



## The Audit Process

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The College of Applied Biology's Audit: A little history and advice for those who anticipate their audit number may be coming up (it could be any one of you).

Our Auditors have been hard at work and as we increase the number of audits we conduct as part of our Strategic Plan and the quality assurance we offer to the public about the competency and professional practice of our members. We felt it was time to do a little updating for you.

If you have wondered why the early Councils of the (then) new College of Applied Biology settled on a random audit as one of the quality assurance tools, and how this is working, you will want to read on.

It's all because biologists in BC aspired to be a self-governing profession and lobbied government for the legislation to enable this. One of the requirements of self-governance is that the organization is obliged to govern members in accordance with the law (the Act that creates a self-regulating profession) and with the standards of conduct that the profession sets for itself. We did this for and to ourselves!

### **Proactive vs. Reactive**

To govern our members in accordance with the law, we needed to put into place some proactive accountability processes and some reactive processes. Our Audit falls under the label 'proactive' - it is not driven by a complaint about practice or conduct (reactive) but relies on a random sampling of active Professional Biologists selected from the College Register, to ascertain that they are meeting the standards of practice the College and the law expect of those carrying our designation. Hence, you get audited when your 'number's up'! It took some hardworking Council members, staff and great member volunteers interested in developing audit practices over 3 years to develop, test and refine the processes currently in place. They are still working at it as the feedback and learning from those who have been audited is carefully noted and applied!



### What's in it for you?

Lest you should believe the designers of the process were only interested in checking up on you as a member of the profession in order to satisfy the law and mandate of acting in the public interest, they were, and are, wiser than that. Operating on the principle that we all want to get better and more effective at what we do as biologists, they designed the process to be educative as well as accountable. All the Auditors, who are first audited themselves and then supported through audits they conduct by the Audit and Practice Review Committee, are also committed to working with the members they are auditing to help them through the process. They take the opportunity to inform, answer questions, and provide examples of how information required by the audit process can be collected and formatted.

### Who oversees all this and makes sure things run well?

The Act required that Council establish an Audit and Practice Review Committee consisting of at least 3 registered members and one lay member. Council appoints interested individuals and usually one of the committee members also sits on Council. Members are appointed for 3 years and may be reappointed. The Committee operates under the Rules and policies that Council enacts. Their task is to make sure the audit process is fair and runs smoothly according to Rule 14.

### Current Members of the Audit and Practice Review Committee are:

- Warren Warttig, Chair
- Brian Clark
- Mark d'Entremont
- Ian Robertson
- Rob Thomson
- Wayne Wall
- Mike Whelen
- Maureen McDermid, Lay Member

### Who are the Auditors?

Most members of the Audit Committee also act as Auditors and from time to time, a call is made to the membership for additional auditors under the



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auspices of the Audit and Discipline Committees. All Auditors are volunteers and receive CPD credits for their involvement. Council established a list of criteria that interested members must meet in order to be considered for a position as an Auditor. Because these members hold a position of trust and exercise judgment as to the practice of their fellow biologists, some of the important criteria that are considered are:

- Minimum of 10 years of diverse experience in the practice of applied biology
- Have been a registered member for 7 years
- Have 5 years' experience in project management in applied biology
- Must be current in the practice of the profession

You can access the full Rule and Policies concerning the audit process by visiting: <https://www.cab-bc.org/audit-program>

They are an impressive group and know the business and practice of applied biology!

### **Current Auditors are:**

All the members of the Audit and Practice Review Committee except the Lay Member, and:

- Michael Engelsjord
- Guy Gilron
- Dave Lindsay
- Pamela Zevit

BC's RPBios are influential!

It is interesting to note that when the 'Audit Rule' which establishes the rationale and process for audits was published along with the criteria for selecting Auditors and details of the responsibilities of all parties engaged in an audit, it drew attention from organizations across Canada and in Europe. Interesting also that biologists in BC can become leaders in their field for more than just the good biology they practice. We wonder where our desire to enhance our professional practice will take others.



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An Audit is a great opportunity to fine-tune your practice in partnership with experienced RPBios who provide feedback, guidance and support where needed. It could be that you would like to control the timing of a potential audit to better suit travels or the rest of your busy life. In that case, you can volunteer, get your audit completed, and your name is taken out of the 'lottery' for 5 years! A win-win!

You can start preparing today by visiting our website at [www.cab-bc.org](http://www.cab-bc.org).

### **Advice from the College's Auditors**

Members have told us there is a certain amount of trepidation about anticipating an audit, especially as it is a random event, and therefore cannot be anticipated within a certain timeline. So, College Matters asked our current Auditors to help us give you some expert advice so you can be ready when the call comes! We asked them 3 questions we hope will help you. Not surprising, most of their individual advice was very similar across the group, so read on and think about how you can use this information, not only to ready for an audit, but because it makes sense as guidance for you in organizing and managing your professional information!

#### **Question 1**

**As an Auditor, when you approach a new audit, what general impressions contribute to your initial impression of competency? What do you look at first?**

We wanted to know when the Auditors receive a completed audit, what they did first to begin their consideration of the information contained. They consistently do 2 things:

- Check for completion of all items. As one Auditor said, "I initially check the completeness of the audit form. If the member has provided lengthy responses then I get the general impression that the information will be mostly acceptable since the auditee has generally put some thought and consideration into the responses."



And then

- Look for consistency between parts. For instance, consistency between the CV or resume and the declared field of practice and knowledge of applicable legislation, references utilized, and project involvement.

A third frequently initially checked item is the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) form. As one Auditor said, "...the CPD form is the one thing that tells me quickly how the audit will likely go. If it is laid out clearly and easy to understand then usually there are no big issues elsewhere."

Seems pretty straight forward – make sure you complete all the parts and attach the required additional items and that there are no contradictions in what you submit! Oh, and track your CPDs!

## Question 2

**What 2 or 3 pieces of advice would you give our members about approaching/preparing for an audit?**

Audit is not a 'gotcha' conducted by the College. It is a quality assurance measure with an educative function. Our Auditors gave great advice:

- Relax, this isn't the Spanish Inquisition. It is meant as a learning experience for yourself. When in doubt, give your auditor a call, he or she is there to support you.
- Keep your CPD and resume up to date. If you do, the rest of the exercise should take about 30 minutes.
- I could say "keep you CPD current", but you could also prepare for an eventual audit by keeping a day timer (and knowing what to record for your CPDs). Any papers you read, photo-copy the front page and write down the time it took and file it in an annual CPD file.
- Track CPD hours throughout the year. If the CPD form is constantly maintained, preparing the audit materials will take less time. The audit is not a negative experience – approach it as a way to improve your professional abilities.



- Ensure that the answers you provide on the form are consistent with your area of expertise as shown on your resume. If your interest or area of expertise has shifted to another unique or distinct facet of your discipline or to another discipline entirely, be sure to provide details of any/all training and education you received towards becoming expert in that new area of expertise (e.g., update resume and sufficient detail in audit form responses).
- Understand your employer's Quality Management Systems; Computer Back-Up; File system and File Retention Policy
- Use the interaction with your auditor as an opportunity to gain different perspectives on how other RPBios (especially in other sectors or disciplines) do their work, and fulfill the requirements of the designation
- Use the audit as an opportunity to demonstrate professionalism to your peers.

And last but not least, "Treat the audit process as an opportunity for growth, development, and to gain a better understanding of what it means to be an RPBio. The auditee can also help by making suggestions for improvement to the audit process. We are all in this together, and should be learning from each other."

### **Question 3**

**What are the most common factors that mark an audit as unacceptable?**

- Conflict between what your resume and education say and what you claim to be working on.
- Lack of information. Fill it all out, it takes less time than answering my questions later.
- CPD: Required information not supplied (e.g. dates, titles and locations of conferences). CPD forms that are fabricated or just never recorded. 'I took a course in 2011, I think it was June, I think it was first aid'
- Redundancy (double counting) in counting hours claimed (i.e., cut and paste a course they took in year 1 and pasting to year two and/or three – don't even think to change the date of the original course to reflect the new year that the hours are being claimed).



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- Lack of knowledge/awareness of College Act and Rules mandatory requirements
- Practice area is inconsistent with experience, training and education as shown on resume.
- Quick, sloppy responses.... What legislation or reference materials guide your practice?...”The Fisheries Act” is hardly an acceptable response. A little more thought should result in dozens of appropriate examples.
- Exceeding time limits for response/ completion

All of the above increase the time and effort required to complete a successful audit – which is always the goal! They require back and forth communication between the Auditor and member, which while in most cases is very positive (see ‘Advice’ above), can be uncomfortable. “While not that common, a hostile attitude is not a good strategy for passing the audit. All auditors are volunteers and approach audits as a proactive educational tool. Most responses after an audit have been positive.” Completing a successful audit is a requirement of continued membership in the College and failure to do so can result in a recommendation for disciplinary action.