Teacher Training Study Guide: How To Prepare For Certification *\*Based on the Balanced Body TT Program*

For most teachers their training programs end up being more than they expect both in terms of the work that is required and the joy that it brings. Even though making it through each module takes a tremendous amount of attention and effort it is, in essence, the easiest part of the journey. What comes next -- applying the material and actually turning it into teaching (and becoming proficient enough to successfully pass your tests) – can be not only arduous but a little confounding!

This guide is designed to:

* Help you create benchmarks for your progress;
* Give you ideas for breaking up the material into manageable pieces;
* Learn how to organize the exercises so that you can successfully plan and create Pilates programs;
* AND ultimately support you in preparing for your certification test.

**Expectations:**

At the time you take your test you are expected to demonstrate a proficient understanding of the Pilates Method and how to teach it.

This means that you:

* Can successfully get a body to move with your words and, if applicable, your touch;
* Are able to encourage (develop rapport), guide, modify and direct a student safely through a session or class while applying the exercises appropriately to the student’s needs;
* Can easily and confidently maneuver all pieces of the Pilates equipment.

Proficiency is typically achieved within 12-18 months, but each teacher is unique and your progress will be directly related to the time you spend on your own personal practice, observing other teachers and applying your knowledge - teaching.

Caveat:

Although you must know each exercise, its set-up, contraindications, modifications, and peel-backs for your test, your ability to apply each exercise with insight and to create sessions and classes that are dynamic and inspiring will evolve over many years – or perhaps, and hopefully, the rest of your life. This is mastery not proficiency. The challenge for many emerging teachers is that they expect mastery in order to feel ready to test-out, which leads ultimately to frustration, exhaustion, and a sense of overwhelm rather than confidence.

Mastery can only come with experience, which means it can only come with time. Mastery or even excelling happens after the foundation is laid. Your teacher training program and receiving your certification is ONLY THE BEGINNING – the laying of your foundation. So…cut yourself a little slack, teach from where you are and trust yourself. You will likely find that you are ready before you know it!

**Tips For Tracking & Staying On Track:**

* Record ALL hours from the very beginning!!
  + You may either:
    - Use the ledger provided by BB in any of your books (I recommend Mat 1)
  + You may also consider tracking hours for each apparatus within its individual manual (I.E. All reformer hours in the Ref. 1 manual, all trapeze hours in the trap manual etc.)
    - Design a spreadsheet that works for you and is EASY to access
    - Designate a notebook strictly for hour tracking
      * If you do this parse out sections for Self-practice, Observations, & Teaching

\*Note: Self-practice hours only count from when you started your program onward.

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| RECOMMENDATION – Choose to do the observations!  Online classes should constitute NO more than 25% of your observations.  Auditing modules may be counted in part toward self-practice and in part toward observation, but no more than half the hours of the module in total. |

* Tally your hours every month or once a quarter so that you will always know where you stand and can accurately prepare for submitting your test-out application.

\*Note: Applications can take up to 30 days to process.

* Track portions of hours when doing a mixed-apparatus session.

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| RECOMMENDATION - Once you are 50% done with your hours ask a mentor or BB faculty to observe you teaching (and/or take a personal session) so that you may pinpoint areas to develop and improve. |

* Once you get 75% of all of your hours completed (whether testing out for Mat, Reformer, or Comprehensive) create a strategic plan for completing the remaining hours and use that plan to orient around a test-out date!

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| RECOMMENDATION – At this point check in with your faculty member and do another personal session or be observed teaching in order to follow-up on developing skills. |

* Collect all certificates of completion (those documents you receive from BB after course work is completed) including anatomy AS YOU GO!

**Creating Benchmarks:**

When you begin the program it is likely you have a sense of how long you want it to take. Inevitably once you begin you realize that it may take longer than you thought J Either way, here are some ideas for creating benchmarks of your progress that will help you manage the sheer volume of material that is the Pilates Method.

Understanding the Movement Principles and Pilates Principles

Benchmarks –

* Can you describe and identify the purpose/importance of each Movement Principle?
  + Can you list at least two ways to teach each one?
* Are you able to recognize the Movement Principles in all Mat exercises?
  + In all Reformer exercises
  + In all Trapeze exercises
  + In all Chair exercises
  + In all ladder Barrel and Spinal Corrector exercises
* Can you identify the muscles involved in the following:
  + Inner Unit of Support
  + Outer Unit of Support
  + Anterior Oblique Sling
  + Posterior Oblique Sling
  + Deep Longitudinal Line
  + Lateral System
* Can you explain the mechanics of breathing and why you would inhale vs exhale given a specific movement?
* Can you identify and describe each Pilates Principle?
* Are you able to recognize the Pilates Principles in relationship to the three different levels of difficulty within the method? IE. What principles would you apply and/or expect a student to be able to utilize/achieve at each level?
  + Beginning
  + Intermediate
  + Advanced
  + Super Advanced
* Are you able to create a basic class flow with at least 3 of the Movement Principles in mind?
* Are you able to create a basic class/session flow with at least 2 Pilates Principles in mind? Or focused on at least 2 of the Pilates Principles?

Understanding Alignment, Posture and Alignment Anomalies

Benchmarks –

* Can you identify the body landmarks for assessing static posture in side, front, and back views?
* Do you have a basic understanding of the common alignment anomalies found in the:
  + Spine and thorax
  + Shoulders
  + Hips and Legs
  + Feet
* Can you apply at least 1-2 corrective actions, cues, or guidelines to each?
* Are you able to identify the components of Upper and Lower Crossed Syndromes?
* Can you identify and describe how and when you might apply three different types of stretching?

Understanding and Applying Modifications for Contraindications or Special Considerations

Benchmarks –

* Can you identify the primary contraindications for:
  + Low back injury
  + Wrist pain/injury
  + Disc herniation, bulges or other disc injury
  + Neck and shoulder injury/pain
  + Knee injury/pain
  + Pregnancy (pre/post)
  + Osteoporosis
    - In the spine/necK
    - In the hips
  + Sciatica or sciatic-like pain
  + Spinal stenosis
* Can you identify modifications/assists for:
  + Stiffness in the low back or lordosis
  + Forward head (on the mat and various pieces of equipment)
  + Kyphosis
  + Pregnancy (primarily in second and third trimesters)
  + Diastasis recti
  + Discomfort on the trochanter in side-lying exercises
  + Discomfort on the sacrum or coccyx during rolling exercises
* Can you identify basic contraindications or modifications for the following health issues:
  + High blood pressure
  + Vertigo
  + Glaucoma

Understanding Exercises According to Their Families, Peel-backs, Progressions

\*Note: This can be done with any exercise, but here are a few examples that cover most families. Families of exercises are groups of exercises that share a common movement goal or action. You should be able to not only group exercises together but accurately identify which ones are at the bottom of the ladder (easiest, beginning) and those at the top (most complex, super advanced).

Example: Boomerang à teaser on the reformer à all teasers on the mat à roll-over à open-leg rocker à roll-up à rolling in a ball.

Benchmarks -

Can you identify exercises according to family or their perspective ladders or progressions? What is above and/or below the following exercises?

* Long spine stretch
* Hamstring 3 on the chair (pull-ups)
* Snake/Twist
* Knee stretches
* Supine hamstring curls on the Chair
* Star on the Reformer
* Parakeet
* Walkover
* Airplane series (high leg springs)
* Footwork on the Chair
* Kneeling side kicks
* Rocking swan
* Control balance front
* Control balance back

Understanding How to Fit Exercises Together

Benchmarks –

* Are you able to transition students smoothly from one exercise to the other?
  + Do you prepare the equipment appropriately beforehand?
  + Do you provide thoughtful transitions so students can stay focused between exercises?
* Do you vary the body’s position every 2-4 exercises creating a balance between flexion, extension, lateral flexion, and rotation?
* Do you build up and use exercise progressions so as to prepare the body, going from simple to complex movements?
* Are you able to plan your sessions or classes around a movement focus, goal, or teaching concept?

**Studying Tips:**

We all learn so differently that telling you how to study seems almost ridiculous especially because what you are learning is deeply rooted in the physical experience as well as the cognitive. However, based on our own experience of training to become teachers of Pilates and the many years watching other teachers learn we’ve crafted some valuable suggestions. Use those that suit your learning style best.

Flash Cards –

Write the name of each exercise on one side of a flash card. On the reverse side write the set-up (including position, springs or other equipment details), repetitions, and movement principle or goal. Either quiz yourself daily or have another teacher quiz you. Practice those exercises you feel unsure of or don’t know at all until you do.

Suggestions:

* Study one piece of apparatus at a time, including mat.
* Study one level at a time: beg, int, adv, super adv

Choose a Focus –

Each week (two weeks/month) choose a topic to focus on in your personal practice and even in your teaching. Teaching the thing that you are supposed to learn in this highly focused way can help you draw relevant and lasting connections that make the exercises or principles stick.

Examples:

* Practice a vignette of 4-5 exercises in your self-practice and teach the same series to your student(s).
  + IE. The long stretch series, abdominal series, split series, side-lying series including kneeling side kicks, swan or prone series, etc.
* Focus on teaching a movement principle throughout the week and weaving it into a variety of exercises and levels.
* Practice a series of exercises you don’t like all in one week and drill them in until they are second nature.
* Practice transitions – be specific with transitions between a series of 5-6 exercises.

Go Through The Table of Contents –

Sometimes the best approach is the simplest! To make it as easy and straightforward as possible in terms of learning the exercises, their set-up, breathing directions, and modifications just stick to the book! Nothing fancy, just check them off one-by-one. Choose a number of exercises per week that feels reasonable to you and your life and dedicate yourself to really learning them well before moving on.

In the meantime however sprinkle these exercises into your self-practice so you can also work with them in a different flow or context. Once you feel confident that you have all the pieces down decide which ones to leave in or take out to make room for new exercises.

Highlight or put a circle by those that you think you might need to go back to and a checkmark next to those that are totally dialed-in.

Your self-practice will vary then from week to week and move from a mat-focused workout to a chair or trapeze-focused workout. Try to always find balance in your self-practice while just simply going through the book.

RECOMMENDATION – When you are about 75% through your hours it’s a good idea to go back through your manuals and quiz yourself on what you know and don’t know and reintegrate those exercises you don’t know back into your personal practice routine or into your teaching programs.

Auditing –

Auditing modules is one of the best way to layer on knowledge. Be selective in how you spend your time by finding out what exercises will be covered on what days or by getting the weekend agenda so that you show up for what is really relevant for you.

Practice The Routines in The Book –

One of the best ways to cover a broad spectrum of material, practice transitions, and build an innate flow of exercises is to use the programs in your manual as your own personal practice. This not only keeps things simple and less “heady” for you, it deliberately promotes your understanding of the unique value of each of the programs, which makes your ability to successfully apply them later on more likely.

Also consider teaching these programs to your fellow teachers or appropriate students, although students may be less likely, especially in the beginning, to get through an entire program.

**Discerning Outside Material –**

Teachers of the same method often teach very differently – even teaching the same exact material differently. You have likely had this experience with the teachers that are training you through the BB program (or you will). It’s quite wonderful, actually, as our unique experiences and personal histories bring teaching to life. However, in the course of preparing to take your final test, be careful about getting too much outside information, too many “creative” and wonderful variations, tricks, and modifications from complementary methods.

All of this is of course WONDERFUL and yet it can be distracting, making preparation for your specific certification more difficult. Everyone has a different capacity for this, and we want you to get excited and make connections to all the awesome and insightful tools there are out there. Simply be discerning about how much you begin to integrate into your teaching before you test-out.

Here are some relevant suggestions to help you navigate this delicious piece of your training:

* Keep an additional notebook for all the extras or juicy tidbits that are not directly facilitating the BB repertoire. OR
* Highlight your notes on “complementary methods/additions/extras” within your manuals in order to help you stay clear about what is key and what is “other” stuff.
* Be very clear with your BB faculty (us J) about information that is not strictly the BB repertoire. Ask lots of clarifying questions when needed.
* Be clear about the training background of other teachers you decide to observe and try when possible to observe BB faculty.
  + Even then you are bound to see subtle -- and sometimes not so subtle – differences. ASK LOTS OF QUESTIONS to clarify what it is you are supposed to be learning about the repertoire itself. Of course you will be observing primarily for other reasons like learning how to: cue, touch, motivate, encourage, make corrections, change course, build rapport, professionalism, etc. These things are teaching skills and the more the better!

There are so many ways you could approach this wonderful journey, but this gives you a solid place to start. Please don’t hesitate to share your tips and tools for learning and preparing with us so we can pass them on to future teachers in training.

**Test-Out Procedures**

At Pilates Collective you will need to make arrangements with one of the faculty members to do your final test-out, which will include:

* 2 hours for your written exam
* 1 hour for your practical test (teaching a session for comprehensive or reformer/class for mat)
* 30-45 for feedback and discussion

We typically leave 4 hours so that you have time between the written and practical exams to prepare or take a walk or whatever you like.

You can either bring someone to use as your test-out student or we can provide you a student. We recommend someone who can do the intermediate level work without modifications; someone who is relatively healthy and able.

You can also choose whether or not to take the written or practical first.

To Schedule Your Test-out –

* Download, print and complete your application.
  + Go to: <http://www.pilates.com/resources/education/test-out-application-mar2011.pdf>
* Submit your application with all appropriate documents
* While waiting for your application to be approved set a date and time with either Chantill or Kristen.
* Once your application is approved you will receive notice from BB and we can then submit the day and time in order to get your private test-out registration link.
* Once the link is provided you may register. Cost of testing out is $250.