ACSM CERTIFIED GROUP EXERCISE INSTRUCTOR® JOB TASK ANALYSIS

The job task analysis (JTA) for the ACSM Certified Group Exercise Instructor® (ACSM-GEI®) describes what the exercise professional does on a day-to-day basis. The JTA serves as a blueprint for an examination intended to assess the practice-related knowledge of professionals seeking certification for the job of an ACSM-GEI®. When preparing for the examination, it is important to remember that all examination questions are based on this document.

Job Definition

The ACSM Certified Group Exercise Instructor® (ACSM-GEI®) possesses a minimum of a high school diploma and works in a group exercise setting with apparently healthy individuals and those with health challenges who can exercise independently to enhance quality of life, improve health-related physical fitness, manage health risk and promote lasting health behavior change. The ACSM-GEI® develops and leads safe and effective exercise programs using a variety of leadership techniques to foster group camaraderie, support and motivation to enhance muscular strength and endurance, flexibility, cardiorespiratory fitness, body composition and any of the motor skills related to the domains of health-related physical fitness.

Performance Domains and Associated Job Tasks

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. The performance domains are:

Performance Domains (2018)	Domain Weights
Class Design	30%
Leadership	25%
Instruction	30%
Professional Responsibilities	15%
Total	100%

Before an item can be used on an exam, it is subjected to Exam Development Committee (EDC) review and pre-testing. Pre-testing allows test developers 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. Treat each item as if it will be scored.

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

ACSM Certified Group Exercise Instructor® (ACSM-GEI®) Content Outline (2018)

Each performance domain is divided into job tasks. Within each task is a list of statements that describe what a group exercise instructor should know and/or be able to perform as part of their job.

Domains/Tasks	Cognitive Level
Domain I. Class Design	
A. Establish the purpose, and determine the objectives of, the class based upon the needs of the participants and facility layout. 1) Knowledge of: a) methods used to determine the purpose of a group exercise class (e.g., survey, focus group, inquiry, word of mouth, suggestion box). 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, gender, ability. e) health challenges and/or special needs commonly encountered in a group exercise setting. f) environmental factors as they relate to the safe participation (e.g., outdoor, indoor, flooring, temperature, space, lighting, room size, ventilation). a) the types of different environments for group exercise (e.g., outdoor, indoor, flooring, temperature, space, lighting, room size, ventilation).	**Application**
B. Determine class content (i.e., warm-up, stimulus and cool-down) in order to create an effective workout based upon the objectives of the class. 1) Knowledge of: a) the physiology of warm-up, stimulus and cool-down. b) training principles (e.g., specificity, adaptation, overload, FITT-VP principles [frequency, intensity, time, type, volume, progression]). 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 (e.g., formal, authoritarian, facilitator, nurturer).	**Recall**

f) different learning styles (e.g., auditory, visual, kinesthetic).
g) the use of music in group exercise.

2) Skill in:
a) applying FITT-VP principles (frequency, intensity, time, type, volume, progression) to class design.
b) organizing the warm-up, stimulus 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) providing different learning styles to effectively meet the objectives of the class.

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, stimulus 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) flexibility training principles and techniques.
f) motor 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) the application of music, if used, given class purpose and objectives.
c) modifying class design based on rehearsal trial and error.
d) applying teaching styles (e.g., formal, authoritarian, facilitator, nurturer).
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.
   b) modeling.
   c) appropriate verbal and non-verbal behavior.
   d) basic behavior-change models and theories (e.g., Social Cognitive Theory [SCT], Health Belief Model [HBM], Transtheoretical Model [TTM]).
   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 behavior change strategies.
   b) applying behavior change models and theories.
   c) applying communication techniques (verbal and non-verbal/body language).
   d) fostering group cohesion.
   e) interacting with participants to develop trust and relationships, providing feedback to class participants.
   f) projecting enthusiasm, energy and passion.
   g) 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) conflict prevention.
   b) basic conflict resolution techniques.
   c) communication techniques as it relates to conflict resolution (e.g., active listening, mirroring, reflection).
   d) specific club policies regarding conflict management and role in application of policies.

2) Skill in:
   a) applying conflict resolution techniques.
   b) applying empathetic listening skills.
   c) selecting the appropriate resolution.

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) the basic principles of weight management and nutrition.
   e) motivational techniques used to promote behavior change in the 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) risk factors which may require referral to medical or allied health professionals prior to exercise.

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 an 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).
d) risks associated with overtraining.
e) body image concepts and perceptions.
f) risks associated with the female athlete triad.
g) referral practices to allied health professionals.

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.
e) when to refer a participant to an allied health professional.
f) identifying issues/behavior related to unhealthy body image and making appropriate referrals.

Domain III. Instruction

A. Prepare to teach by implementing pre-class procedures (e.g., organizing equipment, music, room set-up). **Recall**

1) Knowledge of:
a) equipment operation (e.g., audio, exercise equipment, facility).
b) the procedures associated with determining the health status of group exercise class participants prior to each class.
c) class environment (e.g., outdoor, indoor, flooring, temperature, space, lighting, room size, ventilation).

2) Skill in:
a) determining health status of group exercise class participants prior to each class.
b) time management.
c) delivering pre-class announcements (welcome, instruction, safety, participant accountability).
d) operating sound equipment.
e) 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 modifications.
   c) correcting improper form and/or technique.

C. 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) monitoring participants' performance.
   c) instructing participant how to self-regulate exercise form.

D. 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., mode, intensity, frequency, duration).
   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., mode, intensity, frequency, duration).
   e) teaching participants how to self-monitor exercise intensity.
   f) proper exercise demonstration techniques.

E. Modify exercises based on individual 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.
   e) the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) recommendations for exercise during pregnancy.

2) Skill in:
   a) modifying exercise intensity or selection based on environmental conditions.
   b) modifying exercise intensity or selection based on individual and/or group ability.
   c) applying exercise intensity modification techniques (e.g., tempo, range of motion, alternate movements, load).

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]).
   c) the procedures associated with determining the health status of group exercise class participants prior to each class.

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. Identify and/or address participants with known acute or chronic diseases or conditions to provide recommendations and/or modifications. **Synthesis**

1) Knowledge of:
   a) common medical conditions and contraindications to group exercise participation.

b) risk factors, signs and symptoms, physical limitations and medical conditions that may affect or preclude class participation.
c) appropriate criteria for stopping a participant from exercising.

2) Skill in:
a) determining health status of group exercise class participants prior to each class.
b) determining when to recommend medical clearance.
c) making recommendations based on results of pre-exercise health status.

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

1) Knowledge of:
a) appropriate vocal projection techniques.
b) the value of vocal warm-up.
c) vocal warm-up techniques.
d) safe volume level.
e) group exercise sound projection technology (e.g., microphones, amplifiers, speakers).

2) Skill in:
a) the application of appropriate vocal projection techniques.
b) the application of group exercise sound projection equipment (e.g., microphones, amplifiers, speakers).

E. Follow industry-accepted professional, ethical and business standards in order 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, hyperglycemia, 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 client.

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.