ACSM Certified Exercise Physiologist® (ACSM-EP®)

2024 Job Task Analysis, Public Summary

Purpose of the Job Task Analysis

A job task analysis (JTA) is a systematic study that identifies the tasks, knowledge, and skills required for competent performance of a job. ACSM conducts JTAs so that its certification exams reflect current professional practice, which supports the content validity of each exam. A JTA defines what an exam measures. It is not the exam, a curriculum, or a scope-of-practice document.

The 2024 study reviewed and updated the content outline for the ACSM-EP, which had last been updated through a JTA in 2017. ACSM contracted ACS Ventures, LLC to conduct the study in line with the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* and the NCCA *Standards for the Accreditation of Certification Programs*.

ACSM Policy and Oversight

ACSM policy requires a JTA for each certification program at intervals not to exceed seven years. Each JTA is based on input from a representative sample of the profession and follows accepted psychometric and industry standards. The results are used to establish and update the exam content outline, including its domain structure and weighting.

The CCRB Executive Council holds sole authority over examination content. It is informed of JTA results and reviews and approves substantive changes to the content outline. Subject matter experts (SMEs) are selected for their education, professional experience, and current practice, and they collectively represent the breadth of settings and roles in the profession. They complete required training and agree to confidentiality and conflict-of-interest requirements before they participate.

Methodology

The study had three phases:

STREET ADDRESS:
6510 Telecom Dr., Suite 200
Indianapolis, IN 46278

TELEPHONE: (317) 637-9200
FAX: (317) 634-7817
WEBSITE: www.acsm.org

Movement for all.

Phase 1: SME Focus Groups.

A committee of 15 SMEs met over three days. Members had 2 to 36 years of experience (average of 19). All held the ACSM-EP, and all were currently working or had recently worked as exercise physiologists or educators.

The committee:

- discussed how the profession has changed since 2017, including the clients ACSM-EPs work with, the facilities where they are employed, and the scope of their responsibilities;
- defined the minimally qualified candidate, meaning an entry-level professional who is just qualified to practice;
- reviewed and revised the job tasks and the related knowledge and skill statements;
- assigned a cognitive level to each task;
- reviewed the wording of the survey.

Phase 2: Validation Survey.

The survey was open for about eight weeks. ACSM invited all 8,743 currently certified exercise physiologists by email and also posted the link on social media. Of those invited, 885 accessed the survey and 817 completed the demographic section. For each task, respondents rated how often an entry-level ACSM-EP would perform it and the risk to the client if it were not performed safely. For each knowledge or skill statement, they indicated whether an entry-level ACSM-EP would use it. They could also suggest additional content. The SME committee judged the sample to be representative of the profession based on state, age, employment status, and years of experience.

Phase 3: Analysis and Finalization.

ACS Ventures presented the results to the SME committee, including:

- how respondents compared with the credentialed population;
- average ratings for each task and statement;
- comparisons by region, work setting, and years of experience;
- respondent comments.

Content with low ratings was flagged for discussion. The committee reviewed the additional content respondents suggested and revised the wording of several statements to better reflect their intent. It then finalized the content outline and set the domain weights by consensus.

Results and Findings

The final outline has four performance domains.

Performance domain	Survey-derived importance	Final exam weight	Scored items
I. Health and Fitness Assessment	26.8%	33%	41
II. Exercise Prescription and Implementation	41.3%	40%	50
III. Exercise Counseling and Behavior Modification	22.0%	20%	25
IV. Risk Management and Professional Responsibilities	9.9%	7%	9
Total		**100%**	**125**

Survey-derived importance combines the frequency and risk ratings, scaled by the number of knowledge and skill statements in each domain. The committee treated the survey as the primary basis for its decisions and also considered the prior outline's weights and changes in the field of exercise physiology.

- **Domains II and III:** The panel kept values closely aligned with the survey results.
- **Domain I:** The panel raised the weight above the survey result. Screening, testing, and interpretation come before prescription, counseling, and risk management, and the domain has the most skills that require direct measurement. The number of statements under this domain understates its role in practice.
- **Domain IV:** The panel judged that this content is critical to safe practice but is the least frequent and the smallest in content. It is better assessed through prerequisite credentialing (CPR/AED and first aid) than through broad exam coverage. A weight above 7% would produce items that test recall of regulatory or procedural information rather than candidate competency.

The exam has 140 items: 125 scored and 15 unscored pretest items.

Cognitive Levels

Each job task was assigned one of three cognitive levels.

- **Recall:** recognizing information such as concepts, principles, facts, or procedures that can be found in a manual, textbook, or other resource.
- **Application:** applying knowledge that depends on the situation, including basic calculations and identifying relationships between concepts ("if… then").
- **Analysis:** considering and evaluating several pieces of information or variables to reach an answer, which typically takes several steps, such as complex calculations or identifying patterns in data.

Domain	Tasks	Recall	Application	Analysis
I	6	1	5	0
II	8	0	0	8
III	4	1	3	0
IV	2	1	1	0
Total	**20**	**3**	**9**	**8**

The table counts tasks, not exam items.

Application of Results

The JTA findings are published as the ACSM-EP Exam Content Outline, effective July 10, 2025. Exam forms are built to the outline's domains and weights, and every exam item is linked to the outline. ACSM compares its item bank with the outline, identifies gaps, and works with the ACSM-EP Credentialing Subcommittee to create and review new items. Each exam also includes 15 pretest items that do not count toward a candidate's score.

The detailed tasks, knowledge and skill statements, and weights are in the [ACSM-EP Exam Content Outline — here].