

ACVP Certifying Examination Standard Setting and Cut Score Determination

ACVP is obligated to set cut scores for certifying examinations that reflect the minimum level of knowledge and skills of a newly certified veterinary pathologist. The cut score is the score that a candidate must achieve to pass an examination. Cut scores are established for each examination (Phase I, Phase II Anatomic Pathology, Phase II Clinical Pathology) using standard setting studies. These are performed using a Modified Angoff method which is a criterion-referenced standard setting process. It utilizes a group of content experts, under the guidance of a professional psychometrician, to evaluate all questions within the respective examination. Content experts are ACVP Diplomates selected across employment sectors and experience levels. Data is psychometrically analyzed to derive a cut score. This cut score is initially provisional and may be adjusted downward after critical review of actual examination and question performance to set the final operational score. Once established, the operational cut score is then applied to each subsequent examination until a new standard setting study is conducted.

Standard setting studies are conducted on a regular basis to ensure relevance of the cut score. Additionally, a new standard setting study must be conducted following a job task analysis or when the structure, format, or distribution of content in an examination change sufficiently that the scores may be affected.

There is no expectation that cut scores will remain the same between standard setting studies. As such, historical cut scores are not meaningfully comparable following a new standard setting process. There is also no expectation that cut scores will be similar for anatomic pathology and clinical pathology examinations.

Standard Settings were last conducted in 2017 (Phase I examination) and 2023 (Phase II examinations). The current cut scores for each examination are:

Phase I: Operational cut score: 64 (of 100 possible points)

Phase II, Anatomic Pathology: Operational cut score: 204 (of 300 possible points)

Phase II, Clinical Pathology: Operational cut score: 223 (of 300 possible points)

Equating

In alignment with best practices for professional certifying examinations, ACVP works to ensure consistency in content and examination difficulty across years, such as that candidate results are scored fairly, regardless of the year the examination is taken. To this end, examinations are built within the framework of the test plan and a content matrix. ACVP utilizes a process of examination equating to statistically compare the difficulty of examinations across years and to adjust scores to account for any differences. This equating process, conducted by a psychometrician, compares candidate responses to a reference examination with a cut score based on a standard setting study. A subset of questions from the reference examination is used in each new examination to be equated. The analysis determines the relative difficulty of the new examination with respect to the reference examination and computes equated scores for the new examination to accommodate any difference in difficulty. The equated scores are then used to determine pass-fail status.