

## Oral Exam Guidelines

The objective of the oral exam is to provide a forum for you to demonstrate how you integrate theory, practice, and research related to the training that you have received in the Clinical Counseling Psychology Program. In essence, you will be asked to describe a conceptual model and to show how this model guides and informs your clinical decision making. Therefore, your skill in case conceptualization is an important aspect of the oral exam. Clinical decisions are not guided solely by theory, however. Increasing demands for accountability also emphasize that you consider the empirical evidence in support of your chosen intervention.

In addition to examining the scholarly literature on the effectiveness of psychotherapy, you should address the question of *how you would demonstrate that your intervention worked with a particular client*. In the era of managed behavioral health care, therapists are expected to demonstrate the effectiveness of their interventions. This is not an easy task, especially because each client presents with unique problems and circumstances. Nonetheless, you should discuss how you would demonstrate the effectiveness of your intervention. Several questions are relevant to this issue. For example, what are the goals of the intervention? What evidence would indicate that your intervention has (or has not) been effective? What assessment tools or procedures would you use to obtain this evidence? How does this (i.e., assessment) information guide your clinical decision making?

You should be mindful that you are expected to integrate the various elements of your training and study for the oral exam. Accordingly, you should call upon information from both your course work and internship experience. Narrow, one-dimensional formulations of human nature and experience are strongly discouraged.

The procedures for the oral exam will mirror the training that you have received in the program. The exam itself will be conducted in such a way as to provide you with an opportunity to exhibit your ability to synthesize and integrate theory, practice, and research.

The total time allotted for your oral exam presentation is 45 minutes. During this time frame you are expected to demonstrate competence on several related tasks or topics. As a result, it is essential that you are well prepared for the exam. A structured but flexible approach that organizes the presentation and budgets time appropriately is important for your success. During the exam, you are expected to address the following points.

1. **Adaptive Functioning**: It is important to provide a concise model of human functioning that describes **adaptive functioning**. Outline a model of adaptive functioning that does not rely on terminology or categories of abnormal behavior. During this discussion, you are expected to articulate a vision of adaptive functioning, especially human strengths or resilience. There are a number of models that you have encountered over the course of the program that vary in terms of underlying assumptions and empirical evidence and could be applied to achieve this aim. Additionally, the study of personality and development provides a variety of models that have been subjected to rational and empirical critique.
  - a. Select and describe approximately 5 theories that highlight the capacities of the optimal or adaptive functioning individual.

- b. Given that the Clinical Counseling Psychology Program provides CBT-based education and training, all students should include Beck’s theory of automatic thoughts and core beliefs as one of the theories described.
  - c. All students, especially those presenting a child/adolescent case, are encouraged to include a developmental theory (e.g., Bronfenbrenner’s social ecological systems theory) to highlight how factors outside the individual client influence functioning.
2. **Maladaptive Functioning:** Using the same theories/concepts described in your discussion of adaptive functioning, you should provide a clear description of **maladaptive functioning**. Examples should be cast in psychological rather than medical or quasi-medical language and concepts. The analysis should highlight the role of developmental and social learning processes that are often at the core of impaired or maladaptive functioning. You should also be able to discuss how maladaptive cognitions, behaviors, and emotions are currently construed within the current DSM nomenclature. However, the conceptual categories described in the DSM should not be regarded as the basis for understanding and remediating impaired functioning, but instead, as tools that can be used in this endeavor.
3. **Case Conceptualization:** You should be prepared to present your **case conceptualization** of a specific client with whom you have worked in the past or present. Provide a case history that includes the essential demographic information, overview of your client’s functioning across domains, and describes his/her presenting concerns. It is also important to describe the initial assessment procedures that you administered and connect this data to your understanding of the client, including diagnostic impressions and treatment plan (to be addressed in section 4). The primary component of this section of the paper should be your case formulation, which is your opportunity to provide your clinical understanding of your client. Your formulation should integrate your client’s presenting symptoms, highlight the theoretical underpinnings of CBT, but integrate other empirically supported theories that drive your understanding of the case, especially those discussed in sections 1 and 2. Your formulation should describe the factors associated with the onset and maintenance of your client’s presenting symptoms and address how associated sociocultural variables and strengths/assets influence your case.
4. **Treatment Plan:** It is particularly important to craft **concrete and measurable treatment goals** that address your client’s individualized problem list. Each goal should include **specific and descriptive interventions** to address the goal, as well as formative assessment strategies to track progress. Regardless of the treatment orientation utilized, you must be able to indicate *why* one intervention has been selected instead of some other. In other words, formulaic intervention plans are to be avoided in favor of ones that consider the complexity of human experience. Strengths and limitations of the client, various social ecological variables impacting the case, as well as the relative merits of the intervention (as discussed in the professional literature) should be discussed.
5. **Empirical Support:** Finally, you should be prepared to discuss the **status of the empirical support for the interventions** that you describe. These interventions may have strong empirical justification, with many replications, or they may have provisional information

regarding their efficacy (e.g., some clinical and research evidence that is positive but also some evidence that is inconclusive or contradictory). The point here is that you should not advocate unequivocally, or even provisionally, for an intervention or set of interventions without knowledge of its current empirical status. In other words, you should come to the oral exam mindful of the research that pertains to the interventions that you discussed in during the case formulation. Moreover, you should be familiar with current reviews and meta-analyses of the general efficacy of the conceptual model more generally.

- a. Select and describe three empirical research studies that support the treatment plan you proposed in section 4.
- b. Research conducted in the last 10 years is preferred.
- c. Selection of randomized controlled trials is recommended; however, other research designs may also be acceptable depending upon the status of the literature base. However, no more than one meta-analysis or review study will be accepted.
- d. Reviews of the research should go beyond reporting on the statistical significance of the results to describing what the results actually mean and their clinical implications. Reviews should focus on the outcomes that are consistent with your specific case.
- e. Be sure to connect your review of each study to your client's case and the specific interventions used.