

Texas Veterinary Medical Association

**Certified Veterinary
Assistant (CVA)**

**POLICIES &
GUIDELINES**

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Version

Policy Manual Version 1.1

Publication Date

July 1, 2010

1.0 Introduction and Program Overview

1.1 Owner

The Certified Veterinary Assistant program is a member service of the Texas Veterinary Medical Association (TVMA), a 501(c) 6 not-for-profit professional association chartered by the State of Texas and serving the needs of the veterinary profession and individual veterinarians in Texas since 1903.

1.2 History

The Employee Improvement Committee of TVMA recognized a need to improve the level of employee knowledge and skills in the typical veterinary clinic as early as 1994. The idea for a training and certification program for veterinary assistants gained footing when Dr. Wally Kraft appointed a Task Force to create the guidelines for such a program. With assistance from the TVMA staff and a number of volunteers, including the Directors of three college-based Veterinary Technician programs, the Task Force developed the framework for the original program. The Board of Directors approved the program in 1996 and the first certificates for CVA Level I were granted in 1998. The CVA Level II certification program launched in 1998 and the first Level II certificate was awarded in 1999. Level III of the CVA program followed in 2001.

The program was supported from the launch of CVA Level II by the educational training materials available from Animal Care Technologies (ACT) of Denton, Texas. This company made its extensive library of video training tapes available to support the education and training of Certified Veterinary Assistants at Levels II and III. In 2006, this company provided the technology support needed to deliver CVA program services over the Internet and the CVA-Online program was launched.

It was never the intention of TVMA to be the sole educational provider for the CVA program. Instead, the role was seen as being primarily a certifying agency and, to that end, to develop and defend the standards and content definitions appropriate to the CVA credential. The educational format supporting the certification standards has evolved over time from on-the-job training, to the high school and college classroom, the 4-H youth programs, and finally to the Internet.

Finally, TVMA expects to license the CVA program to other state veterinary medical associations. The CVA program is currently offered to hospitals and schools outside of Texas, ideally in cooperation with the corresponding state VMA to provide the CVA Certification; however, the TVMA will provide the CVA Certification in those states where no licensing agreement is in place.

1.3 Purpose and Mission

Purpose

The modern veterinary clinic depends on a knowledgeable and well-trained animal health-care team to deliver the quality medical services demanded by animal owners and required by the ever advancing standards-of-care accepted within the veterinary profession. Well-established, high quality, formal educational programs exist to provide the education and training required by veterinarians and veterinary technicians. However, there has long existed a need to establish standards of competency and performance for individuals employed as veterinary assistants—the third member of the

successful animal health-care team. The Texas Veterinary Medical Association developed the Certified Veterinary Assistant program to meet this need.

Mission

It is the mission of the TVMA Certified Veterinary Assistant Program to establish knowledge and performance standards in the practice of veterinary assisting and to encourage the widespread adoption of these standards through a highly valued credential of competency.

1.4 Program Governance

The Certified Veterinary Assistance Program is owned and operated by the Texas Veterinary Medical Association and it is governed by the TVMA Credentialing Committee. All appeals, complaints, and grievances should be directed to this Committee.

1.5 CVA and the Veterinary Health Care Team

The modern veterinary clinic or hospital represents a highly complex, well coordinated animal health-care environment. Every person on staff has a vital and specific role to play in caring for the patients entrusted to their care. The central components of a well-functioning animal health-care team include the Doctor of Veterinary Medicine, assisted by the Registered Veterinary Technician, and supported by the Certified Veterinary Assistant. Depending on specific circumstances, the exact deployment of these highly skilled individuals may vary from one health-care team to another, but these three working together represent the ideal. Other non-credentialed members of the veterinary staff make many valuable contributions to the hospital function, but these credentialed staff members are the key to state-of-the-art veterinary care.

Levels of training, expertise and responsibility naturally segment the animal health-care team along a hierarchy of medical authority with the Doctor of Veterinary Medicine accorded the highest rank within the team, followed by the Registered Veterinary Technician and with the Certified Veterinary Assistant filling the third tier of authority and responsibility. Thus the DVM is self-directed within the team and supervises and directs all other members of the team including the RVT and CVA members. With the doctor's approval an RVT may be assigned some degree of oversight for the CVA team members.

Each role on the health-care team is important and distinct. It is not best practice, nor is it the policy of TVMA to suggest the use of a CVA to do those functions that should be reserved to the RVT. The training and capability of the CVA is considerably below that of an RVT and, while every practice owner will deploy staff as she or he deems best, it is highly recommended that one or more RVTs form the back-bone of the support staff with able assistance provided by the CVA.

The CVA program is a learn-on-the-job vocational training experience that covers the basic fundamentals of veterinary medicine and animal care and handling. TVMA envisions the ideal veterinary practice as one in which the veterinarian, RVT, and CVA work together as valuable and highly productive members of a unified animal health-care team.

1.6 Benefits of Certification

The Certified Veterinary Assistant receives a number of benefits as a result of certification in the TVMA program, including:

- **Certificate:** All successful applicants for certification as a CVA will receive a professional quality certificate designating the date and level of certification as well as the name of the certified individual.
- **Verification of Certification:** TVMA maintains a permanent registry of all CVAs who have completed and maintained their certification status, and will respond to all employer inquiries to verify an individual's certification.
- **Promotion of Certification as an Employer Benefit:** TVMA will continually promote to its member veterinarians the value of employing certified veterinary assistants.
- **Discounts on Continuing Education:** Individuals who hold current certification will be allowed to register for continuing education at any TVMA-sponsored seminar or conference at a reduced rate.
 - **FYI Newsletter:** All individuals who maintain current certification as a CVA and provide an email address will receive the bimonthly TVMA publication, *The FYI Newsletter*.
 - **Portability:** The CVA designation can be taken from one practice to another. Because we live in such a mobile society, the portable nature of the CVA credential is extremely important.
 - **Patches/Pins:** A CVA patch can be placed on clinic clothing and makes the public aware of the CVA's credentials. The first patch is provided without cost upon successful completion of CVA Level I. CVA pins are available as well.

2.0 Certification Criteria and Eligibility Requirements

2.1 Certification Levels

The CVA program consists of three levels of attainment, as follows:

- **CVA Level I:** Entry level skills and knowledge, roughly equivalent to 90 days of on-the-job training in a veterinary clinic.
- **CVA Level II:** Intermediate level skills and knowledge, roughly equivalent to 180 days of on-the-job training in a veterinary clinic beyond certification at CVA Level I.
- **CVA Level III:** Advanced level skills & knowledge, roughly equivalent to 180 days of on the job training in a veterinary clinic beyond certification at CVA Level II.

It is the policy of TVMA that all certified veterinary assistants must progress through each certification step in sequence, that is, all CVAs must certify first at Level I, then go on to Level II, then Level III in sequence.

2.2 Eligibility Criteria and Requirements

The eligibility criteria and requirements for certification established for each of the three levels of CVA certification are as follows:

CVA Level I

- Applicant must be at least 16 years of age
- Applicant must have obtained **90 days** of practical work experience (equivalent to **500 hours**, paid or volunteer) in a veterinary setting under the direct supervision of a licensed veterinarian or a registered veterinary technician
- Applicant must submit a completed application for examination for CVA Level I certification including complete payment of examination fee(s)
- Completed CVA Level I **“Skills Validation Checklist”**
- Applicant must score 70% or better on the CVA Level I certification exam

CVA Level II

- Applicant must hold a valid CVA Level I certification
- Applicant must have obtained **180 days** of practical work experience (equivalent to **1,000 hours**, paid or volunteer) under the direct supervision of a licensed veterinarian or a registered veterinary technician, counted from the date initial certification at CVA Level I was awarded [See Sec. 3.3 “Experience Standards for exceptions”.]
- Applicant must submit a completed application for examination for CVA Level II certification including complete payment of examination fee(s)
- Completed CVA Level II **“Skills Validation Checklist”**
- Applicant must score 70% or better on the CVA Level II certification exam

CVA Level III

- Applicant must hold a valid CVA Level II certification
- Applicant must have obtained **180 days** of practical work experience (equivalent to **1,000 hours**, paid or volunteer) under the direct supervision of a licensed veterinarian or a registered veterinary technician, counted from the date initial certification at CVA Level II was awarded [See Sec. 3.3 “Experience Standards” for exceptions.]
- Applicant must submit a completed application for examination for CVA Level III certification including complete payment of examination fee(s)
- Completed CVA Level III **“Skills Validation Checklist”**
- Applicant must score 70% or better on the CVA Level III certification examination

3.0 Program Organization

The CVA program consists of three core components, which are included in every level of certification as outlined above: Knowledge, Skills, and Experience.

3.1 Knowledge Standards

The knowledge standards established for the TVMA Certified Veterinary Assistant are expressed in terms of minimum competencies which must be demonstrated by the candidates for certification at each of three certification levels. The competencies are

subdivided into ten knowledge domains that together span the range of work typically assigned the veterinary assistant in a professional practice of veterinary medicine. These competencies and their assignment to appropriate certification levels are presented in Appendix A for each knowledge domain.

3.1.1 Acceptable Learning Formats for Achieving Knowledge Standards

The Certified Veterinary Assistant Program is a credentialing process, not an educational program. It serves to define the basic knowledge and skills required for successful work as a veterinary assistant and to grant the CVA credential in recognition of demonstrated performance capabilities meeting or exceeding established standards. There are various routes recognized by TVMA for gaining the knowledge required for certification, which may include but are not limited to:

On-the-Job-Training

This requirement has been modified slightly for high schools participating in the program (see “High School Requirements”).

Formal Education Programs

These include the Texas Education Agency through its high school vocational agriculture programs, community colleges and proprietary schools, Texas 4-H programs, and at least two state universities.

Seminars and Workshops

Some of the continuing education programs presented by TVMA, the Texas Association of Registered Veterinary Technicians, the TAMU College of Veterinary Medicine and other providers would be included here.

Internet-Based Instruction

A full program of educational and training activities available online through Animal Care Technologies, which includes online testing and skills validation, is recognized by the TVMA as a valid option for completing CVA certification, provided the work experience and supervision requirements are met.

3.1.2 Educational and Training Materials for Achieving Knowledge Standards

TVMA has available hard copy training materials (including workbooks and DVD's) to support CVA credentialing at all levels as described below. These materials are not mandatory but are recommended for any candidate that intends to sit for certification at any level, and are available for purchase directly through TVMA.

Level I Certification

- Manual consisting of 10 courses dealing with a wide variety of skills and competencies required for initial certification at Level I (consists of educational text, exercises, and other learning experiences arranged in workbook style).

Level II Certification

- Materials consist of 12 DVDs covering all required learning outcomes identified for this level of certification.
- Also includes a comprehensive workbook and sample examination materials.

Level III Certification

- Materials consist of 12 DVDs a workbook, and widely used veterinary technician textbook.

3.2 Skills Standards

Each candidate for certification must acquire specified skills and performance abilities appropriate to the certification level sought. These skills and performance abilities must be validated and confirmed by a licensed veterinarian or a registered veterinary technician (or equivalent). The CVA program relies upon observation and supervision by appropriate professional personnel to assure appropriate skill levels in the veterinary assistants achieving certification. This is accomplished through the "Skills Validation Checklist", which must be completed and signed by an immediate supervisor who is either a DVM or RVT. Digital submission of the "Skills Validation Checklist" is acceptable through the TVMA-approved online program provided by Animal Care Technologies.

3.3 Experience Standards

Certification at any CVA level requires demonstrated proficiency of work-related tasks in an appropriate environment, which is to be a veterinary hospital or its equivalent. The hours required for each level of certification are outlined in section 2.2 and summarized here:

CVA I:	500 hours	It should be noted that these hours are cumulative, i.e. each subsequent level's experience requirement is in addition to the preceding level. For example, CVA III requires a total of 2,500 hrs. of work experience.
CVA II:	1,000 hours	
CVA III:	1,000 hours	

Cumulative Hours.

Work experience hours will be cumulative when acquired while working at the same practice. New CVA applicants may count the hours worked at a practice prior to the program starting date when applicable. This will allow an applicant who has completed the appropriate hours (and can document the hours upon request) to receive a waiver of the designated time period between levels.

If an applicant has been in multiple practice locations and cannot clearly substantiate the hours worked, the applicant must complete the prescribed hours in between the CVA levels. [See Sec. 2.2 "Eligibility Criteria and Requirements"]

4.0 Examination Standards

4.1 Composition and Weighting of the Examination

The CVA examination for each certificate level will consist of 100 multiple choice questions appropriate to the level of certification covered. There are ten (10) units or modules of content for each certification level and the examination will consist of questions drawn from each of the ten modules roughly on an equal basis.

4.2 Skills Validation Checklist Required

Before an applicant is allowed to sit for a CVA examination (Levels I, II, or III), the applicant must submit a completed Skills Validation Checklist for the particular CVA level for which he or she is testing.

4.3 Examination Administration

Employer-Directed OJT Programs

The administration of the certification examination varies with the level of certification sought, as follows:

Level I certification examinations (paper or online tests) may be taken at the place of employment and will be administered by the supervising veterinarian or RVT. Third-party educators who provide classroom preparation for the CVA Level I certification may administer the examination at the conclusion of training, provided a supervising veterinarian or RVT has completed and signed the skills proficiency checklist. The examination and test booklet will be returned to TVMA for scoring.

Level II and III certification examinations (paper tests) must be taken in a “test secure” environment. Most public schools and community colleges have guidance and/or testing centers that will agree to administer the examination. Many public libraries also provide this service. Under this arrangement, TVMA will send the examination to the designated test center and proctor, and that individual will return the completed test to TVMA for scoring. In the event these institutions charge a fee to cover the cost of this service, the cost must be born by the applicant. It is the responsibility of the applicant to make the necessary arrangements for the examination. TVMA should be notified as to where and when the examination will be taken and who will proctor the exam. TVMA reserves the right to refuse to administer the test to any applicant.

Online Testing

Testing for level I and Level II may be taken online through the TVMA-approved ACT program using their secure testing site. This site requires the login of the supervisor at the time of testing. The supervisor will also be responsible for proctoring the examination. CVA Level III testing may also occur online if the supervisor, in addition to logging in on the computer, calls the TVMA office and informs the appropriate staff member that he or she is about to proctor a Level III examination. The verbal confirmation will be documented by the TVMA office.

Examination Administration, School-based Programs

School-based programs certify at CVA Level I only. Level I certification examinations may be taken at the place of schooling/training and will be administered by the teacher of record. In this case, the examination will be given at the conclusion of training, provided all other requirements have been met. It may be administered as a paper test or online through ACT.

Retesting Provisions

Should an applicant for CVA certification at any level fail to pass the examination they may retake the exam as often as they wish following the initial examination date. TVMA

will charge a re-test fee to cover the cost of producing and administering the test. This fee is \$35 for each retest at CVA Levels I, II, and III.

5.0 Renewal of Certification and CE Requirements

5.1 Renewal Dates and Fees

Certification is valid for one calendar year, beginning with the date of initial certification. This date will be clearly shown on the certificate issued to the successful candidate and on each subsequent certificate issued for re-certification. This date will serve as the CVA's permanent anniversary date.

TVMA will make every effort to notify the CVA in writing when their certificate is due to expire, but the CVA is responsible for contacting TVMA on or before their anniversary date and for submitting the application for renewal of certification. The CVA has thirty (30) calendar days following the anniversary date in which to submit the application for renewal of certification, the CVA evaluation, and the renewal fee. If all items required for renewal of certification are not received in the TVMA office before the 30-day deadline, the CVA will lose certification status and will be required to re-test for certification.

The CVA renewal fee is \$30.00 and the candidate for renewal must submit payment in a form acceptable to TVMA.

Failure to submit all application for renewal of certification materials including payment of fees so that they reach the TVMA office after the cut-off date noted on the renewal will result in the assessment of a \$15.00 late fee.

5.2 Continuing Education Requirement

Beginning January 1, 2011 each veterinary assistant previously certified at any level must complete a continuing education requirement for certificate renewal.

During the calendar year preceding the date of expected renewal, the CVA must complete a minimum of five (5) hours of continuing education instruction. These CE hours may be acquired through any legitimate veterinary educational content produced and provided by a recognized provider, including but not limited to: state and local VMA meetings, online courses, professional seminars presented by veterinary companies, etc. Hours accumulated beyond the five required hours may be carried over to the next year's requirement.

Proof of Participation

Documentation validating each continuing education activity must be kept on file by the Certified Veterinary Assistant.

These records will be audited at random, with a certain number of participants audited each year. When TVMA requests copies of CE documentation the veterinary assistant must provide copies of all documentation for review by TVMA. Failure to provide sufficient documentation of required CE will be cause for the applicant's certificate to be deactivated to probationary status.

The applicant for certificate renewal will have six (6) months to correct the CE deficit and thus remove the probationary status.

Failure to complete all CE requirements within the 6-month probationary period will deactivate the certificate completely and the individual will lose the right to use the CVA designation and all other privileges pertaining to certification.

To regain certificate status, the lapsed individual must re-establish eligibility for, and take and pass, the certification exam, including the payment of all applicable fees.

6.0 School-Based Training Programs

6.1 Background

TVMA recognizes that the school-based veterinary assistant programs consist of well-designed, highly organized content taught in classroom settings by well-qualified professional educators extending through 1-3 academic years. TVMA further recognizes that these state-approved programs consist of hands-on laboratory instruction, frequent live demonstrations, field work, internships and other interactive learning activities, which can achieve the same learning objectives envisioned for the on-the-job training requirements described above.

6.2 Minimum Standards

For these programs, TVMA requires that the following minimum standards be met before accepting applications from graduates of that program for certification as CVA Level I:

- Program must be supported by one or more licensed veterinarians who serve in an advisory capacity
- Program must include content addressing all the learning outcomes identified in TVMA standards and guidelines for CVA Level I
- Applicants for certification from any school-based veterinary assistant program must have completed at least 9 months of the school-based program
- Applicants for certification must be at least **16 years of age**
- Candidates for certification must provide documentation that supports appropriate work experience as follows:
 - **500 hours** in which the candidate has engaged in supervised interaction with live animals (This cumulative hourly total may be the sum of hospital experience and instructor-supervised activities involving live animals).*
- In order to insure that the student understands the real, day-to-day workings of a typical veterinary hospital, a minimum of **300 of the 500 hours** required must occur within a veterinary clinic or animal shelter setting with a DVM, CVT or RVT on staff or in attendance to provide the required skill and techniques training. The variety of veterinary-supervised experiences that meet these criteria may also include (but is not limited to): training in a veterinary hospital, riding on large animal veterinary field calls, institutional veterinary clinics that treat animals, shelters that offer medical services through a veterinarian, etc.
- Properly completed Skills Validation Check-List signed by the supervising veterinarian or RVT. The skills on the validation check-list may be demonstrated entirely in the classroom, entirely at a veterinary hospital or like facility, or a combination of the two.

- Payment of the certification fee
- Completed application form, with accompanying signatures, and properly completed Skills Validation Check-List submitted to TVMA. Incomplete applications will be returned to the teacher or supervisor for completion
- Successful completion of the certification examination, either online or paper format

*Applicants who have completed all requirements for certification with the exception of the work requirement will be given a one year period from the date of completing the exam for Level I to gain the necessary 500 hours of work experience. A Pending Practical Experience (PPE) letter & PPE Certificate will be sent by the TVMA to the applicant notifying the student of his or her status. If the work experience is completed and supporting documentation is submitted to TVMA by the anniversary date, the applicant will be awarded CVA Level I certification. The certification fee will be charged for the issuance of the PPE. No additional certification fee will be charged for the issuance of the CVA certification if the applicant completes the work experience requirement and provides supporting documentation to TVMA by the anniversary date.

6.3 Testing Requirements

Program administrators of school-based CVA program must notify TVMA immediately upon enrollment of students in the CVA Program. Doing so helps insure that the administrators are fully aware of the program's requirements, and that students will be able to meet those requirements. In addition, program administrators must notify TVMA when school-based CVA applicants (students) are scheduled to take the certification examination. Administrators must contact TVMA at least three (3) months prior to the test date to insure that all application requirements for certification have been met. Failure to notify TVMA in a timely manner will result in a \$15 late fee and/or a delay in certification. Certification examinations must be returned to TVMA for scoring within seven (7) days from the date of receipt of the examination by the school.

Test security must be maintained at all times. Failure to do so as evidenced by theft of exam forms, evidence of student cheating on the examination or other such failures to properly secure the examination may result in the cancellation of the school's participation in the certification program.

TVMA cannot guarantee immediate scoring and turnaround for the tests and final certification. Processing the certification applications and examinations will be done as quickly as possible.

Teachers and program administrators are asked to discourage or even forbid students and parents from contacting TVMA directly to receive final results.

The individual fee for a student taking the CVA Certification Examination is \$125. If students submit individual personal checks for payment of examination fee, the application documentation and check should be submitted in individual envelopes for each student or else each student's package plus check must be stapled as a unit.

7.0 Out-of-State CVAs

7.1 Out-of-State CVA Programs

TVMA may grant to state veterinary medical associations located outside of Texas a license to operate their own versions of the CVA program. These associations have the right to adopt all policies and procedures established by TVMA or may alter the program to fit the needs of their particular state. The state associations who license the program from TVMA are the certifying entities within their states and thus have the right to alter the certification standards. State associations choosing to alter the program understand that by doing so they may jeopardize the acceptance of their CVA certificates in other states.

7.2 Texas CVA Program in Other States

In those instances in which an out-of-state veterinary medical association chooses not to license the TVMA CVA program, TVMA will certify out-of-state candidates who meet the standards of the TVMA CVA program. Texas CVA candidates in other states should understand that this certification is from the Texas VMA and will not necessarily be recognized by the state in which he or she resides.