

DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICAL THERAPY
COLLEGE OF HEALTH PROFESSIONS
VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

Technical Standards

(Created 10/01; updated 5/2010; updated 9/13; reviewed 2023)

The Department of Physical Therapy at Virginia Commonwealth University has a responsibility to the public to assure that its graduates are prepared to become fully competent and caring physical therapists. In order to fulfill this obligation, physical therapy students must safely and competently demonstrate the technical standards described in both this document and its attachments as well as those in individual course syllabi.

Technical standards refer to the physical and mental abilities, skills, attitudes and behaviors that comprise cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains of physical therapist practice.

A student is required to develop entry-level proficiency across **all three domains** to achieve satisfactory completion of the curriculum and to **develop the qualities** consistent with the profession of physical therapy. Entry-level proficiency is defined as the minimum knowledge, skills and abilities to practice legally, ethically and safely as a licensed physical therapist. Students must meet all of these standards with or without reasonable accommodations. Students who have questions regarding reasonable accommodations should contact the Division for Academic Success (804-828-9782) [Division for Academic Success](#)

A brief description of each domain, along with a behavioral example, is provided below. These examples are representative but not all-inclusive. Additional details are outlined in individual course requirements and in the Department, the College of Health Professions and the University policy and procedure manuals.

Cognitive Domain

The physical therapy student must possess the cognitive abilities necessary to integrate information from courses in the basic, clinical, and behavioral sciences in order to problem-solve effectively during the patient/client management process. In order to achieve entry-level proficiency, students must progress from the basic skills of memorization, comprehension, and application to the advanced skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Students also must be able to measure and calculate as well as use data collected to formulate and test hypotheses. Students must have the ability to communicate proficiently in English in both written and oral forms in a timely manner under high paced stressful environments.

Example:

Physical therapy students must gather and integrate information pertaining to human anatomy and physiology, pathophysiology, medicine and related health care services, as well as psychosocial factors, in order to discern the nature of and to develop and implement a plan of care for a patient/client's actual or potential impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions. Results of the patient/client management process must be communicated professionally orally and/or in written format with other patient care providers, patients and families.

Psychomotor Domain

The physical therapy student must be able to accomplish the physical demands of the work performed by physical therapists, which is categorized as "medium" in difficulty. "Medium work" is defined as: "Exerting 20 to 50 pounds of force occasionally, or 10 to 25 pounds of force frequently, or greater than negligible up to 10 pounds of force constantly to move objects." (Department of Labor)

The physical therapy student also must possess the psychomotor abilities, including gross motor and fine motor skills, to perform the patient/client management elements of examination, evaluation, diagnosis, prognosis, and intervention. This includes possessing the physical abilities to conduct required examination and treatment procedures and communicate with patients about the proposed physical therapy management. This will require walking, standing, bending, and lifting to assist patients, while assuring the student's own safety as well as that of the patient.

Example:

Students must observe, inspect, palpate, test, measure, position, and assist patients/clients with movement in order to determine the extent of, and intervene with, a patient/client's actual or potential impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions.

Successful demonstration of psychomotor skills requires physical therapy students to:

- A. Complete a task within a specified time frame that is consistent with *actual* clinical practice in physical therapy. Actual clinical practice is determined through input from current practicing physical therapists who serve as clinical instructors or as advisors to the program. Time allotments are defined for each course, where relevant, by the:
 - a. Amount of time to execute the psychomotor skill (i.e., set the patient up, calibrate the equipment, apply the equipment, instruct the patient, perform the technique, remove the equipment, etc.)
 - b. Amount of time to perform the overall activity or task (i.e., read the chart, discuss the situation with the patient or instructor, answer questions prior to and at the conclusion of the performance of a psychomotor skill, complete necessary documentation)

- B. Demonstrate the physical capacity (i.e., balance, strength, flexibility) to safely position him or herself prior to assisting a patient/client with movement.
- a. demonstrate the physical capacity (i.e., balance, strength, flexibility) to safely position the patient/client prior to treatment and to assist (i.e., manually guide or lift) the patient/client, as indicated, with:
- Cardiopulmonary resuscitation
 - Balance, coordination, flexibility, strength and functional exercises
 - Positioning
 - Movement in bed
 - Transfers from one surface to another
 - Ambulation on various surfaces
 - Stair climbing
 - Wheelchair mobility

Affective Domain

Students must understand and model the characteristics defined by the ten Professional Behaviors (see below), as adopted by the Department, in order to reflect the values of professional physical therapist practice.

Example:

Physical therapy students must inform and educate patients/clients, and other health care providers, regarding the consequences of actual or potential impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions.

Communication:

Physical Therapy students must be able to speak, hear, and observe patients in order to obtain information, distinguish nonverbal communications, sense changes in mood, and communicate effectively and instruct patients and their families. Students must be able to communicate quickly and effectively in oral and written English and electronically with all members of the health care team.

Student Printed Name

Student Signature

Date