



CAPR
Canadian Alliance
of Physiotherapy
Regulators

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organismes de réglementation
de la physiothérapie

Physiotherapy Competency Examination

WRITTEN COMPONENT

Essential Guide for Candidates

Updated March 2023



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The Written Component of the Physiotherapy Competency Examination (PCE)

The Written Component of the PCE is a four-hour, computer-based, multiple-choice exam that assesses your knowledge and understanding of the principles and processes of physiotherapy practice, and your ability to use and integrate clinical knowledge to solve clinical problems. It aims to test all competencies required for safe, effective, and independent physiotherapy practice at the entry-to-practice level in Canada.

Prior to 2022, the PCE consisted of both a Written Component and a Clinical Component. In January 2022, CAPR discontinued the administration of the Clinical Component of the PCE. Those who have successfully completed the Written Component of the PCE should [contact their regulator](#) for details about the process to become fully licensed.

Exam Development

The questions on the Written Component are developed by Written Item Generation Teams (WIGT) across the country. Each WIGT is comprised of physiotherapy clinicians and educators with diverse levels of experience, areas of practice and specializations, and training backgrounds. All WIGT members receive training from CAPR on item writing best practices, physiotherapy entry-to-practice expectations, and PCE content and style standards to ensure the consistency and quality of new questions that are developed for the exam.

Each question goes through multiple rounds of review before being vetted by a national panel, the Written Test Development Group (WTDG), to ensure that all questions that are admitted to the PCE Item Bank are accurate, relevant, at the entry-to-practice level, and meet current and national practice standards.

Exam forms are assembled to align with the PCE Blueprint following a psychometric, physiotherapy content, and English and French editorial review of the individual items that make up the exam.

Exam Content

The [Physiotherapy Competency Examination Blueprint 2018](#) qualitatively and quantitatively describes what content is covered on the exam and in what format. The PCE Blueprint 2018 is based on the [Competency Profile for Physiotherapists in Canada \(2017\)](#) which was published by the [National Physiotherapy Advisory Group \(NPAG\)](#). The blueprint is organized primarily under two dimensions: **Domains** and **Areas of Practice**. It also lists the contextual variables that guide the Written Component, such as client gender, age, and practice settings. These guidelines ensure that the questions selected for each exam are representative of a variety of conditions, competencies, practice scenarios and client populations that entry-to-practice physiotherapists are likely to encounter.



The questions on the Written Component are distributed across these physiotherapy **Domains**:

- Physiotherapy Expertise 50-60% / 100-120 questions
- Communication 5-15% / 10-30 questions
- Collaboration 5-15% / 10-30 questions
- Management 3-7% / 6-14 questions
- Leadership 3-7% / 6-14 questions
- Scholarship 3-7% / 6-14 questions
- Professionalism 5-15% / 10-30 questions

The questions on the Written Component are distributed across these physiotherapy **Areas of Practice**:

- Musculoskeletal 45-55% / 90-110 questions
- Neurological 15-25% / 30-50 questions
- Cardiovascular-respiratory 10-20% / 20-40 questions
- Other 10-20% / 20-40 questions

More details on the domains and areas of practice can be found in the PCE Blueprint 2018. **It is important that you become familiar with the entry-to-practice competencies, milestones, and conditions tested in the Written Component prior to taking the exam.** For examples of how questions are mapped to the blueprint see the [Mapping of Sample Written Component Questions to the PCE Blueprint](#) on the CAPR website.

Exam Structure

The Written Component is comprised of 200 multiple-choice questions. Each multiple-choice question consists of a **stem** (i.e., the introductory part of the item that presents the question or problem) and four response options. There is only one correct or best option for each question, and the three other options are distractors (i.e., plausible options that are either incorrect or not the best response given the client and clinical scenario).

Approximately 90% of the questions (around 180 questions) on the Written Component are associated with a **vignette**, and the remaining 10% (around 20 questions) are **stand-alone** items. Vignette-based questions are presented first, followed by stand-alone questions towards the end of the exam.

While the Written Component is balanced to match blueprint requirements, the exam is not divided into different sections (i.e., into areas of practice or domains). You should expect to encounter a random sequence of vignettes and questions testing different domains and areas of practice in the exam.



Vignette-based Questions

A vignette is a short paragraph that will provide you information about a client and the clinical scenario. A typical vignette will follow the pattern:

Client's age, gender, practice setting, present complaints or diagnosis, and relevant history.

A series of three to six questions will follow that are based on the vignette.

Sample Vignette-based Question:

Vignette	A 22-year-old woman is at an out-patient physiotherapy clinic after developing anterior left knee pain. She states that the pain began gradually about one month ago while training to run a half-marathon. Her training has included running, weightlifting, and swimming. She has not been able to increase her training lately due to increased pain. The physiotherapist suspects patellofemoral pain syndrome.	
Stem 1	When taking the client's history, which of the following would the physiotherapist <i>most</i> likely expect the client to report?	
	A. Increased knee pain when ascending stairs, significant knee swelling, and occasional "clicking" in the knee.	Distractor
	B. Increased knee pain when ascending stairs, mild knee swelling, and locking of the knee.	Distractor
	C. Increased knee pain when descending stairs, mild knee swelling, and occasional "clicking" in the knee.	CORRECT
	D. Increased knee pain when descending stairs, significant knee swelling, and locking of the knee.	Distractor
Stem 2	When doing an objective assessment of the client, which of the following would the physiotherapist <i>most</i> likely expect to find?	
	A. Decreased lateral glide of the patella and pain that is reproduced with patellar compression.	Distractor
	B. Decreased medial glide of the patella and pain that is reproduced with patellar compression.	CORRECT
	C. Decreased medial glide of the patella and decreased quadriceps angle (Q angle).	Distractor
	D. Decreased lateral glide of the patella and increased quadriceps angle (Q angle).	Distractor



Stand-alone Questions

A stand-alone question is an independent question that is not associated with a vignette or any other question on the exam. All relevant information regarding the client and clinical scenario will be provided in the stem.

Sample Stand-alone Question:

Stem	A 73-year-old man who has rheumatoid arthritis is receiving physiotherapy and other services in a multidisciplinary acute care facility. A volunteer in the facility reports to the physiotherapist that the client has been crying, not eating well, and worried about his family. The volunteer asks if the client is seeing a psychologist for counselling. How should the physiotherapist respond?	
	A. Provide a description of the psychological supportive care that the client is receiving.	Distractor
	B. Explain that it is not appropriate to discuss the client's treatment.	CORRECT
	C. Offer to discuss the matter after consulting the psychologist.	Distractor
	D. Remind the volunteer to concentrate on her assigned responsibilities.	Distractor

Written Component Practice Questions

You can access a larger set of sample [Written Component Practice Questions](#) on the CAPR website. These questions will help you get familiarized with the style, language, types, and format of questions that appear on the Written Component.

Exam Scoring

Each question on the Written Component is equally weighted. Correct responses are worth one mark each, and incorrect responses receive no marks. There are no deductions for incorrect responses. Your total score is calculated by summing your correct responses on all scored items.

All questions are statistically analyzed after each exam, and questions that do not perform as expected may be removed from scoring (i.e., not count towards candidates' scores) following a review by CAPR's Key Validation Committee.

Passing the Written Component

Each candidate who completes the Written Component will receive a score report that summarizes their performance (total score and sub-scores) and their overall result (pass/fail). Your total score and the passing score will be reported as scaled scores, which provide criterion-referenced interpretation. To learn more about scaled scoring, visit the [Exam Scoring and Reporting](#) information on the CAPR website.

The Written Component passing score will always be 600 in scaled scoring. **You must achieve a score of 600 or higher to pass.**



Preparing for the Written Component of the PCE

Studying Strategies for the Written Component

Preparing for the Written Component can be overwhelming for candidates, given the stakes and comprehensive scope of the exam. Here are some universally accepted studying principles that may aid in your preparation:

Create a Study Plan

- **Identify your learning needs and set goals.** You should assess the knowledge and skills that you have already acquired and mastered, and relate them to the content and weightings outlined in the PCE Blueprint. Know your strengths and your weaknesses, and have a plan on how to approach these. It may be best to focus on your weaker areas first, to ensure that you have enough time to cover topics that you may find more challenging.
- **Optimize your study strategy.** You should reflect on your learning style and identify the studying techniques that are best suited for you. You should be mindful of any other competing demands in your life that may affect your ability to study for the Written Component, and plan around these.
- **Create a timeline.** Work back from your exam date and create a study schedule. Post it in a visible or easily accessible spot, and update it as necessary. We cannot be prescriptive about the ideal study duration, as the candidates who take the Written Component are quite diverse. If it has been a while since you last took an exam or if you have taken a break from physiotherapy practice, you may need a bit more time. If you are a non-native English speaker, or if you have documented impairments, you may also want to plan for extra preparation time.
- **Be efficient and consistent.** To avoid getting overwhelmed, it is best to start studying early and establish studying routines that involve regular, small periods of work. Review topic areas on a regular basis to keep your memory active and summarize frequently.
- **Take breaks.** Program breaks into your study schedule to avoid fatigue and burnout. It may be best to stop and do something else when you lose your concentration or struggle with comprehension.
- **Form a study group.** If possible, meet for regular study sessions with a group of other candidates preparing to take the Written Component. Asking and answering questions with other candidates can improve your understanding, reinforce what you learn, and help you identify gaps in your strategy. Having a support group can also boost your morale, and it helps to have people you can consult with if you have issues with any topic.
- **Use active learning techniques.** Engage with the material in diverse ways. Talk about concepts, create flash cards and notes, or summarize key points. Create diverse memory cues that you can recall on exam day.
- **Aim for comprehension and not memorization.** After studying an idea or topic, always ask yourself, “What does that mean?” Answer the question as if you’re trying to explain the concept to someone else. Recalling concepts can come easier after ensuring that you’ve fully understood a topic.



Develop Techniques to Maximize Your Performance on Exam Day

- **Know your pace.** Get an idea of how long it takes for you to read and answer Written Component-style questions and identify if this is something that needs extra work before the exam.
- **Do the math.** Calculate the time that you can allot for each question. Since there are 200 questions and 240 minutes for each exam, you have just over one minute (1.2 minutes or 72 seconds) to read and answer each question. Another way to look at it is that you have to answer 50 questions per hour. You will find, though, that reading and answering times for each question will vary.
- **Build endurance.** Four hours is longer than most typical post-secondary exams. Cognitive fatigue can affect everyone, so ensure that you have coping and pacing strategies to prevent this on exam day.

Look after Yourself

It is important to stay healthy in the months and weeks leading up to the exam. Regardless of how much you prepare, your exam performance may suffer if you are not in the best shape on exam day.

- Manage your study schedule such that you don't significantly compromise your sleep. Inadequate sleep can affect retention and comprehension, and can ultimately affect your ability to stay effective with studying.
- Exercise regularly—do some stretching as well as aerobic and strengthening exercises. Exercise may also help in reducing stress and preventing study burnout.
- Maintain a balanced diet. Poor eating habits while preparing for an exam can compromise your cognitive and energy levels.
- Make yourself comfortable in your study environment.
- Practise concentration and relaxation techniques daily. If done regularly, your body and mind will respond more quickly and effectively. These techniques will also be helpful on exam day.
- If you feel significantly anxious and overwhelmed by the process, talk to someone about it – a friend, someone in your study group, a family member, or an appropriate healthcare provider.

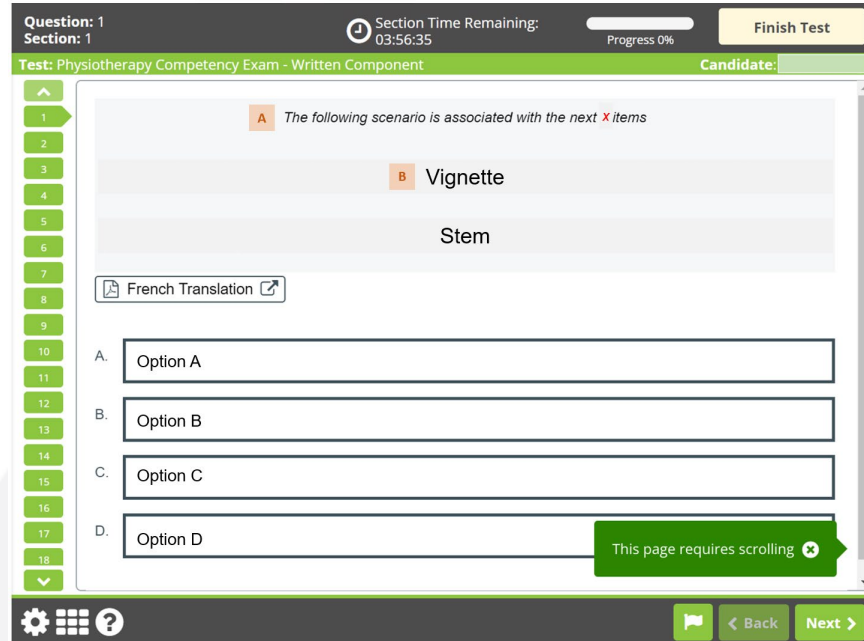
Everyone has a different approach to learning and studying, and everyone has different demands and needs as they prepare for the Written Component. Explore different techniques to understand what works best for you.



Introduction to the Computer-based Exam Platform

Before starting the exam on exam day, you will be able to go through a 10-minute platform tutorial. This section will introduce the functions available on the platform, to help you maximize your performance. If you take the [Written Component Practice Exam](#) prior to exam day, you may already be familiar with these.

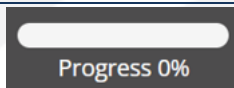
SAMPLE EXAM PLATFORM SCREENSHOT:



- A** This statement will be displayed above the vignette for the first question of each vignette.
- B** The relevant vignette will be displayed above each stem.



TIMER: This is a countdown timer that will let you know how much time you have remaining in the exam. An alert box will appear near the timer to warn you at the final 30, 15, and 5 minutes of the exam.



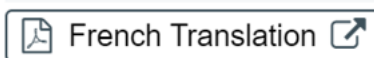
PROGRESS BAR: This will show how much of the exam you have completed as you go along.



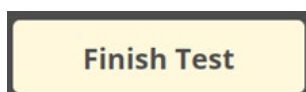
PREFERENCES: This will enable you to access options to modify the screen appearance, such as the colour scheme and contrast.



INTRODUCTION-TUTORIAL: This will re-launch the tutorial.
NOTE: Launching the tutorial after starting the exam will count towards your exam time.



This button will open a PDF pop-up containing the alternate language version of the entire vignette.



FINISH TEST: Clicking this button will end your exam session. You will not be able to re-launch the exam, and your responses will be submitted.
NOTE: Do NOT click this button until you are completely done with your exam.



Navigating the Exam Platform



As with most typical computer programs, the exam software uses a mouse pointer to move through and select objects on the screen.

This page requires scrolling

If a question is too long to fit in a single screen, you will be notified that the page requires scrolling.

- A.
- B.
- C.
- D.

You must select the box containing your desired answer for each question. You will only be allowed to select one option for each question.

When you select an answer, the option box will change in colour.



To unselect that option, click on the box again.

To change your answer, simply click on the new desired option.

Back

Next

The **Next** and **Back** buttons are located at the bottom of the screen. These buttons enable you to move between questions.

1

2

3

4

You can jump to a particular question by clicking on the **numbered buttons** on the left side of the screen.

The numbered buttons will change appearance to reflect the status of the question:

26

27

28

29

An **arrow-shaped** button indicates the current question.

A **dark button with a flap** indicates that the question has been attempted.

The original colour and shape indicate that the question has not yet been attempted.

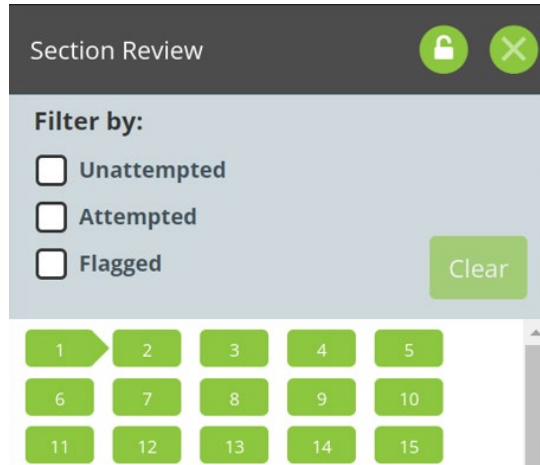
The **flag icon** will appear beside the number of a flagged question.



You can click the up and down arrows on either end of the numbered buttons to get to other questions.



The **Section Review** button will enable you to view more numbered buttons in a single screen. The status of the question will be reflected by the appearance of the buttons, as above.



You can filter the questions to see only unattempted, attempted, or flagged questions.

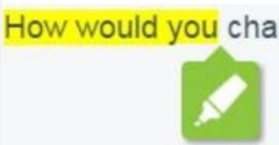
You can keep the **Section Review** panel in place by clicking the **Lock** button on the upper right side, or close the panel by clicking the **x** button.

Test-taking Features



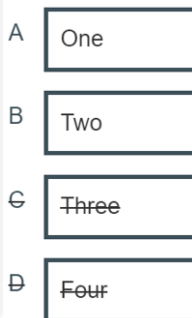
Flagging a Question

You can flag a question to remind yourself to review an attempted question, or to attempt a question at a later time.



Highlighting Text

You can highlight any part of the vignette or stem while taking the exam. You do this by clicking and dragging the mouse pointer over the parts that you wish to highlight and clicking the **Highlight** button. The text will remain highlighted for the duration of the exam unless it is removed. To remove a highlight, click on any part of the highlighted text and click the **Un-highlight** button that appears.



Striking Out Options

As you think through a question, you can eliminate options that you are not considering as the potential answer. You can do this by right-clicking on the option box. The option will remain visible in its original place, but will have a struck-out appearance. You can strike out multiple options; if you change your mind, you will still be able to select a struck-out option as the answer by left-clicking that option. You can also remove the strike-out by right-clicking again on that option.



Taking Notes

If you are taking the exam via remote proctoring, the ProProctor platform has the additional function of an on-screen scratchpad. You can use this to take notes as you won't be allowed to use pen and paper in a remotely proctored exam. To take notes, click the **Scratchpad** button and type your notes into the window.

If you are taking the exam at a test centre, your proctor will provide you with a pen and paper to take notes during the exam.



Test-taking Strategies for the Written Component

Here are some test-taking tips for exam day:

- Familiarize yourself with and utilize the **exam platform tools** that will be available to you on exam day.
 - **Highlighting, striking out options, flagging questions, and taking notes** can help with comprehension and reasoning.
 - Be aware that you can go back to questions and change your answers until you hit the “Finish Test” button.
- **Get comfortable** for a four-hour exam. Sit with your feet, back, and arms supported.
- **Manage your time wisely.**
 - **Aim for an excess of exam time.** It may be helpful to plan to leave 10 to 15 minutes at the end of the exam to answer or review challenging questions.
 - **Always be mindful of your time.** While countdown timers can be a bit stressful, it is important to be constantly aware of how much time you have remaining in the exam, and plan your approach accordingly.
- Answer the questions.
 - Read each question carefully, and note the key terms.
 - Pay close attention to details but don’t be on the lookout for tricks. All questions go through a rigorous editorial process to ensure that the language used on the Written Component is inclusive and not “tricky”.
 - Sometimes, it may look like there is more than one correct answer to a question. Check the stem to see if a qualifier such as *best*, *most*, or *first* is what the question is looking for. These terms are typically italicized in the exam.
 - If, after rechecking the stem for qualifiers, you believe that there is not one correct answer, answer that item to the best of your ability given the information provided. If an item performs poorly, it will be flagged for review during scoring. We may modify the answer key for that item or remove it from scoring.
 - All the information that you need to answer a question will be given to you. Try not to overthink the question. Identify the best answer given the contents of the vignette and stem. Don’t make assumptions about potential complicating factors, or get distracted by a story that you may have created for the client or case.
 - Try to come up with an answer for each question *before* looking at the options for that question. Regardless of your ability to do so, make sure that you read all the options before selecting your final answer. If you are unsure about a question, it may be helpful to eliminate the incorrect options first.
 - **Answer all the questions. There is no penalty for guessing.**



- Take breaks.
 - All candidates are allowed to take breaks; however, breaks count towards your exam time (i.e., the countdown timer does not stop), so make sure you are mindful of your time.
 - You don't have to step away from your station for a break – take deep breaths or stretch while you're in your seat. Relaxation and mobility breaks help with concentration and improve performance. Just make sure you are being mindful of proper exam conduct, and that you are not engaging in behaviours that may be disruptive to other candidates or may be perceived as suspicious by exam proctors (see the Rules of Conduct and Examination Security in the [Exam Registration Guide](#)).
 - Breaks can also be used to go to the washroom. If you step away from your station, you will have to check-out and check back in with your proctor – this process takes time, so be mindful of that.

Resources

CAPR Resources

Below is a checklist of the different Written Component exam preparation resources available on the CAPR website. Ensure that you have reviewed all these before taking the exam.

<input type="checkbox"/>	PCE Blueprint 2018
<input type="checkbox"/>	PCE Key Reference List 2022 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• This is the comprehensive list of the official resources used by CAPR and item writers to develop and maintain questions on the Written Component item bank.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Written Component Information Session <ul style="list-style-type: none">• This is a video recording of the most recent information session on the exam.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Essential Guide for Candidates (this guide)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Candidate Information Package: Remote Proctoring of the Written Component
<input type="checkbox"/>	Written Component Practice Questions <ul style="list-style-type: none">• This document features 50 Sample Written Component questions and answers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Written Component Practice Exam <ul style="list-style-type: none">• This is a paid service offered through our exam delivery partner, Prometric, that will allow you to use the exam platform and experience the test delivery process first-hand, prior to exam day.



External Resources

[Competency Profile for Physiotherapists in Canada \(2017\)](#)

The Competency Profile is a foundational document that describes the essential competencies required of a physiotherapist in Canada throughout their career and specific milestones expected of a physiotherapist at entry to the profession.

[National Physiotherapy Entry-to-Practice Curriculum Guidelines \(2019\)](#)

The Guidelines describe the recommended elements of the academic and clinical content of a Canadian entry-to-practice physiotherapy program's curriculum. The Guidelines reflect current physiotherapy practice and evolving sciences that influence practice while accommodating emerging areas of practice.

Bridging Programs for Internationally Educated Physiotherapists

For physiotherapists educated outside of Canada and who have completed CAPR's credentialling process and received a credentialling result, the programs listed below can help with preparation for the exam and for successful transition to physiotherapy practice in Canada.

Alberta

- [University of Alberta: Graduate Certificate in Bridging to Canadian Physical Therapy Practice](#)

Ontario

- [University of Toronto: Ontario Internationally Educated Physiotherapist Bridging \(OIEPB\) Comprehensive Program](#)

Quebec

- [Université de Montréal: Programme de Qualification Professionnelle en Physiothérapie \(QPP\)](#)
- [McGill University: Equivalency in Physical Therapy Program](#)

Examination Preparation Program

British Columbia

- [University of British Columbia: PhysioRefresh Written Program](#)

NOTE: CAPR is aware that there are a number of PCE Preparation Courses that candidates can access for a fee. These courses are **NOT** endorsed by CAPR.

Exam Procedures and Policies

Information on Readiness for Exam Day (Section 5) and Exam Day Procedures (Section 9) can be found in the [Exam Registration Guide](#). The Registration Guide also contains the registration and application procedures for the Written Component of the PCE.

You can access CAPR's policies on Examination Eligibility, Testing Accommodations, Administrative Accommodations and Appeals on the [Exam Policies](#) webpage.