GCSE Physical Education

Key vocabulary and definitions

Pearson Edexcel Level 1/Level 2 GCSE (9-1) in Physical Education (1PE0)
Specification Issue 6

A student-friendly revision glossary organised by specification topic. It includes the core technical vocabulary for Components 1 and 2, essential language for practical performance and the Personal Exercise Programme, plus the examination command words.

How to use this resource

Cover definitions, then retrieve them from memory. Add a sporting example to each term. For longer answers, link the term to its effect on performance. Definitions are concise revision wording aligned to the specification; teachers may wish to add activity-specific examples.

Source: Pearson Edexcel GCSE (9-1) Physical Education specification (1PE0), Issue 6, September 2026. This independent revision resource is not an official Pearson publication.

Component 1, Topic 1: Applied anatomy and physiology

Key word	Student-friendly definition
Skeleton	The framework of bones that supports the body, protects organs and enables movement.
Cranium	The flat bone of the skull that protects the brain.
Clavicle	The collar bone; a long bone connecting the sternum to the scapula.
Scapula	The shoulder blade; a flat bone providing a broad area for muscle attachment.
Vertebral column	The spine, formed from cervical, thoracic, lumbar, sacral and coccygeal regions.
Sternum	The breastbone; a flat bone protecting the heart and lungs.
Humerus	The long bone of the upper arm.
Radius	The forearm bone on the thumb side.
Ulna	The forearm bone on the little-finger side.
Carpals	The short bones of the wrist.
Metacarpals	The long bones forming the palm.
Phalanges	The bones of the fingers and toes.
Pelvis	The bony structure that supports the trunk and protects pelvic organs.
Femur	The thigh bone and the longest bone in the body.
Patella	The kneecap; a bone protecting the front of the knee joint.
Tibia	The larger, weight-bearing bone of the lower leg.
Fibula	The smaller bone on the outside of the lower leg.
Tarsals	The short bones of the ankle.
Metatarsals	The long bones of the foot.
Long bone	A bone that acts as a lever, such as the femur or humerus.
Short bone	A compact bone mainly associated with weight bearing and stability, such as a carpal.
Flat bone	A broad, thin bone that protects organs and provides muscle attachment, such as the cranium.
Irregular bone	A bone with a complex shape used for protection and muscle attachment, such as a vertebra.
Joint	A place where two or more bones meet.
Pivot joint	A joint allowing rotation, such as the atlas and axis in the neck.
Hinge joint	A joint mainly allowing flexion and extension, such as the knee or elbow.
Ball-and-socket joint	A joint allowing movement in many directions and rotation, such as the hip or shoulder.
Condyloid joint	A joint allowing movement in two planes, such as the wrist.
Flexion	A movement that decreases the angle at a joint.
Extension	A movement that increases the angle at a joint.
Abduction	Movement away from the body's midline.
Adduction	Movement towards the body's midline.
Rotation	Turning a body part around its longitudinal axis.

Key word	Student-friendly definition
Circumduction	A circular movement combining flexion, extension, abduction and adduction.
Plantar flexion	Pointing the toes downwards at the ankle.
Dorsiflexion	Pulling the toes upwards towards the shin.
Ligament	Strong connective tissue joining bone to bone and stabilising a joint.
Tendon	Strong connective tissue joining muscle to bone.
Voluntary muscle	Skeletal muscle controlled consciously.
Involuntary muscle	Muscle that works without conscious control, such as muscle in blood-vessel walls.
Cardiac muscle	Specialised involuntary muscle forming the heart.
Agonist	The muscle chiefly responsible for producing a movement; the prime mover.
Antagonist	The muscle that relaxes or lengthens to allow the agonist to create movement.
Antagonistic pair	Two muscles working oppositely: as one contracts, the other relaxes.
Deltoid	Shoulder muscle that abducts the arm.
Biceps	Upper-arm muscle that flexes the elbow.
Triceps	Upper-arm muscle that extends the elbow.
Pectoralis major	Chest muscle that adducts the arm at the shoulder.
Latissimus dorsi	Large back muscle that adducts the arm at the shoulder.
External obliques	Muscles at the sides of the abdomen involved in rotation and lateral flexion of the trunk.
Hip flexors	Muscles that flex the hip.
Gluteus maximus	Buttock muscle that extends the hip.
Quadriceps	Muscle group at the front of the thigh that extends the knee.
Hamstrings	Muscle group at the back of the thigh that flexes the knee.
Gastrocnemius	Calf muscle that plantar-flexes the ankle.
Tibialis anterior	Muscle at the front of the lower leg that dorsiflexes the ankle.
Type I fibres	Slow-twitch fibres suited to low-intensity aerobic work; fatigue slowly.
Type IIa fibres	Fast-twitch fibres used in anaerobic work that have some resistance to fatigue.
Type IIx fibres	Fast-twitch fibres that produce high force quickly but fatigue rapidly.
Cardiovascular system	The heart, blood and blood vessels that transport substances around the body.
Atrium	An upper chamber of the heart that receives blood.
Ventricle	A lower chamber of the heart that pumps blood out.
Septum	The wall separating the left and right sides of the heart.
Valve	A structure that prevents the backflow of blood.
Aorta	The main artery carrying oxygenated blood from the left ventricle to the body.
Vena cava	The main vein returning deoxygenated blood from the body to the right atrium.
Pulmonary artery	The vessel carrying deoxygenated blood from the heart to the lungs.
Pulmonary vein	The vessel carrying oxygenated blood from the lungs to the heart.

Key word	Student-friendly definition
Artery	A blood vessel carrying blood away from the heart, usually at high pressure.
Vein	A blood vessel carrying blood towards the heart; it contains valves.
Capillary	A microscopic, one-cell-thick blood vessel where exchange occurs.
Red blood cell	A blood cell containing haemoglobin that transports oxygen.
White blood cell	A blood cell involved in fighting infection.
Platelet	A cell fragment that helps blood clot.
Plasma	The liquid part of blood that transports cells, nutrients, hormones and waste.
Vasoconstriction	Narrowing of a blood vessel's lumen to reduce blood flow.
Vasodilation	Widening of a blood vessel's lumen to increase blood flow.
Vascular shunting	Redistribution of blood towards active areas and away from less active areas during exercise.
Respiratory system	The organs responsible for breathing and gas exchange.
Trachea	The windpipe carrying air towards the bronchi.
Bronchi	The two main air passages leading into the lungs.
Bronchioles	Smaller branches of the bronchi leading to the alveoli.
Alveoli	Tiny air sacs where oxygen and carbon dioxide are exchanged with the blood.
Diaphragm	A dome-shaped muscle beneath the lungs; its contraction increases chest volume during inhalation.
Gas exchange	Diffusion of oxygen from alveoli into blood and carbon dioxide from blood into alveoli.
Tidal volume	The volume of air inhaled or exhaled in one normal breath.
Vital capacity	The greatest volume of air that can be forcibly exhaled after a maximal inhalation.
Aerobic respiration	Energy release using oxygen; produces carbon dioxide and water.
Anaerobic respiration	Energy release without sufficient oxygen; supports short, high-intensity activity and produces lactic acid.
Lactic acid	A by-product associated with anaerobic energy release.
Lactate accumulation	A rise in lactate in the muscles or blood as exercise intensity increases.
Heart rate	The number of heart beats per minute.
Stroke volume	The volume of blood pumped by the left ventricle per beat.
Cardiac output	The volume of blood pumped by the heart per minute: heart rate x stroke volume.
Muscle fatigue	A temporary reduction in a muscle's ability to produce force.
Hypertrophy	An increase in muscle size following appropriate training.
Capillarisation	An increase in the number of capillaries supplying muscle tissue.

Component 1, Topic 2: Movement analysis

Key word	Student-friendly definition
Lever	A rigid structure that rotates around a fulcrum; in the body, bones act as levers.
Fulcrum	The pivot point of a lever; usually a joint in the body.
Effort	The force applied to move a load; usually produced by muscle contraction.
Load	The resistance or weight moved by a lever.
First-class lever	A lever with the fulcrum between effort and load, such as neck extension.
Second-class lever	A lever with the load between fulcrum and effort, such as plantar flexion when rising onto the toes.
Third-class lever	A lever with the effort between fulcrum and load, such as elbow flexion by the biceps.
Mechanical advantage	When a lever allows a large load to be moved with relatively little effort.
Mechanical disadvantage	When a lever requires more effort but provides speed and range of movement.
Axis	An imaginary line around which the body or a body part rotates.
Sagittal plane	An imaginary vertical plane dividing the body into left and right sides.
Frontal plane	An imaginary vertical plane dividing the body into front and back.
Transverse plane	An imaginary horizontal plane dividing the body into upper and lower parts.
Frontal axis	A horizontal line from side to side; movement in the sagittal plane occurs around it.
Sagittal axis	A horizontal line from front to back; movement in the frontal plane occurs around it.
Vertical axis	A vertical line through the body; rotation in the transverse plane occurs around it.

Component 1, Topic 3: Physical training

Key word	Student-friendly definition
Health	A state of complete physical, emotional and social wellbeing, not merely the absence of disease.
Fitness	The ability to meet the demands of the environment.
Exercise	Physical activity undertaken to maintain or improve health and/or fitness; it is not competitive sport.
Performance	How successfully a person carries out a sporting action or activity.
Cardiovascular fitness	The ability of the heart, lungs and blood to supply oxygen during sustained exercise; also called aerobic endurance.
Strength	The maximum force a muscle or muscle group can produce.
Muscular endurance	The ability of a muscle or muscle group to make repeated contractions without tiring.
Flexibility	The range of movement possible at a joint.
Body composition	The relative proportion of fat, muscle, bone and other tissues in the body.
Agility	The ability to change direction quickly while remaining controlled.
Balance	The ability to keep the body's centre of mass over its base of support.
Coordination	The ability to use two or more body parts together smoothly and efficiently.
Power	The ability to apply force quickly; commonly described as strength x speed.
Reaction time	The time between a stimulus and the start of a response.
Speed	The maximum rate at which a person can move the whole body or a body part.
Fitness testing	Measuring a component of fitness using a standardised test protocol.
Normative data	Reference results from a relevant population used to compare an individual's score.
Test protocol	The standard instructions and procedures used to conduct a fitness test reliably.
Cooper 12-minute test	A test of cardiovascular fitness using the distance covered running or swimming in 12 minutes.
Harvard Step Test	A cardiovascular fitness test using stepping exercise and recovery pulse rate.
Illinois agility run	A timed course used to measure agility.
Grip dynamometer	A device and test used to measure hand and forearm strength.
Vertical jump test	A test estimating leg power from jump height.
Sit and reach test	A test measuring flexibility, mainly at the lower back and hamstrings.
Individual needs	Adapting training to the performer's goals, fitness, ability and circumstances.
Specificity	Matching training to the sport, activity, muscles, movements and energy system required.
Progressive overload	Gradually increasing training demands so the body continues to adapt.
FITT	Frequency, intensity, time and type - variables used to plan and progress training.
Frequency	How often training takes place.
Intensity	How hard a person trains.
Time	How long a training session or exercise period lasts.
Type	The method or form of training used.

Key word	Student-friendly definition
Overtraining	Training too much without enough recovery, causing fatigue and reduced performance.
Reversibility	Loss of fitness adaptations when training is reduced or stopped.
Aerobic target zone	A training intensity of approximately 60-80% of maximum heart rate in this specification.
Anaerobic target zone	A training intensity of approximately 80-90% of maximum heart rate in this specification.
Maximum heart rate (MHR)	The estimated highest heart rate; simplified formula: 220 - age.
Continuous training	Sustained exercise without rest, usually at a steady aerobic intensity.
Fartlek training	Continuous training in which speed, terrain or intensity varies.
Circuit training	A sequence of exercise stations targeting selected fitness components.
Interval training	Alternating periods of work and recovery.
Plyometric training	Explosive exercises using rapid stretch-shortening actions to develop power.
Weight/resistance training	Working muscles against a resistance to improve strength, muscular endurance or power.
PAR-Q	Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire used to screen whether someone is ready to exercise safely.
Concussion	A brain injury caused by a blow or jolt to the head or body.
Fracture	A crack or break in a bone.
Dislocation	A bone displaced from its normal position at a joint.
Sprain	Damage to a ligament.
Strain	Damage to a muscle or tendon.
RICE	Rest, ice, compression and elevation - immediate management for some soft-tissue injuries.
Performance-enhancing drug (PED)	A prohibited or controlled substance or method used to improve sporting performance.
Anabolic steroid	A PED that promotes muscle growth and strength but can cause serious side effects.
Beta blocker	A drug that lowers heart rate and reduces tremors; may benefit precision sports.
Diuretic	A drug increasing urine production; may cause rapid weight loss or mask other substances.
Narcotic analgesic	A strong painkiller that may allow performance despite injury but can mask damage and cause dependence.
Erythropoietin (EPO)	A peptide hormone that increases red blood cell production and oxygen-carrying capacity.
Growth hormone	A hormone that can promote tissue growth and recovery when misused as a PED.
Stimulant	A drug increasing alertness and reducing fatigue, while raising health risks.
Blood doping	Increasing red blood cells to improve oxygen transport, for example by transfusion.
Warm-up	Preparation that gradually raises body temperature and readies the body and mind for exercise.
Cool-down	Low-intensity activity after exercise that gradually returns the body towards resting levels.

Component 2, Topic 1: Health, fitness and wellbeing

Key word	Student-friendly definition
Physical health	The wellbeing and effective functioning of the body.
Emotional health	The ability to understand and manage feelings and cope with life's demands.
Social health	The ability to form positive relationships and interact effectively with others.
Wellbeing	An overall positive state of physical, emotional and social health.
Lifestyle choice	A decision about how a person lives that can affect health, such as diet, activity, sleep, alcohol use or smoking.
Sedentary lifestyle	A way of life involving little, irregular or no physical activity.
Overweight	Having body weight above a healthy range, which may include muscle as well as fat.
Overfat	Having more body fat than is considered healthy.
Obese	A condition involving excessive body fat that raises health risk.
Coronary heart disease	Narrowing or blockage of coronary arteries, reducing blood supply to the heart muscle.
Hypertension	Persistently high blood pressure.
Osteoporosis	A condition in which bones become less dense and more likely to fracture.
Balanced diet	A diet containing the correct amounts of nutrients and energy for health and activity.
Macronutrient	A nutrient needed in relatively large amounts: carbohydrate, protein or fat.
Carbohydrate	The body's main energy source, especially for moderate- to high-intensity exercise.
Protein	A nutrient needed for growth and repair of body tissues.
Fat	A concentrated energy source that also provides insulation and supports cell function.
Micronutrient	A vitamin or mineral required in relatively small quantities.
Fibre	Indigestible plant material that supports digestive health.
Hydration	Having enough water in cells, tissues and organs for the body to function correctly.
Dehydration	A state in which the body loses more fluid than it takes in.
Carbohydrate loading	Increasing carbohydrate intake before endurance activity to maximise glycogen stores.
Optimum weight	A suitable average weight based on sex, height, bone structure, muscle girth and sporting role.
Energy balance	The relationship between energy consumed and energy expended; equal amounts maintain body weight.

Component 2, Topic 2: Sport psychology

Key word	Student-friendly definition
Basic skill	A simple skill requiring little concentration to perform.
Complex skill	A skill requiring considerable attention, decision making or coordination.
Open skill	A skill performed in an unpredictable environment that requires continual adjustment.
Closed skill	A skill performed in a stable, predictable environment.
Low-organisation skill	A skill whose phases can be separated and practised independently.
High-organisation skill	A skill whose phases are closely linked and difficult to separate.
Massed practice	Practice with little or no rest between attempts.
Distributed practice	Practice broken up by intervals for rest or mental rehearsal.
Fixed practice	Repeated practice of the same skill in the same conditions.
Variable practice	Practice in changing situations so a skill is adapted and repeated in different ways.
Goal setting	Establishing targets that direct effort and motivate improvement.
SMART target	A target that is specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound.
Guidance	Information given to help a performer learn a skill.
Visual guidance	Learning information shown through demonstrations, images or video.
Verbal guidance	Spoken information explaining how to perform.
Manual guidance	Physical support or movement of a performer into the correct position.
Mechanical guidance	Use of equipment to support skill learning, such as a harness.
Feedback	Information received during or after a performance about its quality or outcome.
Intrinsic feedback	Information the performer senses for themselves during or after movement.
Extrinsic feedback	Information supplied by an outside source such as a coach, teammate or video.
Concurrent feedback	Feedback received while the performance is taking place.
Terminal feedback	Feedback received after the performance has finished.
Mental rehearsal	Imagining successful performance before carrying it out.

Component 2, Topic 3: Socio-cultural influences

Key word	Student-friendly definition
Participation rate	The proportion or number of a group taking part in physical activity or sport.
Socio-economic group	A grouping based on social and economic factors such as income, education or occupation.
Commercialisation	The process of managing or exploiting sport to generate income or profit.
Sponsorship	Financial or material support given in return for publicity or association with a performer, team or event.
Media	Communication channels that report, promote or broadcast sport.
Spectator	A person who watches a sporting event.
Sportsmanship	Fair behaviour that respects rules, opponents and officials, including graciousness in victory or defeat.
Gamesmanship	Bending the rules or using questionable tactics without actually breaking the rules.
Deviance	Behaviour that goes against the moral values or laws of sport.
Ethics	Moral principles used to judge whether sporting actions are right or fair.

Use of data, practical performance and PEP

Key word	Student-friendly definition
Qualitative data	Descriptive, non-numerical information, such as observations about technique.
Quantitative data	Information expressed in numbers, such as time, distance, score or heart rate.
Raw data	Original data before it has been organised, processed or analysed.
Mean	The total of a set of values divided by the number of values.
Range	The highest value minus the lowest value.
Interpret	Explain what information or a pattern in data means.
Analyse	Break information into parts and examine relationships or patterns.
Evaluate	Use evidence to judge strengths, weaknesses or effectiveness and reach a supported conclusion.
Reliability	The extent to which a test produces consistent results when repeated.
Validity	The extent to which a test measures what it is intended to measure.
Practical performance	Demonstration of skills and techniques in selected physical activities.
Preparation phase	The body position and movements that ready a performer to execute a skill.
Execution phase	The main action in which the skill is carried out.
Recovery phase	The actions following execution that regain balance or prepare for the next movement.
Technique	The correct method of performing a skill.
Tactic	A planned action or decision used to gain an advantage in a sporting situation.
Strategy	An overall plan for achieving an outcome in performance.
PEP	Personal Exercise Programme: a planned six- to eight-week training programme designed to improve or optimise performance.
Baseline data	Measurements collected before a programme, used as a starting point for comparison.
Monitoring	Regularly recording and reviewing training and performance data.
Training log	A record of training sessions, including relevant workload, intensity and response data.
Work:rest ratio	The relationship between the duration of exercise and recovery in training.
Moderation	External checking of centre assessment to ensure marks match national standards.
NEA	Non-examined assessment: work marked by the centre and externally moderated.

Exam command words

Key word	Student-friendly definition
Assess	Use reasoned argument to judge the importance or relevance of factors in the question context.
Analyse	Break something down into its component parts and examine the relationships.
Calculate	Work out a numerical answer, showing appropriate computation.
Classify	Place into a group or position on a scale using characteristics.
Complete	Add missing information to a table, graph, chart, sentence or other stimulus.
Define	Give the precise meaning of a term.
Describe	Give an account of what something is like or what happens; reasons are not required unless asked.
Discuss	Explore different or contrasting viewpoints or sides of an issue.
Examine	Consider in detail and support points through analysis, justification or examples.
Explain	Give linked reasons showing how or why; use a fact-because-therefore structure.
Evaluate	Review evidence, strengths, weaknesses and alternatives to reach a supported judgement.
Give	Recall a fact or supply an example; often synonymous with identify or state.
Identify	Select or name the required feature, fact or answer.
Justify	Give reasons or evidence supporting an answer or choice.
Label	Add the correct names to structures or features on a diagram.
Predict	State what is likely to happen using the information or data provided.
Select	Choose an answer using the information given.
State	Give a concise fact or answer without development unless the context requires it.
Using an example	Support the response with a relevant illustration from physical activity or sport.