



Analysis of the July 2024 California General Bar Exam *December 17, 2024*

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SUMMARY

The July 2024 General Bar Exam (GBX) had the following three sections: (a) five essay questions, (b) one Performance Test (PT) question, and (c) a standard 200-item multiple-choice test (“MBE”). The combination of the essay and PT sections constituted the “Written” portion of the exam. There were 8,140 applicants¹ who completed all three sections, 32.9% of whom had taken the GBX at least once before.

MBE raw scores are the number of MBE questions answered correctly. These scores were converted to scale scores to control for possible differences in average item difficulty across administrations of the exam. Essay and Performance Test (PT) responses were graded on a 40 to 100-point scale. Scores on this scale were assigned in 5-point intervals. The PT score was multiplied by two so that the maximum possible written raw score was 700 points.

Written raw scores were converted to the same scale of measurement as was used on the MBE. This was done to adjust for possible differences over time in the difficulty of the questions asked and the leniency with which the responses to them are graded. An applicant's total scaled score was computed using the formula below:

$$\text{Total Scaled Score} = (.50 \times \text{MBE Scale}) + (.50 \times \text{Written Scale})$$

The major findings for the 8,140 applicants who had all their answers read at least once and the subgroup of 766 applicants who had them read twice were as follows:

- After the first reading of all answers 37.4% of the applicants failed and 53.2% passed. Overall, 53.6% of the applicants passed the exam².
- The reliability of the written and total scores were 0.81 and 0.93 respectively, meeting standards for a high-stakes licensing exam.
- The correlation between MBE and written scores was 0.73, which was slightly higher than correlation for the prior July administration.
- 128 (16.7%) of the 766 applicants who went into re-grade passed the exam. Thirteen applicants in the lower 10-point portion (i.e., < 1360) of the re-grade range passed.
- Males performed slightly better than females on the written sections (1407 vs 1403), 46 points higher on the MBE (1433 vs 1387), and 25 points higher on total score (1420 vs. 1395).
- With respect to racial/ethnic groups, Black/African American applicants had the lowest total scale score (1335), while White applicants had the highest total scale score (1465).

¹ Applicants who had completed all sections of the exam, including the MBE. This report includes information about only those who had a complete set of applicant scores. By definition, a “complete set of scores” for these purposes would not include any applicants who have a grade of less than 40 on any of the 6 written questions on the exam or a missing MBE score. In contrast, the manner in which numbers are reported for purposes of “Allocation of Applicants, Production of Exam Statistics and Law School Lists” and the Report to the Supreme Court on the California Bar Exam uses a definition of applicants who “completed” the exam that also includes applicants who have a grade of less than 40 (i.e., zeros) on any of the 6 written questions, so long as they are in attendance for the entirety of the exam. Thus, that latter number will be larger in comparison to the former number, as it is more inclusive. For the July 2024 GBX, 8,610 applicants sat for the exam, and there were 470 applicants who had one or more zeros in their set of 6 written questions or did not have an MBE score. Accordingly, there were 8,140 applicants who completed the GBX for purposes of these exam statistics (8,610-470).

² The bar passage rate for all 8,610 applicants taking the California Bar Exam, including those without complete scores was 53.6%. The passage rate for the 319 applicants taking the Attorney’s exam was 48.9%.

- 69.2% of the 5,531 first-time takers passed the exam, while 26.2% of the 684 applicants who took the exam for the second time passed. The overall pass rate after 6 or more attempts was relatively low (15.3%); however, there was one applicant who took the exam for the 47th time and another who took it for their 51st time who passed (see Table 1 below). The number of attempts for applicants on this administration ranged from 1 to 78.
- The Appendices at the end of the report continue key statistics for each of the two annual administrations of the bar exam since 1990.

Table 1 - Pass vs. Fail Statistics by Number of Exams Taken

Decision	1	2	3	4	5	6	>6	Total
Fail	1704	505	515	260	201	92	405	3682
Pass	3827	179	218	80	63	18	73	4458
Total Takers	5531	684	733	340	264	110	478	8140
% Passing	69.2%	26.2%	29.7%	23.5%	23.9%	16.4%	15.3%	54.8%

TEST SECTIONS, TIME LIMITS, AND SCHEDULE

The exam had three parts: the California essay section, and the California Performance Test (PT), and the Multistate Bar Exam (MBE). The combination of the Essay and PT sections constitute the “Written” section.

The written section of the exam consists of two sessions: one three-hour session in the morning, and a three-and-a half-hour session in the afternoon. Essays are administered in the morning and for the first two hours of the afternoon session. The remaining 90 minutes at the end of the afternoon session is allotted for the PT.

The MBE is a six-hour, 200-item multiple-choice test, but only 175 of its items are scored. The applicants’ responses to other MBE items were analyzed for possible use on future exams.

The whole exam (Essay + PT + MBE) is administered over two consecutive days. Day 1 is dedicated to the written sections and Day 2 is devoted to the MBE. One hundred MBE items are administered in a 3-hour morning session and the other 100 items are administered in a 3-hour afternoon session.

SCORING RULES, FORMULAS, AND PHASED GRADING

MBE raw scores (the number of multiple-choice questions answered correctly) were converted by the National Conference of Bar Examiners (NCBE) to equated (“scaled”) scores using Item Response Theory (IRT) methodology. This procedure adjusted the raw scores for possible variation in average question difficulty from one administration of the MBE to another. California multiplies the MBE scale scores by 10.

Each essay answer was graded in 5-point intervals on a scale ranging from 40 to 100-points. The same procedure is used to grade each PT response. The PT score was then multiplied by 2 so that

the maximum possible Written Raw Score is 700 points (5 essays at 100 points each plus 1 PT item at 200 points).

Written Raw Scores were converted to a score distribution that had the same mean and standard deviation as the applicants' MBE scores. This scaling used the MBE and Written scores of 7,823 applicants who had their written answers graded first. The formula used to convert the July 2024 Written Raw Scores to scale scores follows:

$$\text{Written Scale} = (3.9892 \times \text{Written Raw Score}) - 319.0884$$

An applicant's Total Scale Score was a weighted combination of that applicant's MBE and Written Scale Scores. The formula for computing Total Scale Scores is:

$$\text{Total Scale Score} = (.50 \times \text{MBE Scale}) + (.50 \times \text{Written Scale})$$

A two-phased grading process was used to determine an applicant's pass/fail status. In Phase 1, applicants passed if their Total Scale Score was 1390 or higher and failed if it was less than 1350³. The remaining applicants, i.e., those with total scale scores of 1350 to 1389.9999, then have their essay and PT answers read again. The second grader was a different grader than the first one and did not know the score assigned by the first grader. The final score for these applicants was the average of the two graders.

ANALYSIS

Analyses were conducted with the 8,140 applicants who had both an MBE score and a complete set of written scores. This sample contained 5,531 applicants who were taking the exam for the first time (67.9% of all takers) and 2,609 repeaters (32.1% of all takers). [The General Statistics Report](#), available online on the State Bar's website, contains data on the number of first-timers and repeaters by school type.

SUMMARY STATISTICS

Table 2 provides summary statistics on each section after all readings. There was a 0.73 correlation between MBE and written scores which is consistent with the correlation statistics from past administrations. 54.8% of the applicants passed the exam. This rate is slightly higher than the average July rate since 1990. The mean MBE score of 1407 is higher than the two previous July averages and is lower than the historical average of 1447.

Table 2 - Summary Statistics After All Readings

Test Statistic	MBE Scale	Written Raw	Total Scale
Mean Score	1407	432	1406
Standard Deviation	173	44	162
Reliability	.95	.81	.93

³ The decision rules were modified by the CA Supreme Court and first applied during the Fall 2020 administration. The passing score was lowered to 1390, the regrade range was changed to 1350 to 1389.99, and the resolution grading phase was eliminated.

SUBGROUP ANALYSES

Men had higher average scores on the written section and on the MBE section of the exam (1407 vs. 1403 and 1433 vs. 1387 respectively). Men also had higher average total scores than women (1420 vs. 1395). With respect to racial/ethnic groups, whites continue to outscore all other racial/ethnic groups on both exam sections. Black applicants scored the lowest on all sections and the total scale score difference between Black and White applicants was 130 scale points (see Table 3 below).

Table 3 - Mean Scale Scores with Racial/Ethnic and Gender Groups, Number of Applicants in Each Group, and the Percentage of Males in Each Group

Test	Racial/Ethnic Group					Gender	
	Asian	Black	Hispanic	White	Other	Female	Male
Scaled Written Score	1355	1336	1358	1463	1426	1403	1407
Scaled MBE Score	1368	1335	1344	1467	1415	1387	1433
Total Scaled Score	1362	1335	1351	1465	1421	1395	1420
Number of Applicants	2009	489	1089	2674	1625	4718	3180
% Male	35%	40%	36%	43%	43%	0%	100%

PHASED GRADING

A two-phased grading process was used to focus additional grader time on the applicants who were just below passing. There were 766 applicants who had their answers read at least twice. The mean written raw score on the first reading (432.3) was 14.8 points higher than their mean on the second reading (417.5). The difference is higher than observed on the July 2023 administration.

Table 4 presents the number and percentage of applicants in each pass/fail category at each phase. The number and percentage of applicants that passed in the first phase was 4,330 and 53.2%, respectively. During the 2nd Phase, 128 additional examinees (1.6% of all applicants) passed; the same proportion as seen in the July 2023 administration (see Table 4 below).

Table 4 - Number and Percentage of Applicants Who Passed and Failed in Each Phase of the Grading Process

Read Phase	Fail		Pass		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1	3,044	37.4%	4,330	53.2%	7,374	90.6%
2	638	7.8%	128	1.6%	766	9.4%
Total	3,682	45.2%	4,458	54.8%	8,140	100.0%

Table 5 illustrates the relationship between Phase 1 scores and final pass/fail status. Applicants who were within 10 scale score points of passing after the first read were much more likely to pass after their essays were regraded than applicants who were between 11 and 39 points of passing. About seven percent of applicants in the lowest regrade range ultimately earned a passing score (see Table 5 below).

Table 5 - Number of Reread Applicants Who Passed and Failed Relative to Their Total Scores After the First Reading

Group	Number of Applicants			Percent Passing
Score After First Read	Fail	Pass	Total	
1380 – 1389	125	81	206	39%
1370 – 1379	142	18	160	11%
1360 – 1369	188	16	204	8%
1350 – 1359	183	13	196	7%
Total	638	128	766	17%

APPENDIX A: SUMMARY TEST STATISTICS ON FEBRUARY EXAMS*

				Written Raw Score		
		Percent	Mean MBE			Correlation
Exam	N	Passing	Scale Score	Mean	Reliability	with MBE
1991	3,685	51	1430	667	.68	.58
1992	3,907	51	1432	663	.69	.60
1993	3,682	45	1418	666	.73	.59
1994	3,638	44	1421	657	.68	.59
1995	3,488	42	1412	653	.74	.60
1996	3,834	44	1417	646	.67	.58
1997	4,103	49	1434	651	.66	.59
1998	3,871	40	1412	650	.70	.60
1999	4,309	41	1416	642	.65	.55
2000	4,447	40	1415	638	.66	.57
2001	4,461	38	1405	640	.72	.58
2002	4,030	34	1396	633	.71	.53
2003	4,162	38	1398	611	.68	.58
2004	4,363	36	1392	625	.72	.50
2005	4,458	41	1407	607	.72	.62
2006	4,758	39	1402	621	.77	.58
2007	5,109	37	1398	611	.75	.59
2008	4,497	40	1405	614	.78	.55
2009	4,051	34	1383	608	.79	.58
2010	4,193	37	1392	612	.74	.57
2011	4,309	43	1414	606	.72	.56
2012	4,334	43	1407	614	.77	.57
2013	4,362	42	1413	604	.75	.58
2014	4,529	46	1423	596	.77	.61

2015	4,709	40	1400	605	.78	.65
2016	4,678	36	1386	601	.77	.61
2017	4,439	34	1379	607	.78	.61
2018	4,654	28	1357	417*	.74	.64
2019	4,574	31	1373	418	.75	.61
2020	4,139	27	1361	416	.71	.60
2021*	3,019	38	1344	415	.82	.67
2022	3,056	35	1338	426	.76	.69
2023	3,700	33	1325	413	.76	.64
2024	3,796	35	1335	412	.75	.62

* Beginning in July 2017, the raw score was based on 5 essays and 1 PT. 2021 was the first February administration to have 1390 as the passing score. Previous to this administration, the passing score was 1440.

APPENDIX B: SUMMARY TEST STATISTICS ON JULY EXAMS*

				Written Raw Score		
		Percent	Mean MBE			Correlation
Exam	N	Passing	Scale Score	Mean	Reliability	with MBE
1990	6,963	58	1451	684	.76	.67
1991	7,219	55	1454	674	.75	.67
1992	7,108	60	1464	674	.71	.64
1993	7,018	59	1465	671	.77	.68
1994	7,027	64	1482	672	.76	.70
1995	7,109	60	1471	660	.75	.68
1996	7,445	56	1458	667	.76	.70
1997	7,678	62	1478	655	.75	.68
1998	7,548	53	1446	656	.74	.65
1999	7,684	51	1449	644	.75	.66
2000	7,603	56	1460	645	.74	.62
2001	7,585	57	1468	637	.77	.64
2002	7,477	51	1445	632	.72	.64
2003	7,732	50	1443	634	.73	.67
2004	8,020	49	1434	621	.75	.67
2005	8,310	49	1437	630	.79	.68
2006	8,858	52	1452	630	.80	.65
2007	8,115	56	1459	630	.79	.67
2008	8,590	62	1476	623	.80	.68
2009	8,607	59	1463	616	.78	.69
2010	8,521	55	1454	622	.80	.66
2011	8,412	55	1458	618	.78	.71
2012	8,664	56	1460	613	.82	.66

2013	8,822	56	1461	593	.80	.66
2014	8,428	49	1436	610	.83	.67
2015	8,236	47	1426	612	.83	.70
2016	7,648	44	1423	596	.82	.73
2017	8,546	50	1432	429*	.79	.72
2018	7,943	41	1408	419	.80	.71
2019	7,678	51	1431	426	.78	.71
2020	8,640	61	1431	424	.85	.71
2021	7,389	54	1409	426	.85	.76
2022	6,990	54	1403	432	.78	.73
2023	7,425	52	1394	428	.79	.71
2024	8,140	55	1407	432	.81	.73

* Beginning in July 2017, the raw score was based on 5 essays and 1 PT. The 2020 exam was administered in October rather than July. Beginning with that administration, the passing score was dropped from 1440 to 1390 and the third phase of grading was eliminated.