



**CAPR**  
Canadian Alliance  
of Physiotherapy  
Regulators

**ACORP**  
Alliance canadienne des  
organismes de réglementation  
de la physiothérapie

# Essential Guide

## Chapter 5: Exam Day: Maximize Your Performance

After reading this chapter, you will know:

- how to evaluate your need for preparation for the PCE;
- how to develop a study plan;
- how to enhance your performance on exam day;
- what to bring to the exam, and what not to bring;
- what the important exam day processes are for both the Written Component and the Clinical Component; and
- some exam-taking strategies for the Written Component and the Clinical Component.

## Do You Need to Prepare?

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You should evaluate the knowledge, skills and abilities you have developed over the course of your education, including in your supervised clinical placements. In order to determine what additional learning needs you have, prior to taking the examination, you should assess the knowledge and skills that you have already acquired, in comparison with the subject areas and their weightings outlined in the [Exam Blueprint](#).

**You are in the best position to determine what preparation is appropriate for you.**

## Develop a Study Plan

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Here are some universally accepted learning principles.

### Look after Yourself

- Maintain healthy patterns of eating and sleeping.
- Exercise regularly—do some stretching as well as aerobic and strengthening exercises.
- Make yourself comfortable in your study environment.
- Practise concentration and relaxation techniques daily. If done regularly, your body and mind will respond more quickly and effectively. Use these techniques on exam day, too.
  - Take short breaks to stretch.
  - Use other techniques, such as visualization, progressive relaxation and humour.

### Be Efficient

- Create a study schedule, and post it in a visible spot. Update your schedule as necessary.
- Start studying early, and pace yourself.
- Take frequent breaks. Stop and do something else when you lose your concentration.
- If you have a problem with a particular topic, seek help.
- Review topic areas on a regular basis to keep your memory active. Summarize frequently. Use the “little and often” principle.
- After studying an idea or topic, always ask yourself, “What does that mean?” Answer the question as if you’re trying to explain the concept to someone else.
- Analyze your reasoning, especially in clinical situations. This helps to highlight practices that need improvement.
- If possible, form a study group. Asking and answering questions with other candidates improves your understanding and helps you to identify concepts that you should study more.

## Exam Day Tips

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### Before the Exam

- Make sure you know how to get to the exam.
- Try to get some exercise before the exam starts.
- Leave your notes and texts at home. Research has shown that studying on the way to the exam is likely to “muddle” the material you have mastered, thus impairing your exam performance.
- Arrive at the assigned time or a few minutes earlier.
- Avoid having other candidates quiz you.
  - If the concerns of other candidates are likely to upset you, find a place to sit alone while you wait for the exam to start.
  - On the other hand, if chatting and being with your friends is a comfort, steer conversation to non-exam topics.
- Practise your favourite relaxation techniques.
- Go to the washroom before the exam starts.

### During the Exam

- Read all instructions carefully.
- Remember to break occasionally for a deep breath or a stretch. Relaxation helps with concentration and improves performance.
- Sit with your feet flat, your back up against the back of the chair, the chair pulled up to the table, and your arms supported on the table.
- Stand with your head up and your back straight, and take a wide stance; put a foot up on a stool or the edge of an examining table.

### After the Exam

- Do not discuss specific questions and client encounters with other candidates. Doing so may contravene the Rules of Conduct (see *Exam Policy*).
- Do something relaxing. Try reading a good book or going out for dinner.

## Specific Information for the Written Component

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### Remember to Bring the Following

- One** of the three valid government-issued photo IDs with signature — driver’s licence, passport, or permanent resident card.
- Medications or other supplies that you have permission to bring. You need an approved special needs plan from CAPR to bring medications or other supplies into the exam room.
- Ear plugs, if you are easily distracted during written exams. Show the ear plugs to the exam staff when you register.
- Water/juice/drink in spill-proof container with no label (subject to approval by the Test Centre for the Written exam only).
- Please note — books, pens, keys, analog or digital watches, or other personal belongings are not permitted in the exam room. You may be provided a locker in which to store these items.

### What to Wear

- Wear comfortable clothing.
- Dress in layers. Temperatures in exam rooms may vary depending on the location and the season.

### Arriving at the Exam Centre

- Leave all food and drink, outerwear and other personal belongings, including purses and backpacks, in the secure, designated area. You are not allowed to have these items at your desk. **This includes all electronic and wireless devices, which MUST be turned OFF.**
- For the written exam, you will be provided with scratch paper and pencils by the proctor at the test centre. (You are required to leave these with the proctor at the end of the exam.)

### During the Written Component

The Written Component consists of one 4-hour session. There are no scheduled breaks in this exam. There is a countdown clock on the exam interface. This is the clock you must judge your time by, not a wall clock. When the allotted time period is up, the assessment will cease and you will automatically be logged out. If you complete your assessment prior to the time limit, simply hit “submit exam” and you are free to leave.

## Strategies for Taking the Written Component

The Written Component has approximately 200 multiple-choice questions. Each question has a stem (the question) followed by the options (potential answers). See Chapter 3: Written Component Sample Questions for examples.

A multiple-choice exam requires you to take a different approach from exams with true/false, short answer or essay questions.

Here are some suggestions to help you maximize your performance on the multiple-choice questions:

1. **Calculate the time** that you can allot for each question, leaving 10 to 15 minutes to review difficult questions at the end.
2. **Answer the questions.**
  - Read each question carefully, and note the key terms:
    - obvious qualifiers—for example, all, never, most, usually, almost, little, more, good, best, normally;
    - implied qualifiers—for example, “Birds fly south in the winter,” where “all” is not stated but is implied;
    - negatives and double negatives—for example, “It is **not** logical to assume that Thomas Edison’s fame was **not** due to...”; and
    - key concepts or facts—for example, “**Movements** to be **avoided post-surgery...**”
  - Focus your attention throughout the exam on what you do know.
  - Try to answer each question in your mind before looking at the options for that question.
  - Read all the options **before** selecting one.
  - Eliminate incorrect options first.
  - Remember to select the answer for each question as you go along. Your assessment is scored based on your answers submitted through the online system only.
  - You are able to bookmark, review, and change answers until you have hit “submit exam” at the end of your assessment.
  - You are set up on a secure browser and may not navigate away from it.
  - You may **not** leave until at least 30 minutes has elapsed
  - **AFTER** 30 minutes, washroom breaks are permitted; however, you will not receive extra exam time.
  - Only one person may leave the exam room at a time. You must advise the proctor, who will sign you in and out and record how long you were absent from the room.

- At the end of the exam, you may submit feedback in English or French via the online survey.

## Specific Information for the Clinical Component

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### Remember to Bring the Following

- Booking Confirmation Email.** You will receive a Booking Confirmation Email from CAPR 7 weeks in advance of your exam date. You **MUST** bring a printed copy of the Booking Confirmation Email with you to the exam, otherwise you will not be granted access. (Any electronic copy will not be accepted: e.g. email copy on cell phone or tablet.)
- One** of the three valid government-issued photo IDs with signature — driver's licence, passport, or permanent resident card.
- Medications or other supplies that you have permission to bring.** You need an approved special needs plan from CAPR to bring medications or other supplies into the exam area.
- Must Bring - A lab coat and a stethoscope.** All other required equipment will be provided.

*Note:* Write your name on your equipment. If you leave an item in a station during the exam, staff will be able to return it to you faster if your name is on it.

- Leave valuables—including all electronic and wireless devices—at home. The CAPR is not responsible for lost or stolen property.
- Leave books and study materials at home. Bringing them to the exam site contravenes the Rules of Conduct.

### What to Wear

- Wear comfortable clothing that looks professional. Keep in mind that you may be asked to perform physical tasks or to give physical assistance to a standardized client during the exam.
- Wear comfortable shoes. You will be standing or walking for most of the exam.
- Dress in layers. Temperatures in exam rooms may vary depending on the location and the season. Remember that your lab coat adds an extra layer.
- Make sure your lab coat fits you properly. A coat that is too long (in the body or the sleeves) may get in your way. Some candidates prefer to wear a jacket-style lab coat. Be sure your lab coat has enough pocket space for all the equipment you will be carrying.

### Sequestering

To mitigate the risk to exam security, each exam site will follow the approximate times as outlined in schedule below:

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Given that the exam runs on the same day across different time zones, CAPR approves the candidate sign out and release time in advance for each site. Candidates in different time zones may be sequestered after they complete the exam (Halifax, Ottawa, Toronto, Hamilton, London and Winnipeg) or before they start the exam (Saskatoon, Edmonton and Vancouver). This is done to prevent candidates from one-time zone communicating with candidates in another time zone who have not yet completed exam day registration.

Candidates will be sequestered in a room without any candidate materials or access to their belongings. Candidates will not have any communication devices, including telephones or cell phones. No electronics are permitted during the sequestering.

The site may play a movie or a show during sequestering, as talking is not permitted. The movie or show will be PG or 14A in ratings. Any movie or show with higher ratings should not be played during sequestering. Food and water or other drinks may be set up for the candidates during this time.

The support staff will be present in the same room as the candidates. Sequestering rules will be strictly enforced.

### **Arriving at the Exam Centre**

- Leave all food and drink, outerwear and personal belongings (including purses and backpacks) in the secure, designated area. You are not allowed to bring these items into the exam area. **This includes all digital and analog watches, electronic and wireless devices.**
- Put on your lab coat, and put your stethoscope in a pocket. During the exam, return items to the same pocket each time you use them, so that you can find things quickly when you need them.

### **Registration**

- Present your Booking Confirmation Email at the registration desk.
- Sign the candidate registration list. Confirm the correct spelling of your name.
- Collect your Candidate Package, but **do not open it.**
- Help yourself to the refreshments.
- Take your seat. Wait for orientation.

### **Orientation**

The orientation takes 25 to 30 minutes. Exam staff will welcome you and review the following:

- Contents of your Candidate Package
- Timeframe for five- and ten-minute clinical encounters, and for breaks
- Timing system

- Written stations
- Rules of Conduct

### **During the Clinical Component**

The exam consists of two parts. Each part takes up to two hours:

- Eight five-minute stations, each followed by a five-minute written station; and
- Eight ten-minute stations.

You will be assigned to a group of candidates. One group starts at the five-minute stations, and the other starts at the ten-minute stations.

A member of the exam staff will act as your Group Leader, guiding your group through the exam. There are also Hall Monitors who help you to move in the right direction between stations. Exam personnel are clearly identifiable and, if you need help, can assist you.

Halfway through the exam, there is a 10- to 15-minute break. Refreshments will be provided. Make sure to leave yourself enough time to visit the washroom.

After the break, the groups switch stations. (That is, if your group started with the five-minute stations, you will switch to the ten-minute stations, and vice versa.)

### **At the End of the Exam**

- Your group leader will take you to the sign out area.
- Hand in your notebook, name tag and leftover barcode labels.
- Proceed to sequestering, if applicable.
- Sign out of the exam.
- Pick up your personal belongings before leaving the site.
- If you took the exam in the morning session, you may have to wait a few minutes before leaving the exam site.

### **Strategies for Taking the Clinical Component**

Taking the Clinical Component - where you must tend to a standardized client while being evaluated by an examiner - is different from taking an exam on paper. (See Chapter 4: Clinical Component Sample Stations for an overview of how client encounters work.)

To help maximize your performance on exam day, consider these tips:

#### **Have an Exam Day Plan**

If you spend some time making an exam day plan for the Clinical Component, the day will go more smoothly. First, use this *Essential Guide for Candidates to the PCE* to develop a mental picture of

what the exam will be like. Then, keeping the following points in mind, imagine taking the exam, step by step. By the time exam day arrives, your mental preparation will allow you to apply your skills and perform at your best.

## General Considerations

Standardized clients are people who are trained to consistently portray the features of a case and to respond appropriately to your questions and actions.

Assume that you have consent from the standardized client unless the client or the Instructions to Candidate say otherwise.

**Interact with all standardized clients as if they were real clients.** You may recognize one or more of the standardized clients because some of them also work in Canadian physiotherapy programs. Remember that they will be playing different roles on exam day, and that they must stay in their roles.

We will provide hand sanitizer so you can clean your hands at the beginning of each station. The examiners do not give you marks for routine cleaning of your hands, but they will remind you. **Take all other infection control precautions indicated by each clinical situation.**

## Consider All Instructions Carefully

- Pay attention to staff members' verbal instructions, during both the orientation and the exam.
- Read the Instructions to Candidate slowly—**and then re-read them.** Take notes in your notebook if this helps you. Read the copy outside the station and, if necessary, the copy inside the encounter room. The contents of your notebook are not marked. We destroy notebooks after the exam.

## Focus on the Client and the Task(s)

- **Do only what is asked for in the Instructions to Candidate.**
- Each time you enter a station, **take note of the environment**—the client's position and appearance, and the equipment that is available—before beginning.
- Pay attention to the client, not the examiner. Explain aloud to the client what you are doing and why.
- If the instructions say, "Describe to the examiner..." you must tell the examiner what you are doing, observing or assessing in order to receive credit. Remember that the examiner cannot guess what you are thinking.
- If you get confused in a station or lose your train of thought, stop, re-read the question, and then carry on. This is an acceptable exam-taking strategy and is also expected professional behaviour.

- The **client's safety** (and yours) is very important. Keep asking yourself if your actions are safe. Do not leave a client in an unsafe position. Think about the **precautions** and **contraindications** to given interventions, and also about **common sense considerations**:
  - Avoid putting your foot on the IV line.
  - Apply the wheelchair brakes before doing a transfer.
  - Ask how the client is feeling.
  - Check to make sure you are working with the correct body part and on the correct side.
- At some ten-minute stations, the examiner will stop you at the 8-minute mark (at the warning buzzer) to ask questions. The Instructions to Candidate tell you if there are verbal questions at a station. At these stations, **you cannot continue your interaction with the client after you answer the questions.**
- The examiner may ask you to re-read the Instructions to Candidate if he or she believes you have misunderstood the question. An examiner does this to prevent you from wasting time doing the wrong thing in a station (for example, taking a history in a physical examination station). If an examiner asks you to re-read a question, stop what you are doing, re-read the Instructions to Candidate and then reconsider your approach before continuing with the client. **The examiner can ask you to re-read the instructions only once.** The examiner may also ask you to describe to the examiner what you are doing. In other words, do not simply re-read the instructions, but be specific and verbalize what you are doing. **The examiner can ask you to verbalize what you are doing only once.**

## Stay Relaxed

- Work methodically.
- Take your time.
- If you think you performed poorly in one station, put it behind you and focus on the next station. All candidates will likely have some trouble in one or more stations.
- Take a deep breath and then lower your shoulders as you let the breath out before entering each station.

## Written Stations

- **Read the question(s) carefully.**
- If you are asked for three responses, the examiner marks only your **first** three responses. If you change your mind about an answer, erase or cross it out completely.
- The examiner can mark **legible responses only**. Write neatly, or print your answers.
- At the **Ottawa site only**, candidates may write their written responses in either English or French. For more information on language choice, refer to the *Registration Guide*
- You can use common abbreviations and acronyms in your answers. However, if you are unsure about whether an abbreviation or acronym is commonly understood, write it in full to make sure that the examiner who marks your answers will understand what you mean.

