

International Coach Federation

Minimum Skills Requirements for ACC Credentials

ICF believes that it has an obligation to support its member coaches in the growth of their skill set. Every master coach started as a beginner, progressed through an intermediate level of skill, and became masterful, where the hallmark is always the complete evidence of the coach's role as learner about the client. The ICF credentialing process with its three levels is a reflection of the continuum of growth that each coach undergoes.

This document has been created to support coaches with preparation for the ACC credentialing performance evaluation. We also hope that this document will assist mentor coaches supporting and supervising these coaches; and coach training schools undertaking accreditation of their programs. The aim is to help coaches successfully complete the ACC performance evaluation and also to help them continue to develop their skill set as coaches.

The document's structure will provide those seeking a credential an understanding regarding what assessors evaluate in relation to each competency, the minimum level of skill necessary to successfully demonstrate an ACC level of competency, and also help them understand what non-coaching behaviors might prevent successful completion of the ACC performance evaluation process. We hope the document helps each individual coach answer the following queries: What does it mean to be an ACC coach? What do ICF assessors listen for when they are evaluating an ACC coach? As I progress on my coaching journey, what are my strengths and what are the skill set areas that I need to grow to pass the ACC performance evaluation?

Finally, ICF strongly believes that clients receive real and substantive value from ACC coaches. That value rests always in the coach's complete attention to the client and what the client wishes to accomplish as well as the coach's complete support of the client's agenda. We honor each and every coach on their journey and look forward to supporting your path of growth as a coach and your credentialing path within ICF.

1. Meeting Ethical Guidelines and Professional Standards—Understanding of coaching ethics and standards and ability to apply them appropriately in all coaching situations

a. Understands and exhibits in own behaviors the ICF Standards of Conduct

- b. Understands and follows all ICF Ethical Guidelines
- c. Clearly communicates the distinctions between coaching, consulting, psychotherapy and other support professions
- d. Refers client to another support professional as needed, knowing when this is needed and the available resources

Important Note: Familiarity with the code of ethics and its application is required for all levels of coaching and the standard for demonstrating a strong ethical understanding of coaching is similar and rigorous for all levels of ICF credentialing. An applicant will pass this competency if they demonstrate a knowledge of the coaching conversation that is focused on inquiry and exploration and if the conversation is based on present and future issues. An applicant will not pass this competency if the applicant focuses primarily on telling the client what to do or how to do it (consulting mode) or if the conversation is based primarily in the past, particularly the emotional past (therapeutic mode). In addition, ICF notes that if an applicant is not clear on basic foundation exploration and evoking skills that underlie the ICF definition of coaching, that lack of clarity in skill use will be reflected in skill level demonstrated in some of the other competencies listed below. For example, if a coach almost exclusively gives advice or indicates that a particular answer chosen by the coach is what the client should do, trust and intimacy, coaching presence, powerful questioning, creating awareness, and client generated actions and accountability will not be present and a credential at any level would be denied.

2. Establishing the Coaching Agreement—Ability to understand what is required in the specific coaching interaction and to come to an agreement with the prospective and new client about the coaching process and relationship

- a. Understands and effectively discusses with the client the guidelines and specific parameters of the coaching relationship (e.g., logistics, fees, scheduling, inclusion of others if appropriate)
- b. Reaches agreement about what is appropriate in the relationship and what is not, what is and is not being offered, and about the client's and coach's responsibilities
- c. Determines whether there is an effective match between his/her coaching method and the needs of the prospective client

Key Skills Evaluated: 1) The depth of creation of agreement for session; 2) The coach's ability to partner and the depth of partnering with the client in the creation of agreement, measures of success, and issues to be addressed

At an ACC level, the minimum standard of skill that must be demonstrated to achieve a passing score for establishing the coaching agreement is that the coach asks the client what they want to work on and the coach attends to that agenda throughout the coaching.

A coach will not receive a passing score for establishing the coaching agreement on the ACC performance evaluation if the coach chooses the topic for the client or if the coach does not coach around the topic the client has chosen.

3. Establishing Trust and Intimacy with the Client— Ability to create a safe, supportive environment that produces ongoing mutual respect and trust

- a. Shows genuine concern for the client's welfare and future
- b. Continuously demonstrates personal integrity, honesty, and sincerity
- c. Establishes clear agreements and keeps promises
- d. Demonstrates respect for client's perceptions, learning style, personal being
- e. Provides ongoing support for and champions new behaviors and actions, including those involving risk-taking and fear of failure
- f. Asks permission to coach client in sensitive, new areas

Key Skills Evaluated: 1) The coach's depth of connection to the client; 2) The coach's depth of demonstration of trust in the client and the client's processes of thinking, creating; 3) The coach's willingness to be completely comfortable with their own authenticity with the client

At an ACC level, the minimum standard of skill that must be demonstrated to receive a passing score for establishing trust and intimacy with the client is that the coach shows genuine concern for the client and is attuned to client's perceptions, learning style, and personal being at a basic level. The coach must also demonstrate an ability to provide ongoing support for new behaviors and actions at a basic level.

A coach will not receive a passing score for establishing trust and intimacy with the client on the ACC performance evaluation if the coach demonstrates significant interest in the coach's view of the situation rather than the client's view of the situation, does not seek information from the client about the client's thinking around the situation, does not seek information about the client's goals regarding the situation, or the attention seems to be on the coach's own performance or demonstration of knowledge about the topic.

4. Coaching Presence—Ability to be fully conscious and create a spontaneous relationship with the client, employing a style that is open, flexible and confident

- a. Is present and flexible during the coaching process, dancing in the moment
- b. Accesses own intuition and trusts one's inner knowing – “goes with the gut”
- c. Is open to not knowing and takes risks
- d. Sees many ways to work with the client, and chooses in the moment what is most effective
- e. Uses humor effectively to create lightness and energy
- f. Confidently shifts perspectives and experiments with new possibilities for own action
- g. Demonstrates confidence in working with strong emotions, and can self-manage and not be overpowered or enmeshed by client's emotions

Key Skills Evaluated: 1) The coach's depth of partnership with the client; 2) The coach's depth of observation of and use of the whole of the client in the coaching process

At an ACC level, the minimum standard of skill that must be demonstrated to receive a passing score for coaching presence is that the coach attends to client's agenda, seeks information from the client about that agenda, is responsive to that information as it relates particularly to actions to achieve the client's agenda, and is attentive to what actions the client is taking in relation to agenda.

The ICF notes that trust and intimacy and presence are quite related competencies. Therefore, a coach will not receive a passing score for coaching presence on the ACC performance evaluation if the coach demonstrates significant interest in the coach's view of the situation rather than exploring the client's view of the situation, does not seek information from the client about the

client's thinking around the situation or is unresponsive to that information, does not seek information about the client's goals regarding the situation, or is unresponsive to that information, or the attention seems to be on the coach's own performance or demonstration of knowledge about the topic.

5. Active Listening—Ability to focus completely on what the client is saying and is not saying, to understand the meaning of what is said in the context of the client's desires, and to support client self-expression

- a. Attends to the client and the client's agenda, and not to the coach's agenda for the client
- b. Hears the client's concerns, goals, values and beliefs about what is and is not possible
- c. Distinguishes between the words, the tone of voice, and the body language
- d. Summarizes, paraphrases, reiterates, mirrors back what client has said to ensure clarity and understanding
- e. Encourages, accepts, explores and reinforces the client's expression of feelings, perceptions, concerns, beliefs, suggestions, etc.
- f. Integrates and builds on client's ideas and suggestions
- g. "Bottom-lines" or understands the essence of the client's communication and helps the client get there rather than engaging in long descriptive stories
- h. Allows the client to vent or "clear" the situation without judgment or attachment in order to move on to next steps

Key Skills Evaluated: 1) The coach's depth of hearing what the client says in relations to the client's agenda; 2) The coach's ability to hear on multiple levels including both the emotional and substantive content of the words; 3) The coach's ability to hear underlying beliefs, thinking, creating, and learning that are occurring for the client including recognizing incongruities in language, emotions, and actions; 4) The coach's ability to hear the client's language and to encourage the client to deepen descriptive language for themselves

At an ACC level, the minimum standard of skill that must be demonstrated to receive a passing score for active listening is that the coach hears what the client says in relation to the client's agenda, responds to it in relation to the

client's agenda, and the listening is focused on helping the client achieve their agenda.

A coach will not receive a passing score for active listening on the ACC performance evaluation if the coach does not demonstrate listening that is focused on and responding to what the client says or the coach's response is not related to what the client is trying to achieve. The coach will not receive a passing grade on the ACC performance evaluation if the coach appears to be listening for the place where the coach can demonstrate their knowledge about the topic or tell the client what to do about the topic.

6. Powerful Questioning—Ability to ask questions that reveal the information needed for maximum benefit to the coaching relationship and the client

- a. Asks questions that reflect active listening and an understanding of the client's perspective
- b. Asks questions that evoke discovery, insight, commitment or action (e.g., those that challenge the client's assumptions)
- c. Asks open-ended questions that create greater clarity, possibility or new learning
- d. Asks questions that move the client towards what they desire, not questions that ask for the client to justify or look backward

Key Skills Evaluated: 1) The coach's depth of questioning that evokes the core issues that are either contained in or underlie the client's agenda; 2) The coach's ability to explore with and to evoke exploration by the client of the emotional and substantive content of the words; 3) The coach's ability to explore with and evoke exploration by the client of the underlying beliefs and means of thinking, creating, and learning that are occurring for the client; 4) The depth at which the coach's questions provide a thinking space for and elicit new perspectives from the client

At an ACC level, the minimum standard of skill that must be demonstrated to receive a passing score for powerful questioning is that the coach uses inquiry versus telling methodology. This includes exploring what issues exist for the client versus telling the client what the issues are or suggesting solutions. Questions must attend to the client's agenda and seek information about that agenda and are oriented to solving issues set by the client.

A coach will not receive a passing score for powerful questioning on the ACC performance evaluation if the coach does not focus on an inquiring versus telling

methodology, if the majority of questions contain already pre-determined answers by the coach, or if the questions attend to an agenda or issues not set by the client, but set by the coach.

7. Direct Communication—Ability to communicate effectively during coaching sessions, and to use language that has the greatest positive impact on the client

- a. Is clear, articulate and direct in sharing and providing feedback
- b. Reframes and articulates to help the client understand from another perspective what he/she wants or is uncertain about
- c. Clearly states coaching objectives, meeting agenda, purpose of techniques or exercises
- d. Uses language appropriate and respectful to the client (e.g., non-sexist, non-racist, non-technical, non-jargon)
- e. Uses metaphor and analogy to help to illustrate a point or paint a verbal picture

Key Skills Evaluated: 1) The ease, directness, and depth with which the coach shares perspectives, thoughts, intuition, and feedback; 2) Whether the coach appears to have any attachment to the coach's perspective; 3) The coach's effective use of the client's language and learning models; 4) The breadth of the invitation the coach gives to the client to share his/her own perspectives, thoughts, intuition, and feedback

At an ACC level, the minimum standard of skill that must be demonstrated to receive a passing score for direct communication is that the coach is direct at times throughout the session and the communication attends to the client's agenda. The coach should not appear attached to a particular outcome or solution or take the communication away from the client's stated agenda without discussion with and permission from the client.

A coach will not receive a passing score for direct communication on the ACC performance evaluation if the coach does not attend to the client's agenda, changes the agenda without input from the client, or appears attached to a particular outcome or solution. The coach will also not receive a passing grade on the ACC performance evaluation if the communication frequently occurs in a convoluted, meandering, or circuitous manner.

8. Creating Awareness—Ability to integrate and accurately evaluate multiple sources of information, and to make interpretations that help the client to gain awareness and thereby achieve agreed-upon results

- a. Goes beyond what is said in assessing client's concerns, not getting caught up in the client's description
- b. Invokes inquiry for greater understanding, awareness and clarity
- c. Identifies with the client his/her underlying concerns, typical and fixed ways of perceiving himself/herself and the world, differences between the facts and the interpretation, disparities between thoughts, feelings and action
- d. Helps clients to discover for themselves the new thoughts, beliefs, perceptions, emotions, moods, etc. that strengthen their ability to take action and achieve what is important to them
- e. Communicates broader perspectives to clients and inspires commitment to shift their viewpoints and find new possibilities for action
- f. Helps clients to see the different, interrelated factors that affect them and their behaviors (e.g., thoughts, emotions, body, background)
- g. Expresses insights to clients in ways that are useful and meaningful for the client
- h. Identifies major strengths vs. major areas for learning and growth, and what is most important to address during coaching
- i. Asks the client to distinguish between trivial and significant issues, situational vs. recurring behaviors, when detecting a separation between what is being stated and what is being done

Key Skills Evaluated: 1) The coach's ability to partner fully with the client in exploration of new and broader perspectives, learning, creating, and actions; 2) The coach's ability to share perspectives without attachment and invitation to the client to share their own thinking, perspectives, and intuition; 3) The coach's invitation to and acceptance of the client's intuition, thinking, and language as critical tools in the coaching process; 4) The coach's ability to illuminate the client's fixed ways of thinking that might inhibit growth or accomplishment of the client's goals without treating the coach's observation as truth, but only as the coach's thoughts; 5) The coach's ability to use the client's language as a tool of creating awareness; 6) The coach's ability to integrate beginning, middle

and end of the session together if appropriate to the client's learning and creating

At an ACC level, the minimum standard of skill that must be demonstrated to receive a passing score for creating awareness is that the coach focuses on inquiry and observations that relate to the client's stated agenda with the greater focus on inquiry rather than offering the coach's opinions. The coach assists the client to explore that agenda more deeply and without significant attachment by the coach to a particular outcome or direction. The coach uses coaching tools in a manner that encourages rather than limits exploration.

A coach will not receive a passing score for creating awareness on the ACC performance evaluation if the coach does not attend to the client's agenda, changes the agenda without input from the client, or appears attached to a particular outcome or solution. The coach will also not receive a passing grade on the ACC performance evaluation if the coach narrows the exploration of awareness significantly to a single issue without discussing that decision with the client and without the client's consent. The evaluation will also be negatively impacted if the coach seems to substitute assessments or standard coaching exercises for powerful questioning or inquiry.

9. Designing Actions—Ability to create with the client opportunities for ongoing learning, during coaching in work/life situations, and for taking new actions that will most effectively lead to agreed-upon coaching results

- a. Brainstorms and assists the client to define actions that will enable the client to demonstrate, practice and deepen new learning
- b. Helps the client to focus on and systematically explore specific concerns and opportunities that are central to agreed-upon coaching goals
- c. Engages the client to explore alternative ideas and solutions, to evaluate options, and to make related decisions
- d. Promotes active experimentation and self-discovery, where the client applies what has been discussed and learned during sessions immediately
- e. Celebrates client successes and capabilities for future growth
- f. Challenges client's assumptions and perspectives to provoke new ideas and find new possibilities for action
- g. Advocates or brings forward points of view that are aligned with client goals and, without attachment, engages the client to consider them

h. Helps the client “Do It Now” during the coaching session, providing immediate support

i. Encourages stretches and challenges but also a comfortable pace of learning.

Key Skills Evaluated: 1) The coach’s ability to fully partner with the client in designing actions that relate to and move forward towards the client’s stated agenda; 2) That actions are of a breadth and depth that they may include thinking, feeling, and learning; 3) That the designed actions integrate the whole of the client whenever appropriate; 4) That the designed actions are appropriate to what occurred in the session, where the client is with their stated agenda and desired outcomes; 5) That the designed actions are appropriate to the client’s methods of thinking, learning, integrating, and creating

At an ACC level, the minimum standard of skill that must be demonstrated to receive a passing score for designing actions is that the coach suggests homework and actions that are related to the client’s stated agenda and measures of accomplishment of that agenda and that the suggested homework have a clear purpose and potential to move the client forward in their thinking, learning, or action around the stated agenda. At this level, the coach may also suggest tools or structures to assist the client so long as the tools are not forced on the client and that the tools or structure bear an easily recognizable relationship to achieving the client’s stated agenda.

A coach will not receive a passing score for designing actions on the ACC performance evaluation if the coach insists the client do what the coach has prescribed as homework, the suggested homework does not have a clear relationship to the client’s stated agenda, the homework does not have a clear purpose and potential to move the client forward, or if suggested tools and structures clearly do not bear a relationship to the needs of the particular client or his/her agenda.

10. Planning and Goal Setting—Ability to develop and maintain an effective coaching plan with the client

a. Consolidates collected information and establishes a coaching plan and development goals with the client that address concerns and major areas for learning and development

b. Creates a plan with results that are attainable, measurable, specific and have target dates

c. Makes plan adjustments as warranted by the coaching process and by changes in the situation

d. Helps the client identify and access different resources for learning (e.g., books, other professionals)

e. Identifies and targets early successes that are important to the client

Key Skills Evaluated: 1) The coach's ability to fully partner with and explore with the client in order to create goals and plans that match the client's learning and creating style, stated agenda and desired outcomes; 2) That the plans and goals designed are of a breadth and depth that they may include thinking, feeling, learning, and creating; 3) That the designed plans and goals integrated the whole of the client whenever appropriate; 4) That the designed plans and goals are appropriate to what occurred in the session, and where the client is with their stated agenda and desired outcomes; 5) That the designed plans and goals are appropriate to the client's methods of thinking, learning, integrating, and creating; 6) That wherever appropriate, the coach helps the client design measurable achievements that are steps toward the client's ultimate desired outcome

At an ACC level, the minimum standard of skill that must be demonstrated to receive a passing score for planning and goal setting is that the coach adopt goals suggested by the client and/or helps client set goals that are clear on the surface and causally related to achieving the client's overall objectives and stated agenda. The plans and measures of accomplishment must have a clear purpose and potential to move the client forward in their thinking, learning, or action around the stated agenda and toward the client's overall measures of success. At this level, the coach may also suggest tools or structures to assist the client so long as the tools are not forced on the client and that the tools or structure bear an easily recognizable relationship to achieving the client's stated agenda and desired outcome.

A coach will not receive a passing score for planning and goal setting on the ACC performance evaluation if the coach insists that the client follow a prescribed plan familiar to the coach, if the coach is unable to support the client in developing an effective coaching plan, if the plan or goals do not have a clear relationship to the client's stated agenda and desired outcome, if the plan or goals do not have a clear purpose and potential to move the client forward, or if suggested tools and structures clearly do not bear a relationship to the needs of the particular client or his/her agenda.

11. Managing Progress and Accountability—Ability to hold attention on what is important for the client, and to leave responsibility with the client to take action.

a. Clearly requests of the client actions that will move the client toward their stated goals

- b. Demonstrates follow through by asking the client about those actions that the client committed to during the previous sessions(s)
- c. Acknowledges the client for what they have done, not done, learned or become aware of since the previous coaching sessions(s)
- d. Effectively prepares,
- d. Effectively prepares, organizes and reviews with client information obtained during sessions
- e. Keeps the client on track between sessions by holding attention on the coaching plan and outcomes, agreed-upon courses of action, and topics for future session(s),
- f. Focuses on the coaching plan but is also open to adjusting behaviors and actions based on the coaching process and shifts in direction during sessions
- g. Is able to move back and forth between the big picture of where the client is heading, setting a context for what is being discussed and where the client wishes to go
- h. Promotes client's self-discipline and holds the client accountable for what they say they are going to do, for the results of an intended action, or for a specific plan with related time frames
- i. Develops the client's ability to make decisions, address key concerns, and develop himself/herself (to get feedback, to determine priorities and set the pace of learning, to reflect on and learn from experiences)
- j. Positively confronts the client with the fact that he/she did not take agreed-upon actions

Key Skills Evaluated: 1) The coach's ability to partner fully with the client to create structures and methods for measuring progress and holding the client accountable to themselves for the progress; 2) That the methods and structures of accountability integrate the whole of the client whenever appropriate; 3) That the designed structures and methods of accountability are capable of producing forward movement by the client, appropriate to what occurred in the session, and to where the client is with their stated agenda and desired outcomes; 4) That the designed structures and methods of accountability are appropriate to the client's methods of thinking, learning, integrating, and creating; 5) The coach's ability to trust the client to be accountable to themselves and confidence in holding the client accountable as per the agreed upon methods of accountability

At an ACC level, the minimum standard of skill that must be demonstrated to receive a passing score for managing progress and accountability is that the coach suggests measures of success and structures of accountability to the client and/or helps the client develop measures of success and structures of accountability that are clearly and causally related to achieving the client's overall objectives and stated agenda. The structures of accountability and measures of accomplishment must have a clear purpose and potential to move the client forward in their thinking, learning, or action around the stated agenda and toward the client's overall measures of success. At this level, the coach may also suggest tools or structures to assist the client so long as the tools are not forced on the client and that the tools or structure bear an easily recognizable relationship to achieving the client's stated agenda and desired outcome.

A coach will not receive a passing score for managing progress and accountability on the ACC performance evaluation if the coach insists that the client follow prescribed measures and structures familiar to the coach, if the coach is unable to support the client in developing an effective method of managing and measuring progress, if the measures and methods of accountability do not have a clear relationship to the client's stated agenda and desired outcomes, if they do not have a clear purpose and potential to move the client forward, or if suggested tools and structures clearly do not bear a relationship to the needs of the particular client or his/her agenda.

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