



WORKING GROUP PAPER

Core Curriculum

APRIL 2019

#YAstandards

In 1999, in its role as a voluntary, member-based organization serving yoga schools and teachers, **Yoga Alliance (YA)** sought to ensure and preserve the quality of yoga education and practice by establishing and disseminating standards for the education of yoga teachers and by maintaining a registry of teachers who met these standards. In 2018, **YA** launched a review of its standards, calling it the **Standards Review Project (SRP)**.

One result of the **SRP** is this collection of eight collaborative, condensed, and edited working group papers to which key yoga stakeholders for **YA** and for the yoga community at large contributed. These papers represent the recommendations by each working group of the best practices for the standard, or key inquiry area, in question. There is one working paper for each; what follows is the working group paper on the notion of a **Core Curriculum** in yoga.

CORE CURRICULUM UPFRONT

Yoga Alliance (YA) chose Core Curriculum as one of its eight areas of inquiry because defining and preserving the quality of yoga education and practice relies, by necessity, on the formation of yoga courses (curricula) that in turn form yoga programs, or yoga teacher training (YTT) programs, of Registered Yoga Schools (RYSs). Harnessing the power of yoga through curricula, and grounding it through programs which train yoga practitioners to deepen their practice and/or to become teachers, is the fundamental inquiry of Core Curriculum.

YA presented the Core Curriculum Working Group (CCWG) with the following questions:

- ***What content, if any, needs to be standardized within RYS curriculum in training yoga practitioners to become yoga teachers?***
- ***Do yoga curricula need a “common core”? What basic knowledge should every yoga teacher share?***

(There are) three fundamental qualities for determining the definition of being a yoga teacher. These qualities are knowledge, skills, and experience.

The CCWG asked YA to revise its existing standards, called [“Educational Categories of Study and Practice.”](#) Today, these consist of Training & Practice; Teaching Methodology; Anatomy & Physiology; Yoga Philosophy, Ethics, & Lifestyle; and Practicum. The group set out to define and use these terms in its suggested revision of these standards.

The CCWG first recommended three fundamental qualities for determining the definition of being a yoga teacher. These qualities are:

- **Knowledge**, which comprises familiarity with content that forms the foundation of a teacher’s ability to share yoga in a class for the general public; however, this knowledge need not necessarily be shared during the class

- **Skills**, which include actions that a teacher should be able to perform both during a led class as well as within their own practice
- **Experience**, which includes both observation and practice

The CCWG recommended that any new YA-approved Core Curriculum should promote safer, more competent yoga teaching that is accessible and inclusive while also being inspirational and aspirational. The group defined these words as:

- **Safer**, which means improvements in the quality of the teaching and training of Anatomy & Physiology and Teaching Methodology as well as in interpersonal relationships
- **More competent**, which means that Lead Trainers¹ (LTs) demonstrate practical skills in every Core Curriculum subject rather than skills in merely one or a few
- **Accessible and inclusive**, which means including all of the general public, defined by YA as inclusive of a wide variety of mental and/or physical abilities, ages, ethnicities, gender identities, racial identities, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, body images, educational backgrounds, academic social achievements, family composition, geographic backgrounds, languages, learning styles, beliefs, cultures, and yoga experience levels
- **Inspirational and aspirational**, which means promoting the recognition and experience of yoga as more than asana through the sharing of a wide range of yoga practices and teachings that respects yoga's history and the diverse needs and backgrounds of students

The CCWG also addressed considerations such as: the current state of diversity now reflected in RYSs, Registered Yoga Teachers (RYTs), and practitioners; the rapid rise of the number of yoga classes offered worldwide; and the continuous challenge of the implementation of any yoga programming, including for large-scale efforts such as insurance companies, school boards, and similar organizations.

Many Core Curriculum topics were also addressed in the Working Groups for [Teacher Qualifications](#), [Teacher Trainer Qualifications](#), and [Online Learning](#).

¹ The notion of Lead Trainer(s) and Other Trainer(s) come from YA's section of its website on [Standards Guidelines](#) (all RYS).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The CCWG agreed that a reorganization and expansion of YA’s Educational Categories of Study and Practice is necessary. The evolution of these categories presented other mission-critical issues and questions for YA and its membership to resolve together, RYSs and RYTt alike. The group asked:

- 1) What are the minimum hours for learning in educational categories, and how are they integrated?
- 2) What are the best learning formats, including those that take place online? How are in-person and online learnings integrated? How are these learnings tested?
- 3) In the context of this paper, what are the best definitions of concepts such as “knowledge,” “skills,” “experience,” and “inclusion”?

BACKGROUND AND REFLECTION

The CCWG first cited what today’s RYSs agree to teach within YA’s “Educational Categories of Study and Practice” (or Core Curriculum) to trainees in their YTTs who can then obtain a RYT 200 credential from YA upon successful completion. This curriculum is designated as follows:

- Techniques, Training, and Practice
- Teaching Methodology
- Anatomy & Physiology
- Yoga Philosophy/Ethics/Lifestyle
- Practicum

The CCWG addressed three main issues influencing their recommendations:

- 1) **Minimum hours.** The **CCWG recommended that RYSs calculate time spent per category as accurately as possible given the integration of categories.** For example, a two-hour session on trikonasana (triangle pose) might be broken down as 30 minutes of Anatomy & Physiology; 30 minutes of Teaching Methodology; 30 minutes of Techniques, Training & Practice; and 30 minutes of Practicum (or practice teaching)
- 2) **New learning and testing formats.** The CCWG discussed different formats that could be used in each category and how many hours should be slotted for each, including: in-person Trainers within a traditional classroom setting; virtual Trainers conducting a live, interactive training online; virtual Trainers providing learning via static, pre-recorded presentation; and traditional homework
- 3) **Inclusivity of diverse yoga lineages.** The CCWG acknowledged that their recommended Core Curriculum standards could conflict with a lineage or a specific teaching environment. For example, in countries or settings with challenges to freedom of speech that might interfere with a Trainer’s ability to present the Core Curriculum, the CCWG recommended that the Trainer request a waiver of these teaching requirements and use alternative texts and topics for consideration instead

Any new YA-approved core curriculum should promote safer, more competent yoga teaching that is accessible and inclusive while being inspirational and aspirational as well.

The CCWG acknowledged that yoga practices such as chanting or mantra may be presented as religious rituals by some schools or as secular meditative practices by other schools. The group **recommended that RYSs always offer alternatives when the school presents the material in a manner that conflicts with a student’s beliefs**. Similarly, any yoga lineage unable to meet the standards of the Core Curriculum because of the core beliefs of the lineage may similarly apply for a waiver and propose alternatives. None in the CCWG opposed YA allowing such waivers, assuming that YA would apply reasonable standards when considering such requests.

SOLUTION

The **CCWG recommended new and expanded educational categories** from the current five categories into eleven new ones.

| CURRENT | NEW/PROPOSED |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Techniques, Training, & Practice | Yoga History |
| Teaching Methodology | Yoga Philosophy |
| Anatomy & Physiology | Yoga Teacher Ethics |
| Yoga Philosophy/Ethics/Lifestyle | Anatomy, Physiology, & Biomechanics |
| Practicum | Yogic Anatomy |
| | Asana |
| | Pranayama (breath control) |
| | Meditation |
| | Teaching Methodology |
| | Professional Interests |
| | Practice Teaching |

The Core Curriculum Working Group addressed issues surrounding the diversity now reflected in RYSs, RYT’s, and practitioners, combined with the rapid rise in the number of yoga classes offered worldwide.

The CCWG described each new category in detail using the filters of knowledge, skills, and experience to describe how these categories should best be taught. The CCWG also included additional details with respect to learning hours, verification, and testing. In addition to suggesting a minimum number of hours spent on each proposed subject area, the **CCWG recommended implementation of improved assessment and testing methods that verify teachers’ ability to apply their knowledge of the Core Curriculum**. The group supported assessments that combine Trainer and YA testing methods, with some saying that YA should offer schools optional assessment tools or combine graded or pass/fail methods to accommodate more self-reflective, feedback-oriented testing.

Importantly, other than Practicum, the CCWG did not identify any new Core Curriculum area as inappropriate for Online Learning (please see the [Online Learning](#) Working Group Paper for more on this inquiry).

(1) YOGA HISTORY

Knowledge

The CCWG determined that teachers need to be able to demonstrate the knowledge of yogic time periods, geographic origins, definitive characteristics, and teachings. These are:

- 1) Renunciation of origins of yoga
- 2) Vedic, or orthodox, traditions of yoga including the six darshanas, or “viewings” or traditions: Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mīmāsā and Vedanta
- 3) Heterodox traditions: Jain, Buddhist, Ajivika, Ajñana, and Cārvāka
- 4) The *Upanishads*
- 5) The *Bhagavad Gita*
 - a) Three expressions of yoga: *bhakti* (devotion), *jnana* (wisdom), *karma* (selfless action)
 - b) Recommended reading: Chapters 2, 3, 4, 6, and 12
- 6) *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali
 - a) Expressions of *samadhi* (total freedom), options for practice, the eight limbs of yoga
 - b) Recommended reading: Chapters 1 and 2
- 7) Yoga in the *tantric* (energetic) traditions
- 8) Pre-Modern yoga, including the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*
- 9) Modern yoga, including colonialism
- 10) Post-Modern yoga, including the evolution of any specific lineage featured in the training
- 11) Current issues in yoga, such as the [International Day of Yoga](#) and other expressions of yoga in India today, including #MeToo and sexual abuse in yoga communities; appropriation of yoga as a form of entertainment or exercise; religious politics and yoga; the commercialization of yoga; the past and present role of gender in yoga

Skills

The CCWG said that teachers should be able to:

- Accurately summarize the above aspects of yoga history in a class setting when relevant in a manner accessible to students, including the ability to reference relevant texts
- Convey historical source or context of other practices shared during class, such as asana, pranayama, meditation, and philosophy in a manner relevant and accessible to students

Experience

The CCWG recommended that trainings provide the opportunity for teachers to:

- Observe Trainers demonstrating the above skills
- Adequately demonstrate the above skills under Trainer observation

Hours, Verification, and Testing

Many in the CCWG recommended **ten hours of learning**, two of which could be in a static virtual learning environment (SVLE) and three of which could be in an interactive virtual learning environment (IVLE), but there was no resolution on this solution. Most in the CCWG agreed that these skills in Yoga History must be demonstrated by trainees in order to receive certification.

(2) YOGA PHILOSOPHY

Although the recommended Yoga History requirement includes the history of yoga philosophy, the **CCWG recommended that trainings also feature the personal study and practice of Yoga Philosophy as a distinct Core Curriculum subject.** This could include Trainer interpretations of yoga's teachings on the nature of reality (metaphysics), knowledge (epistemology), value (axiology), and logic. The CCWG acknowledged that presentations on Yoga Philosophy may overlap with presentations on the *personal* study and practice of Yoga Philosophy.

Knowledge

Most in the CCWG agreed that YTTs must identify with an existing yoga philosophy and/or create and disclose their own yoga philosophy to ensure that yoga not be reduced to a practice of only physical postures. The group said that the philosophy must clearly define yoga and should address key concepts in Indian philosophy/*dharmic* (dutiful) cultures, such as suffering, karma, *dharm*a (duty), liberation, and *seva* (volunteerism). After completing any training, RYT's should have:

- In-depth knowledge of their RYSs' definition of yoga or yoga philosophy
- An understanding of how that yoga philosophy relates to other yoga practices and/or limbs of yoga
- In-depth knowledge of published texts or unpublished material relating to the philosophy
- An understanding of the historical context or source(s) of the philosophy
- Awareness of practical methods to apply personally and reflect on the philosophy

Skills

The CCWG recommended that teachers be able to:

- Summarize accurately the above aspects of yoga philosophy in a group/private class setting when relevant and in an accessible manner, including referencing relevant texts and history
- Convey how philosophy relates to other practices shared during class, such as asana, pranayama, and meditation in a manner that is relevant and accessible to students

Experience

The CCWG said that trainings provide the opportunity for teachers to:

- Observe Trainers demonstrate the above skills
- Adequately demonstrate the above skills under trainer observation
- Personally reflect on the school's yoga philosophy through practical exercises

Hours, Verification, and Testing

Many in the CCWG recommended **ten hours of learning**, two of which could be in an SVLE and three of which could be in an IVLE, but there was no resolution on this solution. Most in the CCWG agreed that these skills in Yoga Philosophy must be demonstrated by trainees in order to receive certification.

(3) YOGA TEACHER ETHICS

Please also see the [Code of Conduct](#), [Integrity, Inclusion](#), and [Scope of Practice](#) Working Group Papers for more information regarding ethics in yoga teaching.

Knowledge

The **CCWG recommended that teachers have in-depth knowledge of the *yamas* and *niyamas* (ethical principles and external observances, respectively) or similar lineage-based yogic ethical precepts.** The group outlined in a document called “Hallmarks of Ethical Classrooms” the eight essential aspects of ethical classroom environments. Please see Appendix A for this document.

The CCWG agreed teachers must generally possess:

- An understanding of how yogic ethics relate to other yoga practices and/or limbs
- In-depth knowledge of texts relating to yogic ethics
- An understanding of the historical context or source(s) of yogic ethics
- Awareness of practical methods for personally applying and reflecting on yogic ethics

Skills

The CCWG said that teachers should be able to:

- Accurately summarize the *yamas* and *niyamas* or similar lineage-specific precepts in a group/private class setting when relevant, including referencing relevant texts and history
- Embody and abide by their own interpretation yogic ethics during and beyond class to the best of their ability
- Foster an ethical classroom environment to the best of their ability, which includes applying their knowledge of the eight *Hallmarks of an Ethical Classroom* described in Appendix A
- Convey how yogic ethics relate to general conduct and other yoga practices shared during class, such as *asana*, *pranayama*, meditation, etc. when relevant and in an accessible manner.

Experience

The CCWG recommended that trainings provide the opportunity for teachers to:

- Observe Trainers demonstrating the above skills
- Adequately demonstrate the above skills under trainer observation

Hours, Verification, and Testing

Many in the CCWG recommended **10 hours of learning**, two of which could be in an SVLE and three of which could be in an IVLE, but there was no resolution on this solution. Most in the CCWG agreed that these skills in Yoga Teacher Ethics must be demonstrated by trainees in order to receive certification.

(4) ANATOMY, PHYSIOLOGY, AND BIOMECHANICS

Knowledge

- 1) **Systems:** The CCWG recommended teachers have exposure to the following systems, including their components:
 - a) Nervous system
 - i. Neuroscience of meditative absorption, or samadhi
 - ii. Relaxation, the senses, and energy
 - iii. Autonomic/involuntary nervous system and its relationship to the “fight, flight, or freeze” stress response and the “submit, rest, or relax” response
 - iv. Vagal tone, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and hypervigilance
 - v. Mind-body connection including voluntary vs. involuntary breathing
 - b) Cardiovascular/circulatory system
 - c) Endocrine system
 - d) Digestive system
 - e) Respiratory system
 - f) Effect of spinal posture and muscles that affect breathing
 - g) Why/how air enters and leaves the body
 - h) The relationship between the autonomic nervous system, vagal tone, and breathing
 - i) Musculoskeletal system
 - i. The anatomy and physiology of the skeletal system, including the axial and appendicular skeleton
 - ii. The muscular system
 1. The major muscles involved in asana including their origin, insertion, and primary functions and actions
 2. Types of muscle contractions (isometric and isotonic)
 3. The major muscles involved in breathing, including the diaphragm
 - iii. Joints
 1. The biomechanics of the joints of the axial skeleton, including the pelvis and spine, and the joints of the appendicular skeleton including the hip, elbow, knee, wrist, shoulder, and ankle
 2. The types of joints (fibrous, cartilaginous, synovial, and facet)
 3. The six different types of synovial joints (pivot, hinge, saddle, plane, condyloid, and ball-and-socket)
 4. The types of joint movements (abduction, adduction, flexion, extension, rotation, and circumduction)
 5. Joint stabilization
 - iv. Basic understanding of tendons, ligaments, and fascia
- 2) **Research**
Some in the CCWG said that teachers should have awareness of relevant, peer-reviewed literature regarding the effects of asana, pranayama, and meditation on these systems; some disagreed
- 3) **Anatomy of Activities**
The CCWG recommended that teachers have a general understanding of the anatomy and physiology related to the following activities and experiences:
 - a) **Balancing**, which describes the relationship between visual, proprioceptive, and vestibular input
 - b) **Stretching**, including passive/static stretching, active/static stretching, proprioceptive neuromuscular facilitation, loaded stretching, and contraindications for these stretching techniques
 - c) **Safe movement**, flowing from joint physiology, injury awareness, preventions and relative contraindications; this relates to “risk awareness,” one of the eight hallmarks of an ethical classroom described earlier in this paper

d) **Trauma**, including various definitions and the effect of trauma on the nervous system (please see the [Inclusion](#) and [Code of Conduct](#) Working Group Papers for more information on trauma-informed teachings of yoga)

4) **Misalignment and Contraindications**

Advisors recommended that teachers possess adequate knowledge of anatomy to detect and resolve students' misalignment during asana practice and to advise students which asana, pranayama, and/or meditation practices are contraindicated or inadvisable for any other reason

5) **Alternatives**

The CCWG said that teachers must possess sufficient knowledge of anatomy and physiology to offer safe alternatives to asana, pranayama, and meditation practices; to ensure teachers inform students of these alternatives and adaptations in a manner that is relevant and accessible, the CCWG recommended teachers have knowledge of the relevant cueing methods described in the Teaching Methodology section of this paper

6) **Sequencing**

Advisors recommended that teachers have sufficient knowledge of anatomy such that teachers are able to safely sequence asana, pranayama, and meditation

Skills

The CCWG said teachers should be able to:

- 1) Describe to students the general effects of asana, pranayama, and meditation on the anatomical actions and systems described above, when/if relevant and in an accessible manner
- 2) Describe to students the relevant anatomy and physiology involved in the practice of the specific asana, pranayama and meditation techniques the teacher offers during class, when relevant and in an accessible manner
- 3) Disclose to students relevant risks associated with the *specific* asana, pranayama, and meditation practices the teacher offers during class
- 4) Apply their understanding of anatomy and physiology to detect and resolve asana misalignment that would be injurious to students
- 5) Make an effort to learn of student injuries and/or conditions and clarify contraindications related to their issue in asana, pranayama, and/or meditation practices
- 6) Offer students relevant asana and pranayama alternatives and adaptations, employing recommended cueing methods described in the Teaching Methodology section of this paper
- 7) Safely sequence a practice which may include asana, pranayama, and meditation

The Core Curriculum Working Group addressed three main issues influencing its recommendations: 1) minimum hours, 2) new learning and testing formats, and 3) inclusivity of diverse yoga lineages.

Experience

The CCWG recommended that trainings provide the opportunity for trainees to:

- 1) Observe Trainers demonstrating the above skills
- 2) Adequately demonstrate the above skills under Trainer observation
- 3) Practice asana, pranayama, and meditation safely according to the students' own injuries and/or conditions

Hours, Verification, and Testing

Many in the CCWG recommended **40 hours of learning**, 8 of which could be in an SVLE and 10 in an IVLE, but there was no resolution by the group on the number of hours, verification, and testing required for this category.

(5) YOGIC ANATOMY

Knowledge

Regardless of whether a school's lineage gives credence to yogic anatomy, some in the CCWG noted that RYSs should expose teachers to yogic anatomy as it appears in yoga history and texts.² This includes awareness of general definitions of the major terms in these texts. The CCWG did not reach an agreement on their recommendations for Yogic Anatomy.

Skills

The CCWG recommended that if yogic anatomy is part of a particular school's system of yoga, trainees should be able to teach and demonstrate their knowledge of the above topics in group or private classroom setting when relevant and in an accessible manner.

Experience

Advisors recommended that trainings provide the opportunity for trainees to:

- Observe Trainers demonstrate the above skills
- Adequately demonstrate the above skills under Trainer observation

Hours, Verification, and Testing

Many in the CCWG recommended **10 hours of learning**, 1 of which could be in an SVLE and 2 of which could be in an IVLE. Most in the CCWG agreed that these skills must be demonstrated by trainees in order to receive certification.

(6) ASANA

Knowledge

The CCWG said that RYTs must be familiar with various definitions of asana including:

- 1) Knowledge of how the asana is understood historically, in major texts, and according to the school's lineage, including the purpose and potential of asana within the yogic system and its relation to definitions of yoga and to other practices of yoga such as ethics, meditation, pranayama, pratyahara (sense withdrawal), and samadhi
- 2) Understanding of the effects of asana according to anatomy, research, historical texts, lineage, and/or modern interpretations

² The CCWG recommended texts including the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, Gheranda Samhita, and the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali.

- 3) Exposure to modern manifestations of asana including:
 - a) Lineages from India, e.g., Ashtanga, Hatha, and Bikram
 - b) Current fusion forms, e.g., hot yoga and dance yoga
 - c) Types of yoga asana classes, e.g., Vinyasa, Power, Gentle Flow, Yin Yoga
- 4) In-depth knowledge of specific asanas chosen by the school or lineage but which must include *sukhasana* (simple seated sitting pose), *tadasana* (mountain pose), and *savasana* (corpse pose). This includes knowledge of:
 - a) Reflection on why the asana is performed in a manner that promotes self-inquiry, self-motivation, and self-discernment
 - b) How to prepare for the asana, get into various options/stages of the asana, maintain the chosen option/stage, and get out of the asana safely
 - c) How to apply their understanding of anatomy and physiology to detect and resolve asana misalignment that would be injurious to students
 - d) The anatomical and physiological effects of the asana including relevant joint mechanics, muscle contraction, muscle stretching, risks, and relative contraindications
 - e) Alternatives to and adaptations of the asana for common injuries and/or conditions, which may involve the use of props
 - f) Sufficient warm-up and preparation for the asana
 - g) Yoga anatomy of each asana, such as the asana's potential effect on prana
 - h) Lineage-based breathing recommendations, if any
- 5) An understanding of the difference between relaxation and savasana
- 6) In-depth knowledge of how to sequence a complete practice including asana, pranayama, and meditation to achieve a particular effect/intention, safely and competently
- 7) Knowledge of groups of asanas with similar effects and their shared anatomy, alignment, risks, relative contraindications, and role in sequencing

Skills

The CCWG recommended that RYT's be able to demonstrate knowledge of the above topics in group and/or private settings when relevant and in an accessible manner as well as demonstrate the ability to offer general information about the above content to students with the exception of the topic of sequencing. Teachers should be able to demonstrate, or cue an assistant or student to demonstrate, any asana which they are teaching based on their own experience of regular practice of the asana according to their ability.

Experience

The CCWG recommended that an RYS provide the opportunity for trainees to:

- Observe Trainers demonstrate the above skills
- Practice asana regularly including sitting, savasana, and other asanas of the school's choosing, including their adaptations, alternatives, and stages appropriate for the teacher
- Adequately demonstrate the above skills under trainer observation

Hours, Verification, and Testing

Many in the CCWG recommended **50 hours of learning**, 5 of which could be in an SVLE and 10 of which could be in an IVLE. Most in the CCWG agreed that these skills must be demonstrated by trainees in order to receive certification.

(7) PRANAYAMA

Knowledge

The CCWG agreed that RYT's must be familiar with the definitions of pranayama and have:

- 1) Knowledge of how pranayama has been defined and practiced historically, in major texts,³ and according to the school's lineage including pranayama's purpose and potential within the yogic system and its relation to other practices of yoga such as ethics, meditation, asana, pratyahara, and samadhi
- 2) Understanding of the effects of pranayama on anatomy and yogic anatomy according to research, historical texts, lineage, and/or modern interpretations
- 3) Methods for controlling the inhalation and exhalation (valving) through the throat such as during ujjayi pranayama, using the tongue such as in sitali pranayama, or through the nostrils such as in nadi shodhana
- 4) Knowledge of how to safely and competently sequence a series of pranayama exercises as well as a practice that includes a combination of asana, pranayama, philosophy, and meditation exercises to achieve a particular effect/intention
- 5) In-depth knowledge of specific pranayama exercises and pranayama-related kriyas chosen by the school or lineage but which should include nadi shodhana/anuloma viloma, ujjayi, three-part breath, and potentially kapalabhati. This requires knowledge of:
 - a) How to prepare for, begin, maintain, and end the practice of pranayama exercise or pranayama-related kriya
 - b) The relevant anatomical and physiological effects of the pranayama exercise or pranayama-related kriya including joint mechanics, muscle contraction, muscle stretching, risks, and relative contraindications
 - c) Methods to detect and address misalignment to the extent possible during practice of pranayama or pranayama-related kriya
 - d) Alternatives to and adaptations of each required pranayama exercise for common injuries, conditions, and abilities, such as:
 - i. Nadi Shodhana alternative: concentrating on alternating nostrils rather than physically manipulating them, tongue in kechari mudra, eyes in shambhavi mudra
 - ii. Ujjayi alternative: concentrating on or light constriction of glottis with tongue in kechari mudra
 - iii. Three-part breath alternative: actively manipulate only the lower, middle or upper lobes of the lungs rather than all three areas, keeping in mind the energetic effect of each
 - iv. Kapalabhati alternative: modifications in pace and intensity, or bhastrika
 - v. Sitali alternative: breathing in through teeth, breathing out through nostrils

³ The CCWG suggested texts including the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, *Gheranda Samhita*, *Kumbhaka Paddhati* and the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. Please see these works for all pranayama terms in this section.

Skills

The CCWG recommended that teachers be able to demonstrate knowledge of the above topics in group and/or private settings when relevant and in an accessible manner as well as demonstrate the ability to offer general information with the exception of the topic of sequencing.

Experience

The CCWG agreed that trainings provide the opportunity for trainees to:

- Observe Trainers demonstrate the above skills
- Practice the above-mentioned pranayama exercises regularly including their adaptations, alternatives, and stages appropriate for the trainee
- Adequately demonstrate the above skills under trainer observation

Hours, Verification, and Testing

Most in the CCWG recommended **15 hours of learning**, 2 of which could be in an SVLE and 4 of which could be in an IVLE. Most in the CCWG agreed that these skills must be demonstrated by trainees in order to receive certification.

(8) MEDITATION

Knowledge

Most in the CCWG said that teachers must be familiar with the definitions of meditation, pratyahara, *dharana* (concentration) and *dhyana* (absorption) and have:

- 1) Knowledge of what meditation is historically, in major texts,⁴ and according to the school's lineage including meditation's purpose and potential within the yogic system and its relation to other practices of yoga such as ethics, pranayama, asana, pratyahara, concentration, and samadhi
- 2) Understanding of the effects of meditation according to best-practices research, historical texts, lineage, and/or modern interpretations
- 3) Knowledge of how to safely and competently sequence a series of meditation exercises as well as a practice that includes a combination of philosophy, asana, pranayama, and meditation to achieve a particular effect/intention
- 4) In-depth knowledge of specific meditation exercises chosen by the school or lineage but which must include at least one of each of the following types of meditation/concentration exercises:
 - a) Pratyahara-associated exercises: savasana and yoga nidra
 - b) Dharana-based exercises: breath-focused, mudra-focused mantra-focused, chanting, yantra-focused, trataka and body-focused
 - c) Dhyana-based exercises: self-reflection, pratipaksha bhavana, sankalpa, Buddhist-tradition mindfulness, Zen, vipassana
 - d) Samadhi-focused exercises: mantra japa, deity yoga, seedless/expansive meditation

The group noted that the above knowledge requires baseline knowledge of:

- a) How to prepare for, begin, maintain, and end the practice of meditation
- b) The relevant anatomical, physiological, and psychological effects of the meditation exercise including risks and contraindications

⁴ The CCWG suggested texts including the Yoga Sutras, Dhammapada, Hatha Yoga Pradipika, and Gheranda Samhita. Please refer to these texts for definitions and explanations of terms in this section.

- c) Methods to detect and address how students' postures could be made more conducive to meditation
- d) Alternatives to and adaptations of the meditation exercise for common injuries and/or conditions, such as:
 - i. Breath-focused alternative: external sound-focused or other lineage-appropriate, sense-focused technique
 - ii. Body-focused alternative: yantra or mudra-focused (mudra for hands, eyes, tongue, whole body, or other options)
 - iii. Yoga nidra alternative: body-based rotation of consciousness or sankalpa/affirmation concentration
 - iv. Savasana alternative: breath-focused concentration or relaxation

Skills

The CCWG recommended that teachers be able to demonstrate knowledge of the above topics in group and/or private settings when relevant and in an accessible manner as well as demonstrate the ability to offer general information with the exception of the topic of sequencing. The group recommended that trainees be able to practice previously mentioned meditation exercises to the best of their ability.

Experience

The CCWG recommended an RYS provide the opportunity for trainees to:

- Observe Trainers demonstrate the above skills
- Practice above-mentioned meditation exercises regularly including their adaptations, alternatives, and stages appropriate for the trainees
- Adequately demonstrate the above skills under trainer observation

Hours, Verification, and Testing

Many in the CCWG recommended **10 hours of learning**, 1 of which could be in an SVLE and 3 of which could be in an IVLE. Most agreed that these skills must be demonstrated by trainees in order to receive certification.

(9) TEACHING METHODOLOGY

Knowledge

The CCWG determined that best practices in Teaching Methodology comprised the following list. Which is more fully explained in Appendix B.

- 1) Practice selection
- 2) Sequencing
- 3) Pacing
- 4) Environment
- 5) Verbal communication to include offering cues which are inclusive and respectful of students' various abilities, levels of experience, and levels of mobility
- 6) Visual communication
- 7) Touch/physical communication
- 8) Classroom management

Skills

The CCWG recommended that teachers be able to engage the methods described above when relevant and in an accessible manner.

Experience

The CCWG recommended that an RYS provide the opportunity for trainees to:

- Observe Trainers demonstrate the above skills
- Adequately demonstrate the above skills under Trainer observation

Hours, Verification, and Testing

The CCWG recommended **25 hours of learning**, 3 of which could be in an SVLE and 6 of which could be in an IVLE. Most agreed that these skills must be demonstrated by trainees in order to receive certification.

(10) PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS

Knowledge

The CCWG recommended that teachers have knowledge of the following topics relevant to the professional interests of RYT's:

- 1) Contract clarity between teachers and their hiring entities
- 2) Professional organizations for the advancement of yoga and yoga instruction
- 3) Timeliness and consistency, including the need for teachers to start and end classes on time, as well as consistently following through on teaching commitments
- 4) Cleanliness of the teacher's body, dress, and instruction space to the fullest extent possible
- 5) Marketing, including professional methods for self-promotion and promotion of class offerings
- 6) Liability, waivers, and insurance
- 7) Self-care methods to ensure the sustainability of a teacher's profession
- 8) Venues for teaching and formats such as group classes, private classes, workshops, and retreats
- 9) Credentialing/registration process for graduating teachers
- 10) Other relevant topics, including: financial management, negotiation, project management, time management, critical thinking, diplomacy, emotional intelligence, non-verbal communication, conflict management, decision making

Skills

Advisors recommended that teachers demonstrate timeliness, consistency, and cleanliness as described above and obtain and maintain liability insurance.

Experience

Advisors recommended that teachers practice self-care as described above.

Hours, Verification, and Testing

Most in the CCWG recommended **10 hours of learning**, 1 of which could be in an SVLE and 2 of which could be in an IVLE. Some agreed that these skills must be demonstrated by trainees in order to receive certification.

(11) PRACTICE TEACHING

Knowledge, Skills, and Experience

Practicum provides teachers with the ability to apply the knowledge and skills described in each Core Curriculum subject above, according to the CCWG. Practicum activities and formats could include:

- **Mentorship.** A teacher guiding a practice or class under Trainer observation for feedback, or discussing teaching practices and experiences with an experienced yoga teacher, including the time spent receiving feedback.
- **Observation.** A teacher observing Trainers or experienced teachers demonstrating the above skills and knowledge in-person, in an IVLE, or in an SVLE.
- **Assisting.** A teacher assisting Trainers or experienced teachers with demonstration of the above skills and knowledge.

The group agreed that experience in teaching comes only from teaching.

Hours, Testing, and Verification

Many in the CCWG recommended **15 hours of learning**, all of which must be in-person and not via SVLEs or IVLEs. They also agreed that Practicum activities and hours may be fulfilled both during and after a trainee’s participation in the training school program.

ADVISORY GROUP

Our heartfelt thanks go to the following Advisors who spent much time and energy meeting, discussing, debating, and resolving issues on the Core Curriculum to the benefit of Yoga Alliance’s membership. The Advisors were:



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MARLA APT



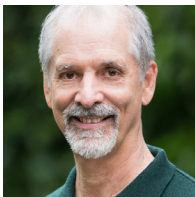
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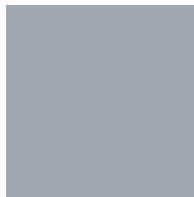
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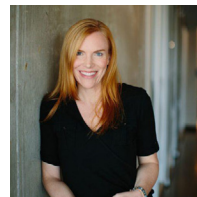
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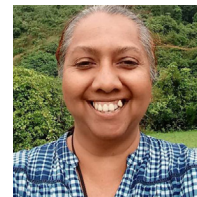
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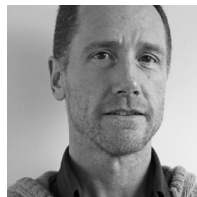
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Special thanks to Andrew Tanner and Hilary Mughloo of Yoga Alliance for facilitating the conversation and taking notes.

APPENDIX A: HALLMARKS OF ETHICAL CLASSROOMS

CONSENT FOR PHYSICAL CONTACT

Many in the CCWG believed that physical contact with students is unnecessary, with others acknowledging that skillful, consensual assists can foster powerful and positive yoga experiences. The CCWG agreed that teachers must have knowledge of methods for ethically requesting consent should it ever become necessary to engage in physical contact with a student during a teacher’s career. Waiver-based consent was proposed as sufficient, but the group valued three-step consent well. This entails:

- 1) **Pre-practice, general consent:** at the start of class, the teacher explains their intention in offering physical assistance/contact and asks students for their consent for general physical contact either:
 - a) Individually as they arrive or are on their mats;
 - b) Individually or as a group with a clear hand position/gesture; or
 - c) With a “chip” or card.
- 2) **Pose-specific consent:** at the start of class the teacher distinguishes between *general* consent for contact vs. consent for contact during a *specific* practice/pose. For instance, a teacher may explain “If at any point during a particular pose you don’t want to be touched and you see that I am approaching you to offer physical assistance, please shake your head or say ‘no.’ If I am in the process of assisting you physically in a practice and the contact is no longer welcome, please shake your head or say ‘no.’” The teacher ensures that students are aware of their approach before making physical contact so that the student has ample opportunity to say “no” before contact is made.
- 3) **Post-contact consent:** A teacher surveys a student’s breathing upon physical contact. If the teacher senses a high level of discomfort or significant change in breathing the teacher refrains from additional physical contact during that pose/practice.

ETHICAL TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

(Please see the [Code of Conduct](#) and [Scope of Practice](#) Working Group Papers for the fundamental inquiry into ethics in yoga.)

The CCWG struggled to define ethical teacher-student relationships but generally agreed that teachers must be aware of the boundaries of the scope of practice.

The group agreed that teachers must be aware of the power dynamics that create the potential for abuse. The CCWG recommended that teachers be able to distinguish between:

- 1) Devotional teacher-student or guru-disciple relationships, such as that described in the Upanishads and exemplified by Arjuna and Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita
- 2) Non-devotional teacher-student relationships, featuring student-focused teaching models and the teaching of yoga as a form of service between equals. The group agreed such relationships feature mutual respect, openness to questioning, and a spirit of inquiry

The CCWG recommended that teachers should be explicitly aware of which type(s) of teacher-student relationship(s) their training promotes. This disclosure may help to prevent the abuses of power stemming from the misperception of non-devotional teacher Trainers as gurus (or dispellers of darkness).

Finally, the CCWG recommended that Trainers disclose explicitly to both YA and to trainees if their yoga lineage/tradition is one in which intimacy is an accepted and a performed form of yoga practice. The group was unable to agree on whether the teacher-student relationship must end between a teacher and any student(s) with whom they are physically intimate or dating, regardless of the lineage. The group also said that Trainers should abstain from sexual relationships with teachers in training. The CCWG stated that teachers always treat their students equally during class, regardless of whether an intimate relationship exists beyond class time.

ETHICAL SCOPE OF PRACTICE

The CCWG agreed that teachers must have an awareness of their role as limited to yoga instruction. Accordingly, teachers must not assume the role(s) of doctor, physical therapist, counselor, mental health therapist, Ayurvedic care provider, salesperson, and/or any other type of health or wellness care provider. Should the teacher have requisite credentials and coverages to practice in such occupations and choose to expand their role beyond that of a yoga teacher, the teacher should inform students accordingly and explicitly request their consent to apply other modalities in the yoga classroom setting.

Please see the Scope of Practice Working Group Paper for the in-depth inquiry into this topic.

CULTURAL APPRECIATION VERSUS APPROPRIATION

The CCWG agreed that teachers must be aware of various interpretations of cultural appropriation and their relationship to yoga's history, including colonization. Some in the group identified yoga being paired with alcohol, or other inebriating or desecrating acts, as examples of cultural appropriation. The CCWG recommended that teachers have knowledge of methods to express cultural appreciation during class, including:

- 1) Citing lineage, source, and/or history of teachings shared during class in a manner that is relevant and accessible to students; and
- 2) Providing a well-rounded exposition of yoga during class, as opposed to reducing students' experience of yoga to the practice of asana only, in a manner that is relevant and accessible to students

CULTURAL COMPETENCY

The CCWG agreed that it is essential for teachers to be aware of various interpretations and applications of cultural competency. They recommended that teachers have knowledge of methods to express cultural competency during class, including demonstrating:

- 1) Awareness of their own cultural identity;
- 2) Willingness to understand the differences that make each class and student unique; and
- 3) Respect for the diversity of students bodies, identities, orientations, mental and emotional states, and levels of experience.

Please see the [Inclusion](#) Working Group Paper for more discussion.

ETHICAL MARKETING, CLAIMS AND IDENTITY

Many in the CCWG said that teachers should have knowledge of actions and effects of yoga according to anatomy, physiology, and/or research. Should the effect of a practice not be verifiable through such methods, the teacher must have knowledge of methods to describe the effect that avoids making inaccurate, unethical claims. Such options may include informing students of the teacher’s personal experience of the effect, inviting students to imagine the effect, or citing the lineage that traditionally claims the benefit. For example, it would be inaccurate to cue, “this pose will eliminate toxins and cancer cells” as opposed to “imagine that this pose strengthens your ability to eliminate toxins and cancer cells.” Some in the CCWG recommended that schools provide trainees with information on how to accurately speak about the benefits of yoga.

Others in the CCWG said that teachers must make an effort toward expressing consistency in their identity as yoga teachers both during and beyond class time. For instance, a person who presents themselves as a teacher of yoga during class and in marketing materials would also need to make an effort to engage in conduct beyond class time that befits a yoga teacher according to their yoga lineage. For instance, teachers should make an effort to live according to the yamas and niyamas or equivalent lineage-based ethical precepts both during and beyond class time (see again [Scope of Practice](#)).

RISK AWARENESS

Several in the CCWG recommended that teachers possess sufficient knowledge of anatomy to inform students of relevant risks of each asana the teacher offers to their students. This requires awareness of joint physiology, best practices for prevention of injuries and/or conditions, and contraindications. Others in the group recommended that teachers should be aware of their duty to ask students to disclose their injuries and/or conditions, if any, so that the teacher may provide tailored practice options (or at least inform the student of which practices to avoid).

ETHICAL TRANSGRESSIONS AND METHODS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

The CCWG agreed that teachers should have awareness of the YA grievance policy⁵ and be informed of their duty to cooperate with YA grievance investigations. The group recommended that teachers be aware of their duty to report unethical or illegal behavior of other teachers to YA and other appropriate authorities. Several in the CCWG also recommended that RYSs direct training participants to YA sites to view reviews of teachers and schools and so that training participants can post reviews themselves while also directing their future students to do so, allowing these sites to form another platform for accountability.

⁵ https://www.yogaalliance.org/About_Us/Policies/Grievance_Policy

APPENDIX B: TEACHING METHODOLOGY

PRACTICE SELECTION

Teachers' abilities to select relevant knowledge and practices of yoga depends on the teachers' awareness of student injuries, conditions, wellness goals, general needs, living conditions, culture, current events affecting the students, and other diverse factors that form students' receptivity to yoga. The CCWG acknowledged that obtaining detailed information from students individually about these factors is not feasible in many group classroom environments but that teachers should still endeavor to obtain sufficient information about students. The group recommended that schools should ensure that their graduates can teach in a manner that ensures presentation of yoga's multidimensional capacities, addressing the various layers and methods of practicing yoga according to the teacher's chosen tradition.

SEQUENCING

Once teachers do their best to identify relevant knowledge and practice options, the CCWG said, they must know how to safely sequence those practices and convey their relevance through the sequence theme or intention. This includes knowledge of how to sequence:

- 1) A series of asana exercises
- 2) A series of meditation exercises
- 3) A series of pranayama exercises
- 4) A combination of asana, pranayama, and meditation exercises
- 5) Any of the above exercises with relevant history, philosophy, anatomy, and yogic anatomy integrated

PACE

Teachers must be able to evaluate students' abilities and offer the appropriate practices at the appropriate pace and in the appropriate order. Teachers may also invite students to practice at their own pace but must make such invitations in earnest and allow appropriate time and space for such variations of pace.

ENVIRONMENT

Teachers must make efforts to create a *sattvic* (harmonious) and safe space to the extent possible. This may involve arriving early to clean the practice area and perform any ritual or personal practice that fosters a *sattvic* state of being for the teacher and space. Some in the CCWG agreed teachers should avoid cultivating competitive classroom environments. Proposed methods for doing so include:

- Teaching practice options appropriate for all, including clear options for the students who may have the least experience or level of mobility in the class as well as concurrent options for the most advanced or mobile students present
- Explicitly stating that the classroom is not a space for competition between students and/or that all practice options are equal
- Cueing various options for practice in a manner not denoting hierarchy of options offered or that of student achievement

VERBAL COMMUNICATION

The CCWG said teachers must be able to:

- 1) Verbally cue practices, their alternatives, and adaptations simply, safely and with accurate anatomical descriptions
- 2) Use appropriate vocal tone
- 3) Project their voice to help students hear verbal cues clearly
- 4) Practice conscious or nonviolent communication whenever appropriate, which may include, for instance, offering invitations and opportunities for inquiry rather than judgement and commands to trauma survivors who would benefit from exploring choice as a practice of self-empowerment
- 5) Offer cues which are inclusive and respectful of the students' various abilities, levels of experience, and levels of mobility. Recommended cueing methods include:
 - a) **Multi-option cues.** Teachers present a choice of multiple practice options simultaneously, without hierarchy, allowing each student to choose the option safest for their body
 - b) **Process-oriented cues.** As opposed to goal-oriented cues, cues which focus on the journey of one's experience in a practice rather than an end goal
 - c) **Cuing options objectively.** Cues which state what anatomical alignment must objectively exist before a student may safely explore a posture alternative or adaptation
 - d) **Tailored cues.** Appropriate for the students present, as opposed to memorized cues or scripts
- 6) Offer cues inspiring self-challenge, self-engagement, self-empowerment, and self-inquiry to offer a balance between effort and ease
- 7) Offer cues that guide students into an experience but which refrain from telling students how to feel
- 8) Cue in a manner that honors the eight hallmarks of ethical classrooms identified in the ethics section of this paper, including cultural competency
- 9) Offer cues with appropriate word choice; this may include the use of positive speech

VISUAL COMMUNICATION

Teachers must be able to offer visual demonstration of practices including demonstrations *before* students engage in the practice, demonstrations *concurrent* with student practice, and demonstrations *after* student practice whenever appropriate. Demonstrations may be made by the teacher, a teaching assistant, or a consenting student. Such demonstrations may be in-person or through the use of audio/visual equipment (video or photographs). Teachers may choose to demonstrate a practice for the entire class or may need to approach an individual student to offer a tailored demonstration. Visual demonstrations may involve the use of props in some traditions.

TOUCH/PHYSICAL COMMUNICATION

Teachers may offer safe, consensual, and appropriate assistance during yoga practices through physical contact, the CCWG noted, recommending that physical contact be as limited as possible unless a school's lineage demands more engagement. Touching genitals and breasts, however, is impermissible under all circumstances as confirmed by the YA policy on sexual misconduct. Methods to limit contact involve teachers' use of minimal parts of their body to perform the adjustment as well as teachers' selection of appropriate areas of the student body for contact. Following are various types of adjustments the CCWG offered:

- **Corrective physical adjustments:** hands-on corrective action. Not recommended in acute-trauma outreach settings unless working with a consistent group of the same students for a predetermined, continuous length of time
- **Non-corrective physical adjustments:** hands-on action to enhance students' experience of an asana (such an assist is not focused on corrective action)
- **Positive touch assists:** touching with little to no desired outcome beyond sharing a positive touch experience
- **Passive vs. active assists:** passive assists involve teacher-induced movement whereas movement in active assists is performed by the student
- **Directional energetic assists:** without engaging in physical contact, a teacher may move her/his/their hand near a part of a student's body to convey the internal or external movement of an asana. These adjustments are often paired with concurrent verbal cues

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

The CCWG said teachers must be prepared to manage the following situations during class to the best of their ability:

- Student display of strong emotional reactions to practices; while remaining clear on the limits of the Scope of Practice, teachers must be prepared to direct students to appropriate specialists or their health care providers
- Emergencies, including the ability to contact and direct emergency services
- Sexual harassment, which may involve the use of nonviolent communication to immediately describe the behavior that may constitute sexual harassment, define sexual harassment for all individuals present and invite the behavior to stop, or contact or arrange for contact of emergency services
- Basic conflict resolution, such as the use of nonviolent communication to resolve conflict, and conflict prevention, such as well the use of community agreements⁶
- Late-arriving and early-departing students and how to communicate boundaries for class attendance using nonviolent communication or similar techniques
- Favoritism, cliques, and the need for teachers to engage students fairly and in an inclusive manner

⁶ Some in the CCWG insisted that this is necessary for teachers leading classes in non-studio settings and in cultures with different expectations relating to conflict.



#YAstandards

YOGA ALLIANCE & THE YOGA ALLIANCE FOUNDATION

Founded in 1999, Yoga Alliance is a member-based, non-profit organization that serves yoga schools and teachers across the globe, providing a world-recognized, best-in-class credential and unifying its members around a shared ethical commitment. In addition, YA delivers a strong value proposition to its members through community-building initiatives, educational resources, advocacy efforts, and social impact programs. Its sister organization, the Yoga Alliance Foundation, supports leveraged impact and direct service programs that expand the reach of and participation in yoga.

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