

Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors (CIPHI)
Board of Certification (BOC) Written Examination Component Review
Employer Survey
Robert Hart, December 12, 2008

Overview

As a component of the Employer Survey conducted this year to validate the Oral Examination Content Guide, the BOC also requested input on the written component of the certification process.

The current requirement is the preparation of two reports based on experience obtained by candidates during their practicum. Specific criteria for both the preparation of reports by candidates and the marking of them by examiners is provided by the BOC.

The following concerns have been raised regarding the current process:

“Originality” of Reports

- Examiners have noted that, in general, reports focus on a small number of topic areas (rabies confinement, swimming pool inspection, restaurant inspection, etc). This has resulted in a large number of very similar reports being submitted making it difficult to screen for plagiarism.

Consistency of Report Scoring

- Despite the existence of a marking scheme, the grading of an open-ended report introduces some subjectivity into the scoring process. This has led to concerns raised by candidates about inequitable/arbitrary scoring of reports.

Relevance of Process

- The current process has also been questioned for its ability to adequately screen candidates for the level of written competency sought by employees.

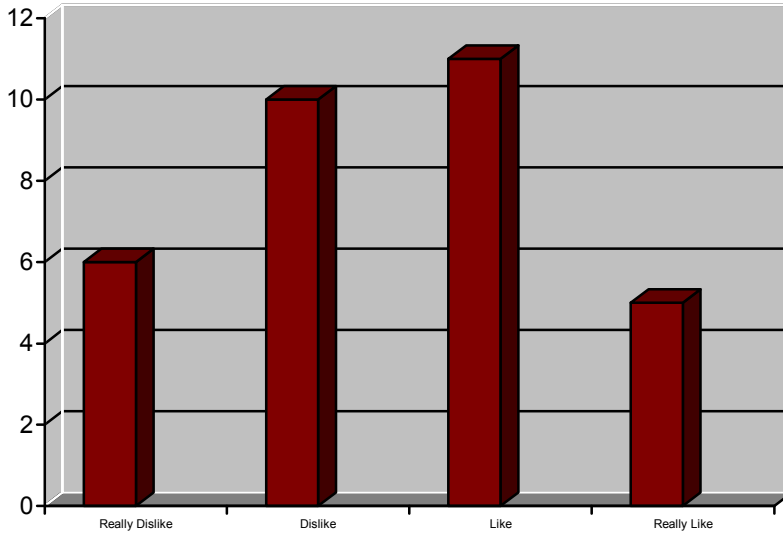
The BOC sought input from employers by requesting that they complete the survey attached below as Appendix A. Employers were asked to gauge entry-level PHI's current written competencies, rate four possible alternative assessment strategies and suggest other possible options.

In total, 32 completed surveys were received from Ontario, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick. Responses were wide-ranging. 54% of respondents were satisfied with the written competency of entry-level PHIs, and/or believed adequate skills would develop naturally with experience. Among the 46% expressing significant dissatisfaction with written competency, spelling, grammar, sentence order/structure, and a general inability to “organize thoughts on paper” were cited as major concerns. Three dissatisfied respondents mentioned English as a second language as a contributing factor to low written skills.

Respondents' reaction to the possible alternative strategies are tabulated below with selected comments.

The results of the survey do not provide any specific direction regarding modifications to the written competency process. As mentioned above, respondents are almost equally divided on whether written competency is an issue at all. Of the alternative strategies posed, there was strong support for both the completion of a written assignment during the oral examination and assessment during practicum. However, even among supportive respondents, concerns were raised about the logistical feasibility of these strategies.

Option 1: Retain the Existing Format

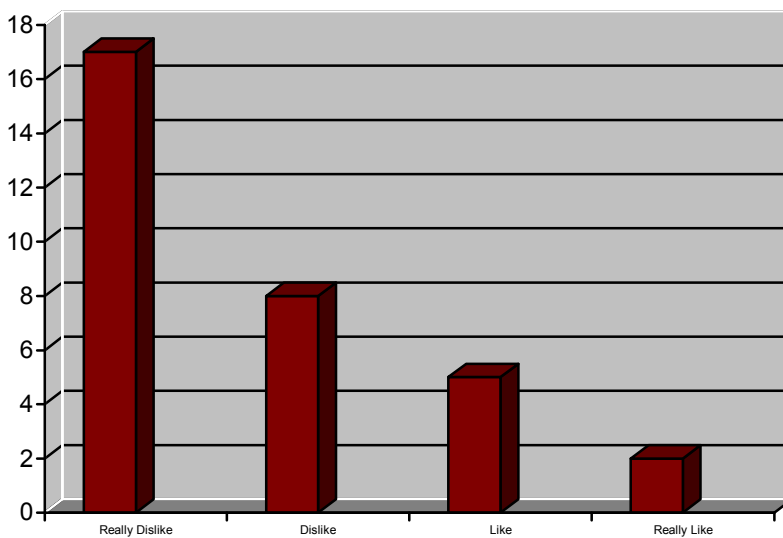


The content needs to include relevance to public / environmental health and not just documenting how the candidate goes through the motions of completing a check box inspection report. The broader public health significance beyond the policy or regulation needs to be stressed in the report.

Surely students who have completed one and sometimes two university courses have written enough papers in their time.

...these reports are not representative of reports they are likely to complete. Also may be reviewed by peers and may not be the work of the candidate

Option 2: One Report Instead of Two

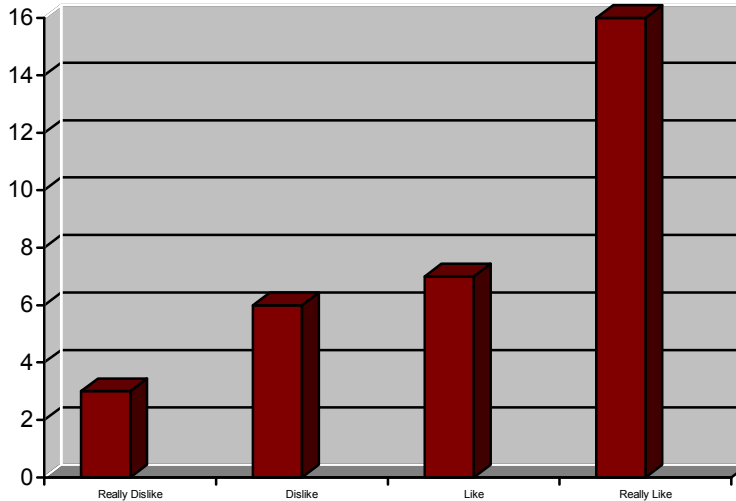


...on the contrary, three reports might be better

...this demands the student spent time on the subjects

...during the process of writing the reports they are learning about the topic and they are practicing report writing skills

Option 3: Written Assignment During Oral



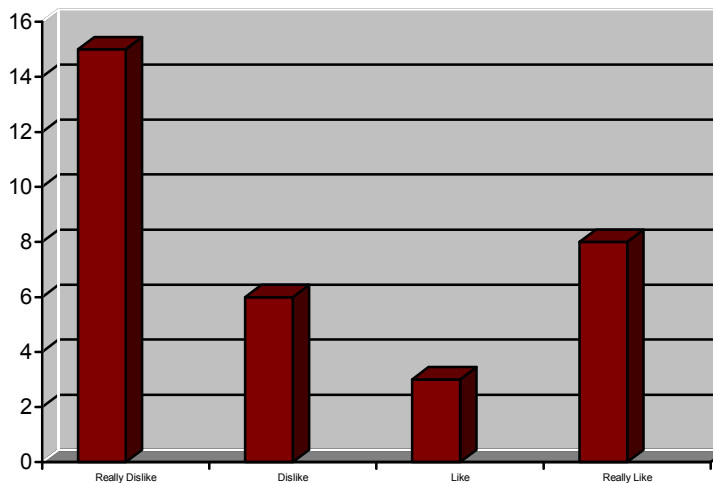
More of a real life test – I like that a lot. But it is more onerous for the BOCs.

I believe this is a great idea but it would be hard to be consistent across the country when it came to marking. The only way it could be fair was if it was a clear answers with no grey areas or the same individual correcting the written part of the exam.

The process would test for both content knowledge and competency in preparing written communications in a brief period of time.

Writing skills take time to develop. Not a good measure of ability.

Option 4: Multiple Choice Administered During Oral

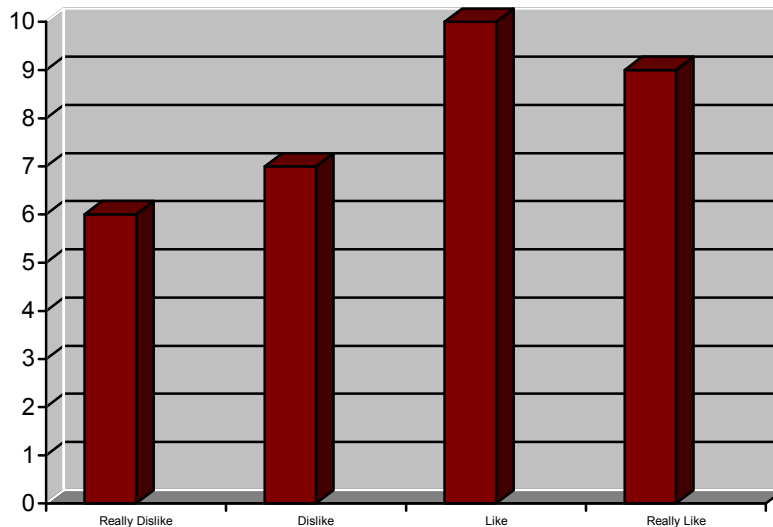


This part was done in school: having a multiple-choice exam will not test for written skills.

We will miss on all the research that candidates have to complete in order to write the report

A multiple choice exam shows little of their ability to communicate what they know.

Option 5: Structured Inspection During Practicum



I'm really concerned about the bias aspect and not sure how you can remove that from this process. The test would have to be really structured but still bias and coaching are a problem.

I like this idea, employers may take a more active role in training as the evaluation of the candidates abilities would be signed off by the practicum agency and submitted directly to the BOC.

Other General Comments and Suggestions:

Food for thought: You could appoint a few examiners in each province to visit candidates while they are training in an RHA [Regional Health Authority]. The RHA would be responsible for providing a list of possible facilities, and the examiner would score the trainees during an inspection of a food premises, daycare, and perhaps one more facility.

We must look at the overall abilities of our candidates. We are presented every year with academically qualified individuals who have a great deal of difficulty communicating or reacting in the real world. There has to be a better way of recruiting students at the front end. We are losing the concept of common everyday sense

Sitting on multiple oral boards and correcting numerous reports as well as being the senior inspector for training of PHI candidates, I've noticed that the written part is very weak. Most entry level PHI's don't have the proper tools/training to write a scientific report based on facts and field work. I strongly believe that a written course should be added either on the University level or as part of the practicum requirements in order to prepare them adequately in writing field reports. Cause in our field, good note taking can make a difference in a court case that could be really beneficial.

Courses should be added at the University level in order to prepare the entry level PHI to write good reports

It is time for change. The [entire certification] process needs revamping! We are asking the same questions using different words for far too long. The students have a better bank of questions than the BOC!

Why not model something like the NEHA process or variation there of (large number M/C plus a few short answer questions) and enable the hiring process to capture the strengths and weaknesses of the candidates

Although you are only seeking comment re written component of BOC process, I think it's important to note that, in my opinion, the reduction in field practicum from 24 to 12 weeks has had a direct negative impact on the quality of candidates that we see. I'd like to see this requirement re-established.

APPENDIX A

BOC Certification Exam - Written Component Survey

PURPOSE:

We are seeking your assessment of current and needed written skills for entry level PHIs and also your input on possible changes to the existing process.

BACKGROUND:

The Existing Process:

The current written requirement for the certification process is the preparation of two reports based on experience obtained by the candidates during their practicum training. Specific criteria for both the preparation of reports by candidates and the marking of them by examiners is provided by the BOC.

The following concerns have been raised regarding the current process:

“Originality” of Reports

Examiners have noted that, in general, reports focus on a small number of topic areas (rabies confinement, swimming pool inspection, restaurant inspection, etc). This has resulted in a large number of very similar reports being submitted making it difficult to screen for plagiarism.

Consistency of Report Scoring

Despite the existence of a marking scheme, the grading of an open-ended report introduces some subjectivity into the scoring process. This has led to concerns raised by candidates about inequitable/arbitrary scoring of reports.

Relevance of Process

The current process has also been questioned for its ability to adequately screen candidates for the level of written competency sought by employees.

PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING TWO TABLES:

TABLE 1 - CURRENTLY OBSERVED LEVEL OF WRITTEN SKILLS

(Please expand the table column sizes as needed to respond)

SKILL AREA	WHAT YOU'VE OBSERVED (Your comments can relate to structure, organization, use of appropriate vocabulary, grammar, and any other aspects of written communication you believe are important)	ARE IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED? IF SO, PLEASE DESCRIBE
Ability to write brief notes, memos, e-mails, etc		
Ability to complete inspection reports that provide written direction to premise operators		
Ability to write progress notes, written records, etc of complaint/incident investigations		
Ability to write detailed reports related to investigations, outbreak response, etc.		
Ability to write formal letters to premise operators, members of the public, other government departments, etc		
Ability to perform any other written task not listed above (please describe)		

TABLE 2 - POSSIBLE CHANGES TO THE WRITTEN COMPONENT OF THE CERTIFICATION PROCESS

*(The following table provides some possible new formats for the written component.
Please rate them according to the scale and provide any comments.)*

POSSIBLE NEW FORMAT	RATING	COMMENTS
<p>1. Continue with the existing process</p>	<p>Really Dislike →→→→ Really Like</p> <p>1 2 3 4</p>	
<p>2. Continue with the existing process, <i>EXCEPT</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates are required to submit only <u>one</u> report. <p>Pros:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The process continues to test for content knowledge and the ability to prepare a formal report. ➤ Reducing the number of reports to one frees up examiner resources so two examiners may mark each report. This would increase the standardization of scoring. <p>Cons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The process differs only in increasing the standardization of scoring. It does not address concerns that reports are not an accurate depiction of the candidates' skills. 	<p>Really Dislike →→→→ Really Like</p> <p>1 2 3 4</p>	

3. Require candidates to complete a written assignment at the time of the oral exam. The assignment would be designed to test the candidate's grasp of an environmental health situation and his/her ability to prepare a written synopsis of the situation.

Pros:

- The process would test for both content knowledge and competency in preparing written communications in a brief period of time.
- Concerns about the work being the candidates' own are eliminated.
- The process makes use of candidate down-time during the sequestering process at the orals.

Cons:

- A standardized scoring procedure would need to be developed for the process.
- The process would introduce more work for the provincial BOCs.

Really Dislike →→→→ Really Like

1 2 3 4

4. Candidates are required to complete a written multiple choice exam at the time of the oral exam.

Pros:

- Scoring is totally objective.

Cons:

- The process does not test for written skills.
- Exam preparation would require a resource-intensive question development/selection process similar to that used for the new oral exam process.
- The process would introduce more work for the provincial BOCs.

Really Dislike →→→→→ Really Like

1 2 3 4

5. During the practicum, the sponsoring health department tests the candidate in a structured inspection of a premise. A

standardized scoring system would be provided by the BOC for use by the health department to assess the candidate's risk assessment, investigative and written/verbal communication skills.

Pros:

- The process tests candidates in "real life" situations and would likely assess for competencies desired by employers.
- The process reduces the burden on the provincial BOCs in providing examiners.

Cons:

- Sponsoring health departments may be reluctant to take on this task.
- Sponsoring health departments may be inadvertently prone to bias in scoring candidates.

Really Dislike →→→→→ Really Like

1 2 3 4

<p>Something else? Please describe, expanding the columns in the table as needed.</p>		
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Thank-you for your assistance in this important project.

Please forward completed surveys to Bob Hart by November 30, 2008

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