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Group Fitness Instructor Certification Exam Content Outline

The Exam Content Outline is essentially a blueprint for the exam. As you prepare for the exam, it is important to remember that all exam questions are based on this outline.

Target Audience Statement

The certified Group Fitness Instructor is responsible for planning and leading group exercise sessions to enhance the general well-being (e.g., fitness and health) and exercise skills of participants. The certified Group Fitness Instructor is at least 18 years of age and possesses current valid cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and automated external defibrillator (AED) certificates.

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Domains, Tasks, and Knowledge and Skill Statements

A Role Delineation Study, or job analysis, was conducted by the American Council on Exercise and Castle Worldwide, Inc., for the ACE Group Fitness Instructor certification. The first step in this process was completed by a panel of subject matter experts in the various disciplines within group exercise. The primary goal of the panel was to identify the primary tasks performed by group fitness instructors in designing and delivering safe and effective exercise classes. The panel first identified the major categories of responsibility for a professional. These categories are defined as “Domains” and it was determined that the profession of group fitness instruction could be divided into four Performance Domains, or major areas of responsibility.

These Performance Domains are listed below with the percentage indicating the portion of the exam devoted to each domain:

- Domain I: Exercise Programming and Class Design – 19%
- Domain II: Group Instructional Methods – 37%
- Domain III: Group Leadership and Class Management – 29%
- Domain IV: Professional Responsibilities – 15%

Each Domain is composed of Task Statements, which detail the job-related functions under that particular Domain. Each Task Statement is further divided into Knowledge and Skill Statements that detail the scope of information required to perform each Task and how that information is applied in a practical setting.

The Performance Domains, Task Statements, and Knowledge and Skill Statements identified by the panel of subject matter experts were then validated by a sample of currently practicing ACE-certified Group Fitness Instructors. This completed the Role Delineation Study, with the outcome of this study being the ACE Group Fitness Instructor exam content outline detailed below. Please note that not all Knowledge and Skill Statements listed in the exam content outline will be addressed on each exam administration.

DOMAIN I: EXERCISE PROGRAMMING AND CLASS DESIGN 19%

Task 1

Select appropriate music and/or equipment based on an understanding of the objectives of the type of class for a varied group of participants to create a safe and effective class design.

Knowledge of:

1. Applicable music licensing laws, decibels, and lyrics/content
2. Basic components of a class (e.g., warm-up, conditioning, cool-down, flexibility)
3. Music styles and tempos appropriate for each class format or class component
4. Various group fitness–related equipment, their appropriate use, and space required for use (steps, indoor cycles, free weights, elastic resistance, medicine balls, stability balls, balance-related tools, etc.)
5. Varied class formats (traditional high-impact/low-impact, step, kickboxing, indoor cycling, water exercise, interval, circuit, muscular conditioning, sports

conditioning, flexibility, mind-body, pre-choreographed, etc.)

6. A/V equipment capabilities and use
7. Safe use of the equipment

Skill in:

1. Assessing music for bpm, structure, etc.
2. Applying awareness of cultural sensitivity to music and equipment selection
3. Analyzing equipment in relation to class design and location

Task 2

Create a class plan of safe and effective exercise movements using general fitness principles in order to achieve individual health, fitness, and wellness goals, reduce potential injury, promote adherence, and enhance the experience for a varied group of participants.

Knowledge of:

1. Skill-related components (balance, agility, speed, power, coordination, reaction time)
2. Principles of training (overload, specificity, reversibility, progression, adaptation)
3. Basic components of a class (e.g., warm-up, conditioning, cool-down, flexibility)
4. Applied kinesiology, exercise physiology, biomechanics, and anatomy
5. Major fitness-related components (cardio-respiratory endurance, muscular strength and endurance, flexibility, and body composition)
6. Current and established guidelines for improving and maintaining cardiorespiratory endurance, muscular strength and endurance, flexibility, and body composition, with reference to appropriate frequency, intensity, time, and type (FITT)
7. Current research on safe and effective exercise and movement

8. Training guidelines for health, fitness, and athletic performance
9. Choreography and sequencing

Skill in:

1. Incorporating fitness components and training principles
2. Adjusting training and skill-related principles to reach desired results
3. Selecting different methods to teach correct exercise and movement for desired results
4. Identifying the safe and effective exercise and/or movements for the desired results
5. Designing choreography, including sequencing, transition, and flow

Task 3

Integrate variety into class design by changing class elements (e.g., exercises, sequencing, equipment, music) for the participants in order to achieve individual health, fitness, and wellness goals, reduce potential injury, promote adherence, and enhance the experience.

Knowledge of:

1. Class components such as movement, instruction, format, and equipment
2. Overload, metabolic pathways, progression, etc.
3. Music styles and tempos appropriate for each class format or class component
4. Use and application of various group fitness-related equipment (e.g., steps, indoor cycles, free weights, elastic resistance, medicine balls, stability balls, balance-related tools)
5. Functional training principles to improve the quality of life

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6. Exercises to develop skill-related fitness components including balance, agility, speed, power, coordination, and reaction time
7. Teaching styles (e.g., command, practice, reciprocal, self-check, inclusion) appropriate for a group fitness class
8. Choreographic methods (e.g., freestyle vs. structured)
9. Verbal and non-verbal communication skills

Skill in:

1. Lesson planning
2. Integrating functional-training principles into a group fitness class setting
3. Incorporating the skill-related fitness components where appropriate
4. Manipulating various exercises, equipment, and music within any class format
5. Varying the class in accordance with fitness principles and established guidelines (frequency, intensity, duration, mode, sets, repetitions)
6. Recognizing the need for, and implementing, progression
7. Using appropriate communication and teaching styles
8. Selecting appropriate motivational techniques for desired outcomes

DOMAIN II: GROUP INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS 37%

Task 1

Lead a class using appropriate and effective instructional techniques (i.e., teaching methods) to accommodate cultural and demographic differences of class participants in order to achieve individual health, fitness, and wellness

goals, reduce potential injury, promote adherence, and enhance the experience.

Knowledge of:

1. Teaching styles (e.g., command, practice, reciprocal, self-check, inclusion) appropriate for a group fitness class
2. Teaching strategies (e.g., slow-to-fast, repetition reduction, spatial, part-to-whole, simple-to-complex) used to facilitate participant learning
3. Choreographic methods (e.g., freestyle vs. structured)
4. Domains and stages of learning
5. Various communication and learning styles (e.g., visual, auditory, kinesthetic)
6. Precautions when using touch to correct improper form
7. Motivational strategies that engage participants with various skills, limitations, preferences, and expectations

Skill in:

1. Using teaching styles (e.g., command, practice, reciprocal, self-check, inclusion) appropriate for a group fitness class
2. Selecting appropriate teaching strategies (e.g., slow-to-fast, repetition reduction, spatial, part-to-whole, simple-to-complex) to accommodate participant fitness and skill levels and class modality
3. Applying appropriate feedback based on participant skill, fitness level, and/or cultural background
4. Recognizing and interpreting participant nonverbal communication
5. Recognizing the cultural and demographic requirements of participants
6. Selecting appropriate motivational technique for desired outcomes
7. Selecting appropriate communication styles

Task 2

Lead a class using appropriate and effective instructional techniques in order to accommodate participants' various learning styles and motor development for optimal participant physical performance and to achieve individual health, fitness, and wellness goals, reduce potential injury, promote adherence, and enhance the experience.

Knowledge of:

1. Teaching styles (e.g., command, practice, reciprocal, self-check, inclusion) appropriate for a group fitness class
2. Teaching strategies (e.g., slow-to-fast, repetition reduction, spatial, part-to-whole, simple-to-complex) used to facilitate participant learning
3. Various communication and learning styles
4. Strategies for identifying participants with kinesthetic awareness dysfunction
5. Principles of learning theory with respect to effective teaching in a group exercise setting
6. Stages of learning

Skill in:

1. Using teaching styles (e.g., command, practice, reciprocal, self-check, inclusion) appropriate for a group fitness class
2. Selecting appropriate teaching strategies (e.g., slow-to-fast, repetition reduction, spatial, part-to-whole, simple-to-complex) to accommodate participant fitness and skill levels and class modality
3. Accommodating participants in the various stages of learning
4. Identifying stages of learning (e.g., cognitive, associative, autonomous)

Task 3

Educate participants on how to monitor their own intensities using a variety of methods to enable them to exercise at the most appropriate level to achieve individual health, fitness, and wellness goals, reduce potential injury, promote adherence, and enhance the experience.

Knowledge of:

1. Reasons for monitoring exercise intensity
2. Methods for monitoring exercise intensity: heart rate, talk test, Borg's ratings of perceived exertion (RPE), dyspnea scale, metabolic equivalents (METs), and zone training, and their use, precautions, and limitations (e.g., abnormal heart-rate responses, effect of medications, pregnancy, other special populations)
3. Heart-rate response to various class components (warm-up, cardiovascular phase, muscular conditioning, and cool-down)
4. Applications and limitations in the calculations of target heart rate: percent of heart-rate reserve, age-predicted maximum heart rate, and measured maximum heart rate

Skill in:

1. Using and explaining the talk test, RPE, and dyspnea scales as methods for monitoring exercise intensity
2. Modifying exercise intensity
3. Identifying signs and symptoms of over- and under-exertion, and making appropriate modifications
4. Selecting an appropriate intensity-monitoring method to accommodate special populations (e.g., pregnancy) and/or the effects of medications on heart-rate response

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Task 4

Observe class participants' exercise and movement techniques and exertion levels and provide feedback and/or corrections using appropriate strategies in order to prevent injury and improve exercise performance.

Knowledge of:

1. Appropriate body alignment and posture (e.g., neutral spine) during proper execution of exercises
2. Correct mechanics for each exercise, movement, and balance (static and dynamic)
3. How to apply effective instructional methods for correcting exercise techniques, balance, and movement
4. Physical signs and symptoms of over- and under-exertion, fatigue, and dehydration
5. Verbal and non-verbal (e.g., demonstrations and hands-on) communication strategies

Skill in:

1. Teaching correct mechanics for each exercise, movement, and balance
2. Recognizing incorrect exercise form and techniques
3. Providing effective feedback to the class to help participants improve exercise form without negatively impacting self-efficacy and/or adherence
4. Providing individualized correction using appropriate strategies when necessary, while maintaining class control

Task 5

Instruct and educate participants using clear, concise, and timely cues during the class in order to facilitate safe and

effective movement execution and transitions.

Knowledge of:

1. Appropriate musical application for the class format (e.g., beats per minute)
2. Verbal and non-verbal (visual) cueing techniques
3. Timing and strategies for effective cueing exercise
4. Teaching styles (e.g., command, practice, reciprocal, self-check, inclusion) appropriate for a group fitness class
5. Teaching strategies (e.g., slow-to-fast, repetition reduction, spatial, part-to-whole, simple-to-complex) used to facilitate participant learning
6. Learning stages (e.g., cognitive, associative, autonomous)
7. Various learning styles (e.g., visual, auditory, kinesthetic)
8. Appropriate techniques and situations for cueing movements via touch
9. Components of effective feedback (e.g., informational rather than controlling, based on performance standards, specific and immediate) and the types of feedback (e.g., corrective, value, and neutral statements)
10. Strategies for effective verbal cueing and prevention of vocal stress

Skill in:

1. Teaching using various styles (e.g., command, practice, reciprocal, self-check, inclusion) appropriate for a group fitness class
2. Implementing appropriate teaching strategies (e.g., slow-to-fast, repetition reduction, spatial, part-to-whole, simple-to-complex) to accommodate participant

fitness, skill levels, cultural background, and class modality

3. Effective timing and use of verbal and visual (non-verbal) cueing methods and techniques (e.g., 32-count phrase when applicable)
4. Using verbal cueing methods that effectively prevent vocal stress
5. Teaching and executing exercises with proper form and technique
6. Leading exercise through mirroring and matching techniques

Task 6

Motivate and educate a varied group of participants, using academically sound resources as well as appropriate strategies and techniques within the GFI scope of practice, to set realistic goals and take ownership of the exercise experience.

Knowledge of:

1. How to identify and access credible resources for academically sound information
2. Educational techniques for disseminating information
3. Effective motivational techniques
4. Scope of practice for ACE-certified Group Fitness Instructors

Skill in:

1. Identifying credible resources
2. Determining pertinent information to disseminate to class participants based on level of interest and information complexity
3. Teaching groups and individuals about exercise science-related topics at a level appropriate for non-fitness professionals
4. Determining appropriate action within the GFI Scope of Practice

DOMAIN III: GROUP LEADERSHIP AND CLASS MANAGEMENT 29%

Task 1

Lead classes that are safe and effective by accommodating for the needs of the multiple fitness levels of participants, by offering exercise and movement modifications, progressions, and regressions to achieve individual health, fitness, and wellness goals, reduce potential injury, promote adherence, and enhance the experience.

Knowledge of:

1. Concepts of variety and progression as they relate to the prevention of injury and boredom
2. Teaching strategies (e.g., slow-to-fast, repetition reduction, spatial, part-to-whole, simple-to-complex) used to facilitate participant learning
3. Methods used to accommodate various fitness levels
4. Strategies for identifying areas of weakness and designing exercises and movements, and providing feedback to encourage improvement
5. Basic flexibility, exercise, movement, and balance progressions, regressions, and modifications

Skill in:

1. Adapting the fitness components to accommodate various fitness levels within the class
2. Manipulating various exercises, equipment, music, and teaching styles within any class format
3. Recognizing the need for progression, regression, and modification

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4. Implementing appropriate progression rates
5. Teaching multiple options for flexibility, exercise, movement, and balance to accommodate various fitness levels

Task 2

Lead classes that are safe and effective by accommodating for the needs of participants from various special population groups by offering exercise and movement modifications and variations to achieve individual health, fitness, and wellness goals, reduce potential injury, promote adherence, and enhance the experience.

Knowledge of:

1. General medical conditions and common physical disabilities of special populations
2. Varied ability and capabilities within each special population group
3. What constitutes a special population and their particular needs
4. Exercise guidelines for different special population groups (youth, older adults, pre/post-natal, people with medical conditions, diseases, disorders, and disabilities)

Skill in:

1. Identifying participants who may need options to either decrease or increase intensity
2. Integrating and modifying programs to meet the needs of a special population
3. Recognizing health issues that interfere with participant ability to exercise safely within a specific class format
4. Recognizing the needs and capabilities of different special population groups

5. Designing safe and effective classes that address the specific needs of a special population

Task 3

Conduct pre-class and ongoing assessments of the space, environment, and participants in order to identify potential hazards and undertake necessary modifications to ensure a safe setting for a varied group of participants.

Knowledge of:

1. Applicable laws, regulations, and insurance needs for outdoor/public spaces
2. Specific environmental factors as they relate to the safety of the class participants (cold, heat, humidity, altitude, acoustics, exercise surface, exercise area)
3. Physiological responses and adaptations that result from variations in environmental conditions
4. Recommendations and precautions, including industry guidelines, for exercising in heat, cold, humidity, altitude, and pollution
5. Space risk management and emergency protocols, including EMS activations
6. Space evacuation procedures
7. Risk management implementation protocols, including assumption of risk, risk assessment, waivers, informed consent, professional liability insurance, and general liability insurance
8. Recommended hydration guidelines
9. Environmental factors that influence adherence

Skill in:

1. Adapting class content and/or programming based on specific environmental conditions

2. Identifying signs and symptoms of over-exertion, overexposure, and dehydration
3. Determining the need for evacuation processes of class participants in accordance with facility evacuation procedures
4. Listening effectively (e.g., use of minimal encouragement, reflecting, summarizing)
5. Establishing rapport (e.g., learning participant names, being accessible and approachable, using culturally appropriate non-verbal techniques such as eye contact)

Task 4

Foster a comfortable exercise environment by utilizing effective communication skills with groups and individuals to establish and enhance rapport, develop relationships, and build community in order to improve class adherence.

Knowledge of:

1. Methods for developing and enhancing rapport
2. Appropriate use of feedback (e.g., corrective, value, and neutral statements)
3. Effective group and interpersonal communication techniques that enhance rapport (e.g., active listening, open-ended questioning, acknowledgement, use of empathy and compassion)
4. Participant-centered teaching approaches
5. Methods for improving adherence

Skill in:

1. Developing rapport with and among class participants
2. Fostering a sense of community among class participants
3. Leading a group of individuals with different goals through a set class with modifications as needed (e.g., addressing individual needs and concerns, alleviating conflicts)

Task 5

Create a positive participant experience by utilizing customer service and skills required to be professional with groups and individuals in order to enhance class adherence.

Knowledge of:

1. Factors that create a positive experience for class participants
2. Strategies and methods for providing effective customer service
3. Participant-centered teaching approaches
4. Strategies to facilitate conflict resolution
5. Factors that facilitate adherence
6. Fair and equal treatment for all participants

Skill in:

1. Providing quality customer service to a group and one-on-one
2. Establishing an atmosphere of trust
3. Establishing rapport (e.g., learning participant names, being accessible and approachable, using culturally appropriate non-verbal techniques such as eye contact)
4. Building group camaraderie
5. Addressing and alleviating class conflicts
6. Observing and interpreting nonverbal communication
7. Listening effectively (e.g., use of minimal encouragement, reflecting, summarizing)

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DOMAIN IV: PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES 15%

Task 1

Prepare for, practice, and respond to, facility emergencies, acute medical conditions, and injuries, by following established protocols and documentation requirements in order to maximize participants' safety and manage risk.

Knowledge of:

1. Industry guidelines, appropriate laws, and facility procedures relating to safety, risk management, emergencies, and injuries in fitness facilities and/or group exercise classes (indoor and outdoor)
2. Physiological responses to, and recommendations for, exercising in various environmental conditions (e.g., heat, cold, humidity, altitude, pollution)
3. Basic procedures for injury management and emergency response within the GFI Scope of Practice (e.g., CPR, AED, basic first aid, RICE)
4. Medical conditions that affect a participant's ability to exercise safely in class (e.g., diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, arthritis, osteoporosis)
5. Procedures for documenting accidents, injuries, and incident reports, while safeguarding participant confidentiality
6. Appropriate insurance protections (e.g., professional liability insurance, general liability insurance, workers' compensation insurance, health and disability insurance) for fitness professionals working in a variety of settings
7. Scope of practice for ACE-certified Group Fitness Instructors

Skill in:

1. Adapting class content, format, and/or programming based on specific environmental conditions in order to maximize participants' safety (e.g., adequate warm-up and cool-down, recognizing potential hazards, providing proper instruction)
2. Utilizing various methods for monitoring intensity (e.g., RPE, heart rate, dyspnea) to prevent overexertion in regular class and adverse environmental conditions
3. Identifying signs and symptoms of overexertion and making appropriate modifications
4. Administering basic injury-management procedures and completing appropriate reports (e.g., incident reports)
5. Safeguarding confidential information
6. Carrying out facility evacuation procedures in the event of an emergency

Task 2

Assess, document, and maintain requirements for certification and liability insurance in order to help minimize risk for the class participants, organizations, and the ACE-certified Group Fitness Instructor.

Knowledge of:

1. Various insurance policies and coverage (e.g., professional liability insurance, general liability insurance, workers' compensation insurance, health and disability insurance) for classes taught in a variety of settings (e.g., indoors, pool, outdoors)
2. American Council on Exercise Professional Practices and Disciplinary Procedure
3. Standards, laws, and regulations governing confidentiality
4. Scope of practice for the ACE-certified Group Fitness Instructor

Skill in:

1. Following industry guidelines to minimize risk for the GFI and class participants (e.g., adequate warm-up and cool-down, recognizing potential hazards, providing proper instruction)
2. Completing requirements to maintain certification
3. Determining appropriate insurance and levels of coverage necessary for the GFI based on the teaching facility and class logistics
4. Referring participants to more qualified fitness, medical, or health professionals when appropriate