



American
Heart
Association.

Instructor Essentials Instructor Candidate Workbook

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General Concepts

Introduction

Welcome to the American Heart Association (AHA) Instructor Essentials Course. Upon completion of the online and in-person portions of this course, you should be able to

- Identify the prerequisites to becoming an AHA Instructor
- Describe the purpose of the *Program Administration Manual (PAM)*
- List the core competencies of an AHA Instructor
- Outline the 5 steps of the AHA Instruction Cycle: prepare, teach, test and remediate, close, and keep current
- Identify resources available to an AHA Instructor
- Use discipline-specific AHA instructor materials: instructor manual, lesson plans, course videos, and skills testing checklists
- Identify discipline-specific course formats available to students for completion of the course
- List discipline-specific course completion requirements
- Describe discipline-specific flexibility options within the course that are available to an AHA Instructor
- Discuss the requirements for maintaining AHA Instructor status
- Use effective AHA Instructor feedback and remediation techniques
- Demonstrate the administration of skills testing with the use of the skills testing checklists
- Describe the role of a CPR Coach (Basic Life Support [BLS], Advanced Cardiovascular Life Support [ACLS], and Pediatric Advanced Life Support [PALS])
- Describe the need to measure chest compression fraction (BLS, ACLS, and PALS)
- Demonstrate prebriefing and structured debriefing skills (ACLS and PALS only)
- Demonstrate facilitating learning and testing stations (ACLS and PALS only)
- Demonstrate facilitating the Bradycardia and Megacode Learning Stations (ACLS only)
- Demonstrate facilitating the case scenario skills testing (PALS only)

AHA Mission

Our mission is to be a relentless force for a world of longer, healthier lives. That single purpose drives all we do. The need for our work is beyond question.

The AHA is the United States' oldest and largest voluntary health organization dedicated to fighting heart disease and stroke. Heart disease is the No. 1 killer worldwide, and stroke ranks second globally. The AHA is the trusted leader in emergency cardiovascular care (ECC) and trains people around the world to save lives by performing cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and first aid.

ECC Guiding Philosophy

- Improve the Chain of Survival in every community
- Increase quality and timeliness of materials
- Identify and expand training
- Document effectiveness
- Improve efficiency

The goal of the ECC Programs department is to be the world's premier resuscitation organization and serve the global community of scientists, health care professionals, and other citizens as a critical leader in the discovery,

processing, and transfer of resuscitation science. ECC programs, products, and services focus on maximizing survival from life-threatening cardiovascular emergencies.

Turning Science Into Training

The process for developing training materials that instructors use to teach is elaborate. The *2025 International Liaison Committee on Resuscitation Consensus on Science With Treatment Recommendations* summarizes the international consensus, interpreting tens of thousands of peer-reviewed resuscitation studies. The *2025 AHA Guidelines for CPR and ECC* used the 2025 Consensus on Science With Treatment Recommendations to guide the development of recommendations.

The 2025 Guidelines are based on an extensive review of resuscitation literature and many debates and discussions by international resuscitation experts and members of the AHA ECC Committee, subcommittees, and writing groups. The AHA Guideline writing groups include a broad representation of the medical community, with experts selected from a wide array of scientific backgrounds, geographic regions, sexes, races and ethnicities, intellectual perspectives, experience levels, and scopes of clinical practice. Each writing group reviewed all relevant and current AHA guidelines for CPR and ECC, pertinent Consensus on Science With Treatment Recommendations evidence and recommendations from 2020 through 2025, all relevant International Liaison Committee on Resuscitation evidence updates, and all AHA evidence evaluation worksheets to determine if current guidelines should be reaffirmed, revised, or retired or if new recommendations were needed. Following evaluation of all relevant evidence, the writing groups drafted, reviewed, and approved recommendations, assigning to each recommendation a Class of Recommendation (ie, strength) and Level of Evidence (ie, quality). The process for recommendation development followed was as previously described and set forth by the American College of Cardiology and AHA Joint Committee on Clinical Practice Guidelines.

After guidelines development, a wide array of volunteer health care professionals collaborate with AHA staff and discipline-specific consultants to develop text and video content. That content is then integrated into the training materials used to teach AHA courses. Courses are tested with their target audiences, including members of the AHA Training Network, and feedback from the test courses is incorporated into the final products used for training.

The AHA is at the forefront of the evidence evaluation process, and the resulting evidence-based science informs every product we create.

The 2025 Guidelines are written as recommendations. No country or organization is required to follow the guidelines, and individual organizations determine which guidelines to adopt. Globally, local protocols and regulations can dictate what organizations must do.

The Instructor-AHA Partnership

The Instructor-AHA partnership is critical to the success of every AHA course. AHA Instructors have the unique opportunity to affect the survival of real people by helping to enhance student skills through learning and practice. AHA Instructors are the hands-on implementers who teach, coach, evaluate, remediate, and facilitate the mastery of course concepts and skills.



AHA Instruction Cycle

Instructors should follow the 5 steps of the AHA Instruction Cycle:

1. Prepare
2. Teach
3. Test and remediate
4. Close
5. Keep current

More information on each step of the AHA Instruction Cycle can be found in the online portion of the Instructor Essentials Course.

Part 1: Prepare

Preparing Yourself

Key Terms

Familiarize yourself with this list of terms.

Atlas: The Atlas website (atlas.heart.org) is the digital platform that supports AHA ECC training and education. Instructors can use this platform to access up-to-date resources and reference information about AHA ECC programs and science. All AHA Instructors are required to join Atlas.

Course completion card: This card is given to students who complete the AHA-defined course completion requirements. Only an AHA Training Center (TC) is authorized to issue course completion cards.

Emergency Cardiovascular Care (ECC): This global business unit of the AHA is responsible for publishing the official *AHA Guidelines for CPR and ECC* and providing lifesaving CPR, first aid, and advanced cardiovascular care training.

Faculty: These are the experienced instructors who teach Instructor Essentials Courses.

- **Training Faculty (TF):** These faculty serve as quality assurance and educational leaders for TCs. They are appointed by the TC Coordinator (TCC) with whom they have primary alignment. TF teach instructor courses and then monitor and mentor the instructors at the TC. The TF designation does not transfer between TCs.
- **Regional Faculty:** Internationally, these faculty are appointed by the AHA and serve as science and curriculum experts to TCs and AHA Instructors. The United States does not have Regional Faculty.

Instructor: This individual has met the AHA requirements for teaching a specific provider course. Instructor requirements vary, depending on the course.

Instructor candidate: This individual is in the process of completing the requirements to become an AHA Instructor.

Instructor Community: This online community is exclusively for the AHA Training Network to network with peers, share best practices, and provide feedback to the AHA. The Instructor Community is accessed through Atlas.

Instructor number: This unique number is assigned to an individual once they have received their instructor card and aligned with a TC or Training Site on Atlas. This number will be on their instructor card, and they can also find it on their Atlas home page. Each person should have only one instructor number, regardless of how many disciplines they teach.

Program Administration Manual (PAM): This manual is a guide to the rules, regulations, and requirements for AHA Instructors, TCs, TF, and other people involved in AHA ECC programs. The PAM is an online document available on Atlas and is updated regularly. For the most current PAM version and information, always refer directly to Atlas.

Provider courses: These courses are intended for health care professionals and other personnel who need to know how to perform CPR and other life-support skills in a wide variety of settings.

Student: This term refers to any participant in a provider course.

Training Center (TC): TCs help deliver ECC educational courses and strengthen the Chain of Survival. All AHA Instructors must be aligned with a TC.

Training Center Coordinator (TCC): The TCC is the person who oversees and assumes responsibility for a TC. The TCC can answer questions related to teaching and administration of AHA courses. The TCC is the first point of contact for information about AHA training programs.

Training Network: The AHA Training Network is a network of all AHA TCs, Training Sites, and Instructors.

How to Find Information

The AHA is a large organization with many departments, guides, and manuals. If you need specific information or have questions, use the following resources:

- Your instructor manual and course provider manual
- Atlas (atlas.heart.org)
- The PAM (cpr.heart.org/en/pam)
- Your TCC
- Your TF

The Role of TCs and TF

TCs are responsible for administering courses and managing instructors. They provide instructors with essential support, including updates, course materials, and AHA course completion cards. TCs also ensure that all courses conducted within their purview meet AHA standards and are delivered as intended.

Each TC has at least one TF member in each discipline. TFs are subject matter experts and serve as valuable resources for instructors, offering guidance and support in their respective disciplines.

While the PAM outlines the official AHA policies, each TC may have additional policies that expand on these standards to help effectively meet AHA goals. TCs may have specific policies that provide additional detail on how to

- Set up, register, and advertise classes through the TC
- Communicate with students
- Properly clean CPR manikins
- Resolve disputes with students or with the TC

Preparing Your Materials

How to Get the Materials That You Need to Teach

All instructors are required to have their own copy of the instructor manual for each course they will teach. The instructor manual has a checklist of everything instructors need to prepare for and teach a course.

Once you complete your instructor training, you'll join the global network of AHA Instructors through Atlas. In addition to your instructor manual, you'll need access to various administrative documents and forms to support your teaching responsibilities. Here is a summary of some useful forms you'll find on Atlas:

- **Sample precourse letters:** Use the precourse letter templates to provide direction and information to your students about a course. Send a precourse letter to the students well in advance of the course.
- **Sample agendas:** The course agendas are intended to be used as written and guide the delivery of the courses.

- **Skills testing checklists:** Every instructor-led AHA course requires hands-on skills testing. Use the skills testing checklists to ensure consistent, uniform testing of your students.
- **Course rosters:** Use these to keep track of students. After each course, you'll need to submit the completed roster for that course to your TC. By submitting your rosters or signing your name as an instructor or an assisting instructor, you are verifying that the listed students have successfully met all requirements for course completion. The rosters are available on Atlas or from your TCC and are also available as electronic forms. Your TCC or TF will provide more information on what roster format you should use.
- **Course evaluations:** Every student receives a digital course evaluation as part of their eCard claim process; however, you can also have your students complete a written course evaluation at the end of a course. Course evaluation forms are available on Atlas or from your TCC. Your TCC or TF will provide more information on what evaluation format you should use.

How to Use Exams

The AHA's online exams are the preferred method for assessing students because online exams enhance security and allow the AHA to collect key performance data. Refer to Atlas or your TCC for more information about how to use online exams.

While using online exams is preferred, there may be instances in which using paper exams is necessary—for example, when exams cannot be completed online. You can obtain paper exams from your TCC. Ensure that the appropriate exams, whether online or paper, are ready before you teach the course.

All exams must be kept secure. Follow your TC's procedures for requesting exams and maintaining exam security. Refer to your instructor manual for more information on exam security.

How to Get Equipment

You must ensure that you have all of the equipment required to teach a course. Refer to your instructor manual for a list of equipment required for that course. Contact your TCC and follow the TC policies for borrowing equipment and reserving classroom space, if necessary.

Before teaching the course, ensure that all equipment is working properly and in good condition.

How to Get Skills Testing Documents

The documents you need for skills testing can be found in your instructor manual and on Atlas or can be obtained from your TCC.

How to Get Course Completion Cards

Your students' course completion cards are issued by your TCC. Learn your TC's process and policy for obtaining course completion cards, and record this information in the Useful Information section of this guide for future reference.

Heartsaver® course completion cards are available as both printed cards and digital eCards. BLS, ACLS, and PALS course completion cards are only available as eCards. Using eCards has several benefits:

- Enhanced security, including a 3-point verification process—by the TCC, instructor, and student—for the card to be issued to and claimed by a student
- Electronic population of card details, editable only by the TCC or AHA Customer Service
- Easy verification by employers through AHA eCards verification (ecards.heart.org/student/myecards) to prove issuance by a valid TC and instructor aligned with that TC

Part 2: Teach

Instructor Core Competencies

The online portion of the Instructor Essentials Course reviews the following core competencies:

- **Skills:** Instructors must demonstrate proficiency in all the skills of the disciplines they teach.
- **Course delivery:** Instructors must teach AHA materials as outlined in the appropriate instructor manual and lesson plans.
- **Testing:** Instructors must be able to test students accurately and objectively.
- **Professionalism:** Instructors need to maintain high standards of ethics and professionalism.
- **Program administration:** Instructors need to manage time, space, materials, and course paperwork in compliance with AHA guidelines.

AHA Instructors should exhibit all of these competencies when they are teaching provider courses.

Using Lesson Plans

For many classes taught at the national and international levels, ensuring consistency can be a challenge. To improve consistency among AHA classes, customized lesson plans for each discipline indicate which material needs to be covered and when. Using the lesson plans and videos enables AHA Instructors to ensure consistency from class to class, no matter their location.

Lesson Plans

All AHA ECC instructor manuals include lesson plans that are intended to

- Help you as an instructor to facilitate your courses
- Ensure consistency from course to course
- Help you focus on the main objectives for each lesson
- Explain your responsibilities during the course

Your lesson plans were created to be used before and during courses and during skills practice and testing sessions, as noted in the Table.

Table. How to Use Lesson Plans

When	How to use
Before class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review your lesson plans, making notes of anything you want to emphasize on the basis of your students' roles and environment. • Identify objectives for each lesson. • Define your role for each lesson plan. • Gather the resources needed for each lesson.
During class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow each lesson plan as you conduct the course. • Remind students what each video segment covers. • Make sure you have all the resources, equipment, and supplies ready for each lesson. • Help all students achieve the objectives identified for each lesson. • Encourage students to work in teams and to help each other. • Create an atmosphere that encourages peak performance and improvement that will carry over into clinical practice.

When	How to use
During practice before a skills test	A student may have a question about a certain part of the skills they will be tested on. The lesson plans serve as a resource for you when answering those questions.

You'll learn more about how to use lesson plans during the practice and role-play sessions in the classroom portion of this course.

How to Assess and Strengthen Skills Performance

Assessing and strengthening students' skills performance are the most critical responsibilities of an AHA Instructor. While AHA materials are grounded in science and research, it's the practical application of hands-on skills that saves lives. Instructors are responsible for helping students learn and practice these critical skills.

To help students learn, use practice scenarios that closely reflect real-life situations relevant to them. For example, if you were training emergency medical technicians, you could tailor their training to them by having them practice CPR on the floor because that's where emergency medical technicians often perform CPR during an emergency response.

To Assess Student Skills

In the Heartsaver and BLS courses, use the practice-while-watching videos to demonstrate correct skills performance and allow students time to practice while following each video demonstration. Additionally, give students the option to practice without the video. Observe students' skills performance and provide positive, corrective feedback when opportunities to improve are identified.

When you are preparing for skills testing in any course, be sure to use both the critical skills descriptors and the skills testing checklists. The critical skills descriptors outline all the essential actions a student must be able to perform. The skills testing checklists ensure a uniform and objective approach to testing. You should be very familiar with all of the skills testing critical skills descriptors and skills testing checklists.

Fill out the skills testing checklist while the student performs the skills. Use the skills testing critical skills descriptors to determine whether the student has demonstrated each step of a skill correctly, paying close attention to what is described and the sequence of steps. When applicable, it is also important to pay attention to how each team member communicates and functions within a team. Review the skills testing checklist to identify successfully demonstrated skills and opportunities to improve skills performance.

To Improve Student Performance

While the students are practicing, offer them positive and corrective feedback. Begin by highlighting what they are doing well. Be specific: Describe their actions and behaviors that demonstrate correct understanding. Make sure the students understand what they are doing correctly. Then, identify areas where their skills could improve and offer constructive suggestions for such improvement.

Use the skills testing checklist while the students practice to provide directed feedback and assure competence in the skills that will be tested. Students should understand exactly what they will be tested on so that they can best improve their skills as needed.

The AHA requires the use of an instrumented directive feedback device or manikin in all AHA courses that teach the skills of adult CPR. According to the *2025 AHA Guidelines for CPR and ECC*, the use of feedback devices is effective in improving CPR performance during training by providing objective feedback to students and instructors during practice. Be familiar with the feedback devices you will be using while teaching.

Part 3: Test and Remediate

Testing Accurately

Skills testing will always be conducted in person, either during an instructor-led course or after students have completed the online portion of a blended-learning course. In the case of a blended-learning course, after the students have completed the online portion, they will complete a hands-on skills session either by attending an instructor-led session that focuses on meaningful skills practice, debriefing and discussions, team scenarios, discussions of local protocols, and skills testing or using a HeartCode®-compatible manikin system. For more specific instructions and details on how to conduct skills testing, refer to the Instructor Essentials Course video and the respective instructor manual for each discipline.

Instructors can sometimes feel pressured to pass students who have not demonstrated one or more skills successfully. However, it's important to make sure that the students are properly prepared and can perform quality CPR in addition to any required advanced techniques upon completion of the course. Use objective feedback from CPR feedback devices to encourage student practice and to indicate when students may be ready for skills testing. Students must successfully complete all course completion requirements to receive a course completion card.

If a student is unable to successfully complete skills testing because of a disability, they should be given written documentation of class attendance, with a listing of what testing was successfully completed. The student should then provide a copy of this documentation to their employer, if needed. For BLS students with disabilities, there is an option to provide them with an Advisor: BLS course completion card. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that the Advisor: BLS card will be accepted by their employer.

Remediation

In this context, remediation is the process of providing additional instruction and support to students who do not successfully demonstrate all required skills or knowledge during a skills test or written exam. It is an opportunity for students to review and address specific areas of difficulty to help close knowledge or performance gaps. If necessary, instructors guide students through focused remediation activities, after which the students are given another opportunity to successfully complete the skills test or exam. Remediation should occur as soon as possible and **must be completed within 30 days** after the original testing attempt to maintain course validity and ensure timely skill acquisition.

Some of the ways you might provide remediation include

- Assisting students to identify and improve skills weaknesses
- Requesting additional skills practice
- Explaining information in a different way
- Assigning additional reading of specific sections in the materials
- Referring students to other courses or instructors

Part 4: Close

Closing the Course

To properly close the course, it's crucial that you follow your TC's requirements for the course completion paperwork. You can expect to submit the completed roster, course evaluations, and other relevant paperwork. Refer to your instructor manual and your TC policies for more details on required paperwork for your discipline.

After each course, review your evaluations for strengths and areas for improvement. Consider how to address areas for improvement. Keep the course evaluations for your records, as directed by your TCC and the PAM.

Part 5: Keep Current

Resources for Course and Science Updates

Whenever AHA materials are updated, you will need to complete an update on the changes to continue teaching. Your TCC will tell you how to complete mandatory updates. This information will also be available on Atlas.

The AHA publishes a newsletter for instructors, the *ECC Beat*, which is located on Atlas. Your dashboard on Atlas will show you anything new that's been posted, including training memos and bulletins. Reading updates, memos, bulletins, and the *ECC Beat* will keep you up to date as an instructor.

When possible, instructors should follow the performance and outcomes of students in real emergency situations to help focus on problem areas and apply these lessons to future teaching.

Maintaining Instructor Status

To teach AHA courses, instructors must maintain their instructor status. For details on maintaining status, refer to your instructor manual, PAM, or TCC.

Thank you for taking this course. We look forward to your joining the global AHA Instructor Network.



Useful Information

Complete each of the following lines with the appropriate information to refer to after this course.

My TCC is _____

The best way to contact my TCC is _____

My TC ID number, which will be on the provider cards for the courses I teach, is _____

The best person to contact about course cards and paperwork is _____

For questions about AHA course content, I should contact _____

These are the steps for administering exams at my TC: _____

These are the steps for getting course completion cards from my TCC: _____

These are the steps to renew my instructor card with my TCC: _____

TCs have agreements with the AHA about where, geographically, they can offer classes. My TC's area is _____



Quick Self-Quiz

Write your responses in the spaces below.

What is the PAM?

Where do I get skills testing checklists, rosters, and other course resources?

How do I maintain instructor status?

How does an instructor become TF?

Where do I find information on remediation?

FAQ

Q: Do I need to have a current provider card to be an instructor?

A: To become an AHA Instructor, instructor candidates are required to have a current provider card in the discipline they want to teach. Current AHA Instructors are not required by the AHA to maintain a provider card, but it may be a requirement from your TC, place of employment, or licensing or credentialing agency for your state or profession (such as for nursing or emergency medical services).

Q: What should I do if I am scheduled to teach a class but cannot make it?

A: Promptly notify your TCC or TF. If no replacement can be found for you, make reasonable attempts to contact the students.

Q: What should I do if someone is injured during a course?

A: If it is an emergency, first call 911. Provide appropriate first aid and assistance and then contact your TCC promptly for further guidance.

Q: What should I do if one of my students has a disability?

A: Reasonable accommodations can be made for students with disabilities. Consult with your TCC or TF for further guidance on requests for accommodation. Each student must be able to successfully complete all course requirements (skills and exams as indicated) to receive a course completion card.

The TCC can also offer Advisor: BLS to the student. The Advisor: BLS course materials and completion cards were developed to accommodate students who pass the cognitive portion of the HeartCode BLS Provider Course but cannot independently perform the physical skills of CPR. By successfully advising others how to perform CPR, Advisor: BLS students with disabilities can receive an Advisor: BLS card. Students should check to make sure that their workplaces will accept these cards. Advisor: BLS cards are available exclusively to authorized TCs for issuance in accordance with AHA policy.

For more information, contact your TCC or TF.

Q: How much should we charge for the courses?

A: The AHA does not set fees for courses. Contact your TCC.

Q: Is there a dress code for teaching courses?

A: All AHA Instructors should have good hygiene and dress appropriately for the course being taught. Your TCC may also have specific guidance.

Q: Is there an age requirement for students?

A: The AHA does not set an age requirement for its courses. Students must be mature enough emotionally and physically to meet all of the necessary requirements for their specific courses.

Q: Is there an age requirement to become an AHA instructor?

A: The AHA has set a minimum age limit of 18 years to become an AHA Instructor.

Q: My instructor card has expired. Is there a grace period?

A: The AHA does not recognize a grace period for courses for instructors (or for providers). Check with your TCC for special exceptions that it can take into consideration.

Q: I want to use the AHA or authorized provider course logo on flyers or other forms for my class. Can I?

A: Consult the PAM or contact your TCC for assistance.

Q: Can I offer continuing education credit for the courses I teach? Does the AHA offer continuing education credit for all AHA courses?

A: Contact your TCC for assistance. The AHA offers continuing education credit for many courses; for more information, visit the information pages on cpr.heart.org and eLearning.heart.org.

Q: I've moved. How do I find a new TC to teach with in the United States?

A: Find TCs in your area by using the Find a Training Center tool on atlas.heart.org.

1. Select Find Training Center.
6. Provide your location to search in your area.
7. Contact these organizations directly.

Q: If I live outside of the United States, how do I find an International TC to teach with?

A: If you live outside of the United States, you will need to locate an AHA International TC in your geographic area. You can search for International TCs on atlas.heart.org. Once you identify an International TC, contact its TCC directly to ask if they are accepting new instructors for alignment. The application can be found and completed at cpr.heart.org/en/international.

Q: Can I teach in Canada?

A: US instructors are not permitted to teach in Canada unless they are aligned with a Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada training program. Refer to heartandstroke.ca for more information.

Q: How do I teach internationally (other than in Canada)?

A: According to the *Program Administration Manual—International Version*, the AHA's preference is to direct training to local International TCs whenever possible. If there is no local TC, instructors can travel from a TC in a different country to offer provider training **after they have obtained approval from the AHA's ECC International Department**.

To obtain approval to teach courses internationally, an applicant must first submit an International Training Application. The application must be filled out completely and submitted at least 6 weeks before the start of the proposed training. Approval is not automatic. The applicant must also submit a letter of support from their TC as well as copies of the AHA Instructor cards of all instructors participating in the training. Applications must be completed upon submission.

The International Training Application can be found at cpr.heart.org/en/international/international-training-application-form.

AHA Instructors must comply with the standards in the current International PAM as well as the discipline-specific instructor manual, regardless of where the course is taught.