

ACE® GROUP FITNESS INSTRUCTOR CERTIFICATION EXAM CONTENT OUTLINE

ATTENTION EXAM CANDIDATES!

When preparing for an ACE Certification exam, be aware that the material presented in *The Exercise Professional's Guide to Group Fitness Instruction*, or any other text or educational materials, may become outdated due to the evolving nature of the fitness and healthcare industries, as well as new developments in current and ongoing research. ACE certifications and the exams one must pass to earn these certifications are based on in-depth job analyses and industry-wide validation surveys. By design, ACE certification exams assess a candidate's ability to analyze multiple case studies that are representative of the work that a certified professional would encounter on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis, and then to apply knowledge of the most current scientifically based professional standards and guidelines to determine the best solution for the scenario presented. *The dynamic nature of this field requires that ACE certification exams be regularly updated to ensure that they reflect the latest industry findings and research. Therefore, the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to pass these exams are not solely represented in this or any other industry text or educational materials.* In addition to learning the material presented on our website, in this handbook, and in associated educational resources, ACE strongly encourages all exam candidates and health and exercise professionals to keep abreast of new developments, guidelines, and standards from a variety of valid industry sources.

For the **current** version of the Exam Content Outline, please go to www.ACEfitness.org/GFExamcontent and download a free PDF.

EXAM CONTENT OUTLINE

The Exam Content Outline is essentially a blueprint for the exam. As you prepare for the ACE Group Fitness Instructor Certification Exam, it is important to remember that each question on the exam maps directly to one of the Task Statements in this outline.

TARGET AUDIENCE STATEMENT

The ACE Certified Group Fitness Instructor (ACE-GFI) prepares and leads safe, effective, and enjoyable exercise classes to promote fitness and support a healthy, active lifestyle. In addition to understanding how to apply knowledge of exercise science in fitness classes, the ACE Group Fitness Instructor motivates and leads by using teaching techniques suitable for multiple stages and styles of learning, cultivates a caring and task-involving environment that inspires and empowers participants, and adapts workouts based on the diverse needs of the participants.

The following eligibility requirements have been established for individuals to sit for the ACE Group Fitness Instructor Certification Examination:

- Must be at least 18 years of age
- Must have completed high school (or the equivalent)
- Must hold a current adult cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) certificate, and if living in the U.S.A. or Canada, a current automated external defibrillator (AED) certificate

DOMAINS, TASKS, AND KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL STATEMENTS

A Role Delineation Study, or job analysis, was conducted by the American Council on Exercise and Measure Learning, for the ACE Group Fitness Instructor Certification Program. The first step in this process was completed by a panel of subject-matter experts in the various disciplines within the field of group fitness. The primary goal of the panel was to identify the primary tasks performed by professional GFIs in creating, leading, and adapting inclusive group fitness workouts based on the diverse needs of the participants while creating a safe, effective, and enjoyable exercise experience in support of a healthy, active lifestyle.

The panel first identified the major responsibilities performed by professional GFIs. These responsibilities are defined as “Tasks,” and it was determined that the responsibilities of the professional GFI could be described in 13 task statements. These tasks were then grouped into three Performance Domains, or major areas of responsibility.

The Performance Domains are listed here with the percentage indicating the portion of the exam devoted to each Domain:

Domain I: Class Preparation – 34%

Domain II: Group Instruction and Leadership – 39%

Domain III: Professional Conduct and Risk Management – 27%

Each Performance Domain is composed of Tasks, which detail the job-related functions under that particular Domain. Each Task is further divided into Knowledge and Skill Statements that detail the scope of information and understanding required to perform each Task and explain the skills required to apply that understanding in a practical setting.

The Domains, Task Statements, and Knowledge and Skill Statements identified by the panel of subject-matter experts were presented to a large, nationally representative group of current ACE Certified GFIs through an online survey, and the survey results were used to validate the work of the panel and establish test specifications for the Exam. This completed the Role Delineation Study, with the outcome of this study being the ACE Group Fitness Instructor Certification Exam Content Outline detailed here. Please note that while each question on the Exam maps to one of the Tasks in the Exam Content Outline, not all Knowledge and Skill Statements will be addressed on each exam administration, as there are not enough questions on a certification exam to cover every knowledge and skill statement.

DOMAIN I:

CLASS PREPARATION 34%

Task 1: Create a plan based on the class format, class objectives, delivery method, anticipated participants, and environment, to establish the structure for a safe, effective, and enjoyable experience.

Knowledge of:

1. Group fitness class formats and objectives
2. Group fitness class methodologies (i.e., freestyle, pre-choreographed, pre-planned)
3. Group fitness class components (e.g., warm-up, conditioning, cool-down)
4. Characteristics of anticipated participants (e.g., demographics, experience, ability)
5. Time management as it relates to the weighting of each component of the class
6. Location, equipment, and space requirements of various group fitness class formats
7. Delivery methods (e.g., in-person, pre-recorded, live stream, hybrid)
8. Environment (e.g., in-home, in-club, outdoor, public spaces)

Skill in:

1. Allocating appropriate time for each component of the class
2. Preparing for environmental factors (e.g., technology, weather, location, available equipment) and anticipated participants
3. Creating group fitness class plans that meet the objectives of the class and the needs of participants

Task 2: Select and organize exercises in sequences that align with exercise science principles, class methodologies, components, and elements (e.g., music, equipment) to meet class objectives.

Knowledge of:

1. Anatomy, kinesiology, and exercise physiology (e.g., major muscle groups, joint actions, cardiorespiratory responses)
2. Principles of training (e.g., overload, specificity, reversibility, progression, regression)
3. Health-related components of fitness (e.g., muscular strength and endurance, cardiorespiratory fitness, flexibility, body composition)
4. Skill-related components of fitness (e.g., balance, agility, speed, coordination)
5. Appropriate exercises and intensities related to components (e.g., warm-up, conditioning, cool-down) of group fitness class formats
6. Teaching strategies (e.g., slow-to-fast, repetition-reduction, part-to-whole, simple-to-complex)
7. Options, intended purposes, and space requirements for using various types of group fitness equipment (e.g., steps, resistance bands and tubing, stability balls, yoga mats)
8. Technology capabilities and use (e.g., stereo, microphone, lighting, video, streaming platforms)
9. Characteristics of music (e.g., beats per minute, structure, lyrics/content, volume) and their relation to group fitness class formats, objectives, intensity, and anticipated participants
10. The use of music to facilitate enjoyable movement experiences
11. Appropriate selection and sequencing of exercises to facilitate desired class objectives

Skill in:

1. Selecting and sequencing exercises for health-related components, skill-related components, and physiological responses to facilitate desired class objectives during warm-up, conditioning, and cool-down phases
2. Applying principles of training to selected exercises (e.g., overload, specificity, reversibility, progression, regression)
3. Incorporating exercises that use a variety of movement variables (e.g., planes of motion, lever length, balance, external resistance)
4. Using various types of equipment (e.g., steps, resistance bands and tubing, stability balls, yoga mats) in a variety of fitness settings
5. Selecting and coordinating music (e.g., tempo, phrasing, genre, volume) to create enjoyable movement experiences
6. Selecting and using appropriate technology for various formats, delivery methods, and class objectives

Task 3: Identify appropriate exercise options (e.g., regressions, progressions, modifications) to reduce the risk of injury, improve performance, and promote adherence through an inclusive, multilevel class environment.

Knowledge of:

1. Anatomy, kinesiology, and exercise physiology (e.g., major muscle groups, joint actions, cardiorespiratory responses)
2. Purpose and key elements of exercises (e.g., joint movements, muscle actions) to offer regressions, progressions, and modifications

3. Principles of training (e.g., overload, specificity, reversibility, progression, regression) and their application to varied group fitness class formats, objectives, and equipment
4. Current guidelines for adapting exercises that support cardiorespiratory fitness, strength, mobility, flexibility, and balance to support activities of daily living
5. Exercise options for common muscular imbalances, chronic injuries, and population- and condition-specific needs and guidelines

Skill in:

1. Accommodating the skill- and health-related needs, ability levels, and preferences of class participants
2. Incorporating exercise variables (e.g., direction, rhythm, range of motion, planes of motion, lever length, balance, external resistance) and variety into the class plan
3. Offering regressions, progressions, and modifications as they relate to the class format, objectives, and equipment to facilitate multilevel teaching
4. Offering appropriate regressions, progressions, and modifications for each exercise based on class location, space parameters, equipment, and class size
5. Appropriate application of safe and effective exercises that support cardiorespiratory fitness, strength, mobility, flexibility, and balance to support activities of daily living

Task 4: Rehearse the class content and refine the plan as needed to ensure a positive and successful experience.

Knowledge of:

1. Methods for adjusting exercise intensity (e.g., exercise selection, equipment use, music, movement variables and speed)
2. Effective dimensional cueing (e.g., directional, alignment, breathing, spatial)
3. Teaching styles (e.g., command, practice, self-check) appropriate for group fitness classes
4. Communication and learning styles (e.g., verbal, visual, kinesthetic)
5. Appropriate use of group fitness-related equipment (e.g., steps, resistance bands and tubing, stability balls, yoga mats) and technology (e.g., stereo, microphone, lighting, video, streaming platforms)
6. Music variables that impact the class plan (e.g., beats per minute, structure, lyrics/content)
7. Movement variables that impact exercise intensity (e.g., lever length, external resistance, balance, speed)

Skill in:

1. Preparing opening and closing statements
2. Refining teaching strategies (e.g., slow-to-fast, repetition-reduction, part-to-whole, simple-to-complex)
3. Determining appropriate transitions and sequence adjustments to facilitate class flow and align with class plan objectives
4. Identifying elements of group fitness class plans that require modifications based on class rehearsal
5. Incorporating appropriate cueing techniques (e.g., verbal, nonverbal, kinesthetic) based on class format to achieve desired class outcomes
6. Refining the timing of cueing techniques (i.e., anticipatory, instructional, follow-up, motivational)
7. Adjusting music (e.g., beats per minute, structure, decibels) and technology (e.g., stereo, microphone, lighting, video, streaming platforms) for group fitness class components based on class format, anticipated participants, and expected outcomes
8. Coordinating musical phrasing and tempo with movement and exercises with applicable group fitness class formats

DOMAIN II: GROUP INSTRUCTION AND LEADERSHIP 39%

Task 1: Assess the space, equipment, environment, and participants to identify potential issues and make appropriate adjustments to the class plan to ensure a safe, effective, and enjoyable movement experience.

Knowledge of:

1. Environmental conditions (e.g., temperature, humidity, wind, air quality, altitude) that affect the class experience and participant safety
2. Potential hazards that affect the safe use of exercise equipment by participants (e.g., worn bands, chipped dumbbells, deflated stability balls, improper placement of equipment, failure to adhere to manufacturer's recommendations)
3. Guidelines and recommendations for various group fitness formats and settings
4. Population- and condition-specific health and exercise considerations and contraindications
5. Location, equipment, and space requirements for safe and effective exercises
6. Observed and self-reported health, fitness, and movement variables that impact exercise participation

7. Personal attributes and characteristics of participants (e.g., cultural backgrounds, demographics, levels of fitness, movement skills, diverse abilities) that affect exercise participation and adherence

Skill in:

1. Adapting the class plan based on specific environmental conditions
2. Adjusting equipment selection relative to class design and delivery methods, based upon equipment availability, placement, and spacing
3. Identifying hazards in the group fitness class setting
4. Recognizing and adapting the class plan (e.g., teaching style, cueing) to meet the needs and capabilities of participants of varying cultural backgrounds, demographics, levels of fitness, movement skills, and diverse abilities to provide an inclusive and positive exercise experience

Task 2: Communicate with participants in a welcoming, positive, and engaging manner prior to, during, and after class to build rapport and foster a sense of community to promote class adherence.

Knowledge of:

1. Opening and closing statements that facilitate a positive experience for participants
2. Effective group and interpersonal communication techniques that enhance rapport (e.g., active listening, acknowledgement, use of empathy, inclusive language)
3. Factors that influence adherence (e.g., personal attributes, environmental factors, physical-activity factors)
4. Participant-centered teaching strategies (e.g., learning styles, dimensional cueing)

Skill in:

1. Delivering informative and inclusive opening and closing statements
2. Explaining class objectives and structure to facilitate positive class experiences
3. Establishing the tone of the class in a positive and motivating manner
4. Building rapport, establishing credibility, and developing trust with class participants (e.g., active listening, acknowledgement, use of empathy, inclusive language)
5. Providing appropriate feedback to help build long-term adherence
6. Observing and responding appropriately to participant verbal and nonverbal feedback

Task 3: Instruct a multilevel class in a variety of settings (i.e., delivery methods, environments) by demonstrating proper exercise movements and modifications while using verbal and nonverbal communication to improve technique, reduce the risk of injury, improve performance, and promote adherence.

Knowledge of:

1. Body alignment and posture (e.g., neutral spine) for proper execution of dynamic and static exercises

2. Appropriate exercise techniques and movement patterns for a variety of group exercise formats and methods
3. Progressions and regressions for exercises used in various group fitness class formats
4. Cueing and communication techniques for different learning styles (e.g., verbal, visual, kinesthetic), domains (i.e., cognitive, affective, psychomotor), and stages of learning (e.g., cognitive, associative, autonomous)
5. Techniques for demonstrating (e.g., tell-show-do, mirroring, matching) proper exercise movements and modifications
6. Methods for improving health- and skill-related components of fitness (e.g., flexibility, cardiorespiratory fitness, muscular strength and endurance, balance) to accommodate various fitness levels
7. Population- and condition-specific exercise guidelines and contraindications (e.g., older adults, prenatal/postpartum, diabetes, obesity)
8. Methods for monitoring exercise intensity (e.g., heart rate, talk test, rating of perceived exertion, power output) and adjusting instruction appropriately (e.g., exercise selection, equipment use, music, movement variables and speed)
9. Physical signs and symptoms of overexertion, fatigue, dehydration, and overtraining
10. Physiological responses and adaptations that result from variations in environmental conditions (e.g., temperature, humidity, wind, air quality, altitude)

Skill in:

1. Recognizing and accommodating participants in various stages of learning (e.g., cognitive, associative, autonomous)
2. Applying effective instructional methods (e.g., tell-show-do, mirroring, matching) for teaching proper form and correcting exercise techniques and movements
3. Communicating succinctly and with purpose (e.g., vocalization, pausing, intonation, avoidance of filler words, clarity, enunciation)
4. Utilizing various cueing techniques (e.g., anticipatory, instructional, follow-up, motivational) to instruct exercise movements, modifications, and transitions
5. Identifying the need to provide and deliver modifications (e.g., equipment selection, exercise type, movement options) based on participants' abilities and responses to exercise
6. Implementing appropriate teaching strategies (e.g., slow-to-fast, repetition-reduction, part-to-whole, simple-to-complex) to accommodate participant fitness, skill levels, cultural background, and class modality
7. Incorporating various teaching styles (e.g., command, practice, self-check) appropriate for group fitness classes
8. Adapting class components, exercises, and sequencing based on environmental conditions
9. Modifying exercise variables (e.g., exercise selection, intensity, duration, recovery) to improve participant performance, adherence, and self-efficacy
10. Monitoring intensity levels of varied groups of participants in group fitness classes
11. Observing and responding appropriately to participant verbal and nonverbal feedback
12. Maintaining situational awareness (e.g., location of participants, room characteristics, potential hazards) while leading group fitness classes

Task 4: Inspire and engage participants in multilevel classes across a variety of settings and formats (e.g., delivery methods, environments) by applying effective strategies that build confidence, enhance performance, and foster a positive and inclusive environment.

Knowledge of:

1. Effective group and interpersonal communication techniques that enhance rapport (e.g., active listening, open-ended questioning, acknowledgement, use of empathy and compassion)
2. Effective motivational techniques that engage participants with various skills, limitations, preferences, and expectations in group fitness classes
3. Factors that influence exercise participation and adherence (e.g., personal attributes, environmental, physical activity, equity, access, representation)
4. Strategies to enhance individual autonomy and personal enjoyment in exercise classes
5. Participant-centered teaching strategies (e.g., learning styles, dimensional cueing)
6. Theories and models of behavior change (e.g., transtheoretical model, health belief model, self-determination theory)
7. Types and appropriate use of feedback (e.g., one correction at a time, sequential form and corrective cues, cues that are positive and solution-based)
8. Varied abilities and capabilities within population- and condition-specific groups

Skill in:

1. Building rapport and trust with class participants (e.g., learning participant names, being accessible and approachable, using audience-appropriate communication techniques)
2. Fostering a sense of community and camaraderie among class participants
3. Accommodating participants in the various stages of learning (e.g., cognitive, associative, autonomous) and readiness to change
4. Providing appropriate feedback based on participant characteristics and preferences (e.g., skill, fitness, stage of learning, cultural background)
5. Adapting communication style to accommodate class variables (e.g., learning styles, class size, class format, location, equipment, space, delivery methods)
6. Interpreting and responding appropriately to participant verbal and nonverbal communication
7. Selecting appropriate motivational techniques (e.g., intrinsic, extrinsic) for desired outcomes

Task 5: Educate participants on general health, wellness, and fitness principles and the benefits of movement to improve performance, reduce risk of injury, and increase participant self-efficacy and adherence.

Knowledge of:

1. Anatomy, kinesiology, and exercise physiology (e.g., major muscle groups, joint actions, cardiorespiratory responses)
2. Scope of practice as it relates to leading various group fitness class formats
3. Principles of training (e.g., overload, specificity, reversibility, progression, regression) as they relate to the class format and objectives
4. Theories and models of behavior change (e.g., transtheoretical model, health belief model, self-determination theory)
5. Various communication and learning styles (e.g., verbal, visual, kinesthetic)
6. Effects of movement adherence on health, wellness, fitness, and modifiable risk factors
7. General medical conditions and individual needs of special populations
8. Methods and reasons for monitoring exercise intensity (e.g., technology, heart rate, talk test, rating of perceived exertion) and their appropriate uses, precautions, and limitations
9. Health-related components of fitness (e.g., muscular strength and endurance, cardiorespiratory fitness, flexibility, body composition)
10. Skill-related components of fitness (e.g., balance, agility, speed, coordination)

Skill in:

1. Using positive and inclusive language (e.g., person-first language, corrective cueing)
2. Building rapport, establishing credibility, and developing trust with class participants
3. Educating participants about class components (e.g., warm-up, conditioning, cool-down) as they relate to class formats, objectives, and exercise selection
4. Recommend and teach techniques for self-monitoring exercise intensity (e.g., technology, heart rate, talk test, rating of perceived exertion)
5. Recommending appropriate apparel, footwear, and technology to participants based on variables (e.g., location, format, delivery method, space, equipment, personal preferences and characteristics)
6. Determining appropriate, relevant, and accurate information to share with class participants
7. Teaching participants how to discern credible health and wellness information (e.g., professional organizations, reputable peer-reviewed journals, evidence-based guidelines) from misinformation and disinformation

DOMAIN III: PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT AND RISK MANAGEMENT 27%

Task 1: Receive and incorporate relevant feedback from a variety of sources (e.g., participants, peers, supervisors, self-evaluation) to support continuous professional growth and enhance the class experience.

Knowledge of:

1. Characteristics of a safe and effective group fitness instructor
2. Effective communication strategies
3. Proper use of feedback (e.g., one correction at a time, sequential form and corrective cues, cues that are positive and solution-based)
4. Methods for obtaining feedback (e.g., participants, peers, supervisors, self-evaluation)
5. ACE Code of Ethics and ACE Professional Practices and Disciplinary Procedures

Skill in:

1. Discerning and evaluating feedback to identify successes and areas for improvement
2. Collaborating with participants to improve the class experience
3. Interpreting and evaluating achievement of objectives within the class plan
4. Modifying exercise variables (e.g., movements, intensity, sequence), equipment, music, and teaching styles to improve class delivery
5. Evaluating and modifying instructional goals and objectives

Task 2: Recognize and respond to high-risk situations following established protocols to ensure participant and instructor safety and reduce liability.

Knowledge of:

1. Environmental risk factors (e.g., technology, weather, location, available equipment)
2. Appropriate use and maintenance of equipment used in group fitness classes
3. Chronic and acute medical conditions and injuries
4. Knowledge of allied healthcare resources and appropriate referral sources
5. Emergency action plans and procedures
6. Risk-management policies and procedures
7. Signs and symptoms of overexertion and medical emergencies
8. Signs and symptoms of instructor burnout

Skill in:

1. Using equipment according to manufacturers' specifications

2. Recommending and referring to appropriate allied healthcare professionals when necessary
3. Responding to risks, incidents, injuries, and emergencies
4. Documenting risks, incidents, injuries, and emergencies
5. Executing emergency action plans and procedures
6. Implementing appropriate and safe early intervention strategies
7. Addressing and resolving conflicts
8. Identifying the need to terminate exercise for a participant or the class
9. Maintaining situational awareness (e.g., location of participants, room characteristics, potential hazards) while leading group fitness classes
10. Promoting and practicing self-care (e.g., meditation, creative outlets, nourishment, rest, sleep)

Task 3: Maintain and enhance competency by staying current on evidence-based research, technology, and best practices using credible resources (e.g., professional organizations, reputable peer-reviewed journals, evidence-based guidelines) to provide safe and effective classes.

Knowledge of:

1. Scope of practice for exercise professionals and ACE Group Fitness Instructors
2. ACE Code of Ethics and ACE Professional Practices and Disciplinary Procedures
3. Agencies and organizations (e.g., ACE, ACSM, ACOG, NIH) that establish and publish evidence-based health and fitness standards and guidelines
4. Appropriate uses of technology and equipment in group fitness settings
5. Credible sources for training and qualifications to teach specific group fitness formats, including the use of specific equipment and modalities
6. Reputable group fitness-related products and service providers

Skill in:

1. Determining appropriate action within the ACE Group Fitness Instructor scope of practice
2. Identifying credible resources for health- and fitness-related standards, guidelines, and research
3. Identifying and applying appropriate uses of technology and equipment in a group fitness setting
4. Explaining relevant health, wellness, and fitness information for class participants using plain language
5. Learning new group fitness class formats, equipment, and modalities from credible sources

Task 4: Adhere to recognized standards, guidelines, policies, laws, and regulations related to fitness instruction in a variety of settings (e.g., delivery methods, environments) to manage risk and liability.

Knowledge of:

1. Scope of practice for exercise professionals and ACE Group Fitness Instructors
2. ACE Code of Ethics and ACE Professional Practices and Disciplinary Procedures
3. Appropriate insurance protections (e.g., professional liability insurance, general liability insurance, workers' compensation insurance, health and disability insurance) for group fitness

instructors, participants, and other relevant parties in a variety of settings (e.g., virtual, in-home, in-club, outdoor, public spaces)

4. Appropriate pre-exercise screening requirements (e.g., PAR-Q+, health screening) and their appropriate uses
5. Industry guidelines, appropriate laws, and facility procedures relating to safety, risk management, emergencies, and injuries in fitness facilities and/or group exercise classes (e.g., virtual, in-home, in-club, outdoor, public spaces)
6. Procedures for documenting accidents, injuries, and incidents while safeguarding client confidentiality
7. Best practices for maintaining professional boundaries
8. Standards, laws, and regulations governing confidentiality (e.g., HIPAA, PHI, PII)
9. Intellectual property laws and regulations
10. Relevant media (e.g., video, music) copyright laws
11. Professional boundaries, client permission, and client privacy when using media (e.g., social, streaming platforms, videography)
12. Employment status designations (e.g., independent contractor, employee, self-employed)

Skill in:

1. Implementing facility/location safety procedures (e.g., emergency, risk management, operations)
2. Safeguarding confidential and private information
3. Applying appropriate and professional use of media, music, and protection of copyright and trademarks
4. Referring participants to appropriate allied healthcare providers, as appropriate
5. Determining and conducting appropriate action within the ACE Group Fitness Instructor scope of practice and ACE Code of Ethics
6. Determining appropriate insurance and levels of coverage necessary for group fitness instructors based upon employment status, environment (e.g., in-home, in-club, outdoor, public spaces) and delivery method (e.g., in-person, pre-recorded, live stream, hybrid)

Note: CPR = Cardiopulmonary resuscitation; AED = Automated external defibrillator; ACSM = American College of Sports Medicine; ACOG = American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists; NIH = National Institutes of Health; PAR-Q+ = Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire for Everyone; HIPAA = Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act; PHI = Protected health information; PII = Personally identifiable information