



**UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA**  
FACULTY OF REHABILITATION MEDICINE  
Department of Physical Therapy

**REQUISITE SKILLS AND ABILITIES FOR  
PHYSICAL THERAPY STUDENTS AT THE  
UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA, AND THE  
ACCOMMODATION OF STUDENTS WITH  
DISABILITIES ON CLINICAL PLACEMENT**

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## **PURPOSE**

This document serves as a supplement to the [Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine Student Accommodation Policy and Procedures Manual](#) which is available on the Faculty webpage. It is intended to provide guidance to students contemplating application, and those already admitted to the physical therapy program.

## **STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

The Department of Physical Therapy supports the principle of accommodation for students with disability in the physical therapy program. In collaboration with Student Accessibility Services (SAS), the Department of Physical Therapy endeavours to accommodate students with disabilities. SAS serves prospective and current students at the University of Alberta, whose disabilities involve any number of conditions affecting mobility, vision, hearing, learning, and physical or mental health. The Department will work cooperatively with SAS to determine if the support you require can be accommodated in the physical therapy program. Students who require learning support or assistance for a disability are strongly encouraged and advised to consult with the SAS prior to starting the program.

It is essential that students with disabilities requiring accommodation allow the Department of Physical Therapy adequate time to put services in place. When accommodations are required in clinical placements, the clinical placement site must agree to the accommodations requested. In order for an accommodation plan to be put in place students **MUST** meet with SAS, and the ACCE to discuss accommodation options. Only an accommodation plan developed by SAS in collaboration with the student and the Department of Physical Therapy will be implemented. To review the mandate and services provided by SAS go to:

<http://www.ssds.ualberta.ca/>



The accommodation required by the student cannot cause undue hardship to the Department of Physical Therapy and must be approved by the Chair of the Department of Physical Therapy or designate. Students who receive accommodation must still meet the requirements of courses and the program in order to progress in, and graduate from the physical therapy program. Disability accommodations provide students with disabilities an equitable opportunity to meet the academic standards that enable successful completion of the physical therapy program. Disability accommodations are not a guarantee of success in the Physical Therapy program; even with optimal accommodations, successful completion of the Physical Therapy program is not assured.

For further information regarding accommodations please review the [Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine Student Accommodations Policies and Procedures Manual](#).

## **ACCOMMODATIONS FOR CLINICAL PLACEMENTS**

Please note: students will be required to complete clinical placements outside of their educational area. Students must be prepared to travel throughout the province in order to obtain the placement experiences that are required for graduation. The Department reserves the right to place students where and when it finds necessary to meet the needs of the student's program. Students requiring accommodations for clinical placements may find their programs lengthened in order to meet the accommodation requests.

**Requests for accommodations, and meetings related to accommodations, MUST be made in writing and must be sent from the student's @ualberta email account. The Department of Physical Therapy will consult and collaborate with Student Accessibility Services for all students who require accommodations. Once an accommodation plan has been agreed upon this will be written up, and will be signed by the student, the SAS clinical placement advisor and the Academic Coordinator of Clinical Education, or designate.**



## **REQUISITE SKILLS AND ABILITIES FOR PHYSICAL THERAPY STUDENTS**

The information provided below is intended to assist individuals who are considering entry, or have been recently admitted, into the physical therapy program at the University of Alberta to determine if they have the physical and mental health attributes that will support success in the program. Throughout the program, students must participate in clinical practice courses which require performance of physically and mentally challenging activities that are the same as those skills required of a practicing Physical Therapist (PT). This information is based on the essential skills for Physical Therapists identified by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada:

[https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/es\\_view\\_profile-eng.do?prof\\_id=318&lang=eng](https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/es_view_profile-eng.do?prof_id=318&lang=eng). The information provided below is intended as a summary. For comprehensive information, prospective or current students are encouraged to go to the Human Resources and Skills Development Canada webpage. At the end of this document are questions that will help you determine if you are able to participate in the activities identified.

The physical therapy program requires students to participate in classroom, laboratory and clinical practice settings in order to achieve the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to practice as a physical therapist upon graduation. Physical therapists assess patients/clients to carry out individualised treatment plans, promote health, restore and improve function, alleviate pain and to prevent physical deterioration. As physical therapy students progress in the program they will be required to participate in clinical placements that take place in a variety of clinical settings including hospitals, private clinics, industry and rehabilitation centres.

## **PHYSICAL ABILITIES**

Clinical practice is physically demanding. Physical therapy students must be physically fit to prevent injury to themselves and/or their patient/client.



Physical Therapists must be able to:

- Stand and maintain balance when performing a variety of tasks
- Walk, kneel, bend and sit in order to provide care for patients
- Transfer patients and move equipment
- Use hand-eye coordination, multiple limb coordination and manual dexterity to perform therapeutic manipulations, massages and exercises.
- Have the strength to support and lift patients through mobility training and to manipulate their limbs
- Have enhanced tactile sensory and proprioceptive skills to examine muscle and bone structures and treat patients.
- Effectively communicate with patients/clients, family members and health care team members
- Demonstrate exercise protocols to ensure patient/client understanding

#### Job task planning and organizing

- Physical Therapists plan and organize job tasks to meet the treatment needs of their patients/clients. They set priorities and provide input into the day-to-day scheduling of patients' visits although their actual appointments are often booked by co-workers. Lack of equipment, appointment cancellations, emergencies and other unexpected events force them to frequently reorganize job tasks.
- Physical Therapists play a central role in organizing, planning and scheduling health services and contribute to long-term and strategic planning for their organizations. They may be responsible for assigning tasks to receptionists, secretaries, office administrators, physical therapy assistants and other workers.

#### Significant use of memory

Physical Therapists must have good memory skills. Examples of memory use include:

- Remember security codes to access computers, photocopiers and fax machines.
- Remember activity codes to speed up time log entry and billing processes.



- Remember patients' names and details about their medical histories, physical conditions, injuries and dysfunctions to save time, facilitate communication and show genuine interest.
- Remember assessments and treatments performed during the day, specific problems encountered and recommendations discussed in order to complete patients' records at the end of the day.

### Hearing Abilities

Physical Therapists must be able to:

- Identify and differentiate sounds related to the heart and lung
- Hear and respond to equipment alarms used to monitor patients and ensure patient safety
- Hear verbal communications from frail patients
- Listen for detailed information in team meetings
- Identify facts, opinions and attitudes during client treatment sessions
- Listen to learn in lectures and seminars as part of professional development

### Visual Abilities

Physical Therapists must be able to:

- Read textbooks, journal articles, policy manuals and computer screens
- See details in objects that are less than an arm's length away
- Utilize a computer or write information related to patient assessment and treatment
- Record information on assessment and treatment forms

### Writing Abilities

Physical Therapists must be able to:

- Write legible instructions for patients/clients
- Write legible and accurate assessment, treatment and discharge notes



- Write legible and technically accurate letters to other health professionals using appropriate professional language

### Communication Skills

#### English Language Requirement

Physical Therapy students must demonstrate a high level of proficiency in English. English is the primary language of instruction at the University of Alberta and in the Canadian healthcare system. Physical Therapists require a high level of English language skills to effectively communicate with patients, their caregivers and other healthcare professionals. According to Canadian Language Benchmarking standards, physical therapists require level 8 for speaking, listening and writing and level 9 for reading.

Physical Therapists must be able to:

- Communicate effectively, accurately and clearly in English in rapidly changing environments in both verbal and written format. Communication occurs with patients, family members, and other members of the health care team
- Communicate effectively to provide instructions and direction to those working under them
- Hear and understand the speech of frail individuals
- Have discussions with colleagues, insurance providers, caseworkers, equipment vendors and other healthcare professionals
- Instruct, and be understood by, their patients/clients during treatment sessions and make therapeutic recommendations to family members and other health care team members
- Ask questions to obtain detailed information
- Recognize, interpret and respond to non-verbal communication
- Give presentations to colleagues, health care professionals and community groups.



### Cognitive (Thinking) Skills

Physical therapists must be able to apply information from textbooks and other sources of professional education to variable situations in a safe competent manner.

Physical therapists are required to:

- Solve unanticipated problems (equipment is no longer available, patients miss appointments, treatments don't go as expected)
- Think problems through and make a decision about an appropriate and defensible action (e.g. select physical therapy techniques, approaches and equipment to maintain, improve and restore physical functioning and autonomy of the patient/client, alleviate pain and prevent physical dysfunctions in patients/clients).
- Think critically and evaluate the reasonableness of treatment goals, evaluate physical abilities, evaluate effectiveness of treatments and appropriateness of equipment

### References

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. (n.d.) Essential skills

Physiotherapists NOC 3142

Retrieved from

<http://www10.hrsdc.gc.ca/es/english/ShowProfile.aspx?v=342#ReadingText>

Benchmarking Language Demands of Occupational Therapists and Physiotherapists in Ontario March 2010. Prepared by The Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks.





## **SELF ASSESSMENT OF SKILLS AND ABILITIES NORMALLY REQUIRED FOR PHYSICAL THERAPY STUDENTS.**

These are everyday tasks that mimic some of the skills and abilities that a physical therapy student may be required to perform on a clinical placement and are provided to give an individual an opportunity to determine if he or she has the requisite skills and abilities to complete the physical therapist program at the University of Alberta. While this list sets out some of the main skills and abilities required of a physical therapy student, it does not necessarily include all of the skills, abilities and competencies required of physical therapy students.

After reviewing the preceding information, complete the questions below:



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Question	YES	NO
I am able to easily lift 45 pounds (20 kilograms) for up to 30 seconds		
I am able to stand on my feet for long periods of time (60 minutes) without requiring a break		
I am able to write legibly with a pen		
I am able to perform computer keyboarding		
I am able to hold a cup of liquid steady for 30 seconds		
I am able to perform complex procedures that require hand-eye coordination		
I am able to perform a task that has multiple different steps		
I am able to hear a microwave beep		
I am able to hear a whispered conversation		
I am able to read legible information on a prescription label		
I am able to read information on a computer screen		
I am able to easily comprehend directions given in English in a busy environment		
I am able to communicate with others effectively in spoken English		
I am able to write in English to effectively communicate my observations		
Question	YES	NO
I am able to work effectively in teams		
I am able to use problem solving skills to resolve an issue		
I am able to solve mathematical problems that involve addition, subtraction, multiplication, division and ratios		
I am able to measure distances and record angles		



**If you have been admitted into the physical therapy program at the University of Alberta and you answered “NO” to any of the above questions please contact the Academic Coordinator of Clinical Education (ACCE), Department of Physical Therapy well in advance of starting a clinical or fieldwork placement (ideally as soon as possible, or at least one term prior to the start of such placement), to discuss whether an accommodation is required and can be made in order to facilitate your complete participation in the physical therapy program. As a matter of course, the ACCE will also consult with SAS in this regard, but students are encouraged to speak with SAS themselves.**

**In addition to the abovementioned skills and abilities, should you have any other condition that affects your physical, mental or general health (including but not limited to allergies e.g latex, or lower immunity to disease,) even if it is well managed, or any other reason that may limit the type of placement you may complete, it is strongly advised that you consult with the ACCE and SAS.**