

**DEVELOPING AND EVALUATING STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES
RELATED TO EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN PSYCHOLOGY:
CONTEXT, PROCEDURES, CRITERIA, AND FORMAT**

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I. INTRODUCTION: A CONTEXT FOR STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

A. Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide a common framework for use in the development, evaluation, and review of proposed and existing standards and guidelines for education and training in psychology, the intent of which is to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the scientific discipline and profession of psychology. Towards these ends, this document is intended as guidance for psychologists or others who teach psychology from whom proposed standards or guidelines for education and training in psychology might be forthcoming for the purpose of adoption, endorsement, or approval by the American Psychological Association (APA). Exempted from the provisions of this document, as specified in Association Rule 30-8.1, are standards or guidelines for which the APA Council of Representatives has adopted specific procedures for review and approval, such as accreditation (American Psychological Association, 2004).

Consistent with provisions of Association Rule 30-8, this document must be reaffirmed by the APA Council of Representatives on a periodic basis, not to exceed a period of 10 years. Prior to such reaffirmation the document will be reviewed, modified as necessary, and disseminated by BEA for public comment to APA boards, committees, divisions, and members; constituents outside the APA that could be affected by the document; and to APA General Counsel.

B. Definitions of Terms

The terms *standards* and *guidelines* are often used interchangeably or inconsistently in the context of education and training. In an effort to achieve more consistency and appropriate use of these terms, therefore, the following paragraphs provide the definition and clarification of the different contexts in which they are typically used in national education communities.

(1) Standards

Standards are defined in this document as *any criteria, protocols, or specifications for conduct, performance, services, or products in psychology or related areas* (American Psychological Association, 1992). This definition satisfies the conditions expected of a standard as defined by national education communities external to the APA, *i.e.*, as benchmarks established for use as a rule or basis of comparison in measuring or judging capacity, quantity, content, extent, value, quality, etc. (Kendall, 2001; and National Center for Education Statistics, 2001). In APA policy, standards are considered to be mandatory and may be accompanied by an enforcement mechanism. In the broader context of education external to the APA, as noted in the paragraphs below on use of terms, whether or not standards are mandatory with an enforcement mechanism is a function of the authority that issues or adopts them, and the purpose for which they are established.

(2) Guidelines

Guidelines are defined in this document as *pronouncements, statements, or declarations that suggest or recommend specific professional behavior, endeavors, or conduct for psychologists* (American Psychological Association, 1992). In relation to education and training, guidelines may be written as an advisory set of procedures related to curriculum development, pedagogy, or assessment; as interpretive commentary or instruction on education policy or standards; as a set of guiding principles about teaching and learning or program development; or as suggested goals and objectives of learning. Guidelines are intended to be neither exhaustive nor mandatory, but rather are aspirational. In whatever form they are framed, guidelines for education and training are intended as suggestions or recommendations to those for whom they are written. In no instance are they intended to take precedence over the judgment of faculty responsible for specific education and training programs or others of academic authority responsible for education and training institutions.

C. Use of Terms

(1) K-12 Education Levels

In the context of K-12 levels of education, use of the term *standards* is common (*e.g.*, National Research Council, 1996; and U.S. 107th Congress, 2002). The term may be used in this context to define the qualifications of teachers, but more often is used to benchmark what students at various levels of education should be expected to know and apply within particular subject or discipline areas (*e.g.*, English, mathematics). When standards are issued in this context as requirements, their authority generally resides in statute or regulation enforced by public agencies or by such private education institutions as may issue them. Standards issued in this context are considered to be mandatory, enforced by the agency or institution responsible for their adoption.

By contrast at the K-12 education levels, national disciplinary associations in the sciences and humanities have developed and endorsed standards for student learning outcomes that are more aspirational in nature than mandatory. Usually developed in collaboration with national associations of teachers in these subjects, such standards generally are developed as benchmarks or learning objectives to guide those in the education system who are responsible for curriculum design, teaching, and student learning assessment. In this context, while the term *standards* is common usage the intent of the term is more like that of the term *guidelines* as defined in this document. When used in this context, therefore, proposed standards should be clear in stating this intended use.

(2) Postsecondary Education Levels

In the national context of postsecondary (undergraduate and higher) levels of education and training, including preparation for the professions, the terms *standards* and *guidelines* are both used, sometimes in combination. When issued by regulatory, accreditation, continuing education, or other professional education and training certification organizations, each of which has enforcement authority, the term *standard* is typically used to refer to a minimal (threshold)

requirement. Standards in this context are typically mandatory, and may be accompanied by guidelines that provide interpretive clarification about how they might be met or about how their achievement is to be assessed. The professions, through their national associations, their accrediting and certification bodies, and their regulatory board members are expected to be involved in the development of such standards and guidelines.

Outside the context of professional regulatory, accreditation, continuing education, and certification functions, for which there are enforcement mechanisms, the term *standards* is infrequently used in reference to postsecondary education and training, other than by educational institutions in relation to their academic degree requirements. For most other aspects of postsecondary education and training, in which advisory pronouncements are made for such purposes as program goal setting, curriculum development, or student learning outcome assessment, their description by the term *guidelines* is more appropriate than by the term *standards*. In learned disciplines and professions, the national disciplinary association's involvement in education and training guidelines development is expected, if not alone, in partnership with national associations of educators or practitioners of the discipline. This context of use applies to the development of guidelines for such purposes as defining the goals of an undergraduate major in psychology to more specialized topics of graduate and postdoctoral education in advancing psychology as a science and a profession. The development of guidelines focused on particular areas of education and training in psychology by groups with expertise in those areas (e.g., APA divisions, special task forces, or professional specialty organizations) can be quite helpful in advancing the quality of education and training in an evolving discipline and profession, in which it is often difficult for any particular faculty to remain current with all scientific, technological, and professional practice advances. This is true also for remaining current with advances in pedagogy, e.g., uses of technology in teaching and learning.

In all instances, the intended purpose for promulgating and implementing standards and guidelines is to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the scientific discipline and profession of psychology, and this intent in turn is rooted in the need for accountability to the public.

II. PROCEDURES FOR REVIEW OF STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

A. Context of Review

All proposed standards or guidelines for education and training in psychology will be subject to provisions set forth in existing APA policies related to the development, review, approval, and promulgation of standards and guidelines. In addition to the present document, these policies include the ASME Guidelines (American Psychological Association, 1992); Association Rules of the American Psychological Association (Rule 30-8) (American Psychological Association, 2004); Criteria for Practice Guideline Development and Evaluation (American Psychological Association, 2002a); and such other APA policies and rules as may be relevant. Throughout the process of review, professional judgment will be exercised in evaluating all proposed standards or guidelines.

B. Process of Review

Within the context of Association Rule 30-8, the Board of Educational Affairs (BEA) will serve as the governance body in the American Psychological Association responsible for coordinating the review of all proposed standards and guidelines for education and training in psychology, ensuring that prior to their submission to the Board of Directors and Council of Representatives for approval or adoption they have been afforded an appropriate period of public review for comment by: (a) other APA boards, committees, divisions; (b) constituents outside the APA that could be affected by the standards or guidelines; and (c) by the APA General Counsel. The BEA will also serve as the recordkeeping body for correspondence and documents generated during the review process.

Groups or individuals intending to seek APA adoption, endorsement, or approval of standards and guidelines for education and training in psychology are encouraged to consult with the BEA early in the development and review process, to ensure that the provisions of Association Rule 30-8 and this document are understood and met, including the need for public review of the proposed standards or guidelines by all parties that could be affected by their implementation.

III. CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

To be adopted, endorsed, or approved by the APA, all documents proposing education and training standards or guidelines in psychology are expected to demonstrate satisfactory compliance with each of the criteria discussed below. Section IV provides the format by which documents proposing such standards or guidelines are to be prepared, following the criteria below. The criteria are organized into five domains: *terminology*, *purpose*, *development process*, *implementation*, and *content*.

A. Terminology Used and Rationale

(1) Terminology

The proposal is clear about whether standards, guidelines, or both are being proposed, and defines these and other lay terms. In clarifying this point, Section I-B (Definitions of Terms) of this document is intended to be used as a guide.

(2) Rationale

A rationale is provided for the choice of terminology used in the proposal. In providing a rationale, Sections I-B (Definition of Terms) and I-C (Use of Terms) of this document are intended to be used as a guide.

B. Scope of Application and Need

(1) Scope of Application

There is a clearly defined scope of application for the proposed standards or guidelines: *i.e.*, to whom they apply and in what context. Included in the statement of scope is a clear articulation of the knowledge and/or skill set content at issue, for what population of students or faculty (including their level of education) the standards or guidelines are intended, by whom and for what purpose the standards or guidelines would be implemented, the context in which this would occur (*e.g.*, education assessment, program or curriculum development, accreditation, certification, continued professional education, etc.), and a clear statement as to whether they are intended as mandatory or aspirational.

If standards are being proposed, there must be a clear statement in the proposal of the authority and process by which they will be enforced if mandatory. If guidelines are being proposed, there must be a clear statement in the proposal to the effect that the guidelines are advisory and are not intended to take precedence over the judgment of faculty responsible for specific education and training programs or others of academic authority responsible for education and training institutions.

(2) Need for standards and guidelines

There is a clearly documented need for the proposed standards or guidelines, including a description of how the need was determined and the educational value of the standards or guidelines, including the implications of not having them in the area(s) proposed.

C. Process of Developing Standards and Guidelines

(1) Participants and Process

There is a clear description of the process by which the standards or guidelines were developed. This includes: (a) a description of those who participated in the document development, how they were selected, and their qualifications relative to the substantive area(s) of the standards or guidelines; (b) a description of the development process itself, including the extent to which iterative drafts were reviewed and final consensus was reached among appropriate parties (including representation of those who would be affected by the standards or guidelines); and (c) a delineation of issues in the document about which alternative views are held, how those were resolved, and what the implications of that resolution are for interpretation and implementation of the standards or guidelines.

(2) Policy Resource Documents

There are references to existing statutes, regulations, policies, and other standards or guidelines that served as resource documents in the development of the proposed standards or guidelines. A clear rationale is given for the selection of the reference documents cited, as well as a description of how they were used in the development of the proposed standards or guidelines and why they were important in that use. These policy reference documents may be of federal, state, or other governmental origin; or they may be documents approved by other professional associations or by the APA if relevant to the proposed standards or guidelines, *e.g.* *APA Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct*.

D. Implementation of Standards and Guidelines

(1) Disseminating Standards and Guidelines

There is clear indication of what group(s) or organization(s) will be responsible for dissemination of the standards or guidelines, once adopted, endorsed, or approved by the APA, and by what means this process will be implemented. For public disclosure in this process, the document(s) so disseminated will state clearly the intended purpose of the standards or guidelines in a manner consistent with provisions of this policy document.

(2) Maintaining Currency of Standards and Guidelines

There is clear indication of what group(s) or organization(s) will serve as the record-keeping body for correspondence and documents related to the development of the standards or guidelines and will be responsible for maintaining currency of the standards or guidelines. The means by which this process will be effected is described in the document proposing the standards or guidelines, and a date is specified by which time the standards or guidelines will be updated and reviewed for reaffirmation by the APA in accordance with Association Rule 30-8.3 (a period not to exceed ten years from the time of their approval). The intent of this provision is to ensure a temporal cycle of review related to the scholarly basis of the standards or guidelines, policies or other standards or guidelines of relevance, and how the standards or guidelines have been implemented and with what benefit.

E. Content of Standards and Guidelines

(1) Clarity and Internal Consistency of Text

A definition of terms is included, particularly when terms are not commonly used or when common usage varies or is imprecise. Definitions may be provided in the text of proposed standards or guidelines or in a glossary of terms. Throughout the proposed standards or guidelines, terminology is used consistently and there is clear exposition of the proposed standards or guidelines. In the latter, words used are consistent with the mandatory or aspirational intent of the proposed standards or guidelines. For example, words such as *must* and *should* connote mandatory intent, while words such as *recommend* and *encourage* connote aspirational intent.

(2) Validity of Standards and Guidelines

The substance of the proposed standards or guidelines is not arbitrary but has a reasoned basis, e.g., based on scholarly literature related to the science and practice of psychology with implications for education and training, accepted principles within the profession or otherwise within the national education community, or other exercise of sound professional judgment. Key literature citations are provided in support of each standard or guideline.

(3) *Individual and Cultural Diversity Issues*

An essential element of standards or guidelines related to education and training in psychology is the consideration given to issues of individual and cultural diversity and the competencies expected in this area in knowledge, skills, and attitudes consistent with other APA documents, e.g. *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* (American Psychological Association, 2002b) and *Guidelines on Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change for Psychologists* (American Psychological Association, 2002c). Proposed education and training standards or guidelines also articulate a feasible plan (as broadly defined) for proactively addressing the anticipated impact of the proposed guidelines on diverse individuals and groups with respect to cultural, individual, and role differences, including those based on age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language, and socioeconomic status.

IV. FORMAT FOR PROPOSED STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

This section provides an outline to assist education and training standards or guidelines development for review within a consistent format. To facilitate review, it is recommended that the document proposing standards or guidelines contain page numbers, line numbers, and not be right justified. In all other ways, APA manuscript style should be followed.

It is recommended that documents proposing standards or guidelines for education and training in psychology be organized in the following way, including the corresponding identification of each section, e.g., A.1.(a). Records or other documentation related to the standards or guidelines development process may be appended to the proposed standards or guidelines.

Section A. Introduction

Standards and guidelines for education and training in psychology have an introductory section that provides a background on why and how the standards or guidelines were developed. This section is organized according to the following criterion areas (with reference to the appropriate criterion information in this document noted for each sub-section).

1. Terminology used and rationale for proposed standards and guidelines
 - (a) Use of term *standards* and *guidelines* (Criterion III.A.(1))
 - (b) Rationale for use of term(s) (Criterion III.A.(2))
2. Scope of application and need for proposed standards and guidelines
 - (a) Scope of application for proposed standards and guidelines (Criterion III.B.(1))
 - (b) Need for proposed standards and guidelines (Criterion III.B.(2))

3. Process of developing of proposed standards and guidelines

(a) Participants and process in developing standards and guidelines (Criterion III.C.(1))

(b) Policy documents relevant to proposed standards and guidelines (Criterion III.C.(2))

Section B: Implementation and Maintenance of Proposed Standards and Guidelines

Standards and guidelines for education and training in psychology have group or organizational sponsors responsible for their initial development, for their dissemination upon adoption, endorsement, or approval, and for maintaining their currency. These functions are described in this section, guided by the following criteria of this document.

1. Plan for promulgating proposed standards and guidelines (Criterion III.D.(1))

2. Plan for maintaining currency of standards and guidelines (Criterion III.D.(2))

Section C: Content of the Proposed Standards and Guidelines

The way in which standards and guidelines are presented may differ from one context of application to another. Generally, each standard or guideline is stated clearly with supporting text for clarification and supporting documentation. Within this framework, the proposed standards and guidelines are consistent with the following criteria of this document.

1. Clarity and internal consistency of text (Criterion III.E.(1))

2. Validity of standards or guidelines (Criterion III.E.(2))

3. Individual and cultural diversity issues (Criterion III.E.(3))

Section D: References

Section E: Appendices (as needed)

V. SUMMARY

This document was prepared in such a way as to be consistent with policies of the APA, while also recognizing the national contexts outside as well as within the APA in which standards and guidelines related to education and training are common.

The introductory section of this document defines the scope of this document as an APA policy, and provides definitions and context for education and training guidelines and standards. It is followed by an outline of the procedures or process by which proposed education and training guidelines or standards are to be reviewed and acted upon by the APA in addition to any other applicable APA rules or policies governing guidelines and standards.

The third section of this document outlines the criteria by which proposed education and training guidelines or standards are to be evaluated in the APA review process. The section is organized into five domains of criteria: A) terminology used and rationale for the use of terms; B) purpose of the proposed guidelines or standards, including their intended scope; C) the process by which they were developed, including information about participants and policy references; D) plans for their implementation, including their promulgation and maintenance; and E) the standards or guidelines content, its clarity, internal consistency, validity, and implications for issues of individual and cultural diversity.

The preceding five criterion domains serve as a model for the way in which proposed education and training guidelines or standards should be written, the issues they should address, and the order in which those are to be organized. Consequently, the fourth section of this document serves as a format guide for those seeking APA adoption, endorsement, or approval of proposed standards or guidelines for education and training in psychology.

V. REFERENCES

- American Psychological Association. (1992). *American Psychological Association ASME Guidelines*. Washington, DC: Author.
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