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# **Physiotherapy Competency Examination**

**WRITTEN COMPONENT**

## **Essential Guide for Candidates**

Updated December 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.

Before 2022, the PCE consisted of a Written Component and a Clinical Component. In January 2022, CAPR discontinued the administration of the Clinical Component of the PCE. Once you have successfully completed the Written Component of the PCE, you must contact the [relevant regulator](#) to learn about the process to become a fully licensed physiotherapist.

### 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 2018 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 \(PCE\) Blueprint 2018](#) qualitatively and quantitatively describes the content covered on the exam. 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 before 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 attends an outpatient physiotherapy clinic after developing anterior left knee pain. Her pain began gradually about one month ago while she was 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 PT suspects patellofemoral pain syndrome.

#### Stem 1

When taking the client's history, which of the following symptom patterns is the PT **MOST** likely to 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. | <b>Increased knee pain when descending stairs, mild knee swelling, and occasional "clicking" in the knee.</b> | <b>CORRECT</b> |
| 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 findings is the PT **MOST** likely to find?

- |           |   |                |
|-----------|---|----------------|
| A.        | Decreased lateral glide of the patella and pain that is reproduced with patellar compression.       | Distractor     |
| <b>B.</b> | <b>Decreased medial glide of the patella and pain that is reproduced with patellar compression.</b> | <b>CORRECT</b> |
| 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 attends physiotherapy and other services in an interprofessional acute care facility. A volunteer in the facility reports to the PT 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 PT respond?

- |           |  |                |
|-----------|--|----------------|
| A.        | Provide a description of the psychological supportive care that the client is receiving. | Distractor     |
| <b>B.</b> | <b>Explain that it is not appropriate to discuss the client's treatment.</b>             | <b>CORRECT</b> |
| C.        | Offer to discuss the matter after consulting the psychologist.                           | Distractor     |
| D.        | Remind the volunteer to concentrate on their assigned responsibilities.                  | Distractor     |



## Written Component Practice Questions

You can access a larger set of sample [Written Component Practice Questions](#) on the CAPR website. These 50 questions will help you get familiarized with the style, language, types, and format of questions that appear on the Written Component.

This is a free resource for all candidates.

## 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, 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 2018. 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 may 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

The Written Component Tutorial is an exam preparation tool that aims to give you an overview of the structure and content of the Written Component, and to orient you to the test-taking features that will be available to you on exam day within the exam platform. We strongly recommend that you access this resource before exam day. You can do so using the information below:

URL:	<a href="https://demo.capr.assess.risr.global/">https://demo.capr.assess.risr.global/</a>
Username:	Candidate
Password:	thisisademo

You will have four hours of access to the demo tutorial once you log in. There is no limit to the number of times that you can access the Written Component Tutorial.

NOTE: You will not have access to the Written Component Tutorial after you have begun the process to launch your exam. We strongly encourage that you access the tutorial before the exam to ensure that you are familiar with how to use the exam platform.

### Sample Exam Platform Screenshot

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL [demo-ca.practique.net/html5/](https://demo-ca.practique.net/html5/). The interface includes a top navigation bar (A) with buttons for OVERVIEW, LANGUAGE, FINISH, COLOUR, TIME REMAINING (02:09:03), NOTES, (UN)HIGHLIGHT, and CAPR3 USER ID. Below this is an overview section (B) with a question list. Question 1 is selected, and its text is highlighted by a red circle (C). The question text is: "The following vignette is associated with the next x questions. A 38-year-old man is attending an outpatient physiotherapy clinic for an insidious onset of right ankle and shin pain. The client states that the pain has been present for two weeks and is now unrelenting, even at night, and has spread from the ankle into the shin. He is a regular jogger and has not changed his training regime. He believes his pain is related to running. He has not seen his family physician about this problem because his physician is away for two weeks. He does not have a history of leg injuries and is in excellent health, except for a recent tooth infection." To the right is the answer section (D) with the question: "Which of the following reports from the client's history may lead the PT to suspect a diagnosis of osteomyelitis?" and four radio button options: "Pain at night.", "Recent history of infection.", "Lack of mechanism of injury.", and "Pattern and location of the painful area." Each option has a red 'x' button next to it.

The exam platform consists of:

#### **A** Control Panel

This bar contains the buttons that activate the different navigation, settings, and test-taking features on the exam platform.



**B** 'Overview' pane

This pane contains the question numbers.

**C** 'Vignette' pane

This pane is labelled with the number of the currently selected question.

- For vignette-based questions, the related vignette is displayed in this pane.
- For stand-alone questions, only the statement '**This is a stand-alone question.**' is displayed in this pane.

**D** 'Answer' pane

This pane contains the stem and the four answer options.

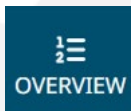
## Navigating the Exam Platform



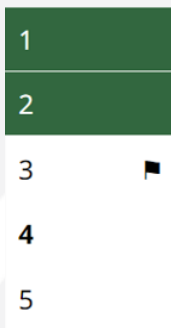
As with most typical computer programs, the exam platform uses a mouse pointer to move through and select objects on the screen.



You can move between questions using the **PREVIOUS** and **NEXT** buttons in the Control Panel.



You can open and close the 'Overview' pane on the left-hand side of the screen that contains the question numbers by clicking on the **OVERVIEW** button in the Control Panel.



You can move between questions or jump to a particular question by clicking on the **numbered buttons** in the 'Overview' pane.

The colour and appearance of the numbers in this pane indicate the status of the question:

- A number in **bold font** indicates the question that you are currently viewing.
- A **white** button indicates that the question has not been answered.
- A **green** button indicates that the question has been answered and submitted to the server.
- A **yellow** button indicates that the question has been answered, but has not yet been submitted to the server.
- A **flag** icon will appear beside the number of a flagged question.

Option 1

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

Option 2

Option 3

When you select an answer, the option box will turn green.

Option 4

You can change your answer by clicking on the new desired option.



## Exam Platform Accessibility Options

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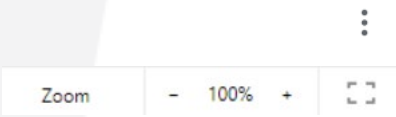


You can change the colour of the background of the exam platform by clicking on the **COLOUR** button in the Control Panel; this opens a pane that shows the available colours. You can also change the Hue, Saturation, and Lightness of the background colour.

The font colour will automatically adjust to the specific modifications.

The default option can be reset by clicking the WHITE colour option in the pane.

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You can change the size of text by using the zoom (magnification) adjustment option in your browser or the keyboard shortcuts (Ctrl +/- or Command +/-) during the exam.

On Google Chrome, click on the three vertical dots on the rightmost side of the address bar. Use the '-' or '+' button in the Zoom option to adjust the text size.

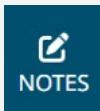
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## Test-taking Features

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### Making notes

You can type and format notes by clicking on the **NOTES** button in the Control Panel. This will open a text field below the Control Panel.



Your notes are specific to the question that is displayed on the screen when you click on the **NOTES** button. No action is required to save notes that you have made; they can be accessed at any point during your exam by returning to that specific question.

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### Highlighting text

You can highlight important parts of the vignette or stem as you go through the exam by selecting the text that you want to highlight and clicking on the **(UN)HIGHLIGHT** button in the Control Panel.



Text that you highlight in a stem will remain highlighted for the duration of your exam, unless you remove it.

Text that you highlight in a vignette will also remain highlighted for the duration of your exam, but only on the question where it was highlighted. When you move to another question within the vignette, you will not see the same text highlighted. To review text that you have highlighted in a vignette, you must return to the

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question where it was highlighted.

To remove the highlight, select the highlighted text again, then click the **(UN)HIGHLIGHT** button.

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### Eliminating options

You can eliminate options that you identify as incorrect or less correct by clicking on the 'x' button beside the option. You can eliminate multiple options.

Option 1	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Option 2	<input type="checkbox"/>
Option 3	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Option 4	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Eliminated option(s) will remain visible in its/their original place, but will have a crossed-out appearance. You will not be able to select an option that has been eliminated.

You can un-eliminate an option by clicking on the 'x' button beside the option.

NOTE: You must always select an answer for each question. Eliminating three options does not automatically submit the remaining option as your selected answer. An option has been properly selected when it turns green.

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### Flagging a question

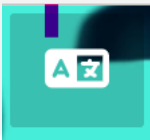


You can use the flag feature to remind yourself to go back and review a question that you have answered, or to return to attempt an unanswered question at a later time; to do so, click on the flag button beside the stem. A flag icon will appear beside the flagged question number in the 'Overview' pane.

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### Changing the Language

The Written Component is available in English and French.



You can change the language of the exam platform by clicking on the Language button on the top left-hand side of the exam log-in page.

NOTE: You will not be able to change the exam platform language once you have logged in.

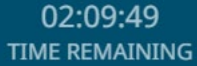


You can change between the English and French versions of the exam content at any point during your exam by clicking on the **LANGUAGE** button in the Control Panel. You can select your answers in either English or French.

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## Managing your exam time



02:09:49  
TIME REMAINING

The **TIME REMAINING** countdown timer in the Control Panel will display the amount of time you have left to complete the exam. The exam timer cannot be paused.

This timer will start counting down immediately after you log into the exam platform. You will have four hours (240 minutes) to answer all 200 questions.

The following notifications will appear in a yellow notification bar under the Control Panel to alert you about the amount of time you have left in the exam:

120 minutes remaining

60 minutes remaining

30 minutes remaining

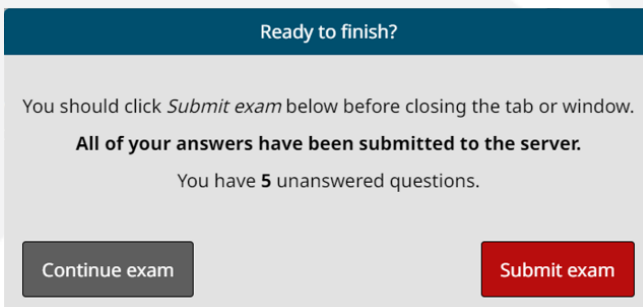
15 minutes remaining

When the timer runs out, you will no longer be able to interact with the exam. A notification window will appear, and you must click the **Submit exam** button before closing the tab or window.



### Finishing the exam

You can end the exam by clicking on the **FINISH** button in the Control Panel. A notification window will appear that will ask you to confirm if you are ready to finish, and will let you know how many questions you have not answered (if there are any).



You must click the **Submit exam** button in the notification window to confirm that you are ready to submit your exam before closing your browser tab or window.

This action will end your exam session. You will not be able to re-launch the exam once it has been submitted.

**NOTE: Do not click the **FINISH** and **Submit exam** buttons until you are completely done with your 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 text, eliminating options, making notes, and flagging questions** can help with comprehension and reasoning.
  - Be aware that you can go back to questions and change your answers until you click the **FINISH** and **Submit exam** buttons.
- **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 stressful, it is important to be constantly aware of how much time you have remaining in the exam, and to 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 Written Component adheres to plain language best practices, thereby making it inclusive and accessible to candidates who do not speak English as their primary language.
- 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 capitalized and bolded (as shown above) to make them easy to identify.
- If, after rechecking the stem for qualifiers, you believe that there is not one correct answer, remember the following:
  - All the information that you need to answer a question is provided. 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 this, 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.
  - You 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 leave your testing environment to take a break – take deep breaths or stretch while you're in your seat. Make sure that 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](#)).
  - Breaks can be used to go to the washroom, or to take relaxation and mobility breaks to help with concentration and improve performance. If you leave your exam environment, 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

#### Before Exam Day

For information on registering for the Written Component, visit the following pages on the CAPR Website:

- [Getting Started](#)
- [Apply for Exam](#)

Make sure that you have read and adhere to the [Exam Policies](#) and the [Rules of Conduct and Examination Security](#).

#### Exam Preparation Checklist

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"/>	<a href="#">PCE Blueprint 2018</a>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">PCE Key Reference List 2023</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 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.</li></ul>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Written Component Information Session</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This is a video recording of the most recent information session on the exam.</li></ul>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Essential Guide for Candidates (this guide)





- Written Component Tutorial (see above for link and log in information)
  - This is a demo site that orients and allows you to experience the exam platform before exam day.
- [Remote Proctoring of the Written Component webpage](#)
- [Written Component Practice Questions](#)
  - This document features 50 Sample Written Component questions and answers.

### Exam Day

If you experience illness, extraordinary circumstances, or any other factor that may affect your performance you are strongly encouraged not to attempt an examination. For more information, see the [Illness or Other Extraordinary Circumstances](#) page on the CAPR website.

### 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: Professional Qualification Program for Physiotherapists \(QPP in French\)](#)
- [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.