National Exercise Trainers Association
Personal Trainer Certification
Exam Content Outline
September 2022

Role of the Personal Trainer:

Personal trainers are fitness professionals who promote wellness through healthy lifestyle behaviors. They accomplish this by developing and implementing safe, effective exercise programs. These programs are designed to meet the individual goals of clients that personal trainers serve within NETA's Code of Ethics.

Personal Trainer Certification Exam Specifications	
Area of Responsibility	Number of Items
I. Communication and Engagement	20
II. Client Intake and Assessments	17
III. Program Design	23
IV. Program Implementation and Modification	25
V. Ethics and Professional Responsibility	15
Total Scored Exam Items	100

I. Communication and Engagement

A. Facilitate a welcoming, trusting, and inclusive environment.

Knowledge of:

1. Effective verbal and non-verbal communication strategies, including active listening
2. Interpretation of body language
3. Strategies for creating and maintaining a professional impression (e.g., being on time, appropriately dressed, well groomed, organized)
4. Strategies for creating a fun and welcoming environment
5. Relationship-building strategies to engage, establish rapport, and demonstrate empathy in a non-judgmental manner
6. Principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion

B. Develop rapport and a professional relationship with the client.

Knowledge of:

1. Effective verbal and non-verbal communication strategies, including active listening
2. Interpretation of body language
3. Coaching methods (e.g., motivational interviewing, appreciative inquiry)
4. Strategies for accommodating various learning styles (e.g., visual, auditory, kinesthetic)
5. Strategies for creating and maintaining a professional impression (e.g., being on time, appropriately dressed, well groomed, organized)
6. NETA Code of Ethics
7. Relationship-building strategies to engage, establish rapport, and demonstrate empathy in a non-judgmental manner
8. Principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion

C. Employ effective communication and coaching skills throughout the client relationship.

Knowledge of:

1. Effective verbal and non-verbal communication strategies, including active listening
2. Interpretation of body language
3. Coaching methods (e.g., motivational interviewing, appreciative inquiry)
4. Aspects of motivation and techniques to enhance motivation (e.g., intrinsic, extrinsic) and promote adherence to healthy lifestyle behaviors
5. Relationship-building strategies to engage, establish rapport, and demonstrate empathy in a non-judgmental manner
6. Considerations for engaging clients in a virtual environment

D. Encourage the client's engagement to facilitate adherence and enjoyment.

Knowledge of:

1. Relationship-building strategies to engage, establish rapport, and demonstrate empathy in a non-judgmental manner
2. Effective verbal and non-verbal communication strategies, including active listening
3. Aspects of motivation and techniques to enhance motivation (e.g., intrinsic, extrinsic) and promote adherence to healthy lifestyle behaviors
4. Coaching methods (e.g., motivational interviewing, appreciative inquiry)
5. Strategies for creating a fun and welcoming environment
6. Considerations for engaging clients in a virtual environment
7. Strategies for accommodating various learning styles (e.g., visual, auditory, kinesthetic)
8. Theoretical models of behavior change (e.g., transtheoretical model, self-efficacy theory)
9. Types of goals (e.g., action oriented, long-term) and collaborative goal-setting strategies (e.g., SMART, SWOT)

II. Client Intake and Assessments

A. Establish the client's desired outcomes and expectations.

Knowledge of:

1. Strategies for determining and accommodating participants' knowledge, skills, abilities, and interests
2. Effective verbal and non-verbal communication strategies, including active listening
3. Coaching methods (e.g., motivational interviewing, appreciative inquiry)
4. Strategies for accommodating various learning styles (e.g., visual, auditory, kinesthetic)
5. Types of goals (e.g., action oriented, long-term) and collaborative goal-setting strategies (e.g., SMART, SWOT)
6. Relationship-building strategies to engage, establish rapport, and demonstrate empathy in a non-judgmental manner
7. Principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion

B. Obtain the client's health, lifestyle, and physical activity history using interviews and questionnaires.

Knowledge of:

1. Preparticipation screening tools and components of a health and lifestyle questionnaire
2. ACSM preparticipation screening recommendations
3. Risk factors for prevalent chronic disease (e.g., diabetes, cardiovascular disease, osteoarthritis, metabolic syndrome)
4. Effective verbal and non-verbal communication strategies, including active listening
5. Coaching methods (e.g., motivational interviewing, appreciative inquiry)

6. Relationship-building strategies to engage, establish rapport, and demonstrate empathy in a non-judgmental manner
7. Time management strategies

C. Conduct an appropriate health screening and fitness assessment to gather objective data about the client's current health, risk factors, and baselines for measuring future progress.

Knowledge of:

1. Considerations in the selection and use of health screening and fitness assessment protocols (e.g., safety, contraindications, effect of common medications on response to exercise)
2. Static and dynamic postural assessment
3. Effective verbal and non-verbal communication strategies, including active listening
4. Coaching methods (e.g., motivational interviewing, appreciative inquiry)
5. Exercise-related anatomy, kinesiology, biomechanics, and physiology
6. Components and administration of Informed Consent
7. Relationship-building strategies to engage, establish rapport, and demonstrate empathy in a non-judgmental manner
8. Time management strategies
9. Theoretical models of behavior change (e.g., transtheoretical model, self-efficacy theory)
10. Recognition of and appropriate response to exercise-related medical conditions and emergencies (e.g., myocardial infarction, stroke, heat-related illness)
11. Signs and symptoms of and immediate care (e.g., PRICE) for acute injuries (e.g., sprain, strain, fractures)
12. Written emergency response procedures (e.g., activation of emergency medical services (i.e., 911), facility emergency response plan, pre-emergency preparation strategies
13. Elements of health, wellness, lifestyle, exercise, and physical activity history and current states
14. Components of health- and skill-related physical fitness

D. Analyze the client's subjective and objective information to determine the need for medical clearance and support program design.

Knowledge of:

1. Considerations and procedures for referring clients to healthcare providers
2. ACSM preparticipation screening recommendations
3. Interpretive guidelines for preparticipation screening tools and health and lifestyle questionnaires
4. Health and injury risk factors and contraindications
5. Exercise-related anatomy, kinesiology, biomechanics, and physiology
6. Acute and chronic responses to exercise in asymptomatic and symptomatic populations
7. Exercise guidelines, contraindications, and considerations for special populations (e.g., pregnancy, older adults, youth/adolescents) and medical conditions (e.g., arthritis, hypertension, diabetes, asthma, osteoporosis, orthopedic and other injuries)
8. Legal considerations, risk management, and scope of practice (e.g., nutrition, medicine, rehabilitation, therapy)

III. Program Design

A. Interpret the assessment results using professional guidelines and normative data.

Knowledge of:

1. Interpretive guidelines for health screening and fitness assessment results
2. Exercise guidelines, contraindications, and considerations for special populations (e.g., pregnancy, older adults, youth/adolescents) and medical conditions (e.g., arthritis, hypertension, diabetes, asthma, osteoporosis, orthopedic and other injuries)
3. Theoretical models of behavior change (e.g., transtheoretical model, self-efficacy theory)
4. Credible sources of information, education providers, and professional organizations

B. Develop short- and long-term goals with the client that relate to desired outcomes.

Knowledge of:

1. Types of goals (e.g., action oriented, long-term) and collaborative goal-setting strategies (e.g., SMART, SWOT)
2. Exercise guidelines, contraindications, and considerations for special populations (e.g., pregnancy, older adults, youth/adolescents) and medical conditions (e.g., arthritis, hypertension, diabetes, asthma, osteoporosis, orthopedic and other injuries)
3. Activity- and exercise-specific benefits, indications, contraindications, risks, and precautions for the general population
4. Principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion
5. Strategies for promoting holistic lifestyle choices
6. Basic principles of nutrition, *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, recommended healthy eating patterns, and food guidance graphics
7. Principles and guidelines (e.g., ACSM, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, National Weight Control Registry) of safe and effective weight management
8. Physical activity recommendations (e.g., *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans*; ACSM, AHA, and CDC Consensus Statements) for improving overall health
9. Principles of motivation and exercise adherence
10. Theoretical models of behavior change (e.g., transtheoretical model, self-efficacy theory)
11. Elements of health, wellness, lifestyle, exercise, and physical activity history and current states
12. Components of health- and skill-related physical fitness

C. Select the appropriate exercises and physical activities necessary to achieve client goals, taking into consideration their health status, preference for training (e.g., virtual, in-person, group), and access to exercise equipment.

Knowledge of:

1. Demographic-specific considerations (e.g., age, gender, culture, fitness level)
2. Activity- and exercise-specific benefits, indications, contraindications, risks, and precautions for the general population
3. Exercise guidelines, contraindications, and considerations for special populations (e.g., pregnancy, older adults, youth/adolescents) and medical conditions (e.g., arthritis, hypertension, diabetes, asthma, osteoporosis, orthopedic and other injuries)
4. Exercise-related anatomy, kinesiology, biomechanics, and physiology
5. Principles of exercise training (e.g., overload, specificity, progression, variation) and ACSM guidelines for exercise program design (e.g., cardiorespiratory, muscular fitness, flexibility training, balance)
6. Appropriate selection and use of exercise equipment
7. Safe and effective exercise technique (e.g., joint alignment, range of motion, breathing pattern)
8. Strategies for recovery and restoration (e.g., stretch, self-myofascial release, rest, sleep)

9. Theoretical models of behavior change (e.g., transtheoretical model, self-efficacy theory)
10. Aspects of motivation and techniques to enhance motivation (e.g., intrinsic, extrinsic) and promote adherence to healthy lifestyle behaviors
11. Corrective exercises for muscle imbalances
12. Elements of health, wellness, lifestyle, exercise, and physical activity history and current states
13. Components of health- and skill-related physical fitness

D. Determine acute training variables (e.g., frequency, intensity, volume, duration, recovery).

Knowledge of:

1. Principles of exercise training (e.g., overload, specificity, progression, variation) and ACSM guidelines for exercise program design (e.g., cardiorespiratory, muscular fitness, flexibility training, balance)
2. Training systems and strategies (e.g., periodization, high intensity interval training (HIIT), circuit training)
3. Methods for measuring and monitoring exercise intensity (e.g., target heart rate, rating of perceived exertion, METs)
4. Activity- and exercise-specific benefits, indications, contraindications, risks, and precautions for the general population
5. Exercise guidelines, contraindications, and considerations for special populations (e.g., pregnancy, older adults, youth/adolescents) and medical conditions (e.g., arthritis, hypertension, diabetes, asthma, osteoporosis, orthopedic and other injuries)
6. Environmental considerations (e.g., cold, hot, high altitude) for exercise program design
7. Physical activity recommendations (e.g., *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans*; ACSM, AHA, and CDC Consensus Statements) for improving overall health
8. Principles and guidelines (e.g., ACSM, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, National Weight Control Registry) of safe and effective weight management

E. Evaluate the program with the client to obtain feedback, determine feasibility, and ensure understanding of benefits and risks.

Knowledge of:

1. Effective verbal and non-verbal communication strategies, including active listening
2. Interpretation of body language
3. Coaching methods (e.g., motivational interviewing, appreciative inquiry)
4. Theoretical models of behavior change (e.g., transtheoretical model, self-efficacy theory)
5. Types of goals (e.g., action oriented, long-term) and collaborative goal-setting strategies (e.g., SMART, SWOT)
6. Principles and guidelines (e.g., ACSM, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, National Weight Control Registry) of safe and effective weight management
7. Relationship-building strategies to engage, establish rapport, and demonstrate empathy in a non-judgmental manner
8. Acute and chronic responses to exercise in asymptomatic and symptomatic populations
9. Appropriate progressions, regressions, and modifications
10. Activity- and exercise-specific benefits, indications, contraindications, risks, and precautions for the general population
11. Exercise guidelines, contraindications, and considerations for special populations (e.g., pregnancy, older adults, youth/adolescents) and medical conditions (e.g., arthritis, hypertension, diabetes, asthma, osteoporosis, orthopedic and other injuries)

IV. Program Implementation and Modification

A. Instruct the client on proper exercise execution and technique.

Knowledge of:

1. Exercise-related anatomy, kinesiology, biomechanics, and physiology
2. Activity- and exercise-specific benefits, indications, contraindications, risks, and precautions for the general population
3. Exercise guidelines, contraindications, and considerations for special populations (e.g., pregnancy, older adults, youth/adolescents) and medical conditions (e.g., arthritis, hypertension, diabetes, asthma, osteoporosis, orthopedic and other injuries)
4. Effective verbal and non-verbal communication strategies, including appropriate cueing and feedback
5. Appropriate spotting techniques and safety precautions during resistance training exercise
6. Appropriate progressions, regressions, and modifications
7. Safe and effective exercise technique (e.g., joint alignment, range of motion, breathing pattern)
8. Strategies for accommodating various learning styles (e.g., visual, auditory, kinesthetic)
9. Strategies for improving form and technique in a non-judgmental manner
10. Credible sources of information, education providers, and professional organizations

B. Conduct ongoing evaluations of the client's performance and response to the program using observation, feedback, and reassessments.

Knowledge of:

1. Considerations in the selection and use of health screening and fitness assessment protocols (e.g., safety, contraindications, effect of common medications on response to exercise)
2. Elements of and guidelines for writing progress notes (i.e., SOAP notes)
3. Elements of and guidelines for maintaining client records
4. Methods for measuring and monitoring exercise intensity (e.g., target heart rate, rating of perceived exertion, METs)
5. Acute and chronic responses to exercise in asymptomatic and symptomatic populations
6. Interpretive guidelines for health screening and fitness assessment results
7. Activity- and exercise-specific benefits, indications, contraindications, risks, and precautions for the general population
8. Exercise guidelines, contraindications, and considerations for special populations (e.g., pregnancy, older adults, youth/adolescents) and medical conditions (e.g., arthritis, hypertension, diabetes, asthma, osteoporosis, orthopedic and other injuries)
9. Theoretical models of behavior change (e.g., transtheoretical model, self-efficacy theory)
10. Interpretation of verbal and nonverbal client responses
11. Principles of motivation and exercise adherence

C. Educate the client about factors related to the program (e.g., nutrition, recovery strategies, healthy living strategies).

Knowledge of:

1. Basic principles of nutrition, *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, recommended healthy eating patterns, and food guidance graphics
2. Principles and guidelines (e.g., ACSM, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, National Weight Control Registry) of safe and effective weight management
3. Physical activity recommendations (e.g., *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans*; ACSM, AHA, and CDC Consensus Statements) for improving overall health
4. Legal considerations, risk management, and scope of practice (e.g., nutrition, medicine, rehabilitation, therapy)

5. Credible sources of information, education providers, and professional organizations
6. Interpretation of body language
7. Elements of health, wellness, lifestyle, exercise, and physical activity history and current states
8. Components of health- and skill-related physical fitness
9. Strategies for recovery and restoration (e.g., stretch, self-myofascial release, rest, sleep)
10. Strategies for promoting body awareness (e.g., mirror, biofeedback) and mindfulness (e.g., meditation, breathing techniques)
11. Signs and symptoms of overtraining and overuse (repetitive strain injury) syndromes

D. Modify the program as needed to enhance effectiveness, efficiency, and safety.

Knowledge:

1. Exercise-related anatomy, kinesiology, biomechanics, and physiology
2. Activity- and exercise-specific benefits, indications, contraindications, risks, and precautions for the general population
3. Exercise guidelines, contraindications, and considerations for special populations (e.g., pregnancy, older adults, youth/adolescents) and medical conditions (e.g., arthritis, hypertension, diabetes, asthma, osteoporosis, orthopedic and other injuries)
4. Principles of exercise training (e.g., overload, specificity, progression, variation) and ACSM guidelines for exercise program design (e.g., cardiorespiratory, muscular fitness, flexibility training, balance)
5. Methods for measuring and monitoring exercise intensity (e.g., target heart rate, rating of perceived exertion, METs)
6. Effective verbal and non-verbal communication strategies, including appropriate cueing and feedback
7. Coaching methods (e.g., motivational interviewing, appreciative inquiry)
8. Appropriate spotting techniques and safety precautions during resistance training exercise
9. Appropriate progressions, regressions, and modifications
10. Safe and effective exercise technique (e.g., joint alignment, range of motion, breathing pattern)
11. Strategies for improving form and technique in a non-judgmental manner
12. Strategies for accommodating various learning styles (e.g., visual, auditory, kinesthetic)
13. Credible sources of information, education providers, and professional organizations
14. Corrective exercises for muscle imbalances
15. Environmental considerations (e.g., cold, hot, high altitude) for exercise program design

V. Ethics and Professional Responsibility

A. Adhere to industry and facility guidelines, legal requirements, and professional ethics to protect the interest of clients and other interested parties.

Knowledge of:

1. Activity- and exercise-specific benefits, indications, contraindications, risks, and precautions for the general population
2. Exercise guidelines, contraindications, and considerations for special populations (e.g., pregnancy, older adults, youth/adolescents) and medical conditions (e.g., arthritis, hypertension, diabetes, asthma, osteoporosis, orthopedic and other injuries)
3. Principles of exercise training (e.g., overload, specificity, progression, variation) and ACSM guidelines for exercise program design (e.g., cardiorespiratory, muscular fitness, flexibility training, balance)
4. ACSM Health/Fitness Facility Standards and Guidelines
5. Requirements for the renewal of professional and safety (e.g., CPR) certification(s)
6. NETA Code of Ethics
7. Rules, regulations, and guidelines regarding privacy of personal health information (i.e., HIPAA) and personally identifiable information (PII)

8. Legal considerations, risk management, and scope of practice (e.g., nutrition, medicine, rehabilitation, therapy)
9. Considerations related to media selection and licensing
10. Credible sources of information, education providers, and professional organizations

B. Respond to emergencies, incidents, and injuries.

Knowledge of:

1. Recognition of and appropriate response to exercise-related medical conditions and emergencies (e.g., myocardial infarction, stroke, heat-related illness)
2. Requirements for the renewal of professional and safety (e.g., CPR) certification(s)
3. Written emergency response procedures (e.g., activation of emergency medical services (i.e., 911), facility emergency response plan, pre-emergency preparation strategies
4. Legal considerations, risk management, and scope of practice (e.g., nutrition, medicine, rehabilitation, therapy)
5. Signs and symptoms of and immediate care (e.g., PRICE) for acute injuries (e.g., sprain, strain, fractures)

C. Maintain required professional and safety certifications through appropriate continuing education.

Knowledge of:

1. Requirements for the renewal of professional and safety (e.g., CPR) certification(s)
2. Credible sources of information, education providers, and professional organizations
3. NETA Code of Ethics

D. Abide by scope of practice and other limitations based on education, credentials, training, skill, and experience.

Knowledge of:

1. Legal considerations, risk management, and scope of practice (e.g., nutrition, medicine, rehabilitation, therapy)
2. NETA Code of Ethics
3. Credible sources of information, education providers, and professional organizations

E. Maintain accurate, secure, and comprehensive client records.

Knowledge of:

1. Rules, regulations, and guidelines regarding privacy of personal health information (i.e., HIPAA) and personally identifiable information (PII)
2. Legal considerations, risk management, and scope of practice (e.g., nutrition, medicine, rehabilitation, therapy)
3. Elements of and guidelines for maintaining client records
4. Elements of and guidelines for writing progress notes (i.e., SOAP notes)
5. ACSM Health/Fitness Facility Standards and Guidelines