



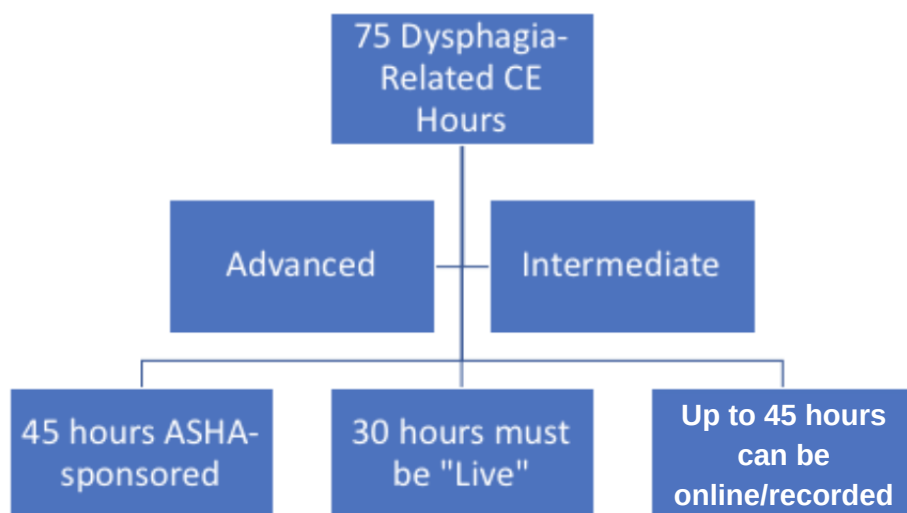
Board Certification in Swallowing & Swallowing Disorders

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So you're passionate about all things dysphagia? Are you looking for a way to distinguish yourself and your skills set in this area of practice? Are you already an expert? Are you actively considering pursuing board certification in Swallowing and Swallowing Disorders? The American Board of Swallowing and Swallowing Disorders (AB-SSD) is the organization that oversees board certification. This resource was created to help speech-language pathologists in pursuit of board certification in Swallowing and Swallowing Disorders. The information discussed below was compiled with guidelines and requirements as stated on the AB-SSD website which you can visit at: <https://www.swallowingdisorders.org/>

Step 1: Visit the AB-SSD website at <https://www.swallowingdisorders.org/> and review the wealth of online resources available.

Step 2: Evaluate where you are at with your continuing education requirements. At least 75 hours (7.5 CEUs) must be dysphagia related in the immediate 3 years prior to applying - 45 of those hours (4.5 CEUs) must be ASHA sponsored. In addition, 30 hours (3.0 CEUs) must be from in-person courses whose primary focus is on the topic of dysphagia (see image below for a visual of this process.) Additional opportunities may qualify related to taking graduate level courses in dysphagia (1 college credit equals 10 hours (1.0 CEUs) or teaching courses in dysphagia (may only be counted once per application cycle). As you're taking courses, make notes so that you can break them up by anatomy & physiology, evaluation, and treatment, as well as intermediate versus advanced levels of content. Beginning levels of coursework will not be counted towards the total. It may be challenging to find "advanced" courses so look online at <https://www.swallowingdisorders.org/> for some of theirs (online) or consider attending Dysphagia Research Society.





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Step 3: Evaluate your clinical experiences after completion of your clinical fellowship year. Pull out your resume. Brainstorm every project, every committee, every presentation, and any activity you have been involved in that relates to the management, treatment, research or leadership of swallowing and swallowing disorders. This is your starting point. Even if some things don't seem impressive they are the building blocks from which you can build your niche. There are two tracks to consider: (1) clinical track vs. (2) academic/administrative track. Differences between the two focus around the number of required direct clinical hours and the career goals of the applicant.

Step 4: If you've made it to this step and are feeling very motivated to move forward please request a mentor on the AB-SSD website. Having someone who has their BCS-S that you can talk to about their experiences and recommendations can be very beneficial.

Step 5: The most complex part of the application is demonstrating advanced skill documentation. There are resources to guide prospective applicants on the AB-SSD website, but working with a mentor may be more meaningful as they can share salient examples. There are three possible areas to demonstrate advanced skills: education/mentorship, leadership, and/or scholarship/research. Typically, a speech-language pathologist (SLP) pursuing the clinical track would choose education/mentorship and leadership while a SLP pursuing the academic/administrative track would choose scholarship/research as one and then one of the remaining two as their second area of focus.

The key word here is "advanced." Most of what you do in your everyday clinical practice related to dysphagia will not be considered above and beyond for the purposes of achieving board certification. You are challenged to think outside the box. Imagine the concentric circles pictured below. You and your clinical practice are in the middle. You create an in-service, a lecture, or a support group at your workplace then those items ALL go in the center circle.



The only
way to be considered "advanced" is to go
outside your circle.

(Image created by the MedSLP Collective Team)



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Ideas/examples include:

- Online blog
- Local journal club (not just at your place of employment)
- Lecture at a university
- Lecture at a medical/nursing school
- Lecture at a state or national convention (try to present solo as well)
- Write for a newsletter
- Join an ASHA leadership group (but make sure your project is dysphagia related)
- Design an online CEU course
- Partner with someone who has their BCS-S and complete a project
- Design an application to help patients/caregivers
- Write a book chapter
- Become active in SIG 13
- Volunteer at a local health fair to showcase the benefit of dysphagia services
- Write an article for a related discipline to show the relationship between the two and how they might work together
- Get additional certifications relevant to your areas of practice (lactation consultant, MBSImp, etc.)
- Complete and publish a case study
- Design a training program for students to help them master the complexity of dysphagia

These are just a few ideas, but the take-away is to get out of the center and take risks!

Sixth Step: Submit the Application! It's all electronic. You will need three letters of recommendation. Make sure you choose wisely and that at least one person can attest to your direct patient care hours. Consider sharing your resume and highlights about yourself with the person writing your letter of recommendation to help them represent the best aspects of you.

The Waiting Time: It can take quite some time to hear back about your application because it goes to 3 different committee members to evaluate. Please be patient. In the event you are not selected, you will be given constructive feedback on what to address to improve your application and many who follow that advice are selected on the follow up application. Perseverance is key.



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Selected to Sit for the Exam: Congrats! If you've made it this far you are now ready to sit for the exam. You will be asked to find a proctor at a local university or hospital whom you do not know. There are some resources related to studying listed on the AB-SSD website. In addition, I recommend the following:

1. Understand the cranial nerves forward and backwards
2. Clearly understand the physiology behind all postural strategies, exercises, and possible compensations or exercises you might recommend
3. Understand the use of the diagnostic procedures available to you in the management of dysphagia and what those exams tell you about anatomy and physiology. The exam will vary depending on whether you choose pediatrics, adults, or both. Reading a wide variety of current texts in addition to more recent journal articles would also be beneficial. At the end of the exam, you will get a digital score and will know whether or not you passed the examination.

Additional Thoughts/Ideas: Once you obtain BCS-S please understand that you will be required to reapply every 5 years, but not retest. You will need to earn 12.5 CEUs (125 clock hours) in dysphagia or dysphagia related topics every five years so you should have a plan in place for how you will manage that financially.

Reference:

Apply for Certification – ABBSD. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.swallowingdisorders.org/page/apply>.