

Minimum Skills Requirements for ACC Credential

ICF believes that it has an obligation to support its member coaches in the growth of their skill set. Every Master Certified Coach (MCC) started as a beginner. They progressed through an intermediate level of skill, and became masterful, where the hallmark is deep evidence of the coach's role as learner about the client. ICF's three levels of Credentials reflect the continuum of growth and learning along the coaching journey.

This document has been created to support coaches as they prepare for the Associate Certified Coach (ACC) credential performance evaluation. We also hope that this document will assist mentor coaches and supervisors in supporting these coaches; and coaching education and training providers in undertaking accreditation of their programs. The aim is to support coaches in successfully completing the ACC performance evaluation and in continuing to develop their skill set as coaches, in alignment with the updated ICF Core Competencies (2019).

For those seeking a credential, this document will provide an understanding of what assessors evaluate in relation to each ICF Core Competency. It will offer the minimum level of skill necessary to successfully demonstrate an ACC level of competency, and also help you understand what non-coaching behaviors might prevent successful completion of the ACC performance evaluation. This document can help each individual coach answer the following queries:

1. What does it mean to be an ACC coach?
2. What do ICF assessors listen for when they are evaluating an ACC coach?
3. 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 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. Demonstrates Ethical Practice

Definition: Understands and consistently applies coaching ethics and standards of coaching.

1. Demonstrates personal integrity and honesty in interactions with clients, sponsors and relevant stakeholders
2. Is sensitive to clients' identity, environment, experiences, values and beliefs
3. Uses language appropriate and respectful to clients, sponsors and relevant stakeholders
4. Abides by the ICF Code of Ethics and upholds the Core Values
5. Maintains confidentiality with client information per stakeholder agreements and pertinent laws
6. Maintains the distinctions between coaching, consulting, psychotherapy and other support professions
7. Refers clients to other support professionals, as appropriate

Important Note: Familiarity with the ICF 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 for an ICF Credential at any level – Associate Certified Coach (ACC), Professional Certified Coach (PCC) or Master Certified Coach (MCC).

An applicant must demonstrate alignment with the ICF Code of Ethics in the performance evaluation. An applicant who commits a clear violation of the ICF Code of Ethics within a performance evaluation recording would not pass this competency and would be denied a Credential.

An applicant must also remain consistently in the role of coach within the performance evaluation. This includes demonstrating a knowledge of the coaching conversation that is focused on inquiry and exploration, and a focus based on present and future issues. An applicant would not pass this competency if they 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).

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 safety, presence, active listening, evoking awareness, and facilitating client growth will not be present and a credential at any level would be denied.

2. Embodies a Coaching Mindset

Definition: Develops and maintains a mindset that is open, curious, flexible and client-centered.

1. Acknowledges that clients are responsible for their own choices
2. Engages in ongoing learning and development as a coach
3. Develops an ongoing reflective practice to enhance one's coaching
4. Remains aware of and open to the influence of context and culture on self and others
5. Uses awareness of self and one's intuition to benefit clients
6. Develops and maintains the ability to regulate one's emotions
7. Mentally and emotionally prepares for sessions
8. Seeks help from outside sources when necessary

Competency 2: Embodies a Coaching Mindset serves as a foundational competency for coach practitioners, focused primarily on the “being” of the coach. The related behaviors are typically demonstrated across a coach's practice, more so than in any specific coaching session. This competency area is therefore more difficult to consistently assess within the performance evaluation process. As a result, there are no behavioral or skill statements in this Competency area that are used for assessment purposes. Rather, an applicant's knowledge of and ability to apply Competency 2: Embodies a Coaching Mindset is more directly evaluated in the ICF Credentialing written exam.

3. Establishes and Maintains Agreements

Definition: Partners with the client and relevant stakeholders to create clear agreements about the coaching relationship, process, plans and goals. Establishes agreements for the overall coaching engagement as well as those for each coaching session.

1. Explains what coaching is and is not and describes the process to the client and relevant stakeholders
2. Reaches agreement about what is and is not appropriate in the relationship, what is and is not being offered, and the responsibilities of the client and relevant stakeholders
3. Reaches agreement about the guidelines and specific parameters of the coaching relationship such as logistics, fees, scheduling, duration, termination, confidentiality and inclusion of others
4. Partners with the client and relevant stakeholders to establish an overall coaching plan and goals
5. Partners with the client to determine client-coach compatibility

6. Partners with the client to identify or reconfirm what they want to accomplish in the session
7. Partners with the client to define what the client believes they need to address or resolve to achieve what they want to accomplish in the session
8. Partners with the client to define or reconfirm measures of success for what the client wants to accomplish in the coaching engagement or individual session
9. Partners with the client to manage the time and focus of the session
10. Continues coaching in the direction of the client's desired outcome unless the client indicates otherwise
11. Partners with the client to end the coaching relationship in a way that honors the experience

Key Skills Evaluated

1. The clarity and depth in creating an agreement for the 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
3. The coach's ability to attend to the client's agenda throughout the session.

At an ACC level, the minimum standard of skill that must be demonstrated to achieve a passing score for Competency 3: Establishes and Maintains Agreements is that the coach invites the client to identify what the client wants to accomplish in the session and the coach attends to that agenda throughout the coaching, unless the client indicates otherwise.

Specifically, ACC applicants are assessed on the following skills within Competency 3: Establishes and Maintains Agreements as part of the performance evaluation process:

- Coach and client reach an agreement on what the client wants to accomplish in the session
- Coach invites the client to identify their desired coaching outcome
- Coach attends to the agenda set by the client throughout the session, unless the client indicates otherwise
- Coach shows curiosity about the client and how the client relates to what they want to accomplish

An applicant will not receive a passing score for Establishes and Maintains Agreements 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.

4. Cultivates Trust and Safety

Definition: Partners with the client to create a safe, supportive environment that allows the client to share freely. Maintains a relationship of mutual respect and trust.

1. Seeks to understand the client within their context which may include their identity, environment, experiences, values and beliefs
2. Demonstrates respect for the client's identity, perceptions, style and language and adapts one's coaching to the client
3. Acknowledges and respects the client's unique talents, insights and work in the coaching process
4. Shows support, empathy and concern for the client
5. Acknowledges and supports the client's expression of feelings, perceptions, concerns, beliefs and suggestions
6. Demonstrates openness and transparency as a way to display vulnerability and build trust with the client

Key Skills Evaluated

1. The coach's depth of connection to and support of the client
2. The coach's demonstration of trust in and respect for the client and the client's processes of thinking, creating
3. The coach's willingness to be open, authentic and vulnerable with the client to build mutual trust.

At an ACC level, the minimum standard of skill that must be demonstrated to receive a passing score for Competency 4: Cultivates Trust and Safety is that the coach shows genuine concern, support and respect for the client and is attuned to client's beliefs, perceptions, learning style, and personal being at a basic level.

Specifically, ACC applicants are assessed on the following skills within Competency 4: Cultivates Trust and Safety as part of the performance evaluation process:

- Coach acknowledges client insights and learning in the moment
- Coach explores the client's expression of feelings, perceptions, concerns, beliefs, or suggestions
- Coach expresses support and concern for the client, which may focus on the client's context, problem or situation, rather than the client holistically

A coach will not receive a passing score for Cultivates Trust and Safety in the ACC performance evaluation if the coach demonstrates significant interest in the coach's own view of the situation rather than the client's view of the situation; if the coach does not seek information from the client about the client's thinking around the situation, if the coach is unsupportive or disrespectful to the client; or if the coach's attention seems to be on their own performance or demonstration of knowledge about the topic rather than on the client.

5. Maintains Presence

Definition: Is fully conscious and present with the client, employing a style that is open, flexible, grounded and confident

1. Remains focused, observant, empathetic and responsive to the client
2. Demonstrates curiosity during the coaching process
3. Manages one's emotions to stay present with the client
4. Demonstrates confidence in working with strong client emotions during the coaching process
5. Is comfortable working in a space of not knowing
6. Creates or allows space for silence, pause or reflection

Key Skills Evaluated

1. The coach's depth of focus on and partnership with the client
2. The coach's depth of observation and use of the whole of the client in the coaching process
3. The coach's ability to create space for reflection and remain present to the client through both conversation and silence.

At an ACC level, the minimum standard of skill that must be demonstrated to receive a passing score for Competency 5: Maintains Presence is that the coach demonstrates curiosity about the client and the client's agenda and is responsive to the information the client offers throughout the session.

Specifically, ACC applicants are assessed on the following skills within Competency 5: Maintains Presence as part of the performance evaluation process:

- Coach is curious throughout the session
- Coach acknowledges situations that the client presents

- Coach allows the client to direct the conversation at least some of the time

The ICF notes that Cultivates Trust and Safety and Maintains Presence are quite related competencies. Therefore, a coach will not receive a passing score for Maintains Presence on the ACC performance evaluation if the coach demonstrates significant interest in the coach's own 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, the coach consistently directs the conversation, or the attention seems to be on the coach's own performance or demonstration of knowledge about the topic.

6. Listens Actively

Definition: Focuses on what the client is and is not saying to fully understand what is being communicated in the context of the client systems and to support client self-expression

1. Considers the client's context, identity, environment, experiences, values and beliefs to enhance understanding of what the client is communicating
2. Reflects or summarizes what the client communicated to ensure clarity and understanding
3. Recognizes and inquires when there is more to what the client is communicating
4. Notices, acknowledges and explores the client's emotions, energy shifts, non-verbal cues or other behaviors
5. Integrates the client's words, tone of voice and body language to determine the full meaning of what is being communicated
6. Notices trends in the client's behaviors and emotions across sessions to discern themes and patterns

Key Skills Evaluated

1. The coach's depth of attention to what the client communicates in relation to the client and 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 and integrate the client's language and to invite the client to deeper exploration.

At an ACC level, the minimum standard of skill that must be demonstrated to receive a passing score for Competency 6: Listens Actively is that the coach listens to what the client communicates in relation to the client's agenda, responds to what the client offers to ensure clarity of understanding, and integrates what the client has communicated to support the client in achieving their agenda. The coach's behaviors in this competency may include listening to what the client has communicated verbally, as well as what the client may communicate in other ways, such as tone of voice, energy or emotional shifts, or body language.

Specifically, ACC applicants are assessed on the following skills within Competency 6: Listens Actively as part of the performance evaluation process:

- Coach uses summarizing or paraphrasing to make sure they understood the client correctly
- Coach makes observations that support the client in creating new associations
- Coach co-creates a shared vision with the client

A coach will not receive a passing score for Listens Actively on the ACC performance evaluation if the coach does not demonstrate listening that is focused on and responding to what the client communicates or the coach's responses are 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.

7. Evokes Awareness

Definition: Facilitates client insight and learning by using tools and techniques such as powerful questioning, silence, metaphor or analogy

1. Considers client experience when deciding what might be most useful
2. Challenges the client as a way to evoke awareness or insight
3. Asks questions about the client, such as their way of thinking, values, needs, wants and beliefs
4. Asks questions that help the client explore beyond current thinking
5. Invites the client to share more about their experience in the moment
6. Notices what is working to enhance client progress
7. Adjusts the coaching approach in response to the client's needs

8. Helps the client identify factors that influence current and future patterns of behavior, thinking or emotion
9. Invites the client to generate ideas about how they can move forward and what they are willing or able to do
10. Supports the client in reframing perspectives
11. Shares observations, insights and feelings, without attachment, that have the potential to create new learning for the client

Key Skills Evaluated

1. The coach's use of inquiry, exploration, silence and other techniques that support the client in achieving new or deeper learning and awareness
2. The coach's ability to explore with and evoke exploration by the client of the emotional and substantive meaning of the client's 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 coach's ability to support the client in exploring new or expanded perspectives or ways of thinking
5. The coach's invitation to and integration of the client's intuition, thinking, and language as critical tools in the coaching process.

At an ACC level, the minimum standard of skill that must be demonstrated to receive a passing score for Competency 7: Evokes Awareness is that the coach uses inquiry, exploration, silence and other techniques to support the client in achieving new or deeper learning and awareness.

Specifically, ACC applicants are assessed on the following skills within Competency 7: Evokes Awareness as part of the performance evaluation process:

- Coach inquires about or explores the client's ideas, beliefs, thinking, emotions, and behaviors in relation to the desired outcome
- Coach supports the client in viewing the situation from new or different perspectives
- Coach acknowledges the client's new awareness, learning, and movement toward the desired outcome

A coach will not receive a passing score for Evokes Awareness on the ACC performance evaluation if the coach focuses consistently on instructing the client or sharing the coach's own knowledge, ideas or beliefs; if the majority of the coach's questions are

leading or contain pre-determined answers by the coach; or if the coach's questions and explorations attend to an agenda or issues not set by the client, but set by the coach.

8. Facilitates Client Growth

Definition: Partners with the client to transform learning and insight into action. Promotes client autonomy in the coaching process.

1. Works with the client to integrate new awareness, insight or learning into their worldview and behaviors
2. Partners with the client to design goals, actions and accountability measures that integrate and expand new learning
3. Acknowledges and supports client autonomy in the design of goals, actions and methods of accountability
4. Supports the client in identifying potential results or learning from identified action steps
5. Invites the client to consider how to move forward, including resources, support and potential barriers
6. Partners with the client to summarize learning and insight within or between sessions
7. Celebrates the client's progress and successes
8. Partners with the client to close the session

Key Skills Evaluated

1. The coach's ability to support the client in exploring their learning about themselves and their situation and the application of that learning toward the client's goals
2. The coach's ability to partner fully with the client in designing actions from their new awareness, which may include thinking, feeling or learning, that support the client in moving toward their stated agenda or goals
3. The coach's ability to support the client in developing measurable achievements that are steps toward the client's stated goals or outcomes
4. The coach's ability to partner with the client to explore and acknowledge the client's progress throughout the session
5. The coach's depth of partnership in closing the session.

At an ACC level, the minimum standard of skill that must be demonstrated to receive a passing score for Competency 8: Facilitates Client Growth is that the coach supports the client in exploring how to apply the client's learning and awareness to post-session actions that are related to the client's stated agenda and have the potential to move the client forward in their thinking, learning, or growth. At this level, the coach may also suggest resources to assist the client in achieving their goals so long as the resources are not forced on the client.

Specifically, ACC applicants are assessed on the following skills within Competency 8: Facilitates Client Growth as part of the performance evaluation process:

- Coach asks questions to support the client in translating awareness into action
- Coach partners with the client to create or confirm specific action plans
- Coach supports the client to close the session

A coach will not receive a passing score for Facilitates Client Growth on the ACC performance evaluation if the coach insists the client carry out specific actions prescribed by the coach, the coach suggests actions or steps to the client that do not have a clear relationship to the client's stated agenda, the coach does not invite the client to identify or explore how the client's learning can be applied to future actions or activities that support the client's agenda, or if the coach does not support the client to close the session.

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