

Nashville State Community College OTA PROGRAM

Curriculum Design Framework

Person–Environment–Occupation Model | Bloom's Taxonomy | Five Curricular Threads

PART I: THE PERSON–ENVIRONMENT–OCCUPATION (PEO) FRAMEWORK

The Person–Environment–Occupation (PEO) Model is a foundational theoretical framework in occupational therapy practice. It conceptualizes human functioning as the dynamic, transactive relationship among three interconnected elements: the Person, the Environment, and the Occupation. Understanding this model is not simply an academic requirement, it is the professional lens through which every OTA student will learn to observe, evaluate, and support every client they serve.

The Three Domains

Person

The Person encompasses the unique individual, including physical, cognitive, affective, spiritual, and social attributes. Each person brings a distinct history, set of roles, strengths, and challenges to every occupational experience. No two clients are the same, even when they share an identical diagnosis.

Environment

The Environment refers to the context in which occupation occurs including physical spaces, cultural norms, social networks, institutional structures, and temporal conditions. The environment can serve as either a facilitator or a barrier to occupational performance, and is always subject to therapeutic modification.

Occupation

Occupation comprises the purposeful activities and tasks that individuals engage in across the lifespan, including self-care, productivity, and leisure. Occupations give life meaning, structure, and identity. They are the vehicle through which the OTA delivers intervention and measures progress.

Occupational Performance: The Outcome of PEO Fit

Occupational Performance is the outcome produced at the intersection of all three elements. When person, environment, and occupation achieve a strong fit, individuals experience competent, satisfying, and meaningful engagement in daily life. When fit is disrupted by illness, injury, environmental barriers, or occupational mismatch occupational performance suffers. Restoring, maintaining, or enhancing that fit is the central purpose of occupational therapy, and the core clinical task of every OTA.

The PEO framework is not a concept introduced once and revisited occasionally. It is the organizing thread of your entire OTA education. From your first course to your last day of fieldwork, you are

developing the capacity to see every client as a whole person, in a real environment, doing the occupations that matter most to them. That is the heart of occupational therapy practice.

Why PEO Matters for OTA Students

The PEO Model shapes how OTA students approach every clinical encounter. It:

- Reminds you that no two clients are the same, even with identical diagnoses
- Directs your attention to modifiable factors across all three domains, rather than treating deficits in isolation
- Anchors your practice in occupation-centered, client-centered care
- Provides a common language for interprofessional collaboration with supervising OTs and the broader care team
- Establishes a systematic way to identify where occupational performance breaks down and where intervention should be targeted

PART II: BLOOM'S TAXONOMY AND THE PEO FRAMEWORK — A CURRICULAR PROGRESSION

The NSCC OTA curriculum is intentionally designed so that PEO understanding deepens across every course and every semester. This progression is scaffolded by Bloom's Taxonomy which is a hierarchy of cognitive learning that moves students from foundational knowledge acquisition toward higher-order professional reasoning and clinical synthesis.

The following levels describe how students engage with the PEO framework at each stage of their cognitive development throughout the program.

Level 1 — Remember & Understand

"What is PEO, and what does each component mean?"

At the beginning of the program, students recall and describe the three domains of PEO and define occupational performance. Learning activities include reading primary sources, matching client vignettes to PEO components, and illustrating the overlapping circles of the model. The focus is on building a clear, accurate conceptual foundation.

Curricular examples:

- Introduction to Occupational Therapy concepts
- Human development across the lifespan
- Anatomy and kinesiology — identifying how the Person domain encompasses body structures and functions

Level 2 — Apply

"How do I use PEO when observing a client performing an activity?"

Students apply the PEO framework to structured observations and simulated scenarios. They begin to identify how environmental modifications or occupational adaptations can improve performance fit. Lab skills are practiced in deliberately varied contexts ; for example, cluttered versus clear workspaces, or quiet versus distracting settings so students directly experience how the environment shapes occupational outcomes.

Curricular examples:

- Activity analysis courses that include analyzing tasks through the lens of person capabilities and environmental demands
- Assistive technology and adaptive equipment
- Therapeutic use of occupation in simulated clinical settings

Level 3 — Analyze

"What is disrupting the PEO fit for this specific client?"

Students analyze complex client cases, breaking down interactions among the person's functional status, the occupational demands, and the environmental context. They identify where the fit is breaking down and

generate clinical hypotheses about contributing factors. This level of reasoning is fundamental to effective OTA practice.

Curricular examples:

- Psychosocial conditions and practice
- Physical rehabilitation conditions
- Pediatric and geriatric populations
- Case study seminars where students dissect PEO fit across different diagnoses and life stages

Level 4 — Evaluate

"Is this intervention addressing the right element of PEO for this client?"

Students evaluate intervention plans by weighing evidence and occupational performance outcomes. They critique documentation, assess goal quality, and reflect on whether interventions adequately address all three PEO domains or focus too narrowly on only one element in isolation.

Curricular examples:

- Evidence-based practice coursework
- Documentation and goal-writing courses
- Interprofessional education experiences
- Peer review of clinical reasoning in case presentations

Level 5 — Create

"How do I design a holistic, occupation-centered plan that integrates all three PEO domains?"

At the highest level of cognitive development, students synthesize their understanding of PEO to create individualized, occupation-centered intervention plans under OT supervision. They design environmental modifications, adapt occupations, and address person-level factors collaboratively demonstrating that PEO is not simply a model they learned, but a sustained habit of professional thought.

Curricular examples:

- Level II Fieldwork placements across settings: acute care, community, school-based, and mental health
- Capstone case presentations
- Professional development assignments reflecting on growth in clinical reasoning

PEO and Bloom's Taxonomy: Summary

Bloom's Level	Cognitive Skill	PEO Application
Remember / Understand	Define & describe	Name and explain Person, Environment, Occupation
Apply	Use in context	Observe PEO factors during activity analysis

Bloom's Level	Cognitive Skill	PEO Application
Analyze	Break down	Identify disrupted PEO fit in client cases
Evaluate	Judge & compare	Critique intervention plans for PEO alignment
Create	Design & synthesize	Build occupation-centered plans across all three domains

PART III: THE FIVE CURRICULAR THREADS OF THE NSCC OTA PROGRAM

The NSCC OTA faculty have identified five overarching curricular threads that are woven throughout every semester and every course of the program. These threads are not course-specific; they are program-wide commitments that ensure consistency, coherence, and progressive development across the full scope of OTA education. They reflect the values of the occupational therapy profession as well as the competencies required for entry-level practice.

Each thread is built upon the PEO framework and advances through the levels of Bloom's Taxonomy, ensuring that students develop not only foundational knowledge but the clinical reasoning, professional identity, and practical skills to serve clients as occupation-centered, evidence-based practitioners.

Thread	Title	Core Focus
Thread 1	Developing the Professional	Professional identity, ethical reasoning, AOTA Code of Ethics, scope of practice
Thread 2	Knowledge of the Profession	OT history, OTPF domains and process, evolution of the profession
Thread 3	Understanding Occupation	Occupation across the lifespan, barriers, culture, spirituality, occupational identity
Thread 4	Maximizing Occupational Performance	Therapeutic use of self, intervention skills, cultural competence, evidence-based practice
Thread 5	Effective Practice & Practice Management	Role delineation, documentation, billing, advocacy, ethical accountability

Thread 1: Developing the Professional

This curricular thread addresses the formation of professional identity, ethical reasoning, and the critical thinking skills that define an occupational therapy assistant as a reflective and responsible practitioner. We do not simply tell students what it means to be a professional we guide them through a developmental process of understanding, practicing, evaluating, and ultimately embodying professional behaviors.

Application through Bloom's Taxonomy:

Remember / Understand

- Foundational knowledge of professional standards and the AOTA Code of Ethics
- Understanding what it means to practice within the OT scope of practice

Apply

- Applying ethical reasoning to practice scenarios and role-play activities

Analyze

- Analyzing complex ethical dilemmas involving competing priorities in real-world contexts

Evaluate / Create

- Reflecting on one's own professional growth and identifying areas for continued development
- Constructing a personal professional identity grounded in OT values and ethical practice

Thread 2: Developing Knowledge and Understanding of the Profession

This thread ensures that every student understands where occupational therapy came from, what it stands for, and how it organizes and guides its practice most significantly through the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework (OTPF). A strong professional knowledge base is prerequisite to competent clinical reasoning.

Application through Bloom's Taxonomy:

Remember

- History and philosophy of occupational therapy
- The Moral Treatment movement and the founding values of the profession

Understand / Apply

- The OTPF: its domains, processes, and application across the lifespan and practice settings
- The OT process: referral, screening, evaluation, intervention, and outcomes

Evaluate

- Critically appraising how the profession has evolved and its implications for contemporary OTA practice

Thread 3: Understanding Occupation

This thread ensures students develop a sophisticated, clinically applicable understanding of occupation and not merely as activity, but as the meaningful, purposeful engagement that defines human experience and health. The thread progresses from foundational concepts to complex cultural and clinical applications.

Application through Bloom's Taxonomy:

Remember / Understand

- Occupation and its relationship to normal development across the lifespan

Understand / Apply

- Challenges to engagement in occupation arising from mental health conditions, physical health conditions, and environmental factors

Analyze

- The role of culture, spirituality, socioeconomic status, and individual values in shaping occupational identity and engagement

Create

- Clinical application of occupational science concepts to design client-centered, occupation-based interventions

Thread 4: Maximizing Occupational Performance

Building on students' understanding of occupation, this thread encompasses the clinical skills, interpersonal competencies, and intervention strategies that OTAs use to facilitate participation and maximize occupational performance for their clients. This thread is where knowledge becomes practice.

Application through Bloom's Taxonomy:

Apply

- Therapeutic use of self as a clinical tool including active listening, empathy, rapport-building, and intentional presence
- Selecting occupation-based, client-centered activities and interventions relevant to each individual's goals and contexts
- Skill-based competencies including transfers, ADL training, splinting, sensory approaches, cognitive strategies, and group facilitation

Analyze / Evaluate

- Integrating cultural competence, spiritual beliefs, educational background, and socioeconomic factors in intervention planning

Create

- Designing and implementing intervention programs that reflect evidence-based practice and occupation-centered principles

Thread 5: Effective Practice and Practice Management

An OTA who understands occupation and can implement interventions must also function effectively within the complex systems of real-world healthcare. This thread prepares students to be not just competent clinicians, but informed and responsible participants in the healthcare environment from documentation and billing to advocacy and ethical accountability.

Application through Bloom's Taxonomy:

Remember / Understand

- Role delineation, supervision requirements, and collaborative relationships between OTs and OTAs across practice settings

Apply

- Documentation standards, Medicare and Medicaid billing principles, and the relationship between documentation and reimbursement

Analyze

- Principles of management, leadership, and interdisciplinary collaboration in healthcare settings

Evaluate

- Advocacy for clients, for the profession, and for equitable access to occupational therapy services
- Ethical accountability: understanding when and how to raise concerns about practice, safety, and professional responsibility

CONCLUSION: AN INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK FOR OTA EDUCATION

The NSCC OTA program is built on the conviction that exceptional occupational therapy assistant education requires more than a collection of courses. It requires a coherent, integrated vision of what graduates will know, who they will be, and what they will do. The PEO framework, Bloom's Taxonomy, and the five curricular threads together form that vision.

The PEO Model provides the philosophical and clinical lens: every client is a whole person, in a real environment, engaged in the occupations that give their life meaning. When that fit is disrupted, the OTA's role is to restore, adapt, or reconstruct it.

Bloom's Taxonomy provides the developmental architecture: students do not simply receive knowledge about PEO and professional practice; they progress through remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and ultimately creating, so that their learning mirrors the complexity of real clinical work.

The five curricular threads ensure that this progression is consistent and cumulative across every course and every semester. Professional identity, knowledge of the profession, understanding of occupation, skills to maximize performance, and competence in practice management as these are not siloed topics. They are braided together throughout the program so that graduates emerge as whole clinicians, prepared for the full scope of entry-level OTA practice.

From the first day of the program to the last day of fieldwork, NSCC OTA students are not just learning about occupational therapy. They are becoming occupational therapy assistants — in knowledge, in reasoning, in values, and in practice.

Reference: Law, M., Cooper, B., Strong, S., Stewart, D., Rigby, P., & Letts, L. (1996). The Person-Environment-Occupation Model: A transactive approach to occupational performance. Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy, 63(1), 9–23.