

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. [2025202X](http://www.aafs.org/academy-standards-board) 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 [2917-24E2917-24a](#) *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

Standard for Qualifications for Forensic Anthropology Practitioners

1 Scope

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

2 Normative References

The following reference is indispensable for the application of the standard. ~~For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.~~ See Annex C, Bibliography, for informative references.

ASTM Standard E2917-24a, *Standard Practice for Forensic Science Practitioner Training, Continuing Education, and Professional Development Programs*. [2024](#).

3 Terms and Definitions

For purposes of this document, the following definitions apply.

3.1

chain of custody

~~chronological~~[Chronological](#) record of the handling and storage of an item from its point of collection to its final return or disposal.

3.2

competency

~~forensic~~[Forensic](#) science practitioner's acquisition and demonstration of necessary specialized knowledge, technical skills, and abilities to successfully perform examinations and analyses prior to independent practice.

3.3

ethical conduct

~~behavior~~[Behavior](#) that conforms to relevant published standards of professional conduct (e.g., follows applicable Codes of Ethics for the discipline).

3.4

forensic science service provider

FSSP

~~organization~~[Organization](#) or individual that provides forensic science services.

3.5

human remains

~~human~~[Human](#) soft, osseous and dental tissues or derived samples (e.g., hair, fingernails, cuttings for DNA or isotopic testing, extracts derived from a primary source).

3.6

internship

~~in~~[In](#)-depth educational or training program that offers a period of supervised practical experience in a forensic science setting.

3.7**medicolegal ~~death investigation~~ authority**

~~A person or persons whose duty it is to perform medicolegal agency charged by statute with conducting death investigations for a designated jurisdiction and ensure certification the purpose of cause and manner of death certifying deaths~~ (e.g., Coroners, Medical Examiners, Justices of the Peace).

3.8**professional development**

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

3.9**proficiency testing**

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

3.10**quality management**

~~coordinated~~ **Coordinated** activities to direct and control an organization ~~concerning with regard to~~ quality.

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

~~**1.1**~~~~**training**~~

~~formal, structured process of teaching and assessment outside of academic coursework, often at a laboratory or other non-educational institution, but also includes continuing education opportunities~~

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

3.11**technical record**

~~all~~ **All** pertinent items created or used to support findings of a forensic anthropological examination.

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

3.12 training

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

NOTE Often results in a certificate or formal documentation of completion

4 Qualifications

4.1 General

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

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

4.2 Education

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

[4.2.2 Forensic anthropologists shall meet the competencies listed in Annex A.](#)

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

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

4.3 Training and Experience

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.4 Certification

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

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

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

4.5 Continuing Education and Professional Development

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

- research, including publication in peer-reviewed volumes and/or presentation at professional meetings;
- teaching of forensic anthropology, forensic science, and associated topics (e.g., archaeology, anatomy, osteology, introduction to the forensic sciences);
- attendance and active participation at professional meetings, seminars, and workshops;
- professional service, including participation in professional forensic committees in the discipline;
- international initiatives in forensic anthropology;
- short courses or other continuing education opportunities at an advanced educational/training level;
- presentation of invited lectures;
- visiting scientist or scholar positions;

- internships/fellowships/~~postdocs~~; [postdoctoral positions](#);
- mentoring and peer-review;
- reading peer-reviewed journals containing forensic anthropology research; and
- participation in communities of practice in forensic anthropology.

4.6 Ethics and Professionalism

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

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

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

5 Documentation of Qualifications

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

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

6 Unacceptable Practices

Forensic anthropology practitioners shall not:

- misrepresent education, training, qualifications, or experience;
- fail to maintain certification in the discipline;
- fail to seek/maintain current and accurate records of education, training, and/or certification in the discipline; or
- violate codes of ethical conduct and professional responsibility for the practice of forensic science.

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., ~~maceration~~[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 ~~and/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;

- medicolegal system, including legal terminology, expert witness testimony, relevant court rulings, and familiarity with medicolegal authorities and jurisdictions; [and](#)
- statistics (univariate and multivariate).

DRAFT

Annex B (informative)

Recommended Areas of Education, Training, and Experience

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

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

Annex C (informative)

Bibliography

The following bibliography is not intended to be an all-inclusive list, review, or endorsement of literature on this topic. The goal of the bibliography is to provide [examples of concepts/publications cited informationally](#), and publications [addressed in relevant to](#) the standard.

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

- [12\]](#) Langley N., M.T. Tersigni-Tarrant, N. Passalacqua, C.M. Crowder, H.M. Garvin, W.E.P. McQuade, M. Soto Martinez, M.A. Pilloud. "The future of forensic anthropology practice and education: competencies, certification, and licensure." *American Journal of Biological Anthropology*. 186(3):e70034. 2025.
- ~~10]~~[13\]](#) Love J.C., N. Langley. "Exploring educational needs beyond technical competency: laboratory management, court testimony, and vicarious trauma." *Forensic Anthropology*. 3(2):82-90. 2020.
- ~~11]~~[14\]](#) Nakhaeizadeh S., I. Hanson, N. Dozzie. "The power of contextual effects in forensic anthropology: a study of biasability in the visual interpretations of trauma analysis on skeletal remains." *Journal of Forensic Sciences*. 59(5):1177-1183. 2014.
- ~~12]~~[15\]](#) Nakhaeizadeh S., R.M. Morgan, C. Rando, I.E. Dror. "Cascading bias of initial exposure to information at the crime scene to the subsequent evaluation of skeletal remains." *Journal of Forensic Sciences*. 63(2):403-11. 2018.
- ~~13]~~[16\]](#) National Commission on Forensic Science. *National Code of Professional Responsibility for Forensic Science and Forensic Medicine Service Providers. Recommendation to the Attorney General*. 2016¹.
- ~~14]~~[17\]](#) Passalacqua N.V., N.R. Langley, M.A. Pilloud, M.T. Tersigni-Tarrant. "Evaluating expertise in forensic anthropology." *Journal of Forensic Sciences*. 68(4):1111-1120. 2023.
- ~~15]~~[18\]](#) Passalacqua N.V., M.A. Pilloud. "Education and training in forensic anthropology." *Forensic Anthropology*. 3(2):66-75. 2020.
- ~~16]~~[19\]](#) Passalacqua N.V., M.A. Pilloud, D. Congram. "Forensic anthropology as a discipline." *Biology*. 10(8):691-708. 2021².
- ~~17]~~[20\]](#) Passalacqua N.V., S. Mulholland, M.A. Pilloud, A. Klaes. "The value of forensic anthropology in undergraduate anthropology programs." *American Anthropologist*. 123(3):603- 616. DOI: [10.1111/aman.13638](https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13638). 2021.
- ~~18]~~[21\]](#) Passalacqua N.V., M.A. Pilloud. *Ethics and professionalism in forensic anthropology*. London: Elsevier, Academic Press. 2018.
- ~~19]~~[22\]](#) Pinto D.C., M.L. Pierce, J.M. Wiersema. "A model for forensic anthropology training." *Forensic Anthropology*. 3(2):91-96. 2020.

¹ Available from: <https://www.justice.gov/ncfs/file/839711/dl>

² Available from: <https://doi.org/10.3390/biology10080691>

DRAFT



ASB
AAFS STANDARDS BOARD

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

www.aafs.org/academy-standards-board