

Study Guide for the Molecular Biology Certification Examination

Introduction

Your study guide consists of a Job Description, a list of Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs), References, and 20 Sample Questions for the exam.

- The **Job Description** describes the education, background, training, and specific duties of an analyst in each discipline.
- The **KSAs** have ten major sections. Sections I-IX cover the core knowledge and skills expected of every forensic scientist and comprise 40% of the examination. Section X, consisting of specific, discipline related, in-depth, upper-level knowledge, skills, and abilities will make up 60% of the examination. Please note that the sub-categories listed under the capital letters in the KSAs are examples and are not meant to be all-inclusive. There will not necessarily be a question on the exam from every sub-category.
- The **References** are broken into core references and discipline-related references. The core references are identical for all the ABC examinations. The discipline-related references are specific to each discipline.
- There are twenty **Sample Questions** to give you an idea of the range of content and difficulty that will appear on the exam. For further information, please see "Introduction to ABC Certification Examinations."

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Job Description

A Qualified Forensic Biologist must be able to:

- Apply principles of General Biology, Cell Biology, Molecular Biology, Biochemistry, Genetics, and Statistics/Population Genetics to the analysis of biological materials.
- Apply chemical, immunological, and microscopic methods to assess, where possible, the physiological nature and species of origin of unknown biological material.
- Apply specialized techniques to isolate and purify nucleic acids from various biological tissues, fluids, and complex mixtures.
- Apply specialized techniques to the quantification of DNA.
- Apply specialized techniques to the elucidation of polymorphic variations in biological genomes.
- Apply principles of population genetics to the assessment of polymorphic variations.
- Stay abreast of current developments in the field of forensic biology.
- Recognize, collect, secure, and preserve physical evidence.
- Recognize the potential for forensic examinations in areas outside an area of specialization, prioritize the sequence of examinations, and handle evidence accordingly.
- Observe safe practices to insure the safety of analyst and co-workers.
- Engage in impartial and ethical work practices.
- Are proficient in the use and maintenance of laboratory instrumentation.
- Evaluate and interpret results of physical and instrumental analysis.
- Thoroughly and accurately produce documentation to support results and conclusions.
- Testify under oath as an expert witness, providing information on analytical processes, results, and conclusions.
- Recognize and employ quality assurance measures to ensure the integrity of the analyses.
- Understand and be able to apply the validation process for the introduction of new DNA technologies into the forensic laboratory.
- Are familiar with the documents Quality Assurance Standards for Forensic DNA Testing Laboratories and Quality Assurance Standards for Forensic Databanking Laboratories.
- Understand uses and practices of the Combined DNA Index System (CODIS.)
- Conduct second reads and technical reviews of the analytical work of other forensic biologists.

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Knowledge, Skills, Abilities (KSA)

- I. History
 - A. Evolution of practice
 - B. Significant historical figures (e.g., Locard, Gross, Orfila, Kirk)
- II. Crime Scene Preservation
 - A. Securing
 - B. Isolating
 - C. Recording
 - D. Searching
 - E. Recognition of evidentiary value
 - F. Safety
- III. Crime Laboratory Operations – Overview
 - A. Laboratory Disciplines
 - 1. Forensic biology
 - 2. Controlled substances
 - 3. Trace analysis
 - 4. Toxicology
 - 5. Latent fingerprints
 - 6. Questioned documents
 - 7. Fire debris
 - 8. Firearms/Toolmarks
 - 9. Digital evidence
 - B. Evidence associated with each discipline
- IV. QA/QC
 - A. Accreditation, Certification, Standardization
 - 1. Laboratory accreditation
 - a) Audit trails
 - b) Accrediting bodies
 - c) ISO 17025
 - d) DAB standards
 - e) ASCLD/LAB
 - 2. Personnel certification
 - a) ABC
 - b) IAAI
 - c) IAI
 - d) ABFT
 - e) AFTE



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3. Standardization
 - a) ASTM
 - b) UN
 - c) TWG/SWG
 - B. QA/QC Application
 1. Non compliant data
 2. Documentation evaluation
 3. Validation and verification
 4. Linearity
 5. Limits of detection
 6. Limits of quantitation
 7. Limits of reporting
 8. Negative and positive controls
 9. Calibrators
 10. Estimate of uncertainty
 11. Traceability
 12. Corrective and preventative actions
 13. Proficiency testing
 14. Confidence interval/Confidence limits
 - C. Document/Data Management
 1. Databases
 2. LIMS
 3. Case document preservation/integrity
- V. Safety
- A. Chemical Hygiene
 1. Safety labeling (MSDS)
 2. Communication plans
 - B. Universal Precautions
 1. Blood-borne pathogens
 2. Personal protective equipment
 - C. Hazardous Waste/Biohazardous Waste Handling
 1. Spill control
- VI. Legal
- A. Decisions/laws
 1. Frye
 2. Daubert/Kumho
 3. Brady
 - B. Legal terms
 1. Chain of custody
 2. Discovery
 3. Voir Dire

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4. Duces Tecum
5. Subpoena
- C. Court Testimony
 1. Monitoring
 2. Courtroom etiquette
- D. Procedural Law
 1. Hearings, trials, appeals
 2. Advocacy, burden of proof
 3. Subpoenas and affidavits
 4. Rules of Evidence
- VII. Ethics
 - A. ABC Code of Professional Ethics
 1. Conflict of interest
 2. Professional integrity
 3. Objectivity
 4. Professional obligations
- VIII. Evidence Handling
 - A. Evidence Recognition and Collection
 1. Prioritization based on circumstance
 2. Sampling
 3. Preservation
 - B. Evidence Classes (Class/Individual)
 1. Exclusionary evidence
 2. Identification
 3. Direct vs. indirect evidence
 4. Tangible vs. latent evidence
 - C. Evidence Preservation
 1. Chain of custody
 2. Alteration/degradation
 3. Storage (long term/short term)
 - D. Evidence Packaging
 1. Proper sealing
 2. Types of packaging
- IX. General Science Terms and Principles
 - A. Definitions and applications
 1. Scientific Method
 - B. General Chemistry Concepts
 1. Nomenclature (IUPAC)
 2. Type of molecules (e.g., aromatics, isoalkanes)
 3. Atomic, molecular weights
 4. Acids/bases



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5. Periodic Table
6. Elemental Composition
7. Bonding
 - a) Ionic
 - b) Covalent
 - c) Hydrogen
 - d) Van der Waals
 - e) Stereoisomers
 - f) Enantiomers
- C. General Biology Concepts
 1. Cell structure
 2. Genetics
 3. Botany
 4. Characteristics of body fluids
- D. General Physics Concepts
 1. Energy
 2. Electromagnetic spectrum
 3. Force
- E. General Physiology and Anatomy Concepts
- F. General Statistics (S)
 1. Mean
 2. Median
 3. Mode
 4. Standard deviation
 5. Variability
 6. Population characteristics
- G. Stoichiometry
- H. Logic
 1. Critical thinking
 2. Inductive and deductive reasoning
- I. Metric System
 1. Metric to metric conversion
 2. Metric to English conversion
- X. Forensic Science Applications for Molecular Biology
 - A. Principles and concepts
 1. Biological Screening Tests
 - a) Locating body fluid stains
 - (1) Visual techniques (daylight, bright or oblique lighting, Alternate Light Source, IR)
 - (2) Mapping techniques

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- b) Amylase/saliva
 - (1) Physiology of saliva
 - (2) Detection methods
 - (3) Interpretation- controls, false positives, and false negatives
 - c) Blood
 - (1) Physiology of blood
 - (2) Detection methods (e.g. presumptive chemical tests such as luminol, o-tolidine, etc.)
 - (3) Confirmatory tests
 - (4) Interpretation- controls, false positives and false negatives
 - d) Feces
 - (1) Physiology of feces
 - (2) Detection methods
 - (3) Interpretation- controls, false positives and false negatives
 - e) Semen
 - (1) Physiology of semen
 - (2) Chemical detection methods (Acid Phosphatase, choline, spermine, P30, MHS-5)
 - (3) Morphology of spermatozoa
 - (4) Post coital intervals in body cavities
 - (5) Azospermic semen stains
 - (6) Interpretation- controls, false positives and false negatives
 - f) Urine
 - (1) Physiology of urine
 - (2) Detection methods
 - (3) Interpretation- controls, false positives and false negatives
2. Anatomy, Physiology, Reproductive Biology
- a) Biology and Organization of organs and tissues
 - b) Cytology and Biochemistry of physiological fluids
 - c) Reproductive Biology
3. Cellular and Molecular Biology
- a) Cell Morphology
 - b) Cells and Chromosomes
 - c) Chromosomal organization
 - d) Cellular DNA content
 - e) Cell Division



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- f) DNA Structure
- g) Transcription and Translation
 - (1) Gene expression regulation
 - (2) Cell differentiation and specialization
 - (3) DNA that is not expressed
 - (4) Levels of gene expression control
 - (a) Transcriptional
 - (b) Processing
 - (c) Translational
 - (5) Gene expression and identification of tissues using RNA
- h) Replication
 - (1) DNA organization
 - (2) Replication forks and bubbles
 - (3) Enzymes involved in DNA replication
 - (4) Proof-reading mechanisms
- i) Mutation mechanisms and rates
 - (1) Kinds of mutations
 - (a) Substitutions and Frameshifts
 - (b) Unstable trinucleotide repeats and other repeat mutation mechanisms
 - (c) Unequal crossing over
 - (d) Insertions/Deletions
 - (2) Agents of mutations
 - (a) Chemical mutagenesis
 - (b) Radiation Mutagenesis
 - (3) Repair
- 4. Genetics
 - a) Mendelian (autosomal)
 - (1) Rules of Inheritance
 - (2) Human Pedigrees
 - b) Non-mendelian
 - (1) Y-chromosomal
 - (2) Mitochondrial
 - c) Cytogenetics-Chromosomal Abnormalities
 - (1) Nondisjunction-Mitotic and Meiotic
 - (2) Chromosomal abnormalities
 - d) Genetic diseases
- 5. Developmental Biology
 - a) Genetics of Development
 - (1) Embryonic Development



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(2) Sexual Development

6. Biochemical Kinetics
 - a) Enzymes as catalysts
 - b) Substrates and Active sites
 - c) Effect of pH
 - d) Metabolic pathways
 - e) Oxidation and Reduction
 - f) Directing metabolism
 - g) Control of enzyme synthesis
 7. Population Genetics
 - a) Hardy Weinberg
 - b) Mechanisms of Evolution
 - (1) Mutation
 - (2) Selection
 - (3) Genetic Drift
 - (4) Migration/Gene Flow
 - c) Statistics and Probability
 - (1) Likelihood ratios
 - (2) Pd and Pi
 - (3) Population substructure-calculations-NRCII
 - d) Databases- CODIS
 8. Phylogeny and Evolution
 - a) Basics of Phylogenetic analysis
 - b) Human evolution- Molecular Clock
 - c) Evolution of humans
 - d) Genetic markers and non genetic markers
 9. Non-human Molecular Applications
 - a) Animal forensic DNA applications
 - b) Plant forensic DNA applications
 - c) Microbial DNA applications
- B. Types of evidence
1. Criminal
 2. Non-criminal
 3. Missing-person/mass disaster
 4. Kinship
 5. Databanking
 6. Non-human
- C. Evolution of the discipline
1. Antigen and immunological systems
 2. Protein and enzyme polymorphisms
 3. RFLP



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4. PCR, qPCR, RT-PCR
5. Genetic markers
6. Automation
- D. Accepted standards and practices
 1. Quality Assurance Standards for Forensic DNA Laboratories
 2. Quality Assurance Standards for Forensic Databank Laboratories
 3. SWGDAM
 4. CODIS
 5. Validation for introduction of new technologies
- E. Casework documentation and reporting (Results and Conclusions)
 1. Case Management
 - a) Evaluate requests for analysis to determine appropriate evidence screening and comparisons to develop the most useful information
 - b) Establishing case record
 2. Process analysis
 - a) Understand the limitations of an analysis in order to formulate a conclusion concerning evidence
 - b) Determine appropriate controls for testing
 - c) Apply and appropriately document procedures
 - d) Interpretation of data
 3. Reporting
 - a) Requirements
 - b) Quantitative / Qualitative Conclusions
 4. Artificial Intelligence
 - a) Second Read Software and automation
- F. Visualization tools/techniques
 1. Microscopy
 - a) Theory
 - b) Application/Processes
 - c) Interpretation/Results
 2. Electrophoresis
 - a) Theory
 - b) Application/Processes
 - c) Interpretation/Results
 3. Fluorescence
 - a) Theory
 - b) Application/Processes
 - c) Interpretation/Results
- G. Isolation and purification of nucleic acids
 1. Theory



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2. Application/Processes
3. Interpretation/Results
- H. Quantification (yield gel, hybridization, real time qPCR)
 1. Theory
 2. Application/Processes
 3. Interpretation/Results
- I. Polymerase Chain Reaction
 1. Theory
 2. Application/Processes
 3. Interpretation/Results
- J. DNA Typing Technology
 1. Fragment Analysis / Short Tandem Repeat Analysis
 - a) Theory
 - b) Application/Processes
 - c) Interpretation/Results
 2. Sequence Analysis
 - a) Theory
 - b) Application/Processes
 - c) Interpretation/Results
 3. SNP Analysis
 - a) Theory
 - b) Application/Processes
 - c) Interpretation/Results

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References

The following recommendations are made for those who wish to prepare to take the Molecular Biology Certification Examination. Small numbers of examination questions may have been drawn from a variety of other sources including general instrumental or chemistry text. Similar information may be obtained by studying earlier or later editions of the listed works, as well as other works covering the same topics.

Core

(40% of Examination Content)

The following texts were used for the generation of test questions for the CORE knowledge. Applicants are encouraged to familiarize themselves with information provided by these texts as that information relates to the KSA (knowledge, skills, and abilities) outlined in this study guide.

Techniques of Crime Scene Investigation, 7th Edition, by Fisher, B.J. (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2004) ISBN 0-8493-1691-X.

Criminalistics, An Introduction to Forensic Science, 7th Edition (or higher), by Saferstein, R. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998) ISBN 0-13-592940-7.

Forensic Science Handbook, Volume I, 2nd Edition, edited by Saferstein, R. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002) ISBN 0-13-091058-9.

Forensic Science Handbook, Volume II, 2nd Edition, edited by Saferstein, R. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2005) ISBN 0-13-112434-X.

Forensic Science Handbook, Volume III, edited by Saferstein, R. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993) ISBN 0-13-325390-2.

Fundamentals of Forensic Science, by Houck, M., Siegel, J. (Burlington, MA: Elsevier Academic Press, 2006) 0-12-356762-9.

Forensic Chemistry, by Bell, S., (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2006) ISBN 0-13-147835-4.

“The Rule of Professional Conduct” supplied by the American Board of Criminalistics.



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ISO/IEC 17025: General requirements for the competence of testing and calibration laboratories. International Organization of Standards, (ISO copyright office, Switzerland, 2005)

Discipline-related

(60% of examination content)

The following recommendations are made for those who wish to prepare to take the Molecular Biology Certification Examination. The following texts are specific to the discipline (molecular biology) portion of this examination.

Books

Any basic genetics textbook.

Any basic biochemistry text book and molecular biology textbook.

Sourcebook in Forensic Serology, Immunology, and Biochemistry, 1989 Update website:
<http://www.ncjrs.gov/App/Publications/abstract.aspx?ID=160880>

It is a collection of PDF files.

Forensic Science Handbook, Volume I, 2nd Edition, edited by Saferstein, R. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002) ISBN 0-13-091058-9.

Chapter 1: "Legal Aspects of Forensic Science"

Chapter 10: "Modern Forensic Biology"

Forensic Science Handbook, Volume II, 2nd Edition, edited by Saferstein, R. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2005) ISBN 0-13-112434-X.

Chapter 8: "The Identification and Individualization of Semen and other Body Fluids"

Forensic Science Handbook, Volume III, edited by Saferstein, R. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Regents/Prentice Hall, 1993) ISBN 0-13-325390-2

Chapter 7: "Forensic DNA Typing of Highly Polymorphic VNTR Loci"

Chapter 8: "DNA Analysis and Biological Evidence: Applications of the Polymerase Chain Reaction."

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Interpreting DNA Evidence: Statistical Genetics For Forensic Scientists, by Evett and Weir, (Sunderland, MA: Sinauer Associates, Inc., 1998) ISBN 0-87893-155-4 (paper)

- Chapter 1: "Probability Theory" (pages 1-21)
- Chapter 2: "Transfer Evidence" (pages 22-42)
- Chapter 4: "Population Genetics" (pages 79-131)
- Chapter 6: "Parentage Testing" (pages 163-187)

Principles of Population Genetics, by Hartl and Clark, (Sunderland, MA: Sinauer Associates, Inc., 1989) ISBN 0-87893-302-6

Forensic DNA Typing, 2nd Edition, by Butler, John M. (Elsevier Academic Press, 2005) ISBN 0-12-14792-8.

Literature

We recommend that you seek out articles pertaining to the application and validation of forensic human DNA identification technology. Listed below are some recommendations where this information is available:

1. *Journal of Forensic Science*
2. *American Journal of Human Genetics*
3. *Biotechniques*
4. *Forensic Science International*
5. *International Journal of Legal Medicine*
6. *NIST STRbase Website*: STR bibliography, validation and background data for short tandem repeats and links to other sites.
(<http://www.cstl.nist.gov/div831/strbase/>)
7. *Forensic Science Communications* "Short Tandem Repeat (STR) Interpretation Guidelines; Vol 2 (3) July 2000.

Publications:

Technical Working Group on DNA Analysis Methods, "Guidelines for a QA Program for DNA Analysis", *Crime Laboratory Digest*, Vol 22, No.2, U.S. Department of Justice, 1995.



AMERICAN BOARD OF CRIMINALISTICS

"Professional Competency Certification in Criminalistics"

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Quality Assurance Standards for Forensic DNA Testing Laboratories and Quality Assurance Standards for Convicted Offender DNA Databasing Laboratories; Forensic Science Communications, July 2000, Volume 2, Number 3..

REVISION Forensic Science Communications, October 2008, Volume 10, Number 4

The Evaluation of Forensic DNA Evidence, by National Research Council (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1996) ISBN 0-309-05395-1

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Sample Questions

- 1) Which of the following best describes the value of field kits for the chemical testing of controlled substances?
 - a) They remove the necessity for laboratory analysis.
 - b) They are presumptive tests.
 - c) They have questionable reliability.
 - d) They allow the officer to make a field identification.

- 2) The primary reason for proving "chain of custody" on a particular item in court is to:
 - a) authenticate the item.
 - b) Show how many people handled the item.
 - c) Show how long it was in each person's possession.
 - d) Deter or prevent unauthorized individuals from handling the evidence.

- 3) Which of the following spectral regions has the highest energy?
 - a) Ultraviolet.
 - b) Infrared.
 - c) Radio.
 - d) Visible.

- 4) Human genomic DNA is not found in:
 - a) White blood cells.
 - b) Red blood cells.
 - c) Spermatozoa.
 - d) Epithelial cells.

- 5) You receive an envelope containing a semi-automatic pistol for an operability check. You open the envelope to examine the weapon. You first remove a fully loaded magazine. The weapon is now:
 - a) Potentially still loaded and unsafe.
 - b) Unloaded and safe.
 - c) Potentially still loaded but safe.
 - d) Rendered safe because of a magazine disconnect.

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- 6) What may happen if the ionic strength of an electrophoresis buffer is too low?
- Diffuse bands may result.
 - The current will not flow.
 - Electroendosmosis will increase.
 - No separation will occur.
- 7) When handling biological materials, which of the following is the most reasonable approach to take?
- Precautions are not normally necessary for sample handling since transmission of disease has not been shown to occur from such contact.
 - Precautions need only be taken when samples are in the liquid state since disease vectors are no longer viable upon drying.
 - Precautions should be taken regardless of the condition or the origin of the samples being handled.
 - Precautions need only be taken with unknown stains and liquids since preservatives and chelating agents present in reference samples will kill any communicable disease.
- 8) Which of the following statements BEST describes the phenomenon of pH?
- The negative log of the hydrogen ion concentration.
 - The positive log of the hydrogen ion concentration.
 - The difference between the concentrations of the hydrogen ions and the hydroxyl ions
 - The titer of the hydrogen ions in solution.
- 9) Which of the following actions is not forbidden by the ABC Code of Professional Conduct?
- Embellishing one's qualifications when testifying.
 - Utilizing a secret method.
 - Refusing to honor a subpoena duces tecum.
 - Interpreting equivocal results based only on an employer's wishes.

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- 10) Upon reviewing your notes for a court appearance in one week, you realize that there is a clerical error and two results have been reversed. Which of the following is the best course of action?
- a) Issue a corrected report including the date of the correction and testify to the error if asked.
 - b) Immediately notify the attorney and issue a report which makes the correction clear.
 - c) Immediately make an entry in your notes as to your discovery and correct it in testimony if asked.
 - d) Correct the error in testimony if asked, but make no additions or alterations to your notes.
- 11) Ohm's law interrelates potential (volts) to _____?
- a) Power
 - b) Joules
 - c) Resistance
 - d) Conductance
- 12) What is the range of probabilities that two genes on the same chromosome will remain together after meiosis?
- a) 5% to 25%
 - b) 1% to 99%
 - c) 25% to 75%
 - d) 50% to 99%
- 13) Which of the following assumptions is required in order to use the product rule?
- a) Hardy-Weinberg equilibrium
 - b) Dependent inheritance of the genetic markers
 - c) Independent inheritance of the genetic markers
 - d) Proper statistical sampling of the population

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- 14) A nucleic acid must contain a nitrogenous base and which of the following?
- I. Aromatic ring
 - II. 4-carbon ring
 - III. 5-carbon ring
 - IV. phosphate
- a) I, II, and IV
 - b) III and IV
 - c) I and III
 - d) I and IV
- 15) What are the four nucleotides found in DNA?
- a) thiamine, adenine, guanine, cysteine
 - b) alanine, guanine, cytosine, thiamine
 - c) cytosine, thymine, guanine, adenine
 - d) adenine, cysteine, thymine, guanine
- 16) Which of the following factors DO NOT affect the migration of DNA fragments through an electrophoretic system?
- I. pore size
 - II. tracking dye
 - III. DNA shape
- a) II only
 - b) II and III
 - c) I and II
 - d) I and III
- 17) A three banded isoenzyme pattern with a 1:2:1 intensity ratio indicates a _____ protein.
- a) monomeric
 - b) dimeric
 - c) trimeric
 - d) tetrameric

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18) Consider the following data describing a genetic marker:

1-1	N = 120
2-1	N = 90
2-2	N = 60

The Probability of Discrimination (PD) for the genetic marker is described by the data above is:

- a) 0.10
 - b) 0.39
 - c) 0.61
 - d) 0.90
- 19) What are organic compounds having the basic formula $\text{NH}_2\text{-R-COOH}$ (where R = an aliphatic or aromatic side chain) that are polymerized to form peptides and proteins termed?
- a) amino acids
 - b) enzymes
 - c) phospholipids
 - d) polysaccharides
- 20) Detection of p30 in a questioned stain would allow identification of semen from individuals who are classified as:
- a) anemic
 - b) aspermic
 - c) nonsecretors
 - d) secretors