



ACSM Certified Group Exercise Instructor®

Exam Content Outline

Effective July 1, 2022

The job task analysis (JTA) is intended to serve as a blueprint of the job of an ACSM Certified Group Exercise Instructor® (ACSM-GEI®). The exam intended to assess the practice-related knowledge of professionals seeking certification as an ACSM-GEI® is based on the content of this document. Each performance domain is divided into job tasks. Within each task is a list of statements that describe what an ACSM-GEI® should know and/or be able to perform as part of their job, either in-person or remotely. When preparing for the exam, it is important to remember that all exam questions are based on this outline.

Job Definition

ACSM-GEIs are fitness professionals who safely teach, lead and motivate individuals through intentionally designed, effective exercise classes. These instructors provide safe instruction across many class types and equipment sets, from choreographed fitness classes to HIIT and beyond.

Overview

The ACSM-GEI® exam has a seat time of 165 minutes and consists of 115 items, of which 100 items are scored and 15 are non-scored. The percentages listed below indicate the proportion of questions representing each performance domain.

Before an item can be used on an exam, it is subjected to Credentialing Committee review and pre-testing. Pretesting allows the Credentialing Committee to gather statistical information about new items for evaluation purposes without affecting candidate scores. Statistical information gathered from pre-test items is analyzed to determine if the items function properly and are ready for use as scored items. Pre-test items are randomly interspersed throughout the exam and indistinguishable from scored items. Candidates should treat each item as if it will be scored.

Table 1. 2021 ACSM-GEI® Performance Domains

Domain I: Class Design	30%
Domain II: Leadership	25%
Domain III: Instruction	30%
Domain IV: Professional Responsibilities	15%
Total	100%

Cognitive Level

The job of a group exercise instructor can range between simple and complicated tasks. Much in the same way, the ACSM-GEI® exam items are written at different levels of cognitive complexity. Cognitive complexity is a way of describing the extent to which a candidate should know or be able to do something. A low level of cognitive processing is simple recall of information whereas a higher level of cognitive processing includes analysis, evaluations and judgments. ACSM uses three levels of cognitive challenge: recall, application and synthesis.

Recall = remember basic facts, information or steps in a process.

Example: A potential client participates in moderate intensity exercise 30 minutes per day, 4-5 times per week for the past 5 months. Which of the following best describes the client's stage of change?

- A. contemplation
- B. preparation
- C. action
- D. maintenance

Application = comprehend and implement processes, interpret simple results or summarize information.

Example: A group exercise instructor is teaching a client who is pregnant. The client has been regularly participating in a moderate intensity indoor cycling class 4-5 times per week. The client is entering her second trimester. She would like to continue with the current program and is asymptomatic. Which of the following recommendations is the most appropriate?

- A. Refer the client to their primary care physician.
- B. Reduce the frequency to 2-3 times per week.
- C. Decrease the exercise intensity to light.
- D. Maintain exercise program as tolerated.

Synthesis = differentiate, relate parts of a system, make judgments on new information based on given criteria, critique a process or product, make recommendations.

Example: A group exercise instructor is observing their class perform 15 consecutive bodyweight squat jumps. A client is performing the exercise as described below:

- Start position
 - Feet are placed shoulder-width apart
 - Hands by the sides
 - The spine in a neutral alignment
- Downward movement
 - The movement is initiated by pushing the knees forward and lowering the hips directly below its current position
 - At the same time, the client extends their arms past the hips and leans their torso slightly forward
 - As the client nears the lowest position, their heels lift slightly off the ground
- Upward movement
 - The movement is initiated with a rapid dip of the hips
 - After completing the dip, the client forcefully upwardly rotates the arms overhead and then simultaneously and rapidly extends their hips, knees and ankles
 - The movement is complete when the client jumps with their arms overhead and then returns to the starting position.

The participant states that they are starting to feel knee soreness but would like to continue the exercise. The group exercise instructor determines the client does not have previous injuries and the client has limited experience with the squat jumping technique. Which of the following recommendations is the most appropriate to make first?

- A. Cue the client to push the hips back during the downward movement.
- B. Discontinue the exercise and request that the client obtain physician clearance.
- C. Recommend the client replace the jump squats exercise with push-ups.
- D. Describe the process of delayed onset muscle soreness to the client.

Example keys

Recall: C

Application: D

Synthesis: A

Table 2. Job tasks and related knowledge and skill statements

Cognitive Level

Domain I. Class Design

A. Establish the purpose, and determine objectives of, the class based upon the needs of the participants and facility layout.

Application

1. Knowledge of:

- a. factors used in determining the purpose of a group exercise class
- b. types of group exercise classes (e.g., land-based, water-based, equipment-based)
- c. types of equipment used in group exercise settings
- d. participant characteristics such as health, fitness, age, sex, ability
- e. health challenges and/or special needs commonly encountered in a group exercise setting
- f. environmental factors as they relate to safe participation (e.g., outdoor weather, indoor, flooring, temperature, space, lighting, room size, ventilation)
- g. the types of different environments for group exercise (e.g., outdoor, indoor, flooring, temperature, space, lighting, room size, ventilation)

B. Determine class content (i.e., warm-up, conditioning and cool-down) to create an effective workout based upon the objectives of the class.**Recall**

1. Knowledge of:

- a. the physiology of warm-up, conditioning and cool-down
- b. training principles (e.g., specificity, adaptation, overload, FITT principles [frequency, intensity, time, type])
- c. different training formats (e.g., continuous, circuit, interval, progressive classes)
- d. exercise modifications to meet the needs of the class participants
- e. different teaching styles
- f. different learning styles (e.g., auditory, visual, kinesthetic)
- g. the use of music in group exercise

2. Skill in:

- a. applying FITT principles to class design
- b. organizing the warm-up, conditioning and cool-down
- c. modifying a class for participants with health challenges and special needs
- d. modifying a class based on exercise environment and available equipment
- e. designing exercise classes to meet objectives for participants with different learning styles

C. Select and sequence appropriate exercises to provide a safe workout based upon the objectives of the class.**Application**

1. Knowledge of:

- a. exercises used during warm-up, conditioning and cool-down
- b. exercises to meet the needs of participants with varying levels of skill and ability
- c. cardiovascular training principles and techniques
- d. muscular conditioning principles and techniques
- e. range of motion, balance, and mobility training principles and techniques
- f. neuromotor fitness components (e.g., balance, agility, speed, coordination)
- g. basic principles of kinesiology (e.g., flexion/extension, agonist/antagonist)
- h. exercise progression (e.g., easy/hard, slow/fast)
- i. health challenges and/or special needs commonly encountered in a group exercise setting
- j. risks associated with various exercises
- k. the benefits and use of music in class design

2. Skill in:

- a. the selection and application of music given class purpose and objectives
- b. selecting and sequencing exercises to meet the goals and/or ability of class participants
- c. designing transitions between exercises

D. Rehearse class content, exercise selection and sequencing and revise as needed to provide a safe and effective workout based upon the purpose and objectives of the class.**Synthesis**

1. Knowledge of:

- a. proper execution of exercises and movements
- b. verbal and non-verbal cueing techniques
- c. types of class environments (e.g., outdoor, indoor, flooring, temperature, space, lighting, room size, ventilation)

2. Skill in:

- a. demonstrating exercises and movements
- b. selecting music given class purpose and objectives
- c. modifying class design (e.g., exercise selection, sequencing, transitions) based on rehearsal trial and error
- d. applying teaching styles as appropriate to class modality
- e. applying verbal cueing techniques for the purpose of providing direction, anticipation, motivation and safety
- f. applying non-verbal cueing techniques (e.g., visual, directional)
- g. matching movements to music phrase and/or counts during selected exercises or segments

Domain II. Leadership

A. Create an exercise environment to optimize participant adherence by incorporating effective motivational skills, communication techniques and behavioral strategies.

Application

1. Knowledge of:

- a. motivational techniques and skills
- b. modeling
- c. appropriate verbal and non-verbal behavior
- d. basic behavior-change models and theories (e.g., Social Cognitive Theory, Health Belief Model, Transtheoretical Model)
- e. the types of feedback and appropriate use
- f. verbal (voice tone, inflection) and non-verbal (body language) communication skills

2. Skill in:

- a. applying strategies to optimize participant adherence
- b. applying communication techniques (e.g., verbal and non-verbal/body language, tone)
- c. fostering group cohesion
- d. interacting with participants to develop trust and relationships, providing constructive feedback to class participants
- e. projecting enthusiasm, energy, positivity and encouragement
- f. applying techniques addressing various styles of learning

B. Respond to participants' concerns to maintain a professional, equitable environment by using appropriate conflict management or customer service strategies set forth by facility policy and procedures and industry guidelines.

Synthesis

1. Knowledge of:

- a. communication techniques relating to conflict resolution (e.g., active listening, mirroring, reflection, verbal and non-verbal)
- b. specific facility policies regarding conflict management and role in application of policies

2. Skill in:

- a. applying conflict resolution techniques (e.g., active listening, mirroring, reflection)
- b. applying empathetic listening skills
- c. selecting the appropriate resolutions

C. Educate participants to enhance knowledge, enjoyment and adherence by providing health- and fitness-related information and resources.

Application

1. Knowledge of:

- a. basic human functional anatomy and biomechanics
- b. basic exercise physiology
- c. basic human development and aging
- d. basic principles of weight management and nutrition
- e. motivational techniques used to promote behavior change in initiation, adherence or return to exercise
- f. benefits and risks of exercise
- g. basic ergonomic principles
- h. stress management principles and techniques
- i. healthy lifestyle practices and behavior
- j. credible, current and pertinent health-related information
- k. health conditions and risk factors that may need the attention of medical or allied health professionals

2. Skill in:

- a. accessing available health- and exercise-related information
- b. delivering health- and exercise-related information
- c. when to refer a participant to a medical or allied health professional

D. Promote healthy lifestyle practices to class participants.

Application

1. Knowledge of:

- a. healthy lifestyle practices
- b. lifestyle behavior-change strategies (i.e., cognitive and behavioral)
- c. appropriate modeling behaviors (e.g., non-threatening, motivating, receptive)
- d. risks associated with overtraining or inadequate nutrition
- e. body image concepts and perceptions

2. Skill in:

- a. applying healthy lifestyle practices
- b. communicating healthy lifestyle information
- c. individualizing behavioral strategies to class participants
- d. recognizing the symptoms of overtraining or inadequate nutrition
- e. identifying issues/behavior related to unhealthy lifestyle practices and making appropriate referrals

Domain III. Instruction**A. Prepare to teach by implementing pre-class procedures (e.g., organizing equipment, music, room setup).**

Recall

1. Knowledge of:

- a. equipment operation (e.g., audio, exercise equipment, facility specific)
- b. class environment (e.g., outdoor, indoor, flooring, temperature, space, lighting, room size, ventilation)

2. Skill in:

- a. complete necessary elements of pre-class procedures, modify typical procedures when necessary
- b. delivering pre-class announcements (welcome, instruction, safety, participant accountability)
- c. operating sound equipment
- d. evaluating and adapting environment to maximize comfort and safety

B. Demonstrate safe and effective exercise technique in accordance with industry standards and guidelines.

Application

1. Knowledge of:

- a. basic human functional anatomy and biomechanics
- b. basic exercise physiology
- c. basic ergonomic principles
- d. proper alignment, form and technique
- e. high-risk exercises and movements

2. Skill in:

- a. demonstrating proper alignment, form and technique
- b. demonstrating exercise progressions and modifications
- c. correcting improper form and/or technique

C. Monitor participants' performance to ensure safe and effective exercise execution in accordance with industry standards and guidelines.

Application

1. Knowledge of:

- a. safe and effective exercise execution
- b. the rationale for exercise intensity monitoring
- c. exercise intensity monitoring methods and limitations
- d. exercise programming (e.g., frequency, intensity, time, type)
- e. the signs and symptoms of overexertion
- f. exercise technique
- g. feedback technique (e.g., visual, auditory)
- h. normal and abnormal physiological response to exercise
- i. appropriate criteria for stopping a participant from exercising

2. Skill in:

- a. safe and effective exercise technique
- b. monitoring exercise intensity
- c. recognizing signs and symptoms of overexertion
- d. applying the principles of exercise programming (e.g., frequency, intensity, time, type)
- e. teaching participants how to self-monitor exercise intensity
- f. demonstrating proper exercise techniques

D. Incorporate verbal and non-verbal instructional cues to optimize communication, safety and motivation based upon industry standards and guidelines.

Synthesis

1. Knowledge of:

- a. anticipatory, directional, educational, motivational, safety, tactile and visual cueing techniques
- b. proper participant performance

2. Skill in:

- a. applying anticipatory, directional, educational, motivational, safety, tactile and visual cues
- b. correcting participants' performance
- c. instructing participant how to self-regulate exercise form

E. Modify exercises based on participant and group needs to ensure safety and effectiveness in accordance with industry standards and guidelines.

Synthesis

1. Knowledge of:

- a. cardiovascular response to various environmental conditions
- b. how aerobic, strength and flexibility exercise modifications affect intensity and safety
- c. various exercise safety and intensity modification techniques (e.g., tempo, range of motion, alternate movements, load)
- d. exercise selection and modification

2. Skill in:

- a. modifying exercise intensity or selection based on environmental conditions
- b. modifying exercise intensity or selection based on participant and/or group ability
- c. applying exercise intensity modification techniques (e.g., tempo, range of motion, alternate movements, load)
- d. managing time during class

Domain IV. Professional Responsibilities

A. Evaluate the class environment (e.g., outdoor, indoor, capacity, flooring, temperature) to minimize risk and optimize safety by following pre-class inspection procedures based on established facility and industry standards and guidelines.

Application

1. Knowledge of:

- a. generally accepted facility standards and guidelines
- b. established regulations and laws (e.g., Americans with Disabilities Act, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], Occupational Health and Safety Act [OSHA])

2. Skill in:

- a. evaluating classroom environment

B. Inform participants of classroom safety procedures and exercise and intensity options to minimize risk.

Recall

1. Knowledge of:

- a. components that contribute to a safe environment
- b. safety guidelines as it relates to group exercise

2. Skill in:

- a. communicating safety precautions before and during class
- b. observing compliance with instructions provided to participants
- c. cueing to reinforce safety precautions during class

C. Provide recommendations and/or modifications to address populations in different health states such as pregnancy or acute or chronic diseases.

Synthesis

1. Knowledge of:

- a. common health and medical conditions and contraindications to group exercise participation
- b. health states/conditions, risk factors or physical symptoms that may affect or preclude class participation
- c. appropriate criteria for stopping a participant from exercising

2. Skill in:

- a. communicating risks associated with different forms of exercise for common health conditions
- b. modifying exercises based on common health conditions

D. Monitor sound levels of vocal and/or audio equipment following industry standards and guidelines.

Recall

1. Knowledge of:

- a. vocal projection techniques
- b. safe volume level
- c. group exercise sound projection equipment (e.g., microphones, amplifiers, speakers)

2. Skill in:

- a. applying appropriate vocal projection techniques
- b. applying group exercise sound projection equipment (e.g., microphones, amplifiers, speakers)

E. Follow industry-accepted professional, ethical and business standards to optimize safety and reduce liability.

Recall

1. Knowledge of:

- a. appropriate professional behavior and boundaries pertaining to class participants
- b. the ACSM code of ethics
- c. the scope of practice of group exercise instructors
- d. standards of practice for group exercise instructors
- e. informed consent, assumption of risk and waivers
- f. established and applicable laws, regulations and policies
- g. bounds of competence
- h. confidentiality, privacy laws and practice
- i. insurance needs (e.g., professional liability, general liability insurance)
- j. basic business principles (e.g., contracts, negligence, types of business entities, tax business structure, advertising, marketing)

2. Skill in:

- a. applying professional behavior and in maintaining appropriate boundaries with class participants
- b. applying the ACSM code of ethics
- c. assuring and maintaining the privacy of group exercise participants' personal information (e.g., contact information, demographic, health history, biometric screening)

F. Respond to emergencies to minimize untoward events by following procedures consistent with established standards of care and facility policies.

Application

1. Knowledge of:

- a. basic cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)
- b. automated external defibrillator (AED)
- c. basic first aid for accidents, environmental and medical emergencies (e.g., heat illness, lacerations, incisions, abrasions, contusions, bleeding/shock, hypoglycemia, sprains)
- d. the standard of care for emergency response (e.g., incident reporting, injury assessment, activating emergency medical services)
- e. an emergency action plan, if applicable, for the fitness facility
- f. unsafe or controversial exercises

2. Skill in:

- a. activating emergency medical services
- b. administering CPR
- c. administering an AED
- d. administering basic first aid for exercise-related injuries, accidents, environmental and medical emergencies (e.g., assessment, response, management of class or environment)
- e. documenting incidents and/or emergencies
- f. selecting exercises that are suitable to the ability of a participant

G. Respect copyrights to protect original and creative work, media, etc., by legally securing copyright material and other intellectual property based on applicable copyright laws.

Recall

1. Knowledge of:

- a. copyright laws (e.g., Broadcast Music Inc. [BMI], The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers [ASCAP])
- b. fair use of copyright material

2. Skill in:

- a. acquiring appropriate copyrighted materials and music