candidates may have access to the examination only while it is being administered and only under the supervision of authorized proctors. Pre-examination access to or discussion of the examination or examination material while studying is strictly prohibited, as is review of such NBEO exam items or materials by candidates or by any person on behalf of the candidates, prior to the exam.

The NBEO has no affiliation with any commercial entity that claims to provide any NBEO test preparation courses or materials. The NBEO does not sanction, endorse, or approve of any such program or information. It is improper for candidates to review, study from, or be exposed to courses, materials or lectures offered by any such commercial entity if such courses, materials, or lectures contain or purport to contain NBEO exam items or NBEO materials (aside from information published on the NBEO website or items released to the public by NBEO prior to 1981). It is also improper for candidates or anyone else to provide NBEO exam items or materials to any such commercial test preparation entity. Candidates who choose to engage in such disallowed activities will be subject to NBEO penalties and legal action. Candidates are also responsible for informing the NBEO of such illegal activity by any commercial entity offering or claiming to offer NBEO exam materials so that action may be taken by the NBEO to prevent further illegal use of its proprietary property. Unauthorized use of NBEO exam material may be reported through the NBEO website by clicking on **Ethics**, then sub-section **Report an Ethics Violations**.

Further, candidates are hereby warned that if any commercial test preparation entity or agent thereof who claims to be providing NBEO exam items or any other material that is held out to be, or under the circumstances is likely to be understood by the recipient, as inside information on NBEO exams, such entity or agent is acting contrary to NBEO policy and in violation of NBEO proprietary rights.

## 2. CANDIDATE CONDUCT DURING ANY NBEO EXAMINATION

Candidates are expected to know and observe the following basic Exam Conduct information applicable to all time spent in NBEO examination facilities. Non-compliance with any of these rules may be considered Improper Conduct and may result in the imposition of NBEO penalties:

- a. *Candidates should arrive at the test center 30 minutes before any NBEO written examination's posted start time and 15 minutes prior to a clinical skills examination's posted start time.*
  - o *For written exams, candidates who arrive late will be admitted to the exam room but will be given no extra time.*
  - o *For the clinical exam, candidates who arrive before the conclusion of the Candidate Orientation and sign the appropriate waiver will be admitted at the discretion of the NCCTO staff, though these candidates technically will have forfeited their exam appointments.*
  - o *For computer-based exams, rules regarding late arrival are established by the Pearson VUE Test Centers and are available online.*
- b. *Candidates will be observed at all times while taking examinations and during all breaks.*
  - o *For written exams, observation will be done through direct monitoring by the test center proctors.*
  - o *For the clinical and CBT exams, observation will be achieved through direct monitoring by the test center proctors as well as video recordings of examination sessions.*
- c. NO electronic devices such as cell phones, beepers, any other communication devices, laptops, or any other electronic gadgets are permitted in any examination room.
- d. Candidates who are easily distracted by noise may request earplugs from the test proctor; personal earplugs and/or headphones are not permitted in the testing center.
- e. No books, pens, coats, wallets, purses, watches, or other personal items are permitted in the Pearson VUE testing room.
- f. Sweaters or light jackets will be inspected before being allowed into the testing room. Candidates may be requested to turn pockets inside out to show they are empty before entering the exam room, at check-in and after all breaks.

- g.** Candidates may not bring paper into NBEO exam rooms. Scratch paper is provided during exams that require its use and is collected at the end of the exams. All study notes are prohibited from test sites. No paper items may be left in clothing pockets, hats, hoods, linings, pants cuffs, etc.
- h.** Guests will not be permitted to wait in the exam room (for written exams) or test center (for clinical skills and CBT exams) or to contact candidates while they are taking exams.
- i.** *Policy regarding food, beverages, and water:*

  - *For written exams, food and drink (other than water) may be kept in personal bags or purses which are stored in lockers, in the hallway, or at the front of the exam room during the exam. During Part I ABS exams, water is permitted at examination desks in authorized bottles (labels must be removed from bottles, which must have pop-up-type tops to prevent spillage). Water bottles are NOT permitted at desks in the Pearson VUE test centers but may be kept in lockers. Stored food and drink may be accessed during supervised breaks authorized by exam proctors. Supervised breaks may be taken as needed by discretely signaling a proctor and quietly requesting a break. An exam proctor will remain with a candidate for the entire duration of the break, including during restroom breaks. No extra time will be given to candidates who take unscheduled breaks.*
  - *For the clinical skills exam, food and drink (including bottled water) may be kept in lockers in the testing facility. There are hallway water fountains for use by CSE candidates during the exam. Candidates with special dietary/nutritional needs relating to a medical condition (e.g., diabetes) are encouraged to make efficient use of the standard 5-minute breaks between exam stations. If these breaks do not provide sufficient time to consume food/drink, prior arrangements must be made by applying for a disability test accommodation at least 11 weeks prior to your CSE test date for a long-term, ADA-eligible disability or as soon as possible for a recent-onset, non-ADA-type condition.*
  - *For computer-based exams, rules regarding food and drink are established by the Pearson VUE Test Centers and are available online.*
- j.** One form of identification must be presented at check-in prior to the start of the exam, except that two forms of identification will be required at Pearson VUE test centers. No admittance will be permitted without the proper identification. Both forms of identification must be current (expired IDs are not acceptable) and signed. One form of identification must include a recent photograph, and the name on it must be identical to the name used to register. The NBEO also reserves the right to take such other measures as it deems appropriate in any particular circumstances to verify the identity of a candidate.
- k.** The provision by the candidate of false or forged information during examination admittance on Test Day is prohibited and will lead to serious implications if detected. If and when discovered and proven, such false documentation will result in score cancellation and possibly other NBEO penalties, which may include a bar from taking NBEO examinations. Any potential penalty(ies) will be applied regardless of the length of time between the exam date and the date of discovery of the false or forged information.
- l.** *At Pearson VUE centers, if you must leave the testing room for any reason (e.g., to use the restroom), you will be required to repeat your palm scan prior to re-entering the test room.*
- m.** *Smoking is not permitted in test rooms at any time.*
- n.** *Use of a cell phone or other communication device is expressly prohibited in examination rooms, during restroom or other types of breaks, or at any time while the examination is ongoing. Candidates caught using electronic devices to call, text, twitter, photograph exam materials, or caught engaging in any other use of such devices, may be subject to score cancellation and other NBEO penalties.*

- o.** Use of foul, vulgar, or politically incorrect language is at all times prohibited in or near all National Board test sites.
- p.** Candidates are prohibited from addressing NBEO exam agents (e.g., proctors) aggressively, with hostility, threateningly, flirtatiously, or with any demeanor other than respectful and appropriate for professional board exam test-taking.