
NBCOT[®]

Professional Practice Standards



For

COTA[®]

Certified Occupational
Therapy Assistant (COTA[®])
and Candidates Seeking
the COTA Designation



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Our Mission

The mission of the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy, Inc. (NBCOT) is to serve the public interest by advancing client care and professional practice through evidence-based certification standards and the validation of knowledge essential for effective practice in occupational therapy.



Our Vision

Certified occupational therapy professionals providing effective evidence-based services across all areas of practice worldwide.



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Introduction

NBCOT offers an initial certification program for the entry-level CERTIFIED OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ASSISTANT (COTA®) that confers the COTA credential and has established the requirements for maintaining status as a COTA with NBCOT through a certification renewal program.

Currently all 50 states, Guam, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia require NBCOT initial certification for occupational therapy state regulation (e.g., licensing). NBCOT certification programs have received and maintained organizational accreditation from the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) and American National Standards Institute (ANSI) to ISO Standard 17024. NBCOT is a member of the Institute for Credentialing Excellence (ICE).

Standards of Practice in Occupational Therapy (OT) are the baseline for quality occupational therapy care holding COTA certificants accountable for delivering consistent, high-quality health care services. The Standards provide guidelines that can be used to determine what the COTA should and should not do when providing services to clients. These Standards represent the expectations of NBCOT and may be used to evaluate performance for ongoing professional development and/or disciplinary action.

The NBCOT Standards of Practice consist of four sections:

- Practice Domains;
- Code of Professional Conduct;
- Supervision; and
- Documentation

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NBCOT Professional Practice Standards (PPS)

PPS 1. The Standards are intended to assist the:

- Client in understanding what to expect from a COTA certificant;
- COTA in understanding their role in the delivery client care and services; and
- COTA in understanding the professional expectations of being certified by NBCOT.

PPS 2. The Standards are not intended to:

- Prescribe services, including treatment plans or procedures; and
- Assure specific client outcomes.

NBCOT does not express an opinion on the competence or warrant the job performance of COTA certificants; however, all COTA certificants and candidates with the COTA designation must agree to comply with the Standards at all times.



NBCOT Occupational Therapy Practice Domains

A **Practice Analysis Study in 2017** identified **Practice Domains**, which are distinct areas of work that have associated tasks; **Tasks** (things practitioners do) are associated with each domain; and the essential **Knowledge** (what a practitioner needs to know) required to complete each Task satisfactorily. The completed COTA Practice Analysis Study—domain, tasks, and knowledge is available for no cost at www.nbcot.org. The Practice Domains establish essential practice expectations for COTA certificants when providing occupational therapy services to clients.

Domain 1

Assist the OTR to acquire information regarding factors that influence occupational performance throughout the occupational therapy process.

Task 01

Recognize the influence of development; body functions and body structures; and values, beliefs, and spirituality on a client's occupational performance.

Task 02

Acquire information by using available resources about a client's functional skills, roles, culture, performance context, and prioritized needs in order to contribute to the development and update of an occupational profile.

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Task 03

Provide information regarding the influence of current conditions, contexts, and task demands on occupational performance in order to assist the OTR in planning interventions and monitoring progress as guided by the practice setting and theoretical construct.

Task 04

Collaborate with the client, the client's relevant others, occupational therapy colleagues, and other professionals and staff by using a culturally sensitive, client-centered approach and therapeutic use of self to provide quality services guided by evidence, scope of practice, service competence, and principles of best practice.

Task 05

Monitor the intervention plan and progress toward goals in collaboration with the OTR by using clinical reasoning, therapeutic use of self, and cultural sensitivity to make decisions about the intervention approach, context, or goals based on client needs, priorities, response to intervention, status changes, reevaluation results, and targeted outcomes.

Domain 2

Implement interventions under the supervision of an OTR in accordance with the intervention plan and level of service competence to support client participation in areas of occupation throughout the occupational therapy process.

Task 01

Incorporate methods and techniques as an adjunct to interventions in order to facilitate healing and enhance engagement in occupation-based activities.

Task 02

Implement developmental, remedial, and adaptive occupation-based strategies to support participation in activities of daily living (ADL), instrumental activities of daily living (IADL), rest and sleep, education, work, play, leisure, and social participation across the life span.

Task 03

Implement interventions for improving range of motion, strength, activity tolerance, sensation, postural control, and balance based on neuromotor status, cardiopulmonary response, and current stage of healing or condition in order to support occupational performance.

Task 04

Apply anatomical, physiological, biomechanical, and healing principles to select or fabricate orthotic devices, and provide training in the use of orthotic and prosthetic devices by using critical thinking and problem-solving as related to a specific congenital anomaly or type of injury, current condition, or disease process in order to support functional outcomes.

Task 05

Integrate assistive technology options, adaptive devices, mobility aids, and other durable medical equipment into the intervention, considering the client's developmental, physical, functional, cognitive, and mental health status; prioritized needs; task demands; and context to enable participation in meaningful occupation.

Task 06

Implement environmental modifications guided by an occupation-based model, disability discrimination legislation, and accessibility guidelines and standards to support participation in occupation consistent with a client's physical needs, emotion regulation, cognitive and developmental status, context, and task demands.

Domain 3

Uphold professional standards and responsibilities by achieving service competence and applying evidence-based interventions to promote quality in practice.

Task 01

Engage in professional development and competency assessment activities by using evidence-based strategies and approaches to provide safe, effective, and efficient services relevant to the job role, practice setting, scope of practice, and professional certification standards.

Task 02

Incorporate risk management techniques at an individual and practice-setting level by using standard operating procedures, safety principles, best practice guidelines, and relevant compliance trainings to protect clients, self, and staff from injury or harm during interventions.

Task 03

Provide occupational therapy service in accordance with laws, regulations, state occupational therapy practice acts, and accreditation guidelines in order to protect consumers and meet applicable reimbursement requirements in relation to the service delivery setting.

Code of Professional Conduct

Preamble

The National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy, Inc. (“NBCOT,” formerly known as “AOTCB”) is a professional organization that supports and promotes occupational therapy practitioner certification. This Candidate/Certificant Code of Conduct enables NBCOT to define and clarify the standards of personal and professional conduct required for eligibility for both initial and continued certification, i.e., OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST REGISTERED OTR® (OTR) henceforth OTR, and CERTIFIED OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ASSISTANT COTA® (COTA) henceforth COTA. Where the term “certificant” is used, the term “applicant or candidate” is included in its scope.

It is vital that NBCOT certifiants conduct their work in a professional manner to earn and maintain the confidence and respect of recipients of occupational therapy, colleagues, employers, students, and the public.

As certified professionals in the field of occupational therapy, NBCOT certifiants will at all times act with integrity and adhere to high standards for personal and professional conduct, accept responsibility for their actions, both personally and professionally, continually seek to enhance their professional capabilities, practice with competence, fairness, and honesty, abide by all federal, state, and local laws and regulations, and encourage others to act in a professional manner consistent with the Practice Standards and responsibilities set forth below.

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Principle 1

Certificants shall provide accurate and truthful representations to NBCOT concerning all information related to aspects of the Certification Program, including, but not limited to:

- The submission of information on the exam application, certification renewal applications, or the renewal audit form;
- Answers to character review questions and, once certified, the disclosure of any criminal, legal, or other disciplinary matters within 60 days of any such matter;
- Abiding by all exam related security policies;
- The submission of information requested by NBCOT for alleged violations of NBCOT's policies, requirements and standards or
- The submission of information regarding his/her credential(s), professional license(s) and/or education.

Principle 2

Certificants who are the subject of a qualifications and compliance review shall cooperate with NBCOT concerning investigations and requests for relevant information.

Principle 3

Certificants shall be accurate, truthful, and complete in any and all communications, direct or indirect, with any client, employer, regulatory agency, or other parties as they relate to their professional work, education, professional credentials, research and contributions to the field of occupational therapy.

Principle 4

Certificants shall comply with state and/or federal laws, regulations, and statutes governing the practice of occupational therapy.

The logo for COTA (The National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy, Inc.) features the letters "COTA" in a large, bold, orange sans-serif font. A thin orange horizontal line is positioned below the letters.

Principle 5

Certificants shall not be convicted of a serious crime.

Principle 6

Certificants shall not engage in behavior or conduct, lawful or otherwise that causes them to be, or reasonably perceived to be, a threat or potential threat to the health, well-being, or safety of recipients or potential recipients of occupational therapy services.

Principle 7

Certificants shall not engage in the practice of occupational therapy while one's ability to practice is impaired due to chemical (i.e., legal and/or illegal) drug or alcohol abuse.

Principle 8

Certificants shall not electronically post personal health information or anything, including photos, that may reveal a patient's/client's identity or personal or therapeutic relationship. (All statements, regardless of intent, about a patient/client can potentially contain sufficient information for a member of a community to recognize the patient/client thus, violating the state and/or federal law (i.e. Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)).

Principle 9

Certificants shall not misuse NBCOT's intellectual property, certification marks, logos, or other copyrighted materials. This includes all NBCOT exam preparation tools, website or exam content. Disclosure of practice test questions or examination material content, including examination questions, is strictly prohibited.

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Supervision

The purpose of supervision is to help protect public health, safety, and welfare as it relates to the delivery of occupational therapy services.

Supervision is categorized as direct and indirect supervision. Direct supervision is defined as the supervisor being present when the employee is performing the job and observes performance. Indirect supervision allows the supervisor to gather information about how the job was performed after the performance occurs. Other facets of this definition include providing guidance, direction, and approval for the delivery of occupational therapy services. Methods include communication with the supervisee (via phone, email, or written correspondence) about their performance, looking at written records, or receiving reports from others.

The COTA should understand that each state has supervision requirements, guidelines, and standards that are unique to that state. If questions and/or situation arise regarding supervision, it is incumbent upon the COTA to discuss their question and/or situations with their supervising Occupational Therapist or clinical supervisor. The COTA may need to contact the state occupational therapy board for official clarification of the question and/or situation.

Documentation of their supervisor's or clinical director's or state occupational therapy board's response should be maintained by the COTA. At all times the COTA should provide occupational therapy services in compliance with their state's occupational therapy practice act and applicable rules and regulations.

Documentation

The OTR and COTA should be aware of the documentation requirements, policies, procedures, criteria, or standards that are delineated in their state's practice act and associated rules, their client's insurance plans, including Medicare and Medicaid, and employment setting.

Listed are some general guidelines that the OTR or COTA should consider when documenting a client's record. Documentation must be: 1) Legible; 2) Relevant; and 3) Sufficient to justify the services billed or to meet regulatory requirements.

Medicare, for example, requires that the services billed be supported by documentation that justifies payment. Documentation must comply with all legal/regulatory requirements applicable to Medicare claims.

The following is an overview of the documentation that is typically included in a client's record:

- Evaluation/Reevaluation results and plan of care;
- General medical status, including any disability issues;
- Approval of the plan by the required professional (i.e., physician);
- Progress reports;
- Treatment notes;
- Dates of documentation.

Documentation should establish the variables that influence the client's condition, especially those factors that influence the OTR or COTA practitioner's decision to provide more services than are typical for the individual's condition. Documentation should establish through objective measurements that the client is making progress toward goals. Note that regression and plateaus can occur during treatment. When regression or plateaus occur, the practitioner should clearly document the medical necessity for continuing treatment and provide a reasonable expectation and timeline for goal attainment.

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Documenting who provided the service, their qualifications and clinical expertise, and for what purpose is an essential component of the record. Documentation should be signed by the qualified professional as indicated by facility policy, third-party payer regulations, and state licensure laws. Additionally, OT services should be provided by qualified professionals who have the expertise, knowledge, clinical judgment, decision making skills, and abilities related to occupational performance. Skilled OT services should be clearly delineated from non-skilled services which are routine maintenance services and can be provided by nonprofessional personnel or caregivers.

OTR or COTA practitioners working in schools under the US Department of Education's Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) have similar documentation requirements to that of Medicare.

The IDEA requires occupational therapists to:

1. Write a report of the evaluation the OT conducted;
2. Provide information and recommendations for students' Individualized Education Program (IEP) plans;
3. Write service plans for students, considering: disability, medical diagnosis, contraindications to therapy;
4. Help develop IEP goals and determine equipment and personnel/ assistance needed to meet therapy goals;
5. Prepare periodic status reports; and
6. Write a report when students discontinue therapy.

The law does not specify how long therapists must keep documentation. The OTR or COTA should discuss the documentation retention policy of their supervisor or employer.

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