



CAPR
Canadian Alliance
of Physiotherapy
Regulators

ACORP
Alliance canadienne des
organismes de réglementation
de la physiothérapie

Essential Guide

Chapter 1: The Physiotherapy Competency Exam (PCE)

After reading this chapter, you will know:

- what the purpose of the exam is;
- how the exam is structured;
- how to apply for the exam;
- what makes the PCE different from university exams;
- how the exam is marked;
- where to get information about registering to practise physiotherapy.

Purpose of the PCE

The Physiotherapy Competency Examination (PCE) tests whether qualified exam candidates have demonstrated a minimum standard of practice. It fairly and accurately evaluates the competencies needed to practise physiotherapy. All physiotherapy regulators in Canada except Quebec require applicants to have passed the PCE before being granted the right to practice, (although Quebec requires all applicants trained outside Quebec to have passed the PCE). Quebec-trained applicants must pass a comprehensive exam unique to that province that is equivalent to the PCE.

The PCE tests the essential competencies of physiotherapy practice – the essential knowledge, skills and abilities. It tests history-taking, physical examination, data interpretation, clinical problem solving, treatment techniques, ethics, safety, interviewing and communication. The exam covers the core clinical practice areas: neuromusculoskeletal, neurological, cardiopulmonary-vascular and multisystem.

	Written Component	Clinical Component
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tests your understanding of essential physiotherapy knowledge, skills and abilities • Tests your understanding of the principles and processes of physiotherapy practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tests your understanding and application of physiotherapy knowledge, skills and abilities • Tests your ability to safely and effectively apply the principles and processes of physiotherapy practice

Structure and Timeline of the PCE

The exam has two components:

	Written Component	Clinical Component
Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One 4-hour session • Computer-based format • Multiple choice • 200 questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One 5-6 hour session (approximately) • Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) • 16 stations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 stations: a 10-minute encounter with a standardized client • 8 stations: a 5-minute encounter with a standardized client, followed by a 5-minute related written station
Timeline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offered six times each year • Results (Pass/Fail) uploaded on CAPR website and mailed within 6 weeks of the exam 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offered twice each year • Results (Pass/Fail) uploaded on CAPR website and mailed within 12 weeks of the exam

Applying to take the PCE

Application and Procedure of PCE

CAPR recommends that you apply for both components at the same time, but you can apply for the Written Component first and then apply for the Clinical Component later.

To apply to the PCE, follow these steps:

1. Make sure that you are eligible to apply to the PCE (Refer to the [Exam Policy](#), 4. Eligibility to take the PCE.)
2. Review the available information on exam dates, times and locations (Refer to the [Exam Registration Guide](#), 1. Exam Date, 7. Exam Sites)
3. Contact the regulator in the province in which you want to work for information about registration to work as a physiotherapist. (Refer [Regulator Websites](#))
4. Calculate your fees and arrange for payment. (Exam Registration Guide, 2. Exam Fees and payment methods)
5. Apply for the exam.
 - Send original [application forms](#), payment, and any other required documents to our office. Include your Declaration of Identify form, if you have not already sent this.
 - We **DO NOT** accept application forms via fax or email.
 - Once successfully registered, you will be sent a Registration Notice by email.
 - Once you receive a Registration Notice, you can schedule your exam through the website of our computer-based testing partner, Prometric. Once scheduled, Prometric will send you a Booking Confirmation Email.
6. Study for the exam. See the following resources:
 - Chapter 3: Written Component with Sample Questions
 - Chapter 4: Clinical Component with Sample Stations
 - Chapter 5: Exam Day: Maximize Your Performance
7. Make arrangements for travel and accommodation.
8. Take the exam.
 - Exam results released as per above schedule.

If you are already registered in a province or territory, you will need to update your registration with the physiotherapy regulator after you successfully complete the exam. Contact the regulator when you receive your results. (See “Certificates and Licensing.”)

How the PCE Differs from University Exams

There are two main types of exams: formative and summative. University-based physiotherapy courses and clinical placements use both formative and summative evaluations specific to their program goals and objectives.

A formative exam is a process evaluation designed to provide immediate constructive feedback in order to improve an exam-taker's performance. A summative exam measures how well an exam-taker can apply his or her education. Its purpose is not to improve performance, but to measure if an exam-taker meets, exceeds or falls short of a minimum standard of performance.

The Physiotherapy Competency Examination is a summative evaluation that measures your competence in physiotherapy. For each exam component, you will receive feedback on your performance. The feedback includes scores for each area of practice so you will know how you did in different areas.

For security reasons, we do not provide detailed feedback on errors or omissions in either component. We also do not educate, mentor or coach candidates in preparation for the exam.

Criteria for Successful Completion of the PCE

The passing score for the PCE is based on the difficulty of each individual exam. There is no set percent score to pass. We also do not pass a certain percentage of candidates.

For both components, the relevant National Test Development Group determines how difficult each individual question or station will be. We use this information to help determine the passing score. The score required to pass the exam is expressed in standard score terms. We convert your raw score to a standard score scale with a mean of 500 and a standard deviation of 100. Information about interpreting your standard score can be found on the CAPR website.

For the Clinical Component, we also set a critical incidents passing score. This means that if your unsafe actions or unprofessional behaviours during the exam are too serious or too numerous, you will not pass.

Written Component

How Is the Written Component Marked?

All questions are equally weighted. Correct responses are worth one mark each. Incorrect responses receive no marks. We do not deduct marks for incorrect responses.

If a large number of candidates do not answer a question correctly, we will review that question. The review committee may change the accepted answer or delete the question from the final scoring.

Passing the Written Component

Your score must meet or exceed the passing score to pass the Written Component of the exam.

In all large scale assessments, the passing score is set by a group of subject matter experts during a standard setting exercise. This is done on a regular basis, every three to five years, to ensure that the passing score reflects the current expectations of the field. It is also done when either the blueprint upon which the exam is based or the structure of the exam itself is changed.

In February 2017, CAPR undertook a standard setting exercise to set a new passing score standard for the Written Component of the Physiotherapy Competency Examination. The previous standard was set so that a candidate had to achieve a standard score of 330 or better to pass. The new passing score standard was approved by a subcommittee of the CAPR Board of Directors in early June of 2017. A new method of calculating the standard score was also approved by the subcommittee.

The result is that the new passing score will vary with each administration to better reflect the level of difficulty of the exam. The new method of calculating the standard score was adopted to give candidates and programs more information about the level of difficulty of a particular exam. If the exam is deemed to be more difficult, the standard score will be below 330, and, if the exam is easier, the score will be above 330. The new passing score standard is equivalent to the old passing score standard, which means that your result would have been the same no matter which method we used to calculate your standard score.

Failing the Written Component

You will fail the Written Component of the exam if you have a score that is less than the passing score.

Clinical Component

How Is the Clinical Component Marked?

The examiner in each station evaluates you and records your performance on a predetermined checklist. The examiner also makes note of any actions or omissions you make that could be considered critical incidents. Information on “Critical Incidents: Safety and Professional Issues,” is listed below.

After you complete a written station, exam staff will collect your answer sheets. Examiners mark your answers using the marking key developed by the station writers. For each five-minute (couplet) station, the written station is worth 50 percent of the total score.

After the initial marking process, the Board of Examiners reviews all critical incidents identified by examiners on exam day. The Board of Examiners decides whether each incident represents unsafe or unprofessional practice and, if so, if it is of a major or minor nature.

Passing the Clinical Component

You must meet all of the following criteria to pass the Clinical Component of the exam:

- Achieve or exceed the overall passing score. Your total score shows your overall performance over a range of knowledge, skills and abilities. Your total score does not provide information about specific areas of practice or functions in which you may have gaps in your knowledge, skills or abilities.
- Achieve a passing score on a set number of stations. This criterion ensures that the exam identifies frequent or systematic gaps in your knowledge, skills and abilities.
- Demonstrate an overall level of safe, professional practice. Examiners write down any critical incidents, which are actions or behaviours that cause concern about your ability to practise physiotherapy safely and professionally. The Board of Examiners reviews these critical incidents and makes a final decision about each one.

Here are some of the things that the examiners will score you on:

- You take a focused approach to the station, as indicated on the Instructions to Candidate. (See Chapter 4: Clinical Component Sample Stations for a sample).
- You select, apply and complete the appropriate interventions (history-taking, assessment, treatment, education).
- You approach the station in an organized manner.
- You consider precautions and your client's safety, and discuss these issues with the client when appropriate.
- You communicate well with the client, both verbally and non-verbally.

Critical Incidents: Safety and Professional Issues

Safety incidents can include:

- Allowing a client to fall.
- Failing to apply a wheelchair's brakes.
- Omitting necessary warnings or precautions.
- Performing contraindicated exercises.

Professionalism incidents can include:

- Not respecting the client's pain tolerance.
- Being rude to the client.
- Performing an intervention without consent, or after consent has been withdrawn.
- Laughing at the client.
- Not respecting personal boundaries.
- Making inappropriate comments or jokes.
- Giving advice or instructions beyond physiotherapy competencies.

Major critical incidents include any conduct that can cause serious harm or death to a client.

Failing the Clinical Component

You will fail the Clinical Component of the exam if you

- have a score that is below the passing score;

- do not pass the required number of stations;
- have three or more minor critical incidents;
- have one major critical incident.

Certificates and Licensing

When you have successfully completed the PCE, we will grant you a Certificate of Completion. To become licensed, you must apply to the regulator of the province or territory in which you want to practise to be registered in that area. (In some countries, a registration certificate is called a “licence to practise.”)

Note:

Not all physiotherapy regulators in Canada require you to successfully complete both the Written and Clinical Components of the PCE before you get your licence. Some regulators will give you a temporary licence while you complete the exam. For details, contact the regulator of the province or territory in which you want to practise. (Refer [Regulator Websites](#))

The Licensing/Registration Process:



