



British Cattle Veterinary Association Day One Practical Skills

The following is a list of practical skills which is considered important for graduates entering work in cattle practice. The list has been split into “essential” and “desirable” skills.

This list is focused on skills that build trust and credibility with clients such as animal handling, examining, and treating sick animals and coping in an emergency until support arrives.

It is important to acknowledge that alongside these practical skills there are other key skills such as professional attributes and core knowledge which will be required for success in farm animal practice.

Essential day one skills for a farm animal practitioner:

1. Understand and demonstrate biosecurity. Arrive well-presented with correct personal protective equipment (PPE) and demonstrating appropriate levels of cleanliness.
2. Be able to handle and restrain an animal to be examined safely and effectively and understand the responsibility for other persons in attendance. This includes being able to:
 - assess the safe operation of cattle handling systems (such as crushes) when used for veterinary work
 - put on a halter and tie a quick release knot
 - restrain a cow for stomach tubing
3. Be able to perform a clinical examination appropriate to the presenting signs. This is to include:
 - thoracic and abdominal auscultation
 - rectal and reproductive tract examination including vaginal examination
 - creating a differential diagnosis list in your head to prepare for making a plan of action
4. Assess the nutritional status of an animal; be able to body condition score and apply the concept to the examination.
5. Be able to assess an obstetrical problem, for example a calving or prolapse. Be able to use a calving aid.
6. Following assessment, be able to safely perform sedation and recognise when sedation could be beneficial, e.g., safe restraint.
7. Be competent in the performance of local anaesthesia, including regional techniques and epidurals. Be able to administer for the following procedures:
 - castration
 - disbudding/dehorning
 - uterine replacement
 - caesarean section
 - abdominal surgery

8. Be able to apply the principles of aseptic surgical techniques to carry out basic surgical procedures.
9. Be able to humanely euthanase an animal whilst ensuring personal safety and safety of assistants.
10. Be able to administer treatment to an animal via all routes of administration. These include:
 - subcutaneous injection
 - intramuscular injection
 - intravenous injection (including the use of a flutter valve)
 - stomach intubation of cow and calf
 - intramammary infusion
11. Be able to find the cervix and manually palpate the uterus, ovaries, and ovarian structures.
12. Be able to collect a blood sample to carry out diagnostic investigations.
13. Be able to strip milk from the udder and take an aseptic milk sample.
14. Be able to perform haemostasis of acute trauma.

Desirable day one skills for a farm animal practitioner:

1. Be able to perform local anaesthesia in the form of paravertebral nerve blocks and Intravenous Regional Anaesthesia (IVRA) for the performance of abdominal surgery and digital amputation, respectively.
2. Be able to routinely trim a foot and identify obvious lesions. Be familiar with different types of foot blocks available and be able to apply a preferred type of foot block adequately.
3. Know how to use an ultrasound scanner with a linear rectal probe and be able to interpret the image.
4. Be able to rectally examine an animal and pregnancy diagnose manually from 60 days. Appreciate the importance of practice. Have the confidence to recheck later if required.
5. Catheterise a calf for fluid administration.

When conducting the essential and desirable practical skills, it is important to recognise where your personal limitations are and when to request assistance.

This is a prioritised list and therefore not exhaustive. For more information on the evidence base behind this list please see reference:

Wood S, Sellers E, Vallis R, Baillie S. Prioritising practical skills for farm animal veterinary graduates using a Delphi technique. Vet Rec. 2023; e2643. Available here:
<https://bvajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/share/5U5HE7YWQVIYGJYEXPPC?target=10.1002/vetr.2643>