



Practical Polygraph: How to Annotate the Acquaintance Chart as a Functionality Check

Ben Blalock¹ and Raymond Nelson²

Procedures exist for each different polygraph instrument as to how to conduct a formal functionality check. Blalock and Nelson (2018) described an instrument-independent procedure for a *field-functionality-check (FFC)* that can be used for any instrument in virtually any environment. However, even without the completion of a functionality check, it is not likely that a polygraph sensor malfunction or instrument malfunction will go un-noticed or un-corrected prior to the onset or completion of an examination. In practice, FFC is rarely required except to investigate and document a suspected sensor or system fault. However, some field practice

standards may require periodic completion and documentation of functionality checks for polygraph instruments in field service. For this reason, the routine *acquaintance test (ACQT)* – a part of virtually every polygraph exam – is, for practical purposes, a form of functionality check, in addition to providing the examinee an opportunity to become accustomed to the polygraph recording sensors and instructions that will be used during the data-acquisition phase of a polygraph exam. Nelson, Prado, Blalock & Handler (2018) described the basic procedure, and also summarized the literature and history, for the acquaintance test.

¹ There are no proprietary interests associated with this publication.

² Ben Blalock is the director of the Peak Credibility Assessment Training Center, an accredited training program owned by Lafayette Instrument Company.

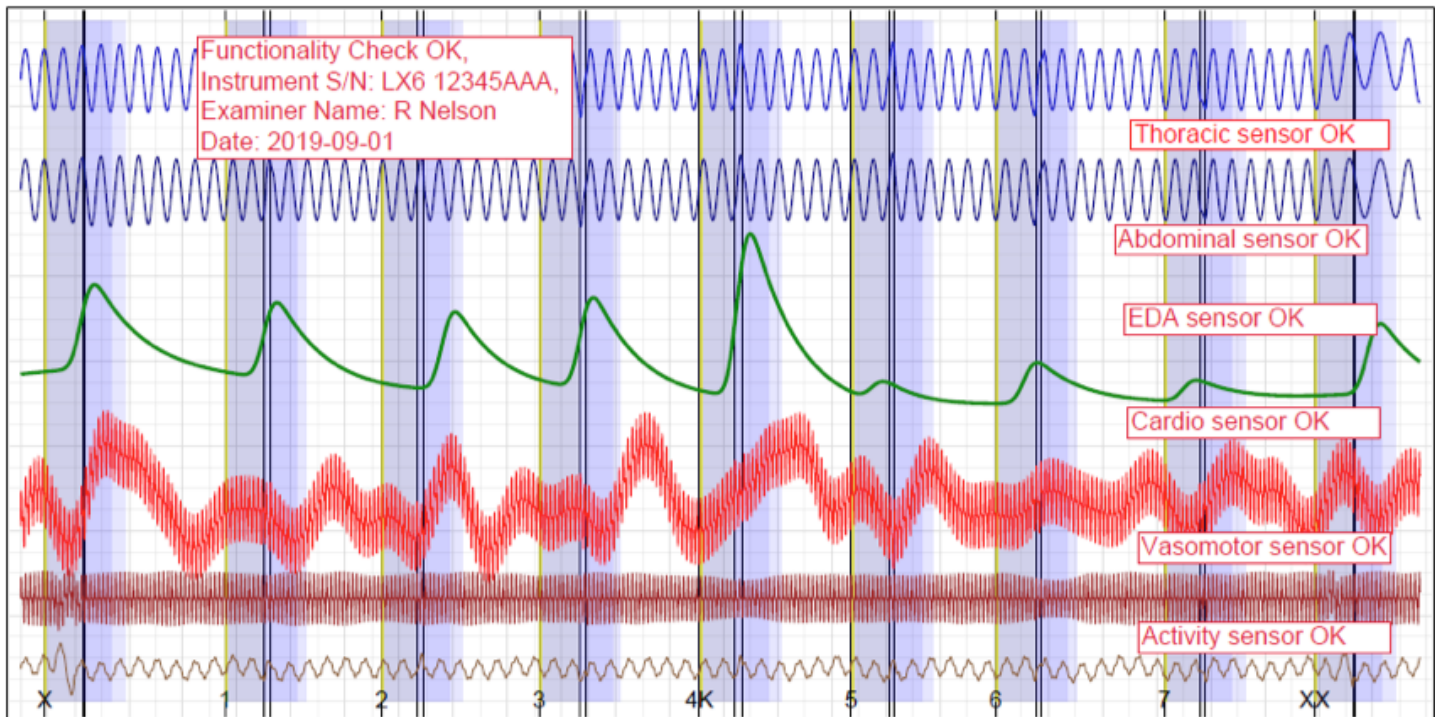
³ Raymond Nelson is a research specialist with Lafayette Instrument Company, which develops and markets polygraph instrumentation and software.



We suggest a convenient way to use chart comments to formalize and document the ACQT as serving the FFC purpose. See Figure 1 for an example. This is easily ac-

complished by entering a series of comments to describe the functional state of each recording sensor and the data acquisition instrument.

Figure 1. Acquaintance functionality test (ACQT-FFC).



The American Polygraph Association mandates that its members conduct an ACQT in conjunction with all diagnostic, evidentiary, paired-testing, initial screening, and initial investigative examinations (APA Standards of Practice, effective September 1, 2018, paragraph 1.7.5). Policies, procedures, standards, and statutes have previously required that functionality checks occur prior to each evidentiary examination, and at minimum intervals, such as at least once every three months (i.e. Utah Administrative Code, effective February 1, 2012. R156-64-502.22(i)).

However, it is not inconceivable that, for different reasons, all examiners may have not consistently administered a functionality check prior to either each evidentiary examination, or during each period of time mandated by law, standards, rules or regulations.

The suggestions we make herein provides a simple way to document that an instrument and its accompanying sensors are properly functioning according to manufacturer's specifications prior to each diagnostic (or other) examination where an

ACQT is administered. It also serves to assure both the examiner and any subsequent exam data reviewer (courtroom, peer, quality control, etc.), that the instrument was properly functioning just prior to the data acquisition phase of each examination. Finally, and more practically,

it serves to alert both the original examiner and any quality assurance personnel of any improperly functioning recording sensor(s). This procedure can be easily accomplished with any polygraph instrument for which it is possible to add written comments to the chart data.

References

- American Polygraph Association (2018). APA Standards of Practice(Effective September 1, 2018). Retrieved (January 20, 2019) from <https://www.polygraph.org/apabylaws-and-standards>.
- Blalock, B. & Nelson, R. (2019) Practical polygraph: how to perform a field functionality check. APA Magazine, 51(5), 58-62.
- Nelson, R. Prado, R., Blalock, B. & Handler, M. (2018). Practical polygraph: the known solution acquaintance test and functionality check. Polygraph & Forensic Credibility Assessment , 2018(47), 122-134.



