

Introduction to Veterinary Clinical Skills

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Designed as a quick-reference guide for students and new practitioners.

1. Core Competencies

Domain	Key Skills	Typical Activities
History Taking	• Active listening • Systematic questioning • Client education	• Obtain signalment (age, breed, sex, reproductive status) • Record chief complaint & duration • Explore diet, environment, vaccination, travel, and previous illnesses
Physical Examination	• Observation & restraint • Systematic organ? system assessment • Recognition of normal vs. abnormal findings • Differential list generation	• General appearance, posture, gait • Vital signs (temperature, pulse, respiration, mucous membrane color) • Palpation, auscultation, percussion, visual inspection
Diagnostic Reasoning	• Prioritization based on severity & prevalence • Evidence-based test selection	• Use of mnemonic "VITAMIN D" (Vascular, Infectious, Trauma, Autoimmune, Metabolic, Idiopathic, Neoplasia, Degenerative) • Choose point-of-care vs. laboratory diagnostics
Procedural Skills	• Aseptic technique • Instrument handling • Pain management	• Venipuncture, catheter placement, fluid therapy • Sample collection (blood, urine, feces, cytology) • Minor surgeries (wound closure, biopsy, castration)
Client Communication	• Clear explanation of findings • Shared decision-making • Compassionate delivery of bad news	• Use visual aids or models • Summarize plan in simple language • Verify client understanding (teach-back)

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Professionalism & Safety	• Personal protective equipment (PPE) • Infection control • Ethical practice	• Hand hygiene, glove changes, sharps disposal • Confidentiality & record keeping • Reporting adverse events

2. Systematic Physical Examination Workflow

1. Preparation

- Gather equipment (stethoscope, thermometer, otoscope, ophthalmoscope, gloves).
- Verify patient identity and secure consent.
- Choose appropriate restraint (manual, cage, sedation).

2. General Survey

- Observe from a distance: posture, coat condition, demeanor.
- Note any obvious deformities, swelling, or discharge.

3. Vital Signs

- **Temperature:** Rectal (dogs, cats) or tympanic/infrared (large animals).
- **Pulse:** Peripheral (radial, femoral) – assess rate, rhythm, quality.
- **Respiration:** Rate, effort, pattern; look for nasal flaring, abdominal effort.
- **Mucous Membranes & Capillary Refill:** Color, moisture, CRT ? 2?s.

4. Head & Neck

- **Eyes:** Visual acuity, pupillary light reflex, menace response, discharge.
- **Ears:** External canal inspection, otoscopic exam, cerumen quality.
- **Nose & Oral Cavity:** Nasal discharge, teeth, gums, tongue, palate.
- **Lymph Nodes:** Submandibular, prescapular, popliteal – size, consistency.

5. Cardiovascular System

- **Auscultation:** Heart sounds (S1, S2,