ACSM Certified Personal Trainer® (ACSM-CPT®)

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-CPT, 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, using input from a representative sample of the profession. The CCRB Executive Council holds authority over examination content and approves substantive changes to the content outline. Subject matter experts (SMEs) are selected for their education, professional experience, and current practice. They are trained and agree to confidentiality and conflict-of-interest requirements before they participate.

Methodology

The study had three phases:

Phase 1: SME Focus Groups.

A committee of 17 SMEs worked together over three sessions. Members had 4 to 20 years of experience. All held the ACSM-CPT, all were working as fitness professionals or instructors, and all held at least a bachelor's degree. The committee:

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Movement for all.

- discussed how the profession has changed since 2017;
- 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 8,036 currently certified personal trainers by email and also posted the link on social media. Of those invited, 692 accessed the survey and 644 completed the demographic and task-rating sections. For each task, respondents rated how often an entry-level ACSM-CPT 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-CPT would use it. They could also suggest additional content. Respondents came from all four US Census regions and from outside the United States. 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 then finalized the content outline and set the domain weights by consensus.

Results and Findings

The committee changed one domain name to add detail and removed two knowledge and skill statements. The final outline has four performance domains.

Performance domain	Survey-derived importance	Final exam weight	Scored items
I. Initial Client Consultation and Assessment	24.8%	25%	30
II. Exercise Programming and Implementation	27.6%	43%	52
III. Exercise Leadership, Client Education, and Client Engagement	23.7%	22%	26
IV. Legal and Professional Responsibilities	23.9%	10%	12
Total		**100%**	**120**

Survey-derived importance combines the frequency and risk ratings, weighted equally. The committee treated the survey as the primary basis for its decisions and also considered the prior outline's weights and changes in personal training practice.

- **Domains I and III:** The panel adopted the survey result for Domain I and kept a value closely aligned with the survey for Domain III.
- **Domain IV:** The panel judged that this content is important to safe and effective practice but not well suited to multiple-choice measurement. A weight above 10% would produce

items that test recall of regulatory or procedural information rather than candidate competency. It would also not support a defensible number of high-quality items on each form.
- **Domain II:** The remaining percentage went to Domain II. The panel judged that exercise programming and implementation is the largest share of the work certified personal trainers actually perform.

The exam has 135 items: 120 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 or textbook.
- **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	3	2
II	6	1	3	2
III	3	0	2	1
IV	3	1	2	0
Total	**18**	**3**	**10**	**5**

The table counts tasks, not exam items.

Application of Results

The JTA findings are published as the ACSM-CPT Exam Content Outline, effective July 10, 2025. Exam forms are built to the outline's domains and weights. ACSM compares its item bank with the outline, identifies gaps, and works with the exam committee 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-CPT Exam Content Outline — here].