

ASB Standard 234, First Edition
202X

**Standard for Qualifications for Forensic Anthropology
Practitioners**

DRAFT



ASB
AAFS STANDARDS BOARD

Standard for Qualifications for Forensic Anthropology Practitioners

ASB Approved Xxxxx 202X

ANSI Approved Xxxxxx 202X



410 North 21st Street
Colorado Springs, CO 80904

This document may be downloaded from: www.aafs.org/academy-standards-board

This document is provided by the AAFS Standards Board (ASB). Users are permitted to print and download the document and extracts from the document for personal use, however the following actions are prohibited under copyright:

- *modifying this document or its related graphics in any way;*
- *using any illustrations or any graphics separately from any accompanying text; and,*
- *failing to include an acknowledgment alongside the copied material noting the AAFS Standards Board as the copyright holder and publisher.*

Users may not reproduce, duplicate, copy, sell, resell, or exploit for any commercial purposes this document or any portion of it. Users may create a hyperlink to www.aafs.org/academy-standards-board to allow persons to download their individual free copy of this document. The hyperlink must not portray AAFS, the AAFS Standards Board, this document, our agents, associates and affiliates in an offensive manner, or be misleading or false. ASB trademarks may not be used as part of a link without written permission from ASB.

The AAFS Standards Board retains the sole right to submit this document to any other forum for any purpose.

Certain commercial entities, equipment or materials may be identified in this document to describe a procedure or concept adequately. Such identification is not intended to imply recommendations or endorsement by the AAFS or the AAFS Standards Board, nor is it intended to imply that the entities, materials, or equipment are necessarily the best available for the purpose.

Proper citation of ASB documents includes the designation, title, edition, and year of publication.

*This document is copyrighted © by the AAFS Standards Board, LLC. 202X All rights are reserved.
410 North 21st Street, Colorado Springs, CO 80904, www.aafs.org/academy-standards-board.*

Foreword

Anthropology is a broad discipline dedicated to the study of humanity in both the past and present. Forensic anthropology is a specialized subdiscipline focused on the search, recovery, and analysis of human remains within the context of the medicolegal death investigation system.

Currently, uniform qualifications do not exist for forensic anthropologists, leading to variability in competency to practice. This standard provides minimum qualifications for forensic anthropology education, training, certification, ethics, and professionalism in the United States of America.

This document supplements ASTM E2917-24a *Standard Practice for Forensic Science Practitioner Training, Continuing Education, and Professional Development Programs*. This standard is of value to 1) forensic anthropology students and practitioners as they acquire and maintain their knowledge, skills, and certification; 2) institutions and organizations, both within and outside of academia, in their development of student and professional educational, training, and certification programs; and 3) forensic anthropology service providers and consumers in their evaluation of forensic anthropology competency.

The American Academy of Forensic Sciences established the Academy Standards Board (ASB) in 2015 with a vision of safeguarding Justice, Integrity and Fairness through Consensus Based American National Standards. To that end, the ASB develops consensus based forensic standards within a framework accredited by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), and provides training to support those standards. ASB values integrity, scientific rigor, openness, due process, collaboration, excellence, diversity and inclusion. ASB is dedicated to developing and making freely accessible the highest quality documentary forensic science consensus Standards, Guidelines, Best Practices, and Technical Reports in a wide range of forensic science disciplines as a service to forensic practitioners and the legal system.

This document was revised, prepared, and finalized as a standard by the Anthropology Consensus Body of the AAFS Standards Board. The draft of this standard was developed by the Anthropology Subcommittee of the Organization of Scientific Area Committees (OSAC) for Forensic Science.

Questions, comments, and suggestions for the improvement of this document can be sent to AAFS-ASB Secretariat, asb@aaafs.org or 410 N 21st Street, Colorado Springs, CO 80904.

All hyperlinks and web addresses shown in this document are current as of the publication date of this standard.

ASB procedures are publicly available, free of cost, at www.aaafs.org/academy-standards-board.

Keywords: *forensic anthropology; education; training; qualifications.*

Table of Contents *(to be updated when the document is finalized)*

1 Scope.....

2 Normative References

3 Terms and Definitions

4 Requirements.....

DRAFT

1 Standard for Qualifications for Forensic Anthropology Practitioners

2 **1 Scope**

3 This standard provides the minimum qualifications and requirements for forensic anthropology
4 practitioners, including education, training, experience, certification, ethics, and professionalism.

5 **2 Normative References**

6 The following reference is indispensable for the application of the standard. See Annex C,
7 Bibliography, for informative references.

8 ASTM Standard E2917-24a. *Standard Practice for Forensic Science Practitioner Training, Continuing*
9 *Education, and Professional Development Programs*. 2024.

10 **3 Terms and Definitions**

11 For purposes of this document, the following definitions apply.

12 **3.1**

13 **chain of custody**

14 Chronological record of the handling and storage of an item from its point of collection to its final
15 return or disposal.

16 **3.2**

17 **competency**

18 Forensic science practitioner's acquisition and demonstration of necessary specialized knowledge,
19 technical skills, and abilities to successfully perform examinations and analyses prior to
20 independent practice.

21 **3.3**

22 **ethical conduct**

23 Behavior that conforms to relevant published standards of professional conduct (e.g., follows
24 applicable Codes of Ethics for the discipline).

25 **3.4**

26 **forensic science service provider**

27 **FSSP**

28 Organization or individual that provides forensic science services.

29 **3.5**

30 **human remains**

31 Human soft, osseous and dental tissues or derived samples (e.g., hair, fingernails, cuttings for DNA
32 or isotopic testing, extracts derived from a primary source).

33 **3.6**

34 **internship**

35 In-depth educational or training program that offers a period of supervised practical experience in
36 a forensic science setting.

37 **3.7**

38 **medicolegal authority**

39 A person or agency charged by statute with conducting death investigations for the purpose of
40 certifying deaths (e.g., Coroners, Medical Examiners, Justices of the Peace).

41 **3.8**

42 **professional development**

43 Mechanism through which a forensic science practitioner improves personal skills, successfully
44 handles increasing responsibility, makes contributions to the profession, and reinforces ethical
45 behaviors.

46 **3.9**

47 **proficiency testing**

48 Evaluation of participant performance against pre-established criteria using interlaboratory
49 comparisons (ISO/IEC 17043:2023).

50 **3.10**

51 **quality management**

52 Coordinated activities to direct and control an organization with regard to quality.

53 NOTE Direction and control with regard to quality generally include the establishment of a quality policy and
54 quality objectives, quality planning, quality control, quality assurance, and quality improvement

55 **3.11**

56 **technical record**

57 All pertinent items created or used to support findings of a forensic anthropological examination.

58 NOTE Technical records may be field or laboratory notes documenting tests undertaken, photographs and
59 medical imaging forming the basis for analysis or technical conclusions, test records, antemortem medical
60 and dental records, and other documentation (e.g., bench notes, inventories, observations, diagrams,
61 sketches, charts)

62 **3.12 training**

63 Formal, structured process of teaching and assessment outside of academic coursework, often at a
64 laboratory or other non-educational institution, but also includes continuing education
65 opportunities.

66 NOTE Often results in a certificate or formal documentation of completion

67 **4 Qualifications**

68 **4.1 General**

69 Forensic anthropologists shall have discipline-specific expertise to conduct forensic
70 anthropological examinations.

71 NOTE Sections 4.2 through 4.6 describe minimum qualifications for forensic anthropology education,
72 training and experience, certification, continuing education and professional development, and adherence to
73 ethical and other professional standards.

74 **4.2 Education**

75 **4.2.1** Forensic anthropologists shall have a graduate degree in anthropology from an accredited
76 college or university. This degree should be a Ph.D. with an educational curriculum that includes a
77 broad foundation in anthropology and a focus in forensic anthropology.

78 **4.2.2** Forensic anthropologists shall meet the competencies listed in Annex A.

79 NOTE 1 The discipline of forensic anthropology does not currently have a standardized curriculum
80 addressing the competencies in Annex A comparable to other forensic specialties. Therefore, the academic
81 transcripts of forensic anthropologists are variable.

82 NOTE 2 It is preferred that all competencies in Annex A be gained through formal educational coursework.
83 To ensure educational programs meet the needs of future forensic anthropology practitioners, standardizing
84 curricula is recommended. If all competencies are not acquired through formal coursework, see 4.3.

85 **4.3 Training and Experience**

86 **4.3.1** Forensic anthropologists shall supplement their education with discipline-specific training
87 and experience, as outlined in ASTM Standard E2917, *Standard Practice for Forensic Science*
88 *Practitioner Training, Continuing Education, and Professional Development Programs*.

89 NOTE Forensic training can be obtained through internships, postgraduate fellowships, continuing education
90 coursework, and other types of professional mentoring (see Annex B).

91 **4.3.1.1** Experience shall be a component of building and maintaining competency as a forensic
92 anthropology practitioner. Experience shall include both practical (i.e., direct observation and
93 participation) and theoretical aspects of the discipline.

94 **4.3.1.2** Forensic anthropologists shall have experience working with medicolegal authorities,
95 including observation of casework in a medicolegal setting (e.g., medical examiner/coroner facility)
96 and observation of courtroom testimony when possible and appropriate.

97 **4.3.2** Although the length and depth of training and experience are dependent on the scope and
98 setting of work to be performed, they shall focus on addressing the competency areas listed in
99 Annex A.

100 **4.3.3** Forensic anthropology practitioners shall demonstrate and document training and related
101 experiences.

102 **4.3.3.1** All training and experience should be supervised by a certified forensic anthropologist.

103 **4.3.3.2** All training and experience should be documented in a training log verified by a subject
104 matter expert.

105 **4.4 Certification**

106 In addition to the minimum qualifications established in 4.2 and 4.3, forensic anthropology
107 practitioners shall obtain certification from an accredited body that assesses expertise and
108 competence in forensic anthropology, when eligible.

109 NOTE 1 Certification is a necessary component of professional development, in part because it provides an
 110 objective means of demonstrating competence to practice. It is a key indicator to stakeholders (e.g.,
 111 employers, medicolegal community, legal practitioners, families of decedents, and the public) that an
 112 individual is a competent practitioner in the area(s) in which they practice. It also mandates adherence to a
 113 code of ethics and a recertification program.

114 NOTE 2 Certification assesses competency to practice. Competency in a discipline is assessed through the
 115 demonstration of the requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities in areas specific to that discipline (see Annex
 116 A). It is typically established by passing professional certification exams.

117 **4.5 Continuing Education and Professional Development**

118 **4.5.1** Forensic anthropology practitioners shall remain current in their discipline through
 119 continuing education and professional developmental activities, with the goals of maintaining
 120 competency and broadening their knowledge, skills, and abilities. These activities are available in
 121 multiple forms and should include professional involvement in formal and/or informal programs
 122 and activities, such as:

123 — research, including publication in peer-reviewed volumes and/or presentation at professional
 124 meetings;

125 — teaching of forensic anthropology, forensic science, and associated topics (e.g., archaeology,
 126 anatomy, osteology, introduction to the forensic sciences);

127 — attendance and active participation at professional meetings, seminars, and workshops;

128 — professional service, including participation in professional forensic committees in the
 129 discipline;

130 — international initiatives in forensic anthropology;

131 — short courses or other continuing education opportunities at an advanced educational/training
 132 level;

133 — presentation of invited lectures;

134 — visiting scientist or scholar positions;

135 — internships/fellowships/postdoctoral positions;

136 — mentoring and peer-review;

137 — reading peer-reviewed journals containing forensic anthropology research; and

138 — participation in communities of practice in forensic anthropology.

139 **4.6 Ethics and Professionalism**

140 **4.6.1** Forensic anthropologists, as forensic science service providers (FSSPs), shall conform to a
141 code of professional responsibility that includes strict adherence to a code of ethical conduct.

142 **4.6.2** As forensic scientists, forensic anthropologists shall adhere to the National Code of
143 Professional Responsibility for Forensic Science and Forensic Medicine Practitioners (see Annex C
144 for website address).

145 **4.6.3** Forensic anthropologists who are members of professional forensic science organizations
146 shall also conform to their organizations' codes of ethics.

147 **5 Documentation of Qualifications**

148 **5.1** Forensic anthropology practitioners shall maintain documentation of all qualifications,
149 including education, training, certification, and continuing education and professional development.

150 **5.2** Documentation of all forensic anthropology qualifications listed in 5.1 shall also be
151 maintained by the FSSP's internal quality management program(s) governing forensic
152 anthropologists' work, including proficiency testing, competency testing, and memoranda
153 indicating training completion and ability to perform supervised or independent casework.

154 **6 Unacceptable Practices**

155 Forensic anthropology practitioners shall not:

156 — misrepresent education, training, qualifications, or experience;

157 — fail to maintain certification in the discipline;

158 — fail to seek/maintain current and accurate records of education, training, and/or certification in
159 the discipline; or

160 — violate codes of ethical conduct and professional responsibility for the practice of forensic
161 science.

162

163
164
165
166
167
168
169
170
171
172
173
174
175
176
177
178
179
180
181
182
183
184
185

Annex A
(normative)

Competency Areas for Forensic Anthropology Practice

Forensic anthropologists, at a minimum, shall be competent in the following areas:

- human osteology, musculoskeletal anatomy, comparative osteology;
- bone biology, human variation, skeletal growth and development;
- laboratory methods for processing human remains (e.g., preparing and sampling);
- determining medicolegal significance of remains (e.g., determining human, non-human, or non-
osseous);
- evaluation of commingled assemblages;
- estimation of the biological profile;
- personal identification comparative methodology (e.g., evaluating medical or dental imaging);
- skeletal trauma, the role of bone biomechanics in trauma interpretation, and the timing of
injury;
- evaluation of microscopic, histological representations of bone;
- evaluation of pathological conditions (including description and interpretation of the healing
process) and anomalies of the skeleton;
- taphonomic modifications;
- estimating the postmortem interval/time since death;
- field search, recovery, and scene and evidence documentation and handling;
- evidence handling (e.g., chain of custody) and documentation (e.g., creation and management of
technical records);
- professional standards and ethical conduct in forensic anthropology;

186 — medicolegal system, including legal terminology, expert witness testimony, relevant court
187 rulings, and familiarity with medicolegal authorities and jurisdictions; and

188 — statistics (univariate and multivariate).

189

DRAFT

190 **Annex B**
 191 **(informative)**

192 **Recommended Areas of Education, Training, and Experience**

193 Forensic anthropologists are encouraged to have education, training, and/or experience in the
 194 following areas:

- 195 — general knowledge of forensic science disciplines and their relevance to and impact on case
 196 analysis;
- 197 — bone histology (e.g., sampling and preparation) and light microscopy;
- 198 — biomolecular and chemical methods of skeletal analysis [e.g., X-ray fluorescence (XRF), X-ray
 199 diffraction (XRD), Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR), stable isotope analysis,
 200 DNA]
- 201 — bone and cartilage tool mark characteristics for classification;
- 202 — photography (e.g., effective lighting/exposure, orientation/distance, and scale/case number
 203 placement);
- 204 — laboratory management;
- 205 — quality management including quality assurance;
- 206 — laboratory accreditation;
- 207 — Geographic Information System (GIS);
- 208 — unidentified decedent databases (e.g., National Missing and Unidentified Persons System
 209 [NamUs], National Crime Information Center [NCIC], National Center for Missing and Exploited
 210 Children [NCMEC]); and
- 211 — human factors (e.g., cognitive bias and its effect on forensic anthropology).

212
213

Annex C (informative)

214

Bibliography

215 The following bibliography is not intended to be an all-inclusive list, review, or endorsement of
216 literature on this topic. The goal of the bibliography is to provide publications cited informationally,
217 and publications relevant to the standard.

- 218 1] Bartelink E.J., D.C. Boyd, D. France, J.T. Pokines, D. Prince Zinni. “The American Board of
219 Forensic Anthropology turns 40: historical perspectives and current trends in certification for
220 forensic anthropology.” *Forensic Anthropology*. 3(2):103-111. 2020.
- 221 2] Bolhofner K.L., A.C. Seidel. “Expertise and the expert witness: contemporary educational
222 foundations of forensic anthropology.” In: Fulginiti L.C., Hartnett-McCann K., Galloway A., eds.
223 *Forensic anthropology and the United States judicial system*. Chichester UK: Wiley. pp. 71-88.
224 2019.
- 225 3] Boyd D.C. “Navigating liminality in evolving forensic anthropology professionalism.” *American*
226 *Journal of Biological Anthropology*. 186(1):e25054. 2025.
- 227 4] Boyd D.C., E.J. Bartelink, N.V. Passalacqua, J.T. Pokines, M.T. Tersigni-Tarrant. “The American
228 Board of Forensic Anthropology’s certification program.” *Forensic Anthropology*. 3(2):112-
229 119. 2020.
- 230 5] Fleischman J., J. Vollner, B. Adams, C.M. Crowder, D. Pinto, M. Soto Martinez, C. Rainwater, C.
231 Vogelsberg, J. Wiersema. “The evolving role of forensic anthropologists in medical examiner
232 offices.” *Forensic Anthropology*. 7(4):282-289. 2023.
- 233 6] Fleischman J.M., M.L. Pierce, C.M. Crowder. “Transparency in forensic anthropology through the
234 implementation of quality assurance practices.” In: Fulginiti L.C., Hartnett-McCann K.,
235 Galloway A., eds. *Forensic anthropology and the United States judicial system*. Chichester UK:
236 Wiley. pp. 53-68. 2019.
- 237 7] Galloway A., T.L. Simmons. “Education in forensic anthropology: appraisal and outlook.” *Journal*
238 *of Forensic Sciences*. 42:796-801. 1997.
- 239 8] Hartley S., A.P. Winburn. “A hierarchy of expert performance as applied to forensic
240 anthropology.” *Journal of Forensic Sciences*. 66:1617-1626. 2021.
- 241 9] ISO/IEC 17043:2023. Conformity assessment — General requirements for the competence of
242 proficiency testing providers, 2nd edition.
- 243 10] Langley N., M.T. Tersigni-Tarrant. “Core competencies in forensic anthropology: a framework
244 for education, training, and practice.” *Forensic Anthropology*. 3(2):76-81. 2020.
- 245 11] Langley N., M.T. Tersigni-Tarrant. “Education, training, and competencies in forensic
246 anthropology.” *Forensic Anthropology*. 3(2):65. 2020.

- 247 12] Langley N., M.T. Tersigni-Tarrant, N. Passalacqua, C.M. Crowder, H.M. Garvin, W.E.P. McQuade,
 248 M. Soto Martinez, M.A. Pilloud. "The future of forensic anthropology practice and education:
 249 competencies, certification, and licensure." *American Journal of Biological Anthropology*.
 250 186(3):e70034. 2025.
- 251 13] Love J.C., N. Langley. "Exploring educational needs beyond technical competency: laboratory
 252 management, court testimony, and vicarious trauma." *Forensic Anthropology*. 3(2):82-90.
 253 2020.
- 254 14] Nakhaeizadeh S., I. Hanson, N. Dozzie. "The power of contextual effects in forensic
 255 anthropology: a study of biasability in the visual interpretations of trauma analysis on
 256 skeletal remains." *Journal of Forensic Sciences*. 59(5):1177-1183. 2014.
- 257 15] Nakhaeizadeh S., R.M. Morgan, C. Rando, I.E. Dror. "Cascading bias of initial exposure to
 258 information at the crime scene to the subsequent evaluation of skeletal remains." *Journal of*
 259 *Forensic Sciences*. 63(2):403-11. 2018.
- 260 16] National Commission on Forensic Science. *National Code of Professional Responsibility for*
 261 *Forensic Science and Forensic Medicine Service Providers. Recommendation to the Attorney*
 262 *General*. 2016.
- 263 17] Passalacqua N.V., N.R. Langley, M.A. Pilloud, M.T. Tersigni-Tarrant. "Evaluating expertise in
 264 forensic anthropology." *Journal of Forensic Sciences*. 68(4):1111-1120. 2023.
- 265 18] Passalacqua N.V., M.A. Pilloud. "Education and training in forensic anthropology." *Forensic*
 266 *Anthropology*. 3(2):66-75. 2020.
- 267 19] Passalacqua N.V., M.A. Pilloud, D. Congram. "Forensic anthropology as a discipline." *Biology*.
 268 10(8):691-708. 2021.
- 269 20] Passalacqua N.V., S. Mulholland, M.A. Pilloud, A. Klales. "The value of forensic anthropology in
 270 undergraduate anthropology programs." *American Anthropologist*. 123(3):603- 616. 2021.
- 271 21] Passalacqua N.V., M.A. Pilloud. *Ethics and professionalism in forensic anthropology*. London:
 272 Elsevier, Academic Press. 2018.
- 273 22] Pinto D.C., M.L. Pierce, J.M. Wiersema. "A model for forensic anthropology training." *Forensic*
 274 *Anthropology*. 3(2):91-96. 2020.

DRAFT



ASB
AAFS STANDARDS BOARD

Academy Standards Board
410 North 21st Street
Colorado Springs, CO 80904

www.aafs.org/academy-standards-board