



Toxicology FAQs

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1. General minimum educational requirements for your section:

- Bachelor's degree in Chemistry, Biochemistry, or Toxicology
 - While not required, a Master's degree is preferred.
- College Level Statistics
- College coursework should meet the education requirement for the Texas Forensic Science Commission Toxicologist (Interpretive) license as stated in the [Texas Administrative Code](#).

2. What advice would you offer someone considering this career path?

- Take a 3-hour statistics class in college!!!!
- Make sure you have enough chemistry hours and in the right, specific courses!!! See the Texas Forensic Science Commission [website](#) for more information about TFSC [licensing requirements](#), including minimum education requirements as described in the Texas Administrative Code.
- Get lab experience if you are not obtaining a graduate degree. Also, specifically get analytical experience to make sure you want to be in the lab.
- You will have to go through a criminal background check and undergo on-going random drug testing.
- Start working on fostering good communication skills.
- Seek out continuing education opportunities and go to conferences (e.g., Society of Forensic Toxicologists, AKA SOFT) to get involved in the field, even as a student.
- Keep up with current literature and trends in drugs and instrumentation.
- Never be afraid to ask questions.
- Be confident! Make sure to highlight your skills and strengths when pursuing the field.

3. Besides a degree(s), what other things does HFSC look for in future analysts in this section?

- Time management
- Detail oriented
- Flexible
- Great communication skills, personable, approachable, team player
- Able to work under pressure
- Good problem solver, critical thinking skills
- Good Microsoft knowledge: Office, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, O365, TEAMS.

4. What testing and instrumentation are used in the Toxicology section?

- Take a look at our standard operating procedures: [HFSC Toxicology Analytical Manual](#).

5. What is a typical day/week like for a forensic scientist in this section?

- 60% desk, 40% lab work. Much more paperwork than most people anticipate.
- Average 40-hour work week, 8 hours per day.
- For our section, we focus on human performance testing and drug facilitated crimes.
- We have training modules, and scientists may be performing casework while they are training. For more information on what our training looks like, see our [Training Manual](#) on HFSC's eDiscovery website.

6. Is it typical to work overtime? How often?

- No, it happens as needed. We are not on call outside work hours in this section.

7. How often do analysts in this section appear in court to testify?

- Between 2021 to 2023, we have averaged about 15 testimonies per year or roughly one per month, though, there are periods of the year where we tend to testify more than others.
- The scientist will receive more subpoenas than they actually end up testifying for. In 2023, there were about 22 subpoenas received to one testimony actually given.
- It is not uncommon to testify in multiple types of settings, like hearings or jury trials. The toxicologist usually testifies last or towards the end.

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9. How important is communication in the daily function of your job?

- Very important! We work as a team, reviewing each other's casework and collaborating on various projects and in meetings. Also, we communicate with stakeholders, like attorneys and police.

10. In your opinion, what do you think is the most challenging part of your occupation?

- Managing all the tasks and having to switch tasks, depending on changing priorities.
- Managing varied deadlines
- Providing testimony
- This work does involve sensitive information that may have an emotional impact, and one should be prepared to handle it with responsibility.

11. What advancement opportunities are available in your line of work?

- Most toxicology labs have career ladders that are based on experience, skills, and certifications.
- Our section specifically recognizes *ABFT Certification*.

12. What is a common misconception people have about your job?

- It is not like what you see in the TV shows. People are a lot more specialized in their area of expertise than what the shows portray.
- That we are in mostly the lab. We actually spend more time doing desk work, such as report writing and casework review.
- There is no cross training with other sections.

13. How is the work/life balance for an analyst in this section?

- This is dependent on how good the scientist is at making sure there is a balance. It depends on the person and their interest in extracurricular activities.