

AU Section 336

Using the Work of a Specialist

(Supersedes SAS No. 11.)

Source: SAS No. 73.

See section 9336 for interpretations of this section.

Effective for audits of periods ending on or after December 15, 1994.

Introduction and Applicability

.01 The purpose of this section is to provide guidance to the auditor who uses the work of a specialist in performing an audit in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards. For purposes of this section, a specialist is a person (or firm) possessing special skill or knowledge in a particular field other than accounting or auditing.¹

.02 Specialists to which this section applies include, but are not limited to, actuaries, appraisers, engineers, environmental consultants, and geologists. This section also applies to attorneys engaged as specialists in situations other than to provide services to a client concerning litigation, claims, or assessments to which section 337, *Inquiry of a Client's Lawyer Concerning Litigation, Claims, and Assessments*, applies. For example, attorneys may be engaged by a client or by the auditor as specialists in a variety of other circumstances, including interpreting the provisions of a contractual agreement.

.03 The guidance in this section is applicable when—

- a. Management engages or employs a specialist and the auditor uses that specialist's work as audit evidence in performing substantive tests to evaluate material financial statement assertions.
- b. Management engages a specialist employed by the auditor's firm to provide advisory services² and the auditor uses that specialist's work as audit evidence in performing substantive tests to evaluate material financial statement assertions.
- c. The auditor engages a specialist and uses that specialist's work as audit evidence in performing substantive tests to evaluate material financial statement assertions.

[Revised, March 2006, to reflect conforming changes necessary due to the issuance of Statement on Auditing Standards No. 105.]

.04 The guidance provided in this section applies to audits of financial statements prepared in conformity with generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP)³ and to engagements performed under section 623, *Special Reports*, including a comprehensive basis of accounting other than GAAP.

¹ In general, the auditor's education, training, and experience enable him or her to be knowledgeable concerning income tax matters and to be competent to assess their presentation in the financial statements.

² The auditor should consider the effect, if any, that using the work of a specialist employed by the auditor's firm has on independence.

³ References in this section to "financial statements" and to "generally accepted accounting principles" include special reports covered under section 623, *Special Reports*.

.05 This section does not apply to situations covered by section 311, *Planning and Supervision*, in which a specialist employed by the auditor's firm participates in the audit.

Decision to Use the Work of a Specialist

.06 The auditor's education and experience enable him or her to be knowledgeable about business matters in general, but the auditor is not expected to have the expertise of a person trained for or qualified to engage in the practice of another profession or occupation. During the audit, however, an auditor may encounter complex or subjective matters potentially material to the financial statements. Such matters may require special skill or knowledge and in the auditor's judgment require using the work of a specialist to obtain appropriate audit evidence. [Revised, March 2006, to reflect conforming changes necessary due to the issuance of Statement on Auditing Standards No. 105.]

.07 Examples of the types of matters that the auditor may decide require him or her to consider using the work of a specialist include, but are not limited to, the following:

- a. Valuation (for example, special-purpose inventories, high-technology materials or equipment, pharmaceutical products, complex financial instruments, real estate, restricted securities, works of art, and environmental contingencies)
- b. Determination of physical characteristics relating to quantity on hand or condition (for example, quantity or condition of minerals, mineral reserves, or materials stored in stockpiles)
- c. Determination of amounts derived by using specialized techniques or methods (for example, actuarial determinations for employee benefits obligations and disclosures, and determinations for insurance loss reserves⁴)
- d. Interpretation of technical requirements, regulations, or agreements (for example, the potential significance of contracts or other legal documents or legal title to property)

Qualifications and Work of a Specialist

.08 The auditor should consider the following to evaluate the professional qualifications of the specialist in determining that the specialist possesses the necessary skill or knowledge in the particular field:

- a. The professional certification, license, or other recognition of the competence of the specialist in his or her field, as appropriate
- b. The reputation and standing of the specialist in the views of peers and others familiar with the specialist's capability or performance
- c. The specialist's experience in the type of work under consideration

.09 The auditor should obtain an understanding of the nature of the work performed or to be performed by the specialist. This understanding should cover the following:

⁴ In the specific situation involving the audit of an insurance entity's loss reserves, an outside loss reserve specialist—that is, one who is not an employee or officer of the insurance entity—should be used. When the auditor has the requisite knowledge and experience, the auditor may serve as the loss reserve specialist. [Footnote revised, June 2009, to reflect conforming changes necessary due to the issuance of recent authoritative literature.]

- a. The objectives and scope of the specialist's work
- b. The specialist's relationship to the client (see paragraphs .10 and .11)
- c. The methods or assumptions used
- d. A comparison of the methods or assumptions used with those used in the preceding period
- e. The appropriateness of using the specialist's work for the intended purpose⁵
- f. The form and content of the specialist's findings that will enable the auditor to make the evaluation described in paragraph .12

Relationship of the Specialist to the Client

.10 The auditor should evaluate the relationship⁶ of the specialist to the client, including circumstances that might impair the specialist's objectivity. Such circumstances include situations in which the client has the ability—through employment, ownership, contractual right, family relationship, or otherwise—to directly or indirectly control or significantly influence the specialist.

.11 When a specialist does not have a relationship with the client, the specialist's work usually will provide the auditor with greater assurance of reliability. However, the work of a specialist who has a relationship with the client may be acceptable under certain circumstances. If the specialist has a relationship with the client, the auditor should assess the risk that the specialist's objectivity might be impaired. If the auditor believes the relationship might impair the specialist's objectivity, the auditor should perform additional procedures with respect to some or all of the specialist's assumptions, methods, or findings to determine that the findings are not unreasonable or should engage another specialist for that purpose.

Using the Findings of the Specialist

.12 The appropriateness and reasonableness of methods and assumptions used and their application are the responsibility of the specialist. The auditor should (a) obtain an understanding of the methods and assumptions used by the specialist, (b) make appropriate tests of data provided to the specialist, taking into account the auditor's assessment of control risk, and (c) evaluate whether the specialist's findings support the related assertions in the financial statements. Ordinarily, the auditor would use the work of the specialist unless the auditor's procedures lead him or her to believe the findings are unreasonable in the circumstances. If the auditor believes the findings are unreasonable, he or she should apply additional procedures, which may include obtaining the opinion of another specialist.

Effect of the Specialist's Work on the Auditor's Report

.13 If the auditor determines that the specialist's findings support the related assertions in the financial statements, he or she reasonably may conclude

⁵ In some cases, the auditor may decide it is necessary to contact the specialist to determine that the specialist is aware that his or her work will be used for evaluating the assertions in the financial statements.

⁶ The term *relationship* includes, but is not limited to, those situations discussed in section 334, *Related Parties*, footnote 1.

that sufficient appropriate audit evidence has been obtained. If there is a material difference between the specialist's findings and the assertions in the financial statements, he or she should apply additional procedures. If after applying any additional procedures that might be appropriate the auditor is unable to resolve the matter, the auditor should obtain the opinion of another specialist, unless it appears to the auditor that the matter cannot be resolved. A matter that has not been resolved ordinarily will cause the auditor to conclude that he or she should qualify the opinion or disclaim an opinion because the inability to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence as to an assertion of material significance in the financial statements constitutes a scope limitation. (See section 508, *Reports on Audited Financial Statements*, paragraphs .22 and .23.) [Revised, March 2006, to reflect conforming changes necessary due to the issuance of Statement on Auditing Standards No. 105.]

.14 The auditor may conclude after performing additional procedures, including possibly obtaining the opinion of another specialist, that the assertions in the financial statements are not in conformity with GAAP. In that event, the auditor should express a qualified or adverse opinion. (See section 508.35, .36, and .41.)

Reference to the Specialist in the Auditor's Report

.15 Except as discussed in paragraph .16, the auditor should not refer to the work or findings of the specialist. Such a reference might be misunderstood to be a qualification of the auditor's opinion or a division of responsibility, neither of which is intended. Further, there may be an inference that the auditor making such reference performed a more thorough audit than an auditor not making such reference.

.16 The auditor may, as a result of the report or findings of the specialist, decide to add explanatory language to his or her standard report or depart from an unqualified opinion. Reference to and identification of the specialist may be made in the auditor's report if the auditor believes such reference will facilitate an understanding of the reason for the explanatory paragraph or the departure from the unqualified opinion.

Effective Date

.17 This section is effective for audits of periods ending on or after December 15, 1994. Early application of the provisions of this section is encouraged.
