



National Fitness Leadership Alliance

Group Exercise Performance Standards

The National Fitness Leadership Alliance (NFLA) Mission/Mandate is as follows: The NFLA is a Canadian partnership dedicated to developing, promoting and implementing national standards for training and certification of fitness leaders in Canada.

The standards are intended to guide course curriculum development and ongoing education initiatives and will provide a minimum set of standards dealing with the knowledge, skills, and values of basic Fitness Leaders. The Performance Standards are intended, as well, to provide a common base from which to design, validate or upgrade examination and practical assessments.

The Performance Standards are designed to provide the fitness leadership training and certification organizations throughout Canada with:

- A reference point from which both entry-level training and the continuing education for Fitness Leaders can be planned;
- A clear description of measurable knowledge, values and skills that characterize acceptable practices by competent Fitness Leaders;
- A blueprint for nurturing professional standards for Fitness Leaders;
- A means for improving the quality of fitness services offered to consumers.

These Performance Standards are considered appropriate and necessary for training Fitness Leaders to design and instruct safe, enjoyable and effective fitness class experiences with asymptomatic, generally healthy people.

Competency-Based Approach – Training and Development

The key to a competency-based training approach is to design a program focused on the actual tasks to be performed and to create tools to assess the levels of performance. The list of skills, knowledge and values combine to describe the attributes of a competent Fitness Leader that is able to design and deliver safe, effective and enjoyable fitness programs.

Application of the Performance Standards in Human Resource Planning

Recruitment	Assists employers with the recruitment of individuals with the skills to perform the job.
Selection	Assessment of the knowledge, skill and values of prospective fitness leader candidates.
Orientation	Provides a guideline for development of job descriptions and job assignments.
Training	Guides new leaders into areas that may require upgrading and can focus the discussion to provide meaningful and specific feedback to the Fitness Leader.

Definitions

A number of terms have been used repeatedly in the development of these Performance Standards. It is important to have a common understanding of their meaning, and therefore NFLA presents the following definitions:

Training¹	The participation in organized workshops or seminars in a specific field of study.
Certification/ Registration²	The process by which an organization recognizes an individual who has met the qualifications specified by the agency or association.
Fitness Leadership³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health-related; • A contract with expectations of service, safety and quality in meeting the needs of individuals and groups; • An opportunity occurring in a structured setting (e.g. in the gym/studio, in the pool, in the weight room); • Structured in design and delivery; • Demanding of physical performance; • Follower-leader oriented; and • Observable, measurable, and adheres to NFLA Performance Standards and/or Guidelines.
Fitness Leader	An individual who meets criteria outlined in the NFLA Performance Standards plus one specialty area.
Competency	A cluster of inter-related behaviors, knowledge, understandings, attitudes, skills and values that are required for performing effectively in a particular identifiable area. ⁴ Competencies are output driven and are expressed in behavioural terms that are measurable and observable.
Performance	Performance focuses on how well the individual performs the tasks and whether the individual has achieved the desired results.
Knowledge	An understanding of the related theories and concepts one must have in order to accomplish the tasks. This is often referred to as the “mental part of the job”. ⁵
Skills	An ability to apply the knowledge within the work environment. This is the “doing part of the job”.
Values/Beliefs	This is the feeling or the believing part of a job. There has to be an understanding of the “operating values, attitudes or principles associated with the carrying out of the job related activities”.

¹ *Taking Our Pulse: Survey of Fitness Leaders* (p. 29), 1996

² *Taking Our Pulse: Survey of Fitness Leaders* (p. 29), 1996

³ *NFLA's Model* – November 1997

⁴ Suessmuth, P. & West S. (1987) *Competency analysis for trainers, a professional assessment and development guide*. Toronto: Ontario Society for Training and Development.

⁵ Rabinovitz, T. (1990) *The Development and Testing of a Training Needs Assessment Model*.

Leadership Skills (15%)

Performance Standard

The Group Exercise Leader will conduct a safe and effective fitness class using a variety of leadership styles.

Competencies

- a) Demonstrate the ability to create a supportive environment.
- b) Explain the purpose of a given exercise and offer alternatives.
- c) Demonstrate an awareness of participants' feedback during a fitness class by acknowledging individual differences.
- d) Identify and demonstrate effective leadership qualities.
- e) Identify potential challenges that leaders may experience in an exercise class, and describe strategies for accommodating these situations.

Communication Skills (10%)

Performance Standard

The Group Exercise Leader will recognize and demonstrate a variety of effective communication techniques.

Competencies

- a) Demonstrate effective use of visual and verbal cues.
- b) Demonstrate effective feedback techniques.

Review of Anatomy (Fitness Theory)

Performance Standard

The Fitness Leader will demonstrate a basic knowledge of human anatomy.

Competencies

- a) Identify the major muscle groups, including Latissimus Dorsi; Trapezius; Serratus Anterior; Erector Spinae; Deltoids; Rhomboids; Pectoralis Major and Minor; Rectus Abdominus; Internal and External Obliques; Transverse Abdominus; Biceps; Triceps; Iliopsoas; Gluteus Maximus, Medius, and Minimus; Hamstrings (Biceps Femoris, Semitendinosus, Semimembranosus); Quadriceps (Rectus Femoris, Vastus Lateralis, Vastus Intermedius, Vastus Medialis); Rotator Cuff (Subscapularis, Infraspinatus, Teres Minor, Supraspinatus); Sartorius; Gastrocnemius; Soleus; and Tibialis Anterior.
- b) Identify the types of joints, including Fibrous, Cartilaginous and Synovial (e.g., Ball and Socket, Saddle, and Hinge) and describe how bone structure influences joint function.
- c) Identify joint structures and connective tissues, including Joint Capsule, Synovial Membrane, Articular Cartilage, Joint Cavity, Ligaments, and Tendons.
- d) Identify the major bones, including the Femur, Tibia, Fibula, Pelvic Girdle, Vertebrae, Scapula, Ribs, Cranium, Humerus, Radius, Ulna, and Clavicle.
- e) Identify and describe the anatomical limitations to joint range of motion (flexibility).
- f) Describe the various neuromuscular reflexes (e.g., stretch reflex, inverse stretch reflex) and how they affect range of motion and joint stability.

Review of Movement Mechanics (Fitness Theory)

Performance Standard

The Fitness Leader will demonstrate basic knowledge of the biomechanics involved in human movement.

Competencies

- a) Identify the major joint actions, including flexion, extension, abduction, adduction, rotation, circumduction, hyperflexion, hyperextension, dorsi-flexion, plantar-flexion, pronation, supination, eversion, and inversion, protraction, retraction, elevation, depression, transverse abduction and transverse adduction.
- b) Describe how to balance conditioning exercises for the muscles surrounding the major joints.
- c) For a given exercise, identify the prime mover, stabilizing muscles, and the type of contraction for each phase of the exercise.
- d) For a given exercise, identify the stabilizing muscle/muscle groups, and describe their impact on continued exercise execution.
- e) Define and describe muscle actions (e.g., concentric, eccentric, isometric).

- f) Determine the most stable exercise position, and state which of the following three (3) factors is responsible for the increased stability: a) widening the base of support, b) lowering the centre of gravity, or c) moving the centre of gravity over the base of support.
- g) Using the principle of levers, explain how to vary the intensity of an exercise.
- h) Identify the pros and cons associated with static and dynamic stretching and when each is most appropriate.

Exercise Analysis and Risk Management (10%)

Performance Standard

The Fitness Leader will demonstrate an understanding of methods that ensure safe and effective exercise execution.

Competencies

- a) Describe the responsibilities and legal liabilities associated with a participant's medical history, personal injury background, and physical activity/exercise screening.
- b) For a given exercise, analyze its intended and actual purpose, potential risks to joint structures, and modifications or alternative exercises.
- c) Demonstrate an understanding of appropriate emergency procedures and protocols.
- d) Describe a leader's professional limitations regarding physical activity participation for adults who are not apparently healthy.
- e) Demonstrate the principle of exercise progression for a given muscle group.
- f) Describe and demonstrate correct body alignment.

Program Planning (10%)

Performance Standard

The Group Exercise Leader will design an effective program using established methods and training principles.

Competencies

- a) Describe pre-screening strategies for safe program delivery and participation in physical activity (e.g., PAR-Q, informed consent, needs assessment, goals).
- b) Describe ways to assess the effectiveness of a group exercise program.
- c) Demonstrate an understanding of effective design and delivery for group exercise programming.

Class Organization/Design Skills (25%)

Performance Standard

The Group Exercise Leader will design and conduct a safe and effective group exercise class using a variety of class formats.

Competencies

- a) List the advantages and disadvantages of introducing different class formations.
- b) Prepare an effective lesson plan.
- c) Demonstrate the following: continuity of movements, smooth transitions between movements and body positions, progressions, and compatibility with participants' abilities.
- d) Describe shock absorption techniques and neutral body alignment.
- e) Demonstrate and describe the components of group exercise class design, including warm-up, aerobic conditioning, aerobic cool-down, flexibility, muscle conditioning, and cool-down/relaxation.
- f) Describe the common methods used to monitor exercise intensity for each fitness component. Discuss the relevance of using these methods.
- g) Describe and demonstrate various choreography techniques.

Use of Music (15%)

Performance Standard

The Group Exercise Leader will discuss reasons for using music in a fitness class, and demonstrate an understanding of music tempo and how it relates to safe and effective movement.

Competencies

- a) State or list reasons for using music in a fitness class.
- b) Describe the purpose of identifying music tempo when preparing a lesson plan for a fitness class.
- c) Identify music beats per minute that are safe and appropriate for: a circulatory warm-up, low-impact aerobics, high-impact aerobics, step aerobics, walking, jogging on the spot, muscle conditioning, and stretching.
- d) Identify risks associated with: music volume, how music speed influences movement, and participants' range of motion to the pace of music.
- e) Know the music copyright laws with respect to reproduction and playing music in fitness classes.
- f) Identify rhythm, musical phrasing, tempo, melody, and mood of music. Describe how each can be applied in a fitness class.
- g) Identify techniques for reducing the risk of voice injury and hearing loss from excessively loud music.

Monitoring Individual Progress (10%)

Performance Standard

The Group Exercise Leader will describe the various methods for monitoring intensity as they apply to the components of a group exercise class.

Competencies

- a) Describe methods for monitoring exercise intensity.
- b) Describe self-assessment techniques that can help participants monitor changes in fitness status.

Ongoing Professional Development (5%)

Performance Standard

The Group Exercise Leader will demonstrate an understanding of how to pursue continuing education related to fitness leadership.

Competencies

- a) Identify fitness or related organizations; research what continuing education opportunities they currently offer.
- b) Demonstrate an awareness of a Fitness Leader's code of conduct and scope of practice.