

CANADIAN CERTIFIED OPTOMETRIC ASSISTANT

PROGRAM GUIDE

2025 - 2026



Table of Contents

1.1	Introduction.....	2
1.2	Required Resources.....	3
1.3	Flexible Learning Options.....	3
1.4	Program Overview	3
1.4.1	Authorized examiners.....	5
1.4.2	Module Assignment and Time Limited Quiz Standards.....	5
1.4.3	Late Assignments/Quizzes.....	6
1.5	Face to Face Workshop (mandatory).....	6
1.6	CCOA Examination Standards.....	7
1.6.1	Special Exam Accommodations.....	7
1.7	Cancellation & Refund Policy.....	8
1.8	Contact Us.....	9
1.9	Appendix: Course Syllabus.....	10

1.1 Introduction

An optometric assistant (OA) is an individual specially trained in vision care who assists optometrists in the provision of full scope optometric services to patients. OAs help optometrists provide a range of services in a more efficient and effective manner.

The Canadian Certified Optometric Assistant Program (CCOA) is a member benefit of the Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO). Our goal is to use the program to help optometrists improve the quality and efficiency of vision care they provide in their practice using highly trained personnel.

The CCOA Program is administered in Canada to OAs on the CAO members' behalf. As such, the sponsoring optometrist shall have access to their students' progress via the CAO Learning Portal. When necessary, the CCOA Program may contact the sponsoring optometrist regarding the registrant. Registration with the CCOA Program is dependent upon the OA remaining employed and sponsored by a CAO member optometrist for the duration of the program, including the final examination.

In this online remote learning program, most of the practical knowledge will come from hands on office experience under the guidance of the supervising optometrist. The course material will provide the framework of knowledge upon which the assistant can build. Receiving guidance from the supervisor will allow for the integration of the academic and practical aspects of this program.

A Canadian Certified Optometric Assistant (CCOA) certificate, valid for three years, will be issued upon:

- successful completion of all nine modules
- attended a face-to-face workshop
- successful completion of the CCOA Examination.

CCOA Designation Maintenance: To maintain the CCOA designation, CCOAs pay an annual membership fee and submit a total of 18 hours of Continuing Education credits (including CPR) every three years. Once renewal requirements are met, a new CCOA certificate, valid for another three years, will be issued. Failure to maintain the CCOA forfeits the legal right to use the CCOA designation, and the certificate is no longer valid.

1.2 Required Resources

Full Course & On-Demand:

1. CCOA Program Study Guides for each module.
2. Module Assignments.
3. Time Limited Quiz.
4. Practical Skills Checklists.
5. Opportunity to routinely practice skills in the optometric setting pertaining to the module of study.

The above resources are accessible online in the student's learning center.

1.3 Flexible Learning Options

CCOA Full Course (September - June): Each of the nine modules are of four weeks duration. The schedule begins in September (visit the [website](#) or your CAO Learning for start dates). Modules are delivered back-to-back, finishing in the spring. The online CCOA Examination is available for three weeks after the close of the final module (all nine modules must be successfully completed and workshop attended).

CCOA On-Demand (At your own pace): Students can register at any time, begin studying right away and can move through the modules at their own pace. Modules can be taken in any order. From the date of enrollment, students have 24 months to complete all nine modules (quizzes, assignments, and checklists), attend a workshop and pass the final CCOA Examination within three weeks of completing the nine modules and attend the workshop.

1.4 Program Overview

The CCOA Program is designed to provide participants with an understanding of the fundamentals of optometric assistance. It will provide assistants with an in-depth knowledge of various equipment, procedures and techniques required to function smoothly and efficiently in an optometric office.

The practical skills checklist component is intended to develop hands-on skills as the assistant applies the theory learned from the required reading. It is critical that the assistant is given the opportunity to work under supervision in the areas of the clinic pertaining to the module of study.

The study plan, assignments and quizzes are structured on the learning objectives for each module. Assignment questions and quizzes are based on the content in the module study guides.

CCOA Full Course: All module assignments and quizzes must be completed in the CAO learning Portal by the deadline indicated on the student's progress tab. **A late \extension fee of \$50 will apply to all late assignments/quizzes.** Incomplete assignments will be graded as zero and participants will not be able to complete the program.

CCOA On-Demand: All module assignments and quizzes must be completed in the CAO learning Portal within 24 months of the registration date. The program's deadline date is indicated in the student's portal. Late submissions will not be accepted.

The Practical Skills Checklist

Modules 1, 4 and 9 do not include a Practical Skills Checklist as these focus on clerical skills. Links to the checklists will be available on the students' CAO Learning Portal. The checklists should be printed. All skills listed are required learning objectives. The checklists are to be completed as the student works through each module and must be uploaded to the Portal by the specified deadline. Each skill is demonstrated and examined by the sponsoring optometrist or other approved examiner. The examiner must initial and date the checklist once the skill has been deemed competent. All checklists must be uploaded to the student's CAO Learning Portal. **Note that the portal does not allow for individual pages to be uploaded (one file only).**

CCOA On-Demand: Checklists must be submitted for a module to be considered complete.

Access to equipment

All students are required to be trained to standards established by the CCOA Program Committee to be eligible to earn CCOA designation. This includes mastery of ALL skills in the checklist. If fulfilling some of the skill requirements within the clinic environment is problematic due to lack of equipment, it is recommended that the supervising optometrist locate an optometric office in the area for the student to acquire these skills.

1.4.1 Authorized examiners

All examiners must identify themselves by completing the information on the second page of the Practical Skills Checklists.

Examiners are restricted to:

- CAO member optometrist or;
- CCOA (Canadian Certified Optometric Assistant) in good standing, working under the direct supervision of the sponsoring OD;
- Licensed Optician

1.4.2 Module Assignment and Time Limited Quiz Standards

Course grades required to pass are as follows:

- Module assignments 65% (16/25)
- Time limited quizzes 65% (13/20)
- CCOA Examination 65% (65/100)

The purpose of the assignment is to facilitate the learning process as well as assess the assistant's knowledge and abilities in the optometric field. Each assignment consists of 25 multiple choice questions. Questions are based on the **content covered in each specific module**.

The purpose of the **closed book** quiz is to test a student's knowledge and to prepare them for the final exam, which is timed. The quiz questions are based upon the module's required reading. The quiz consists of 20 questions, and students will have 25 minutes to complete it. A student will not have the option to preview the timed quiz.

The **assignment and quiz grades will be available in the student's profile immediately after submission**. The sponsoring optometrist will also have access to monitor grades and progress.

Support from an Instructor

Student requiring support may contact: ccoa@opto.ca. A CCOA instructor will help direct the student to the relevant section of the course material, and/or be available to offer guidance.

1.4.3 Late Assignments/Quizzes

All module requirements must be completed by the due date. If a due date cannot be met, the student is required to submit a written request for an extension. A late fee of \$50 will apply. The CCOA reserves the right to share any related communications with the sponsoring optometrist. All requests must be emailed to ccoa@opto.ca.

1.5 Face to Face Workshop (mandatory)

The Canadian Certified Optometric Assistant (CCOA) program mandates that all students attend a two-day workshop that provides hands-on training. These workshops are held annually across Canada between January and the end of March. ***Workshop registration is included in the CCOA program fee.***

The workshop includes six different sessions covering topics such as pretesting, frame adjustment, repair, and selection, lensometry, contact lenses, and measurements. Students are divided into equal groups and rotate through each session over the two days. Approximately 90% of each session involves hands-on learning.

Workshop Locations

- **Western Canada:** CCOA workshops will alternate between Alberta and British Columbia in January of each year.
- **Central Canada:** CCOA workshops are typically held in or around the city of Toronto in February of each year. Locations may vary annually around Ontario.
- **Eastern Canada:** CCOA workshop is typically held in Halifax in March of each year however location may vary depending on registration trends.
- **Atelier AOCC:** This CCOA Workshop - offered in French only - is held in Montreal in March of each year however the location may vary.

The workshops and the nine CCOA learning modules offer students a comprehensive understanding of the optometric field. They also allow the OA to practice procedures that may not be performed regularly, learn from industry professionals, and ask questions in a safe and relaxed environment.

The workshops are both educational and enjoyable. They allow students to meet and interact with each other, learn from different practices, and acquire new tips and tricks to apply in their offices.

Workshop dates and locations are announced in October of each year.

1.6 CCOA Examination Standards

The CCOA Examination:

- is online (via a student's learning portal)
- is closed book
- contains 100 multiple choice questions
- has a two-hour time limit
- covers general knowledge and content from all nine course modules
- can be written from home

To write the final exam, students must:

- Submit all practical skills checklists (per applicable module).
- Obtain a minimum grade of 65% on each module requirement. An unlimited number of tries will be available until the student achieves the required pass mark.
- Attend the mandatory 2-day in-person workshop.
- Remain employed by the sponsoring optometrist.

Students must achieve a minimum of 65% on the final exam to obtain the CCOA designation. If the student fails to achieve the minimum required grade, exam rewrites (maximum of two) are allowed within a limited time (fees apply).

1.6.1 Special Exam Accommodations

If a learning disability prohibits a student from taking the exam under standard conditions, special accommodations may be requested by sending the following to ccoa@opto.ca:

- a letter from the student normally requesting and specifying the accommodation needed.
- a letter from a professional (e.g., physician, psychologist, rehabilitation counsellor) who is familiar with the disability and provides a formal diagnosis and outlines the required accommodation.

1.7 Cancellation & Refund Policy

All program and course cancellation requests must be received in writing by ccoa@opto.ca.

Upon withdrawal of the CCOA On-Demand program:

Every cancellation/ withdrawal request is subject to a cancellation fee of \$250 per student (in addition to below).

- 90% of the program fee will be refunded if the request is received **within 10 days of program registration and no modules have been completed.**
- 40% of the program fee will be refunded if the request is received **within six months of registration.**
- 10% of the program fee will be refunded if the request is **received within a year of program registration date.**
- No refund will be issued **after one year of the program registration date.**

Upon withdrawal from the CCOA Full Course program:

Every cancellation/ withdrawal request is subject to a cancellation fee of \$250 per student (in addition to below).

- 90% of the program fee will be refunded if the request is received **within 14 days of the program start date and no modules have been completed.**
- 50% of the program fee will be refunded if the request is received **within three months of the registration deadline.**
- No refund will be issued **after three months of the registration deadline.**

The following are **not considered** for refund:

- Individual module registration
- Workshop registration
- Examination rewrites
- Administration fees
- Course materials
- Incidentals

Refunds are issued to the individual who paid for the registration. Any agreement between payee and candidates is separate from CAO.

All requests must be received in writing to ccoa@opto.ca prior to the timelines listed above.

1.8 Contact Us

Canadian Association of Optometrists, 234 Argyle Ave., Ottawa, ON K2P 1B9

Email: ccoa@opto.ca | Voicemail: 613.235.7924 x 219

1.9 Appendix: Course Syllabus

Introductory Course – Module 1

This introductory module gives an overview of the profession of optometry and defines the roles and importance of the 3 O's. Medical, ophthalmic, and optical terminology as well as ocular anatomy and physiology are reviewed. This module covers office procedures, such as customer service and administrative tasks including; patient intake and flow, scheduling and referrals, recall systems, and the management of patient records and privacy. An overview of the certification program as well as the role of the optometric assistant are discussed.

Pretesting – Module 2

Covers preliminary optometric testing techniques including case history, visual acuity, contrast sensitivity, color vision, and stereopsis. Additional procedures such as eye drop administration, blood pressure testing, and infection control are reviewed. Automated instruments such as the refractor, keratometer, and non-contact tonometer are introduced.

Supplementary Testing – Module 3

Introduces supplemental optometric tests including: visual fields, digital imaging systems (OCT, HRT, corneal topography, fundus photography) and pachymetry.

Refraction and Ocular Health – Module 4

Explores common eye conditions, children's and senior's vision, pharmacology, triage and referrals. After this module, assistants will have a comprehensive understanding of eye examinations.

Ophthalmic Lenses – Module 5

Provides a background in basic optics and covers ophthalmic lens designs, treatments, specialty lenses and troubleshooting. After this module, the assistant will be able to make recommendations and select the appropriate lenses to meet various patient needs.

Ophthalmic Frames – Module 6

Techniques required to dispense and adjust ophthalmic frames including: learning frame parts, repairs, selection and troubleshooting. Frame inventory and communication with vendors is discussed. After this module, the assistant will be able to assist in appropriate frame selection and maintenance.

Ophthalmic Finishing Lab – Module 7

Standard and automated lensometry as well as the lab work involved in producing a finished lens product. After this module, the assistant will be able to verify the quality of finished eyewear.

Contact Lenses – Module 8

Ocular anatomy and physiology as it pertains to contact lenses. Types of contact lenses, care systems, hygiene, and insertion and removal techniques are reviewed. After this module, the assistant will have a thorough understanding of contact lenses, as well as the ability to instruct patient fittings and manage trials lenses and inventory.

Business/Retail – Module 9

Administrative processes such as sales techniques, maintaining inventory, billing and insurance plans. Communication strategies for dealing with challenging patients is reviewed. After this module, the assistant will be able to manage the business of an optometric business.