

APA STANDARDS OF PRACTICE  
(Amended 8-23-24)

- 1 Statement of Purpose: To promote the highest degree of decision accuracy in credibility assessment, the APA establishes for its membership the following Standards of Practice. All examinations are required to be conducted in compliance with governing local, state, and federal regulations and laws.
- 1.1 Definitions
  - 1.1.1 Polygraph examination: A psychophysiological test of deception or recognition sometimes referred to as lie-detection as a term of convenience. The polygraph examination is a standardized, evidence-based test of the margin of uncertainty or level of confidence surrounding a categorical conclusion of deception or the possession of knowledge or information regarding a test target issue. Test data are a combination of physiological proxies that have been shown to vary significantly with different types of test stimuli as a function of deception or truth-telling in response to the relevant investigation target stimuli. The psychological basis of responses to polygraph stimuli is thought to involve attention, cognition, emotion, and behavioral conditions. The examination consists of an interview phase, to clarify the issue under investigation and related test stimuli, a data acquisition phase, during which physiological responses to test stimuli are permanently recorded, and an analysis phase during which differences in responses to different types of test stimuli are numerically quantified to calculate a statistical classifier for a categorical test result. The examiner may also provide the examinee an opportunity to explain any physiological responses and resolve any remaining inconsistencies.
  - 1.1.2 Evidentiary Examination: A polygraph examination in which the written and stated purpose agreed to by the parties involved is to provide a diagnostic opinion as evidence in a pending judicial proceeding.
  - 1.1.3 Paired Testing Examination: Polygraph examinations conducted in tandem on two or more individuals by different examiners who are mutually blind to the other test results regarding a single central contested fact to which all examinees are expected to know the truth thereof. Paired testing is used by voluntary stipulation between the testifying parties to resolve disputed facts.
  - 1.1.4 Investigative Examination: A polygraph examination which is intended to supplement and/or assist an investigation and for which the examiner has not been informed and does not reasonably believe that the results of the examination will be tendered for admission as evidence in a court proceeding. Investigative examinations may be conducted for screening purposes or to investigate known allegations or known incidents.

- 1.1.5 Diagnostic examination: An event-specific evidentiary or investigative polygraph examination conducted to assist in determining the veracity of an examinee regarding his or her knowledge of or involvement in a reported issue or allegation. Diagnostic examinations may address a single aspect or multiple facts of an event.
- 1.1.6 Screening examination: A polygraph examination conducted in the absence of a reported incident or allegation. Screening examinations may be conducted as single issue or multiple issue exams.
- 1.1.7 Test data analysis in polygraph refers to any structured method, whether manual or automated, for the evaluation and interpretation of the recorded physiological data in terms of probabilistic margins of uncertainty and/or categorical test decisions concerning the examinee's truthfulness or concealed knowledge. Decisions for diagnostic and screening examinations include:
  - 1.1.7.1 Diagnostic Opinion: A professional opinion based on the results of a polygraph technique that meets the criterion validity requirements for evidentiary testing or paired testing. Results of deception tests can be described in terms of statistical significance, and are normally reported using the terms Deception Indicated, No Deception Indicated, Inconclusive, and No Opinion (DI or NDI, INC, or NO). Test results of recognition tests are normally reported using the terms Recognition Indicated, No Recognition Indicated, or No Opinion (RI, NRI, NO).
  - 1.1.7.2 Screening Opinion: A professional opinion based on the results of a polygraph technique that meets the requirements for screening purposes; normally reported using the terms Significant Response, No Significant Response, Inconclusive, or No Opinion (SR, NSR, INC, or NO).
  - 1.1.7.3 Polygraph Technique: A polygraph technique consists of a combination of:
    - 1) a polygraph testing format for which there is a published description of test administration procedures that conforms to evidence-based principles for target selection, test question construction, and test administration; and
    - 2) a published description of the test data analyses model, including physiological features, transformations, decision rules, and normative data.
  - 1.1.7.3.1 Polygraph techniques for evidentiary examinations shall be those for which there exists at least two published empirical studies, original and replicated, demonstrating an unweighted average accuracy rate of 90% or greater excluding inconclusive results, which shall not exceed 20%.
  - 1.1.7.3.2 Polygraph techniques for paired testing shall be those for which there exists at least two published empirical studies, original and replicated,

demonstrating an unweighted average accuracy rate of 86% or greater, excluding inconclusive results, which shall not exceed 20%.

- 1.1.7.3.3 Polygraph techniques for investigative testing shall be those for which there exist at least two published empirical studies, original and replicated, demonstrating an unweighted average accuracy rate of 80% or greater, excluding inconclusive results, which shall not exceed 20%.
- 1.1.7.3.4 Polygraph techniques used for screening purposes shall be those for which there exist at least two published empirical studies, original and replicated, demonstrating an unweighted accuracy rate that is significantly greater than chance, and should be used in a “successive hurdles” approach which entails additional testing with validated methods when the screening test is not favorably resolved.
- 1.1.7.4 A Polygraph Examiner: a person who meets the training and education requirements as set forth in the APA Bylaws.
- 1.1.7.5 Post Conviction Sex Offender Testing (PCSOT) Examiner: a polygraph examiner who conducts examinations of sex offenders as a condition of treatment, probation, parole or supervised release, and who has completed specialized training consistent with APA standards.

## 1.2 Examiner Responsibilities

- 1.2.1 A polygraph examiner shall, where applicable, comply with all state continuing education requirements. Practicing examiners shall complete a minimum of 30 continuing education hours every two years in coursework related to the field of polygraphy. Examiners are responsible for maintaining their own records to document that they have met the continuing education requirement.
- 1.2.2 Examiners shall accurately represent their APA membership category, their academic credentials, licensure, and certification status.
- 1.2.3 The examiner should make reasonable efforts to determine that the examinee is a suitable candidate for polygraph testing. Basic inquiries into the medical and psychological condition of the examinee should be made where allowed by law. Mental, physical, or medical conditions of the examinee that are observable by or reasonably known to the examiner should be considered when conducting and evaluating an examination.

### 1.3 Instrumentation and Recording

#### 1.3.1 Polygraph examinations shall be conducted with properly functioning instrumentation that records with, at a minimum, the following physiological data:

1.3.1.1 Respiration patterns recorded by pneumograph components. Thoracic and abdominal patterns should be recorded separately, using two pneumograph components;

1.3.1.2 Electrodermal activity reflecting relative changes in the conductance or resistance of electrical current by the epidermal tissue;

1.3.1.3 Cardiovascular activity including changes in relative blood pressure, pulse rate, and pulse amplitude; and,

1.3.1.4 A seat activity sensor.

1.3.1.5 Other physiological data may also be recorded during testing, but may not be used to formulate probabilistic or categorical conclusions unless their validity is supported by replicated and published research.

1.3.2 Physiological recordings during each test shall be continuous and should be of sufficient amplitude to be easily readable by the examiner and any reviewing examiner.

### 1.4 Test Location and Conditions

1.4.1 The testing environment should be reasonably free from distractions.

1.4.2 Examiners conducting polygraph examinations during public viewing are prohibited from rendering opinions regarding the truthfulness of the examinees on the basis of these examinations. Examiners should ensure that reenactments of polygraph examinations are clearly conveyed as such to viewers. If the examiner determines that the reenactment will not or has not been clearly conveyed as a reenactment, the examiner shall immediately notify the APA National Office.

### 1.5 Preparation

1.5.1 Prior to an examination, the examiner shall dedicate sufficient time to identify and discuss the examination issues and potential problem areas.

### 1.6 Pretest Practices

1.6.1 The examiner shall obtain information sufficient to identify the examinee.

- 1.6.2 The examiner shall obtain the informed consent of the examinee prior to testing. It is recommended that the informed consent of the examinee be obtained after an overview of the polygraph process, including polygraph instrumentation and sensors, use of video/audio recording, issues to be discussed, requirements for cooperation during testing, and the need to report information and results to the referring professionals.
- 1.6.3 The examiner shall review all test questions prior to recording the physiological responses of the examinee.
- 1.6.4 The examiner shall conduct the examination in a neutral manner and shall not display or express any bias regarding the truthfulness of the examinee prior to the completion of testing.
- 1.7 Testing
  - 1.7.1 A member polygraph examiner shall use evidence-based validated testing techniques. For purposes of these standards, a testing technique shall be considered valid if supported by research conducted in accordance with the APA's research standards. Where examinations deviate from the protocols of a validated polygraph technique, the deviations should be explained in writing.
  - 1.7.2 Nothing in these standards of practice shall be construed as preventing examiners and researchers from investigation and developing improved methods. Polygraph techniques that do not meet these standards for validation shall be considered experimental methods.
  - 1.7.3 Field examiners who employ experimental techniques shall be in compliance with applicable law related to human subject research and should inform the examinee and the party requesting the examination of the use of any experimental techniques. Results from experimental techniques used in field settings shall not be used in isolation to render diagnostic or screening decisions.
  - 1.7.4 Nothing in these standards of practice shall be construed as prohibiting the use of other supportive methodologies that do not meet the requirements of these standards (e.g.: Yes Test, Searching Peak of Tension, etc.). However, non-validated techniques shall not be used in isolation to render screening or diagnostic decisions.
  - 1.7.5 An audio or audio-video recording of all phases of the exam shall be maintained as part of the examination files, consistent with agency policy, regulation or law, for a minimum of one (1) year.

- 1.7.6 Examiners shall conduct an acquaintance test for all diagnostic, evidentiary, paired-testing, initial screening, and initial investigative examinations.
- 1.7.7 Questions used in the assessment of truth and deception shall be followed by time intervals of not less than 20 seconds from question onset to question onset.
- 1.7.8 Examiners should use standardized chart markings.
- 1.7.9 Polygraph examiners should ensure that all polygraph reports, data, recordings, information and documents are protected against loss, inappropriate release, unauthorized access, alteration and misuse. Polygraph reports and related work products should be released only to authorized referring or retaining persons, professionals, and agencies as delineated on the signed statement of informed consent or as set out in orders of the court. Unless required by law, polygraph examiners should not release polygraph reports, test questions, data, recordings, information and documents of any kind related to the polygraph pre-test, in-test or post-test to persons that may attempt to use such information to neutralize or interfere with the effectiveness of future polygraph examinations.
  - 1.7.9.1 Polygraph examiners should ensure that all polygraph reports, test questions, data, recordings, information and documents of any kind related to the polygraph pre-test, in-test and post-test are maintained for a minimum of three (3) years or as otherwise required by law.
  - 1.7.9.2 A recording of all phases of the exam shall be maintained as part of the examination files, consistent with agency policy regulation or law, for a minimum of one (1) year.
- 1.7.10 All aspects of the polygraph, including the pre-test interview, the in-test and the post-test interview, if conducted, shall be conducted in-person by the examiner. Electronic communications shall not be substituted for in-person communication between the examiner and examinee. At the onset of the examination, the examiner shall obtain information sufficient to identify the examinee.
- 1.7.11 Examinations shall be scheduled for not less than 90 minutes. A member polygraph examiner shall not conduct more than five examinations of any type in one day.
- 1.7.12 Examiners who test sex offenders as a condition of treatment, probation, parole or supervise release, shall have earned a certificate of training for a minimum of 40 hours of specialized instruction in post conviction testing.

## 1.8.0 Data Analysis and Test Results

1.8.1 Examiners shall render a conclusion for each examination based on a method of data analysis that is validated in a manner consistent with section 1.1.7 in these Standards

1.8.1.1 Examiners may suspend judgement when there is countervailing information or an identified external factor that reduces confidence in a decision that would otherwise be based on the polygraph data. Under those circumstances an examiner may issue a conclusion of Inconclusive or No Opinion.

1.8.2 Examiners shall document in the examination report and exam notes sufficient information and analysis parameters to support the replication of the analysis and conclusion by a reviewing examiner.

1.8.3 For evidentiary examinations, an examiner shall report the probabilistic results for the technique and/or the rendered opinion.

1.8.4 A test result shall not be final until it is documented in the examination report and issued to the referring professional or agency.

1.8.4.1 Where no written report is requested, the examiner should retain sufficient notes and information that the details of the test, including the testing instrumentation, testing format, content of the pretest interview, test questions, audio-video or audio recording, and data analysis can be accurately discussed at a later time, including the completion of a written report, if necessary.

1.8.5 Examiners shall maintain the confidentiality of their work conducted until a release is obtained from the examinee. Information shall be released only to the person or entity named on the signed release form.

1.8.6 An examiner subject to quality control review shall provide sufficient information, excluding privileged communications and/or work product, to complete the quality control review, including at a minimum:

1.8.6.1 The digital or electronic polygraph data in original form;

1.8.6.2 All test questions;

1.8.6.3 Referral information sufficient to review the target selection and question formulation;

1.8.6.4 Audio-video or audio recording of the examination in its entirety;

1.8.6.5 The examination report, and;

1.8.6.6 Any additional information necessary to replicate the analysis and result.