I. Purpose
   A. The principal purposes of the American Board of Ophthalmology (ABO) are to determine the eligibility of candidates who seek certification by the ABO, to conduct examinations of eligible candidates, and to issue certificates to those who meet the ABO’s requirements and pass its examinations. The intent of both initial certification and maintenance of certification (MOC) is to assure the public that an ophthalmologist certified by the ABO has successfully completed an approved educational program and evaluation process designed to assess the medical knowledge, clinical judgment, and professionalism required to provide high-quality patient care.
   B. The Rules and Regulations apply to all candidates and diplomates.
   C. The ABO may amend the Rules and Regulations from time to time in such manner as it deems appropriate. All amendments will be effective from the date of adoption.

II. Mission and Principles
   A. Mission. To serve the public by certifying ophthalmologists through the verification of competencies.
   B. Principles.
      1. Certification promotes and recognizes aspirational goals, not minimum standards.
      2. Certification is a lifelong process that promotes excellence through continuous improvement.
      3. Certification should be voluntary, as our founders intended.
      4. Certification should be challenging and meaningful, yet not burdensome to busy practitioners.
      5. ABO diplomates are professionals and colleagues, and we honor them accordingly.
      6. The ABO stewards its finances with integrity and transparency.
      7. The ABO is an independent certifying board of practicing ophthalmologists who collaborate whenever possible with professional societies, organizations, and other stakeholders who strive to advance excellence.

III. Nature of Certificate
   A. Until June 30, 1992, the ABO issued a Certificate that was not time-limited in its validity. The Certificate stated: The American Board of Ophthalmology hereby certifies that: Dr. (Name) has satisfactorily completed an accepted course of graduate study and clinical work and has successfully passed the examinations in Ophthalmology conducted under the authority of this Board. (Date and Seal) Issued: Date, Day, Year; Signatures of Directors of the ABO.
   B. A Certificate issued by the ABO on or after July 1, 1992 expires ten (10) years following the date of its issuance. During the ten (10) year period, the diplomate must satisfactorily complete a renewal process as defined by the ABO to obtain a new certificate upon expiration of the then-current certificate, which will expire ten (10) years thereafter. The current certificate states: The American Board of Ophthalmology hereby certifies that: Dr. (Name) has satisfactorily completed an accepted course of graduate study and clinical work and has successfully passed the examinations in Ophthalmology conducted under the authority of this Board. (Date and Seal) Issued: Date, Day, Year; This certificate is valid through December 31, Year; Signatures of Directors of the ABO.

IV. Requirements for Initial Certification
   A. Professional Training
      1. A candidate must have graduated from an allopathic or osteopathic medical school accredited by the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME). If a candidate graduated from a medical school located in a country other than the United States or
Canada, the candidate must submit a certificate from the Educational Commission of Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG).

A candidate entering an ophthalmology training program must have undertaken a postgraduate year 1 (PGY-1) in a program in the United States accredited by the Accreditation Council of Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) or a program in Canada accredited by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons. The resident must have primary responsibility for patient care in fields of emergency medicine, family medicine, internal medicine, neurology, obstetrics and gynecology, pediatrics, or surgery.

For programs in the United States using either an integrated or joint preliminary year/ophthalmology format, the PGY-1 must comprise direct patient care experiences and must include nine months of broad experience in direct patient care and three months (no more, no less) of experience in ophthalmology. This experience must take place in diverse settings. Residents must participate in the diagnosis and treatment of patients with varied diseases and conditions. Starting July 1, 2021, either an integrated or joint preliminary year format will be required.

2. The program chair of the initial ophthalmology training program attended by a candidate must verify and attest that the candidate has completed an accredited PGY-1 in the United States or in Canada prior to the start of the ophthalmology residency.

A candidate must satisfactorily complete an entire formal graduate residency training program in ophthalmology (PGY-4 or higher) approved by the Ophthalmology Review Committee and accredited by the ACGME. For applicants who are graduates of United States programs (PGY-4 or higher), education in ophthalmology must be provided in one of two formats:

   a) Integrated ophthalmology format: All 48 months of education are under the authority and direction of the ophthalmology program director.

   b) Joint preliminary year/ophthalmology format: This includes a preliminary year of graduate medical education followed by 36 months in an ophthalmology program.

For applicants who are graduates of Canadian programs (PGY-5 or higher), education in ophthalmology must be 48 months long and provided by a Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada-accredited residency program. The candidate’s department chair and program director are required to verify satisfactory completion of an entire formal graduate ophthalmology residency training program in medical and surgical care.

3. When a resident’s training has occurred in more than 1 residency program, an interim evaluation must be completed by the initial program. Less than 6 months’ service in an accredited program is not acceptable as part of the required training in ophthalmology. It is the responsibility of the second (or final) program to obtain the interim evaluation from the initial program or a subsequent program. The second (or final) program, in its satisfactory completion document, must evaluate all competencies, taking into account any deficiencies noted in the interim evaluation by the preceding program(s).

4. It is the responsibility of the candidate to confirm, with the assistance of the department chair and program director, the ACGME approval status of a residency program. Details
of the categories of approval are provided in the ACGME Manual of Structure and Functions, as amended or updated. If a residency program loses approval or is withdrawn during a candidate’s training, the candidate must complete the remaining required number of months of training in another ACGME-accredited program.

The American Board of Ophthalmology recognizes that leaves of absence for vacation, medical issues, parental leave, or other personal reasons are essential for resident well-being and may be granted at the discretion of the institution’s department chair and/or residency program director. Residency training in ophthalmology traditionally comprises 48 months following graduation from medical school, including a 12-month internship and at least 36 months of ACGME-accredited ophthalmology training.

To be eligible to sit for the ABO written and oral examinations, the board requires that a satisfactory rating be confirmed by the residency program for each of the ACGME competencies. Depending on the length of absence or the inability to accomplish residency educational goals during the traditional period, the required time for graduate medical education may be extended accordingly. Residency program leadership and the institutional graduate medical education offices, not the ABO, determine the need for any extension of residency training and the ultimate completion date for each resident.

B. Licensure

1. The candidate must maintain a valid and unrestricted license to practice medicine in all states in the United States, its territories, and/or Canadian provinces in which the physician holds a license. A candidate who does not have a valid and unrestricted license in each state, territory, and/or Canadian province in which the physician has a license is not eligible to sit for an ABO examination.

2. A candidate shall be deemed to meet the requirements of Section IV.B.1 if and for so long as the person is on full-time active duty at a military installation as a physician in any branch of the United States armed services and has a valid and unrestricted military medical license.

C. Examination of Candidates

To become Board Certified, each candidate must pass a Written Qualifying Examination (WQE) and an Oral Examination administered by the ABO.

A. The WQE is a 250 multiple-choice question examination designed to evaluate the breadth and depth of the basic science and clinical knowledge of candidates who have satisfactorily completed an accredited program of education in ophthalmology. It is necessary to pass this examination before being admitted to the Oral Examination. The WQE is administered at nationally-distributed test centers on one assigned day in an approximately 5-hour testing period that includes a tutorial and break time. Approved candidates are provided with the information necessary to schedule a test appointment and are responsible for scheduling a test appointment at a test center. The topics covered in the WQE include:

a) Cataract and Anterior Segment
b) Cornea and External Disease
c) Glaucoma
d) Neuro-Ophthalmology
e) Oculoplastic Surgery and Orbit
f) Ophthalmic Pathology and Oncology
g) Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus
h) Refractive Management and Optics
i) Retina and Vitreous
j) Uveitis

B. The Oral Examination is the second evaluation in the initial Board Certification process. Due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on travel and large gatherings, the American Board of Ophthalmology will administer the Oral Examination in an online format. The virtual Oral Examination, hereinto referred to as the Oral Examination, will preserve the original case-based format of the face-to-face oral examination but will be administered online.

C. During the Oral Examination, a candidate is presented with patient management problems (PMPs), each of which represents a patient or clinical situation, and is asked to identify how s/he would care for that patient. Oral Examinations are given by appointment within a half-day period (four hours). The half-day period is divided into three 50-minute, two-topic examinations to allow multiple examiners to assess the candidate’s patient care ability (six total topics). The pooled group of examiners is referred to as a panel. The paired examination topic areas are:

- Anterior Segment of the Eye; Optics, Visual Physiology, and Correction of Refractive Errors
- Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus; External Eye and Adnexa
- Neuro-Ophthalmology and Orbit; Posterior Segment of the Eye

D. The administration and grading of all examinations shall be at the sole discretion of the ABO. All examinations shall be administered and graded without discrimination to ensure a fair and unbiased examination for each candidate. The candidate shall be notified of his/her test results by the Chief Executive Officer via email and hard copy letter to the mailing address provided by the candidate. The decision of the ABO as to the results of an examination shall be final and conclusive. To ensure confidentiality, examination results will not be given over the telephone.

V. ABO Eligibility Timeframe

1. The ABO Eligibility Policy requires successful completion of Board Certification requirements within 7 years of residency graduation.

   A candidate who successfully passes the WQE then must take and pass the Oral Examination to be Board Certified. During the 7-year eligibility period, a candidate is considered and may refer to himself/herself as Board Eligible and can:

   a) sit for the WQE each time it is offered until successful; and
   b) sit for the Oral Examination, after successful completion of the WQE.

2. If a candidate fails to register by the deadline for an examination that is scheduled in the final year of his/her eligibility, s/he is no longer considered Board Eligible following the registration deadline date.
3. A candidate who does not qualify for Board Certification within the timeframe described above may continue to pursue Board Certification, however s/he will not be considered Board Eligible by the American Board of Ophthalmology and the American Board of Medical Specialties and may not represent himself/herself in this manner.

IV. Applications for Board Certification
   A. A candidate who wishes to be certified by the ABO shall complete an application on the ABO web site and must agree to be bound by the ABO Rules and Regulations. Information regarding how to access the application system on the ABO web site, including log-in information, can be obtained from the department chair or program director of an accredited residency program, the ABO office, or the ABO website (abop.org).
   B. A candidate who wishes to be considered for the WQE must apply (including submission of all supporting data and verifications furnished directly by others) by the posted deadline. If a completed application and all required supporting data are submitted after the posted deadline, the application will not be valid, and the application fee shall be returned (less an administration fee).
   C. Each application timely received by the ABO shall be reviewed for purposes of determining whether the application is complete. The application shall be considered complete only when all supporting data required by the application, including all verifications, are received. The ABO will notify the candidate of any deficiencies in the application, but this notice shall not extend the filing deadline. If an application is not complete, the application shall not be considered or acted upon for any purpose until it is fully completed in the ABO’s determination.
   D. The ABO may make or cause to be made inquiries of all persons and institutions reasonably believed to have information bearing upon or relevant to a determination of whether the candidate meets the ABO’s requirements for examination, including, without limitation, persons and institutions named in the application.
   E. If the ABO determines that a candidate who has applied does not meet the ABO’s requirements for examination, the candidate will be notified of the reason(s) why the candidate does not meet the ABO’s requirements for examination. The notice may include recommendation(s) for the candidate to remedy each determined deficiency and the notice may require a response. A candidate has the right to appeal the decision in writing. A candidate’s appeal will be reviewed by the Credentials Committee at its next regularly scheduled meeting, which may jeopardize the ability of the candidate to sit for that examination if that meeting were to occur after the application deadline. A determination by the Credentials Committee is final and conclusive. A subsequent application submitted by the candidate will not be considered by the ABO if it exhibits any of the deficiencies previously identified by the Credentials Committee.
   F. Candidates who apply to take the WQE and Oral Examination must affirm that the information they provide in their applications is true and accurate. If (1) any misrepresentation is discovered in the application or in any other information submitted to the ABO or in the identity of a person applying to take or taking an examination, (2) any financial or other benefit is offered by a candidate to any director, officer, employee, proctor, or other agent or representative of the ABO in order to obtain a right, privilege or benefit not usually granted by the ABO to similarly situated candidates, or (3) any irregular behavior before, during, or after an examination including, but not limited to, copying questions or answers, sharing information, questions, or answers, using notes, or re-creating all or portions of the examination by memory or otherwise giving or receiving aid, is discovered by observation, statistical analysis of answer files, or otherwise, the candidate shall be given written notice of
the charges and an opportunity to respond in accordance with the procedures set forth in the Rules and Regulations. If the ABO determines that a violation has occurred, the ABO may permanently bar the person(s) involved in the violation from all future examinations, invalidate the results of prior examinations taken by the person(s), withhold or revoke the Certificate of the person(s), and/or take other action. If sanctions are imposed pursuant to the Rules and Regulations, the ABO may notify interested third parties of its action and may post a summary of the action and the name of the candidate or diplomate on its website or in other publications or communications.

G. If the ABO has reasonable grounds to believe that irregular behavior may have compromised the integrity of an examination, the ABO will make every reasonable effort to withhold the scores of only those candidates directly implicated in the irregularity or who may have benefited from the irregularity. Nevertheless, in some instances, the evidence of irregularity, though sufficiently strong to cast doubt on the validity of scores, may not enable the ABO to identify the specific candidate(s) involved in the irregularity. In such circumstances, the ABO may withhold the scores of candidate(s) not directly implicated in the irregularity and, if necessary, may require those candidates to take an additional examination later to ensure the validity of all scores.

H. The WQE, the Oral Examination, and other assessment instruments such as Quarterly Questions® (QQ®) are copyrighted by the ABO, and the ABO will strictly enforce its rights with respect to these materials. The examination materials (questions and visuals) are the sole property of the ABO and shall not be removed from the test area or reproduced in any way. Any reproduction of the examination materials, in whole or in part, is illegal and may subject the candidate to sanctions. No candidate shall be permitted, while taking a WQE, an Oral Examination, or Quarterly Questions®, to record, copy, transmit, or retain any part or all of the examination on any device of any nature whatsoever. No recorder, camera, cellular phone, or any device that has the capability to record, copy, transmit, or retain pictures, text, or sound may be brought into a WQE or Oral Examination. Notes, scratch paper, textbooks, calculators, and/or other reference materials are also prohibited. Any attempt to recreate any portion of an examination or assessment exercise from memory or otherwise is strictly prohibited.

I. Candidates must electronically agree to these rules during the examination registration process.

J. Candidates who participate in the virtual oral examination must agree to the policies and processes described in the ABO Virtual Oral Examination 2020 Procedures Manual (Appendix A) and sign the Candidate Agreement (Appendix B).

J. All applications and registration information for the WQE and separately for the Oral Examination shall be accompanied by a fee payable to the ABO in the amount of the application fee then in effect. No application will be complete until the fee has been received. A candidate who cancels or fails to appear for a WQE or Oral Examination for which s/he has been scheduled will not be scheduled for another such test until s/he pays to the ABO a new fee in the amount then in effect. The fees shall be established by the ABO Board of Directors based on the actual and anticipated costs of the ABO in the examination of applicants and the administration of its business.

VI. Participation in Maintenance of Certification
A. In accordance with standards established by the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS), of which the American Board of Ophthalmology (ABO) is a founding member, all certificates issued by the ABO since 1992 have been time-limited, that is, valid for a period of
10 years. Diplomates may renew their certificate through satisfactory completion of a 4-part process that conforms to the ABMS standards for Maintenance of Certification (MOC).

- **Part I: Professionalism and Professional Standing:** maintain a valid and unrestricted license to practice medicine in all states, territories and/or Canadian provinces in which s/he holds a license;

- **Part II: Lifelong Learning and Self-Assessment:** Diplomates must earn and attest to completion of at least 250 AMA PRA Category 1 CME Credits™ over the 10 years of their current certification. CME must include:
  - At least 200 CME credits relevant to ophthalmology
  - At least 80 CME credits designed for self-assessment
  - At least one patient safety activity

- **Part III: Assessment of Knowledge, Judgment, and Skills:** For at least 5 years out of the 10-year renewal cycle: achieve a passing score on a cognitive, longitudinal assessment; and complete at least 10 article-based questions; and

- **Part IV: Improvement in Medical Practice (IMP):** Improvement in Medical Practice activities are designed to encourage ongoing assessment and improvement of patient care in ophthalmology. The ABO offers a menu of options for completing this requirement.

MOC requirements are based on the diplomate’s certification expiration date. Diplomates should log on to the ABO web site to review their requirements.

**B. MOC Access and Fees:** Diplomates access all MOC activities via the ABO website. To access the ABO website, diplomates must log in with a current email address and a password. Diplomates are required to pay the MOC annual fee prior to accessing any MOC activities or requirements. The ABO is committed to keeping the monetary and administrative expenses of the MOC process reasonable. The ABO cannot reduce or waive fees for individual diplomates, however diplomates in active duty United States military service may request a 50% discount on MOC fees. The ABO understands that its diplomates are busy practitioners and the ABO makes every effort to communicate important dates and deadlines via its web site, direct mail, and other communications.

**C. Non-Time-Limited Diplomates:** Diplomates who hold non-time-limited certificates issued before 1992 are eligible to participate in MOC without affecting their original certificate, as follows:

1. **Non-time-limited diplomates who wish to recertify can participate in the MOC “Fast Track” Process by completing all MOC requirements within a 3-year timeframe.** Upon successful completion of these steps, non-time-limited diplomates will earn a new voluntary certificate, valid for 10 years, and will be listed as "Participating in MOC" on the ABO's online “Verify a Physician” tool. The diplomate’s original certificate does not expire.

2. **Previously Certified Diplomates:** Ophthalmologists whose ABO certification has lapsed can participate in the MOC “Fast Track” Process by completing all MOC requirements within a 3-year timeframe. Upon successful completion of these steps, former diplomates will earn a new voluntary certificate, valid for 10 years, and will be listed as "Participating in MOC" on the ABO's online “Verify a Physician” tool.

**D. Certificate Extension:** Diplomates with certificates expiring in 2020, 2021, and 2022, and who are up to date in all other MOC activities, may be eligible for a one-year extension of their time-limited certificate in order to successfully complete the Quarterly Questions program. This policy applies only to diplomates who are:
1. Transitioning to the 5-year the Quarterly Questions requirement (defined as possessing a certificate expiring December 31, 2020 through December 31, 2022).

2. Without a successful Demonstration of Ophthalmic Cognitive Knowledge (DOCK) examination in their current 10-year certification period.

3. Up to date on all other MOC requirements as of year 10, including all activities and fees as indicated on the MOC status page. Being up to date in Quarterly Questions is defined as having attempted all available years of questions.

4. Diplomates must request extensions in writing by emailing the ABO at moc@abop.org at least 30 days prior to certificate expiration. An extension is valid for one calendar year, during which time the ABO will continue to report the diplomate’s status as “board certified.” However, no hard-copy certificate with a new expiration date will be issued. During the extension year, diplomates are required to pay the annual MOC fee.

5. Diplomates who successfully complete all required activities will receive a new 10-year time-limited certificate, effective January 1 of the following year. Diplomates who do not complete MOC by the close of the extension period will no longer be board certified and will be listed on the ABO website and its directories as not certified.

6. Diplomates whose certification has lapsed may obtain a new certificate by completing all remaining MOC requirements within 3 years of the expiration of their most recent certificate (including any extensions granted).

VIII. Public Reporting of Certification and MOC Participation

A. The ABO provides a service on its website that allows the public to search for Board Certified ophthalmologists and to verify both Board Certification and current participation in MOC. The information details the physician’s certification history with the ABO. The information displayed is as follows:
   1. Name: Last, First, Middle
   2. Location: City, State, Zip Code
   3. MOC Participation: current participation is represented as a badge of professional achievement and the statement, “Participating in MOC.” If a Diplomate has a non-time-limited certificate and is not voluntarily participating in MOC, the badge of professional achievement and text are not displayed.

B. Certification Status
   1. Certified - The ophthalmologist holds a non-time-limited certificate. Physicians certified prior to 1992 were awarded with certificates before the recertification program was introduced. Therefore, these ophthalmologists are encouraged, but not required, to participate in the Maintenance of Certification program.
   2. Certified - The ophthalmologist holds a time-limited certificate. Physicians certified in 1992 and thereafter are required to recertify every 10 years through Maintenance of Certification – a program of lifelong learning and quality improvement.
   3. Not Certified – The ophthalmologist is not ABO certified.
   4. Participating in MOC - Ophthalmologists who are participating in Maintenance of Certification are Board Certified and engaged in a structured program of lifelong learning designed to help them stay up to date in practice. This patient-centered process includes continuing medical education, patient safety activities, knowledge assessments, and quality improvement programs. Like certification, MOC is not
required to practice medicine, but all ophthalmologists certified in 1992 and thereafter must participate in the program as a condition of their certification. Certified ophthalmologists who are completing the MOC process on time, and in accordance with the program rules, are listed as Participating in MOC.

5. Certification History: Dates of initial certification and recertification.

C. Public Reporting of Certification - Other Statuses

1. Clinically Inactive: The ABO recognizes that some diplomates leave the practice of ophthalmology but may wish to remain ABO Certified. Diplomates who have become clinically inactive and are therefore unable to complete the Improvement in Medical Practice Activity requirement of MOC may continue to remain ABO Certified by completing the other MOC activities during the MOC cycle. Clinically inactive status is determined by the ABO on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the diplomate. If a diplomate designated by the ABO as clinically inactive returns to clinical activity in any capacity, the diplomate must report this to the ABO in writing immediately. Diplomates who are approved for this designation, will be reported as “ABO Certified – Clinically Inactive.” This designation will be printed on the diplomate’s ABO Certificate and will be publicly reported to the ABMS and will be noted as such on the ABO’s “Verify a Physician” webpage.

2. Retired
   b. Retired status is available to diplomates who have voluntarily concluded medical practice. A diplomate who is no longer engaged in the active practice of ophthalmology may notify the ABO to establish Retired status by submitting a form to the ABO office acknowledging that s/he is no longer engaged in the practice of ophthalmology. Diplomates will be publicly reported as “Retired” along with their certification history.

   a. Retired status is not available to diplomates who have involuntarily suspended practice, for example, to avoid a disciplinary action. Retired status is also not available to diplomates who voluntarily suspended practice with the intention to return at a later date. This includes but is not limited to temporary leaves of absence or temporary interruption of current practice for illness or disability.

   c. If a diplomate designated by the ABO as retired returns to clinical practice in any capacity, the diplomate must report this to the ABO in writing immediately. Requests to modify a diplomate’s retired status will be evaluated by the ABO and determinations made on a case-by-case basis.

3. Revocation
   a. If the ABO revokes or suspends a diplomate’s certificate, places the diplomate on probation, or imposes conditions upon the diplomate’s certificate, the ABO may also require the diplomate to surrender his/her certificate and copies thereof to the ABO immediately upon notice of the determination. Suspension or probation of a diplomate’s certificate may be elected by the ABO in lieu of revocation if the ABO wishes to mirror the actions of a licensing entity, awaits the outcome of an investigation or a disciplinary proceeding, or for other reasons. During a period of suspension, the diplomate is reported
as not certified. During a period of probation, the diplomate is reported as certified but on probation, as long as any conditions of probation are met.

b. The ABO may notify the ABMS and any other party of any action taken by the ABO, and it may post a summary of the action on its website and/or publish a summary or a complete copy of the decision itself.

IX. Candidate and Diplomate Standard

A. A candidate or diplomate must maintain a valid and unrestricted license to practice medicine in all states in the United States, its territories, and/or Canadian provinces in which the physician holds a license. A candidate or diplomate shall be deemed to meet the requirements of the previous sentence if and for so long as the person is on full-time active duty at a military installation as a physician in any branch of the United States armed services, has a valid and unrestricted military medical license, and is providing medical care and treatment on the military installation to members of the United States armed services and eligible recipients.

B. Any restriction or sanction or communication with respect to a candidate or diplomate’s medical license, administrative or otherwise, can be reviewed by the ABO.

C. A candidate or diplomate must provide written notice to the ABO Chief Executive Officer of any final action taken by a licensing entity within 60 days of receiving notice from the licensing entity of such action. A candidate or diplomate is responsible for providing written notice to the ABO Chief Executive Officer when the final action by a licensing entity expires or is otherwise no longer in effect. As part of any written notice to the Chief Executive Officer, a candidate or diplomate must include a copy of all correspondence and documentation (i) received from the licensing entity and (ii) sent by or on behalf of the candidate or diplomate to the licensing entity relating to the event(s) which resulted in the licensing entity taking a final action.

D. Each licensing entity may use different terminology to describe a final action affecting a candidate or diplomate’s medical license. The terms a licensing entity may use with respect to a final action may include but are not limited to: revocation; surrender; suspension; reprimand; disciplinary action; administrative matter; practice improvement; probation; restricted license; letter of concern; special conditions or requirements; or, a no action letter. A final action taken by a licensing entity may be indefinite in duration or have a defined period of applicability or result in the conclusion that the licensing entity is not taking any action with respect to the candidate or diplomate’s medical license. If a licensing entity characterizes its decision as a final action, it is not relevant for purposes of the ABO’s decision-making that a candidate or diplomate may wish to consider an appeal in any forum with respect to a final action taken by a licensing entity.

E. Resignation, suspension, or return of a medical license in anticipation of or to prevent a licensing entity from taking a final action or from the threat of taking an action against a physician’s medical license also will be considered a final action by the ABO.

F. A physician who has voluntarily entered a rehabilitation program for chemical dependency or a practice improvement plan with the approval of a licensing entity will not be considered, for purposes of this Section, to have a restriction on his/her license provided the physician maintains compliance with the rehabilitation program and all terms or conditions established by the licensing entity. A written notice and documentation as outlined in Section IX. C. must be submitted under these circumstances.

G. A candidate or diplomate is required to respond in a timely, accurate, and complete manner to any correspondence from the ABO. Failure to respond in a timely, accurate, and complete manner may be independent grounds for discipline. With respect to a candidate who is
nonresponsive or does not provide timely, accurate, and complete information, the ABO reserves the right to permanently or temporarily suspend the candidate’s application materials, including but not limited to allowing an individual to sit for an examination. With respect to a diplomate who is nonresponsive or does not provide timely, accurate, and complete information, the ABO reserves the right to take disciplinary action including, but not limited to, revocation of the diplomate’s Certificate.

H. Licensing Entity Final Actions Resulting in Restrictions

1. The description of an action taken by a licensing entity may not correspond to the terminology used in Section IX.D describing a final action. The ABO takes an expansive view of what may be considered a final action given the lack of consistency of terminology used by each licensing entity. The ABO considers any of these final actions a restriction on a physician’s medical license regardless of whether (i) a licensing entity unilaterally imposes these requirement(s); or (ii) the outcome is part of an agreement entered between the physician and a licensing entity; or (iii) any other action takes place which leads to the same outcome with respect to the physician’s medical license:
   a. a licensing entity revokes a diplomate or candidate’s license;
   b. a diplomate or candidate resigns, suspends, or returns a license in anticipation of or to prevent a licensing entity from taking a final action or from the threat of it taking an action against a diplomate or candidate’s medical license;
   c. a licensing entity suspends a diplomate or candidate’s license;
   d. a licensing entity places a diplomate or candidate’s license on probation; or
   e. a licensing entity places conditions or requirements on a diplomate or candidate’s license (including, but not limited to, supervision, chaperoning during the examination of patients, documentation standards, documentation review, additional training beyond that required of all physicians for the maintenance of licensure, continuing education, limitations placed on usual scope of practice) regardless of whether or not such conditions or requirements are imposed by order of the licensing entity or are the result of a voluntary agreement or arrangement between the physician and the licensing entity.

I. Diplomate or Candidate Transgressions

1. In addition to a restriction on a diplomate or candidate’s license as described in Section IX.D, the ABO will consider taking action against a candidate or diplomate if any of the following occur, each of which is considered a transgression:
   a. the individual violates any ABO rule, regulation, or policy;
   b. the individual’s actions or inactions affect the process for initial certification or MOC or the terms and conditions related to the same;
   c. the individual makes a misstatement or omission of a material fact in an application or in any other information submitted to the ABO;
   d. the individual presents or distributes, or aides or assists another person(s) to present or distribute, a forged document or other written instrument purporting to have been issued by or under the authority of the ABO to evidence that a diplomate or candidate or any other person(s) is currently or was previously certified by the ABO, when that is not the case, or claiming orally or in writing, or assisting another person(s) to claim, orally or in writing, that a diplomate or candidate or any other person(s) is currently or was previously certified by the ABO, when that is not the case;
e. issuance of a Certificate contrary to or in violation of any ABO rule, regulation, or policy;

f. ineligibility of the individual to whom the Certificate was issued to receive the Certificate;

g. engaging in conduct that disrupts an examination or that could reasonably be interpreted as threatening or abusive toward any examinee, proctor, staff, examiner, or Director; or

h. failure to cooperate in any investigation, hearing, or appeal conducted by the ABO, even if the diplomate or candidate is not the subject of the investigation.

i. In addition to the transgressions listed above, the ABO will consider acting against a candidate or diplomate if any of the following occur, each of which is also considered a transgression:

1) the individual is convicted of a misdemeanor or felony;

2) the individual enters a guilty, nolo contendre plea, deferred adjudication status, or any other type of action or resolution as part of a criminal justice matter;

3) the individual is issued a letter of concern or reprimand or a similar concept by a licensing entity; or

4) the individual demonstrates questionable judgment, poor judgment, unethical behavior, or immoral personal or professional behavior, regardless of whether such conduct affects the individual’s status with a licensing entity.

J. ABO Response to a Diplomate or Candidate’s Restriction or Transgression: Appeal Rights and Process

1. The ABO may gather information as it sees fit and is available. The ABO may send a letter to a diplomate or candidate requesting information with respect to the restriction or transgression.

2. ABO staff may decide, with or without any additional information provided by the diplomate or candidate, that no further action by the ABO is warranted. ABO staff will consult with the ABO Credentials Committee Chair. If the Credentials Committee Chair concurs that no further action is warranted, the ABO will send a letter to the diplomate or candidate regarding the ABO’s decision based upon the information the ABO has received. If the review demonstrates that further action by the ABO may be warranted, the ABO will send a letter to the diplomate or candidate requesting information be submitted to the ABO with respect to the Restriction or Transgression within 30 days of the date of the letter. The matter will then be presented to the Credentials Committee for adjudication and include the information submitted by the diplomate or candidate, if applicable.

3. If a motion is made and seconded and approved by majority vote of those Credentials Committee members present when the vote is taken (excluding any person with a conflict of interest as described below in Section X.D) such action shall be considered the act of the Credentials Committee.

a. If the Credentials Committee approves a motion that no further action is warranted against the candidate or diplomate, a letter will be sent to the candidate or diplomate.

b. If the Credentials Committee recommendation is:

1) to revoke or place on probation a diplomate’s Certificate because the diplomate does not satisfy a provision in Section IX.A, the diplomate
(i) will be provided a letter regarding the Credentials Committee recommendation; (ii) will not be asked to provide any additional information to the Board of Directors; (iii) will not be eligible to participate in any of the appeal processes described in Section IX.J.4; and (iv) the matter will go directly to the Board of Directors for consideration; or

2) to take an action against a candidate or diplomate based upon a provision in Section IX.I, the candidate or diplomate (i) will be provided a letter regarding the Credentials Committee recommendation; (ii) will be offered the opportunity to provide additional information to the Board of Directors; (iii) will be eligible to participate in any of the appeal process described in Section IX.J.4 below.

4. Appeals

If the diplomate is eligible for and requests to participate in the appeal process based upon Section IX.I, the appeal will be handled in the following manner:

a. The Credentials Committee shall notify the diplomate of the date and time of the appeal. All appeals shall be held telephonically. The diplomate may have an attorney participate in the appeal in accordance with instructions provided by the Credentials Committee.

b. As part of the appeal process, the Credentials Committee may gather information as it sees fit. The diplomate will have the right to submit information that has not previously been provided within the timeframe and documentation limits required by the Credentials Committee.

c. The Chair of the Credentials Committee, or a person designated by the Chair, will call the meeting to order to consider the diplomate’s appeal. A member of the Credentials Committee will begin the proceeding by providing an overview of the basis for the recommended discipline. The diplomate, including the individual’s attorney, may present oral information to the Credentials Committee. If the diplomate is asked questions during the meeting, the diplomate is expected to answer the questions truthfully and completely. The meeting may be recorded or transcribed upon the terms and conditions and in the manner determined by the Credentials Committee. The Chair of the Credentials Committee, or a person designated by the Chair, will determine when the meeting is complete and then excuse the diplomate and the individual’s attorney from the meeting.

d. Once the diplomate and the individual’s attorney are excused, the Credentials Committee will consider the diplomate’s appeal. If a motion is made and seconded and approved by majority vote of those Credentials Committee members present when the vote is taken (excluding any person with a conflict of interest as described below in Section X.D), a letter shall be sent to the diplomate informing the diplomate of the decision and that the matter will be forwarded to the Board of Directors for a final disposition.

e. The Board of Directors will consider the decision of the Credentials Committee relating to the diplomate, and:

1) If a motion is made and seconded and approved by majority vote of those Board of Directors members present when the vote is taken (excluding any person with a conflict of interest as described below in Section X.D) endorsing the Credentials Committee decision, the
matter will be considered concluded and a letter will be sent to the diplomate.

2) If a motion is made and seconded and approved by majority vote of those Board of Directors members present when the vote is taken (excluding any person with a conflict of interest as described below in Section X.D) which does not endorse the Credentials Committee’s decision, the diplomate will be sent a letter and will be offered the opportunity to provide additional written information. The matter will then be re-considered by the Credentials Committee, utilizing any additional information, but without the presence of the diplomate or the diplomate’s attorney.

   a. If a motion is made and seconded and approved by majority vote of those Credentials Committee members present when the vote is taken (excluding any person with a conflict of interest as described below in Section X.D) such action shall be considered the act of the Credentials Committee. Notice of an action by the Credentials Committee will be sent to the diplomate and the diplomate will be informed that the Board of Directors will consider the Credentials Committee decision without the presence of the diplomate or the diplomate’s attorney.

   b. If a motion is made and seconded and approved by majority vote of those Board of Directors present when the vote is taken (excluding any person with a conflict of interest as described below in Section X.D) with respect to the diplomate, the Board of Directors shall send a letter to the diplomate informing the diplomate of such decision and the matter shall be concluded.

3) An action by the Board of Directors may include but is not limited to:
   a. The diplomate’s Certificate may be revoked or suspended, or the expiration date of the Certificate may be advanced;
   b. the diplomate may be publicly or privately reprimanded, be placed on probation, or have appropriate conditions imposed upon his/her Certificate, or may be required to participate in MOC, even if such diplomate was not previously subject to MOC. The diplomate may also be required to complete some or all MOC components on an expedited basis;
   c. issuance of a Certificate to the candidate may be withheld or delayed;
   d. results of prior examinations of the candidate may be invalidated;
   e. the candidate may be temporarily barred from any 1 or more future examinations, for such period, and upon such terms and conditions, as the ABO may determine;
   f. the candidate may be permanently barred from all future examinations;
g. the candidate or diplomate may be required to reimburse the ABO for its costs and legal fees in connection with the investigation, the hearing and any appeal; or
h. any other action deemed appropriate by the ABO.

K. General Rules of Procedure
   1. Matters considered by the ABO, the Board of Directors, or any ABO committee or any representative of the ABO shall not be bound by technical rules of evidence. Any of these parties may receive and consider any evidence it deems appropriate and relevant.
   2. Any written notice provided to a diplomate or candidate will be provided to the address on file with the ABO. It is the responsibility of the diplomate or candidate to ensure a current address is on file with the ABO. A diplomate or candidate will fully indemnify and hold harmless any party that provides information to the ABO upon the ABO’s request.

L. If the Board of Directors revokes or suspends a diplomate’s Certificate, places the diplomate on probation, or imposes any conditions upon the diplomate’s Certificate, the Board of Directors may require the diplomate to surrender his/her Certificate and copies thereof to the ABO immediately upon notice of the determination.

M. The ABO reserves the right to notify the American Board of Medical Specialties and any other interested party of any action taken by the Board of Directors. The ABO may post a summary of the action on its web site and/or publish a summary in its newsletter, or otherwise disclose the decision as it sees fit.

X. Compliance and Awareness
   A. Candidates must comply fully with all Rules and Regulations of the ABO, as amended, during the entire time the individual is a candidate.
   B. Diplomates must comply fully with all Rules and Regulations of the ABO, as amended, for as long as the individual retains a Certificate.
   C. A diplomate or candidate will fully indemnify and hold harmless any party that provides information to the Board upon Board’s request.
   D. The Board maintains a conflict of interest policy that applies to the Directors, Examiners, Volunteers, and staff. Board Directors, whether or not a member of the Credentials Committee, will recuse themselves from discussing or voting on an issue involving a diplomate with whom they have a relationship that may compromise their impartiality.
ABO VOE20 - Candidate Procedures Manual

1 — Last update: Jun 18, 2020

American Board of Ophthalmology
# Table of Contents

1. Overview .................................................................................................................. 2
   1.1. Examination Topics ......................................................................................... 2
   1.2. Examination Specifications ............................................................................. 2
   1.2.1. Exam Breakdown ....................................................................................... 3
   1.2.2. Quality Control ......................................................................................... 3
   1.3. Scope of Examination ................................................................................... 3
   1.4. Examination Scoring Criteria ......................................................................... 4
   1.4.1. Data Acquisition Criteria ........................................................................... 4
   1.4.2. Diagnosis Criteria ...................................................................................... 5
   1.4.3. Management Criteria ................................................................................... 5
   1.5. Scoring Procedures ......................................................................................... 5

2. 2020 Virtual Oral Exam Administrations ................................................................. 7
   2.1. Administration Assignment Process and Test Assignment Changes ............... 7
   2.1.1. July 11-12, 2020 Pilot – East Coast Time .................................................... 7
   2.1.2. All Other Exam Administrations .................................................................. 8
   2.2. Cancellations ................................................................................................... 9
   2.3. Interrupted Test Appointments ...................................................................... 9
   2.4. Retests ............................................................................................................. 9
   2.5. Exam Administration and Session Assignment ............................................ 10

3. Candidate Requirements ........................................................................................ 11
   3.1. Equipment and Internet Speed Requirements .............................................. 11
   3.1.1. Desktop or Laptop ...................................................................................... 11
   3.1.2. Charger ....................................................................................................... 12
   3.1.3. Supported Operating Systems ................................................................. 12
   3.1.4. Supported Web Browsers ......................................................................... 13
   3.1.5. Supported Processor and RAM ................................................................. 13
   3.1.6. Internet Speed ........................................................................................... 13
   3.1.7. Audio and Video ....................................................................................... 13
   3.2. Preparing for Check-In and Security Protocols ............................................. 14
   3.2.1. Identification ............................................................................................. 14
   3.2.2. Room Check ............................................................................................. 14
   3.2.3. Eyes on the Screen .................................................................................... 15
   3.2.4. Candidate Verbal Agreement ................................................................... 15
   3.3. Test Environment/Professional Appearance Requirements ........................ 15
   3.4. Candidate Resources .................................................................................... 16
4. Test Day: Starting the Test Appointment, Check-in, and Orientation ............................................. 17
   4.1. Troubleshooting .................................................................................................................. 17
   4.2. Examinations ..................................................................................................................... 17
   4.3. Interacting with Examiners, Panel Leaders and the Meeting Host ................................. 17
   4.4. Scheduled Breaks ............................................................................................................. 18
   4.5. Unscheduled Breaks ......................................................................................................... 18
   4.6. After the Examination ....................................................................................................... 18

5. Disclosures, Disclaimers and Policies ......................................................................................... 19
   5.1. Candidate Agreement for the Virtual Oral Examination ................................................ 19
   5.2. Copyright Notice and Agreement ..................................................................................... 22
   5.3. Non-Disclosure Policy ....................................................................................................... 22
   5.4. Examination Irregularity Policy ....................................................................................... 22
   5.5. Acknowledgement/Cooperation Agreement ..................................................................... 23
   5.6. Competency with Technology ........................................................................................ 23
1. Overview

The Oral Examination is the second of two evaluations in the American Board of Ophthalmology (ABO) certification process. Upon successful completion of the Written Qualifying Examination (WQE), candidates are eligible for the Oral Examination. Due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on travel and in-person meetings, the ABO will administer the Oral Examination virtually in 2020. The virtual Oral Examination, hereinto referred to as the Oral Examination, will preserve the original case-based format of the face-to-face oral examination but will be administered online.

The Oral Examination is a timed evaluation in which candidates are presented with a series of Patient Management Problems (PMPs) and asked to identify how they would care for each patient. The entire assessment takes approximately four hours to complete and is divided into three exam appointments focused on two specific topic areas (six total topics).

*Note: These policies are subject to change without notice at the discretion of the American Board of Ophthalmology.*

1.1. Examination Topics

The paired examination topic areas are:

- Anterior Segment of the Eye; Optics, Visual Physiology, and Correction of Refractive Errors
- Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus; External Eye and Adnexa
- Neuro-Ophthalmology and Orbit; Posterior Segment of the Eye

For more information on this, check out our [Test Blueprint](#).

1.2. Examination Specifications

Each exam appointment is administered by two volunteer examiners, all of whom are experienced practitioners and ABO 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 group of six examiners assigned to each candidate is referred to as a panel, which is overseen by a panel leader, who also serves as the candidate’s guide for the duration of his/her examination. The panel leader may observe the exam session but will not be evaluating or scoring the candidate’s performance. Their main role is to guide the panel of candidates through the examination and ensure that examiners are administering a fair and consistent examination.
1.2.1. Exam Breakdown

Candidates will have three exam appointments. In each appointment, two examiners will present a total of 14 PMPs that cover two topic areas. Fifty minutes will be allotted for each appointment, but candidates may finish in less than 50 minutes. The total examination time will be about four hours including time for orientation, security protocols, and breaks. In total, the candidate will be administered 42 PMPs (six topics, seven PMPs per topic).

To begin the examination, candidates will join a virtual meeting room and participate in an orientation with the other candidates being examined in their panel. Although this group of candidates will be examined by the same examiners, their performance will not be judged in comparison to one another. A meeting host will move candidates to each exam appointment from the main meeting room at the start of each hour until they have completed all three exam appointments that make up the Oral Examination. Candidates will transition back to the main meeting room after each exam appointment for an approximately 10-minute scheduled break.

Examiners will control the presentation of materials to candidates, so no additional training is necessary for candidates. Some PMPs include one or more visual images. If not all visuals are able to be shared on screen at once, candidates can ask to see the other image(s). If any videos are presented, candidates can ask to view the video as many times as desired.

1.2.2. Quality Control

Panel leaders and other authorized ABO personnel will periodically “visit” exam rooms for quality control purposes. The role of the Panel Leader is to visit each examination to monitor the examiner’s techniques and performance. In some cases, the ABO will be training a new examiner and the candidate will see three examiners in an exam room. In this case, all three examiners may ask questions.

1.3. Scope of Examination

The Oral Examination includes clinical scenarios affecting the eye and related structures. The ABO has developed a test blueprint for the Oral Examination. The purpose of the test blueprint is to describe the spectrum of examination topic areas that may be covered on the Oral Examination. Candidates are encouraged to use this blueprint to prepare for the Oral Examination. As an independent testing organization, the ABO cannot recommend study products for its examinations. This is done to prevent any conflicts of interest in the process of exam development and administration. For further assistance locating preparation materials, the ABO suggests talking to peers and colleagues about what resources they have
found most helpful or contacting a professional society such as the American Academy of Ophthalmology or a subspecialty organization for advice, recommendations, and information about their educational materials.

### 1.4. Examination Scoring Criteria

The Oral Examination is designed to simulate how candidates care for patients in a clinical setting. Candidates are assessed regarding their ability to incorporate the cognitive knowledge demonstrated in the Written Qualifying Examination with judgment in caring for a patient.

A candidate is presented with a series of Patient Management Problems (PMPs), each of which represents one patient or clinical situation, and is asked to identify how he/she would care for that patient.

Each PMP consists of three sections:

- **Data Acquisition**: Refers to how well the candidate obtains and evaluates the information required to manage a particular case.

- **Diagnosis**: Concerns the candidate's ability to integrate and evaluate that information to arrive at an accurate differential diagnosis.

- **Management**: Refers to the appropriateness of the management plan, including prognosis, follow-up, and the ability to manage complications. Evaluating competencies, such as communication, professionalism, and systems-based practice are also important components of management.

Examiners are instructed to evaluate candidate performance according to the scoring criteria outlined in the following sections.

### 1.4.1. Data Acquisition Criteria

In the Data Acquisition section, examiners will evaluate whether the candidate:

- Elicited the pertinent history

- Obtained information and identified important data

- Performed an appropriate clinical examination

- Recommended appropriate testing
1.4.2. Diagnosis Criteria

In the Diagnosis section, examiners will evaluate whether the candidate:

- Provided a working diagnosis and focused differential diagnosis
- Effectively selected, evaluated, and justified diagnostic tests and procedures
- Ultimately arrived at the correct diagnosis

1.4.3. Management Criteria

In the Management section, examiners will evaluate whether the candidate:

- Discussed and recommended a safe and effective management plan
- Recognized potential complications of proposed treatments including surgery
- Made accurate inferences regarding the expected outcomes and prognosis
- Communicated the management plan in a clear, professional, and ethical manner

In some PMPs, when prompted by the examiner, the candidate may also be asked to:

- Evaluate alternatives to the proposed management plan
- Demonstrate effective communication with the patient and other health care providers
- Discuss professionalism issues involved with the case

1.5. Scoring Procedures

Results of your Oral Examination will be provided as pass/fail only. A passing score in all topics is not required to pass the examination, as the result is based on overall performance. The score required to pass the Oral Examination is determined by a standard-setting methodology. This method requires a group of peers to estimate the minimum level of clinical decision-making and medical knowledge an ophthalmologist requires to practice competently. The examination employs a criterion-referenced passing standard, which means scoring is not done “on the curve,” i.e., that a certain percentage of candidates will pass or fail. For
every administration, it is possible for all examinees to pass if they achieve a score at or above the passing standard.

The pass/fail result of your examination will be issued to you within 2-4 weeks. Please keep the Board Office apprised of any changes to your contact information during this time.
2. 2020 Virtual Oral Exam Administrations

The ABO will pilot the virtual oral exam once for up to 102 candidates and then will administer the virtual oral examination three times for up to 204 candidates each to accommodate the 650 candidates who were registered for the March 2020 oral exam (and to allow for possible re-tests, if needed, if technical issues arise). Virtual oral exams are identified as East Coast, Central, and Mountain/West Coast to account for the major time zones, as follows:

- **PILOT**: East Coast Time: July 11-12, 2020 (102 candidates maximum)
- **Central Time**: August 29-30, 2020 (204 candidates maximum)
- **Mountain/Pacific Time**: September 12-13, 2020 (204 candidates maximum)
- **Central Time**: November 7-8, 2020 (204 candidates maximum)

Each exam administration will include four sessions.

- **Session 1**: Saturday: 7:00 AM – 11:00 AM
- **Session 2**: Saturday: 11:00 AM – 3:00 PM
- **Session 3**: Sunday: 7:00 AM – 11:00 AM
- **Session 4**: Sunday: 11:00 AM – 3:00 PM

2.1. 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 exam assignments once the assignments have been distributed in mid-June. We apologize for any hardship this may cause and appreciate your understanding.

2.1.1. July 11-12, 2020 Pilot – East Coast Time

Candidates who are currently registered for the March 2020 oral examination and who have indicated their
willingness to participate in a pilot examination will be randomly selected for pilot participation via lottery. The candidates who are selected via lottery will be notified and provided the opportunity to accept or decline the pilot assignment. If a candidate declines a pilot assignment, another candidate will be selected via lottery and notified.

Candidates who pass the pilot examination will become Board Certified. Candidates who do not pass the pilot examination will be eligible for another 2020 oral examination at no additional charge and the exam attempt will not be counted against their Board Eligibility.

2.1.2. All Other Exam Administrations

Candidates who are currently registered for the March 2020 oral examination are eligible to sit for the virtual oral examinations in 2020. These administrations include:

- August 29-30, 2020 (Central Time)
- September 12-13, 2020 (Mountain/Pacific Time)
- November 7-8, 2020 (Central Time)

The ABO will send all candidates a survey asking them to rank their preferred test dates and provide requests for accommodations (including nursing mother’s accommodations and Sabbath observances). Candidates can also indicate if an examination administration(s) conflicts with the candidate’s planned marriage, or birth/adoption of a child. Whenever possible, the ABO will assign test dates based on candidate preference. The ABO will not consider test reassignment for any reason other than the candidate’s planned marriage, birth/adoption of a child, an unexpected family/health emergency at the time of testing, or a change in deployment for military personnel. Requests for exam date changes will not be reviewed outside of the survey responses for any reason.

Board Eligible candidates who passed the Written Qualifying Examination but are not currently registered for the Oral Examination may register for the virtual oral examination in 2020 on their candidate status page, however, exam assignments may be limited. If the ABO is unable to provide an exam assignment in 2020, these candidates will be offered a later oral examination administration.

Candidates who are registered for the March 2020 Oral Examination but who are unable to participate in one of the 2020 administrations will be offered a later oral examination administration.
2.2. Cancellations

To cancel an examination, candidates must email the Board Office at least seven (7) days prior to the scheduled examination. Cancellations must be confirmed in writing. Candidates who cancel their examination at least seven (7) days prior to the deadline will have 1/2 their fee applied to the following year’s examination, minus a $300 application fee (as long as the full fee was paid for the original 2020 registration). All fees will be forfeited by candidates who cancel less than seven (7) days prior to the exam or do not appear for their scheduled examination appointment.

2.3. Interrupted Test Appointments

Technical Issues

The ABO understands that technical issues may occur for both candidates and examiners. The ABO will take preventative measures to minimize such issues prior to the examination, including ensuring required equipment and broadband speed testing for candidates and examiners.

If technical problems occur on test day that the ABO cannot remedy, the panel leader and ABO staff will have the authority to terminate the examination. The technical issues will be documented, and the candidate will be contacted by ABO staff that day to discuss retest options. Candidates who have interrupted test appointments due to technical issues will be offered a retest in 2020, if possible.

Distractions and Interruptions

The ABO anticipates 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 examiners, in consultation with the panel leader, 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 test appointment. The reasons for the interrupted test appointment will be documented and the candidate will be contacted by ABO staff that day to discuss retest options.

2.4. Retests

The ABO will offer examination retests for candidates who are unable to test due to documented technical issues that prevent the full administration of the examination. Technical issues will be documented, and ABO staff will contact the candidate on the originally scheduled examination date. It will not be possible to
reschedule a test appointment during the same examination administration weekend. Candidates will be provided options within three days of the interrupted test appointment to reschedule for a future date.

Candidates with interrupted test appointments will have the opportunity to retest in 2021.

If a candidate is able to complete the examination, but feels that their test performance was affected by technical issues, the candidate can request a retest by writing to info@abop.org within three days of the examination and explaining the reason for the retest request. Retest requests will be considered based on the request and in consultation with the examiners and staff involved in the test administration. By making this request, the candidate will waive the completed examination results, even if the result was a passing score. Retests of completed examinations are not guaranteed to occur in 2020. Candidates will be informed of their retest options within seven days of receipt of the written request.

The ABO will offer examination retests for individuals who do not pass the examination, however retests for unsuccessful examinations are not guaranteed to occur in 2020. Candidates will be provided with their retest options in the letter conveying their examination result.

2.5. Exam Administration and Session Assignment

Candidates will be assigned to the pilot or one of the three 2020 virtual oral examination administrations based on their responses to the Oral Examination Administration Preference and Special Requests Survey. Candidates will be assigned to one examination administration date and one of the four examination sessions (Saturday AM or PM; Sunday AM or PM). All session assignments are final and cannot be changed for any reason. Candidates will receive email notification of their test date and time approximately 8 weeks prior the exam administration. This notification will include instructions for scheduling an equipment and internet testing appointment. At least one week prior to the examination, candidates will receive a final email notification confirming their test appointment and providing them with their test schedule and link to their test appointment.
3. 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 by your Candidate Concierge prior to your exam.

When instructed, you will need to download and install the free Zoom application (Zoom Client for Meetings). Please create a free Zoom account and download the latest version of the desktop app. The Zoom link to access your exam will be emailed to you and posted on your Candidate Status Page at least five days prior to your exam. You will not be asked to download or operate any additional online platforms or exam delivery software.

Because of the complexities of scheduling approximately 650 candidates for the VOE20, once you’ve been assigned to a specific date and time the ABO will not be able to reschedule your examination.

3.1. 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 ABO at least 10 days before the examination. This assessment should take approximately 15 minutes. Candidates can also use this time to have their test environment and photo ID reviewed for acceptability. Candidates who do not complete this equipment test at least 10 days prior to the examination will waive their ability to retest in 2020 due to failed test appointments.

3.1.1. Desktop or Laptop

Desktop or Laptop device connected to the internet. No phones or tablets.
3.1.2. Charger

The device must be plugged in to an outlet or charger at all times during the exam.

3.1.3. 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 Vista with SP1 or later
- Windows XP with SP3 or later
- Ubuntu 12.04 or higher
- Mint 17.1 or higher
- Red Hat Enterprise Linux 6.4 or higher
- Oracle Linux 6.4 or higher
- CentOS 6.4 or higher
- Fedora 21 or higher
- OpenSUSE 13.2 or higher
- ArchLinux (64-bit only)
3.1.4. Supported Web Browsers

- Windows: IE 11+, Edge 12+, Firefox 27+, Chrome 30+
- Mac: Safari 7+, Firefox 27+, Chrome 30+
- Linux: Firefox 27+, Chrome 30+

3.1.5. 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

- 4GB Recommended

3.1.6. Internet Speed

This is what is optimal for a Zoom video meeting with screensharing.

- Candidates can conduct a test of their internet speed at Speedtest.net – Download speed should reach 15Mbps per second or higher.
- To ensure an optimal internet speed throughout the exam, please ensure that other devices sharing the internet connection are not streaming, downloading, or conducting tasks that may consume internet bandwidth.
- A wired connection would provide the most ideal experience but is not necessary.

3.1.7. Audio and Video

Candidates may use the built-in camera and audio from the computer. Candidates are also permitted to use external audio and video options such as a headset, USB-connected microphone, or camera. Candidates
are NOT permitted to join their Zoom meeting by phone, they must use their computer audio.

- The camera should be placed as close to the display as possible.

- Newer computers may only have a USB-C port and an adapter may be necessary to attach a USB-3 connected microphone or camera.

- For Audio, the Zoom desktop client on Windows supports buttons for devices made by these manufacturers: Aver, Crestron, Jabra, Logitech, Plantronics, Polycom, Shure, Yamaha, and Yealink.

3.2. Preparing for Check-In and Security Protocols

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

3.2.1. Identification

During the check-in with the ABO concierge, candidates must present an unexpired, U.S. or Canadian (in English) government-issued form of identification (such as a driver’s license or passport) that includes their photograph and signature. This identification must match their first and last name as it appears on their Candidate Status Page. The only acceptable difference is the presence of a middle name or middle initial.

3.2.2. Room Check

Prior to the start of the examination, to ensure no unauthorized items are in the candidate’s test environment, the examiner will ask the candidate to use their webcam to display a 360-degree view of the test environment and desktop/table. The 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 test appointment, invalidation of the candidate’s score, and exclusion from the board certification process. These policies are designed to protect the integrity of the examination.
3.2.3. Eyes on the Screen

Candidates will be instructed to keep their eyes on the computer screen at all times and to look at the examiner who is currently speaking to them. Non-compliance with this requirement can lead the examiners to terminate the exam.

3.2.4. Candidate Verbal Agreement

Candidates must verbally state that they are adhering to the ABO’s agreement for examination integrity and understand the consequences of non-compliance.

The Candidate Verbal Agreement states:

Prior to your sitting for this examination, you agreed to the ABO Virtual Oral Examination Agreement. You are also asked to verbally acknowledge that you will not violate the Examination Irregularity Policy and/or the Non-Disclosure Policy and/or the Acknowledgement/Cooperation Agreement, or you will not give or receive aid in connection with this examination, or engage in any other conduct that subverts or attempts to subvert the integrity of the examination or the ABO certification. Please state “yes, I agree.”

3.3. Test Environment/Professional Appearance Requirements

• Candidates must have access to a quiet, suitable space for the four-hour examination session.

• The space must be well-lit.

• The test environment/or camera view of the test environment should be as clear of personalized information as possible (e.g., academic degrees, family photos, etc.). This does not mean that the space must specifically designed for the virtual oral examination, but it should not be set up or staged to inform the examiners about the individual’s background.

• Virtual backgrounds are not permitted.

• Desk should be free of any clutter/unnecessary materials, but you are permitted to have water/coffee/tea.

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

- Candidates must be dressed in professional business attire.

3.4. Candidate Resources

When candidates are assigned to a virtual oral examination administration, they will also be provided with an ABO staff concierge to answer general questions, test their equipment, and provide experience support.
4. Test Day: Starting the Test Appointment, Check-in, and Orientation

Candidates will be provided with a link to their examination appointment via email at least one week prior to the examination. This link will also be located on the candidate’s ABO status page. Candidates will click on their Oral Examination link at the appointment time to begin their test appointment. The candidate will remain in this test appointment for the entire four-hour exam. The meeting host will move the candidate in and out of exam rooms and scheduled breaks according to the candidate’s exam schedule.

Candidates are required to check-in and attend a 45-minute orientation on exam day. This time will be spent ensuring all individuals are present and connected and reviewing the exam protocol, including appropriate examiner/candidate interaction, explanation of the timeline and breaks, and frequently asked questions. Candidates who do not check-in for orientation at the scheduled time will not be admitted to the examination and their examination fee forfeited.

4.1. Troubleshooting

Both candidates and examiners will have the ability to request support to assist with technical issues during the examination.

4.2. Examinations

The virtual oral examination consists of three 50-minute exam appointments. Following orientation, the meeting host will admit each candidate to his/her first exam room on the exam schedule. The first examination will begin with the security protocols. In most exam rooms there will be two examiners, each asking seven questions. In some exam rooms there will be three examiners, one of whom will be a new examiner-in-training. The examination will be monitored by a panel leader who may occasionally enter and leave the exam appointment. Candidates are encouraged to focus on the examiner who is asking the question.

A text announcement will appear on the screen indicating the end of each exam appointment and candidates will return to the main waiting room during the scheduled 10-minute breaks between exams. At the conclusion of the third exam appointment, candidates will leave the meeting.

4.3. Interacting with Examiners, Panel
Leaders and the Meeting Host

Examiners will introduce themselves to the candidate and will share the examination. The examiner will present each question and will prompt the candidates to provide information about the three components of an oral examination patient management problem: Data Acquisition, Diagnosis, and Management.

Examiners may ask additional questions or prompt candidates to provide additional information. Candidates should expect to interact with the examiner for each clinical case. The examiner does not expect the candidate to move through the PMP without pausing or asking follow-up questions. Providing more information than is relevant to the PMP does not provide any advantage to the candidate. Candidates should be comfortable asking for additional information or to view photos or videos multiple times.

4.4. Scheduled Breaks

Ten-minute breaks are scheduled between exam appointments. 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.

4.5. Unscheduled Breaks

In the event that a candidate needs to take an unscheduled break during the examination, the candidate must alert the examiners, specify the reason and time interval, and acknowledge that they will forfeit that time on their examination. Unscheduled breaks will be documented in the candidate’s examination file.

4.6. After the Examination

Immediately following the examination administration, candidates will be asked to complete an experience survey. Examination results will be provided via email and posted on the candidate’s status page 2-4 weeks after the examination.
5. Disclosures, Disclaimers and Policies

Participating in a pre-exam on-boarding and equipment check appointment with your Candidate Concierge is required. You will not be permitted to test if you have not scheduled a Candidate Concierge appointment at least 10 days prior to your exam. You will receive instructions about how and when to do this after June 15.

The ABO 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, ABO examination content in any way. Candidates who share or receive ABO 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 because the questions for each examination form will be unique.

We have taken into account the potential challenges of online exam delivery and have adjusted our policies and processes accordingly. Please carefully read the Candidate Procedures Manual for information about technical specifications, in-exam troubleshooting, and rescheduling policies in the event of a computer or internet glitch.

5.1. Candidate Agreement for the Virtual Oral Examination

I hereby apply to the American Board of Ophthalmology (ABO) for the issuance of a certificate of qualification as a specialist in ophthalmology and for examinations relative to that certificate, all in accordance with and subject to the Rules and Regulations of the ABO. A complete copy of the Rules and Regulations is available on the ABO website. By electronically signing this Agreement and submitting it to the ABO, 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 ABO. I agree that upon the issuance to me of a certificate of qualification, I shall become bound by the Bylaws of the ABO and shall remain bound by the Rules and Regulations of the ABO 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 ABO. I understand and agree that the virtual oral examination is supervised by
examiners, staff, and others who are responsible to the ABO and are empowered by the ABO to ensure that the examination is conducted securely and appropriately and in accordance with the Rules and Regulations of the ABO.

I understand and agree that:

(i) The ABO will verify my identity before I take the examination. I certify that all sources of identification I provide to the ABO 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 4-hour examination appointment in a quiet, distraction-free setting.

(iii) I am responsible for supplying and using my own testing equipment, including a computer, webcam, internet access, and required software. I understand that this equipment must meet the technical requirements specified in the oral examination procedures manual and that I am required to test my equipment with the ABO prior to the examination. If I do not complete this equipment test at least 10 days before the examination, I waive my ability to retest in 2020 due to a failed test appointment.

(iv) The ABO 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 ABO will not penalize me for examination administration failures on the part of the ABO or myself. If I am unable to test on the scheduled day and time due to technical failure on the part of the ABO or myself, I will be rescheduled to a future examination administration. If this happens, the ABO is not responsible for reimbursing me for time and materials spent in preparation for the examination or necessary increased preparation, including professional and personal time and materials used for examination preparation.

(v) My examiners, in consultation with ABO 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 use pen and paper, 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 ABO, and constitutes grounds for the ABO 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 ABO may withhold my scores and may require me to retake the oral examination or other assessment if the ABO is presented with evidence demonstrating to the ABO, 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 ABO 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 ABO 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 ABO’s examinations qualify me for a certificate of qualification rests solely and exclusively in the ABO, and that its decision is final.

I hereby waive and release and shall indemnify and hold harmless the ABO and persons in their capacities as the ABO’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 ABO which I apply to take or take, the grade or grades given me on the examination and, if applicable, the failure of the ABO to issue me a certificate of qualification or the ABO’s revocation of any certificate of qualification previously issued to me.

To help analyze the effectiveness of my training program, and to satisfy requirements of the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) and ACGME Ophthalmology Review Committee, I hereby authorize the ABO to release, in confidence, to the director of the program in which I have trained, and to the chair of the department of which the program is a part, the results of my performance on the examinations conducted by the ABO.
5.2. Copyright Notice and Agreement

All ABO certification and maintenance of certification examinations, including the content and wording of examination questions, constitute confidential ABO information protected by copyright law. Any unauthorized receipt, copying, recording, possession, or transmission of ABO written, computer-based, or oral examination questions, content, props, or other materials (“Examination Materials”), for any purpose(s), either before the examination or after an examination administration, in whole or in part, by any means, including but not limited to reconstruction from memory, is strictly forbidden. Use of ABO Examination Materials, including that which may have been reconstructed from memory, for the purpose of examination preparation or training is also strictly forbidden.

I agree not to record, copy, or reproduce Examination Materials in whole or in part in any way, including but not limited to reconstruction from memory.

5.3. Non-Disclosure Policy

As noted above, all ABO 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 ophthalmology. I am expressly prohibited from disclosing, publishing, reproducing, or transmitting any ABO 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.

5.4. Examination Irregularity Policy

Engaging in any conduct that subverts or attempts to subvert the integrity of the examination or the ABO certification process is sufficient cause for the ABO 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 ABO’s investigation; and/or

• Take other appropriate action against the candidate, including legal action.

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

5.5. Acknowledgement/Cooperation Agreement

In the event that I am aware of an examination irregularity or the ABO investigates a potential examination irregularity, I agree to report that information to the ABO and/or cooperate fully with the ABO and to provide all relevant information in my possession to the ABO. I understand and agree that the failure to cooperate fully with the ABO 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.*

*I declare a dedication to provide ophthalmic services with compassion, respect for human dignity, and integrity.*

*By submitting this Application and Agreement electronically, I agree that this electronic form shall have the same legally binding effect as an original paper version would have.*

5.6. Competency with Technology

Consistent with the ABMS/ACGME General Competencies in Systems-Based Practice, the ABO requires its candidates to possess sufficient competencies in information technology, including the use of personal computers, the internet, and email, for correspondence and completion of examinations and modules throughout their participation in ABO certification activities.
APPENDIX B - APPLICATION AND AGREEMENT FOR INITIAL CERTIFICATION EXAMS

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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 ABO. I understand and agree that the virtual oral examination is supervised by examiners, staff, and others who are responsible to the ABO and are empowered by the ABO to ensure that the examination is conducted securely and appropriately and in accordance with the Rules and Regulations of the ABO.

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(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.

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EXAMINATION IRREGULARITY POLICY

I further understand that any violation of the Examination Irregularity Policy and/or the Non-Disclosure Policy and/or the Acknowledgement/Cooperation Agreement, or the giving or receiving of aid in connection with any ABO examination, or engaging in any other conduct that subverts or attempts to subvert the integrity of the examination or the ABO certification and maintenance of certification process is sufficient cause for the ABO to:

- Bar me from the examination and/or future examinations;
- Terminate my participation in the examination;
- Withhold and/or invalidate the results of my examination;
- Withhold my certificate;
- Revoke my certificate;
- Require me to pay the costs of the ABO’s investigation; and/or
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