

How to Ace Your PT

Avoiding the common errors that fail
proficiency tests.

A practical refresher for bench technicians and lab managers



PT is your lab's external report card

A third party sends blind samples; you analyze and report them exactly like any client samples. Your results are then compared to other lab results.



What it is

Unknown samples arrive from an accredited provider. You test them and report by a set deadline.



How it's scored

Results are compared to determine the Consensus Mean.
PT Score ≥ 70 is Acceptable



Why Do it

Helps to monitor your laboratory quality, monitor competence and identify problems areas.



Treating PT samples differently

WHERE LABS SLIP

- ✗ Assigning your best analyst or a special instrument just for PT
- ✗ Running extra replicates or “cleaning up” the method for PT
- ✗ Labeling or flagging PT vials so they stand out on the bench

HOW TO ACE IT

- ✓ Run PT through the same people, SOPs, and instruments as client samples
- ✓ Don't over-test - PT checks your process, not a best-case run. Trust your process.
- ✓ Log and store PT results in your normal workflow and records



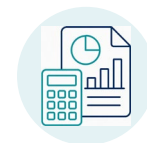
Sample handling & Contamination

WHERE LABS SLIP

- ✗ Opening the vial before reading the kit's handling instructions
- ✗ Dilution or volume errors
- ✗ Trace contamination from glassware, reagents, or the bench

HOW TO ACE IT

- ✓ Read the PT instructions fully before testing the sample
- ✓ Double-check dilutions and units against the reporting form
- ✓ Run blanks and matrix spikes to identify issues



Calculation & Reporting errors

WHERE LABS SLIP

- ✗ Wrong units on the report form
- ✗ Transcription slips when copying results into the portal
- ✗ Report results for the wrong sample e.g. sample 1 for sample 4

HOW TO ACE IT

- ✓ Report in the exact units and format the provider requests
- ✓ Have a second analyst verify every entry before submitting
- ✓ Confirm entered results are for the correct sample



Deadlines, Calibration & QC

WHERE LABS SLIP

- ✗ Missing the deadline - an automatic fail, even with perfect data
- ✗ Ignoring calibration drift
- ✗ Ignoring out-of-control QC results

HOW TO ACE IT

- ✓ Keep track of PT Reporting deadline
- ✓ Verify calibration and continuing-calibration checks
- ✓ Confirm blanks, spikes, and QC pass for the batch

Your pre-submission checklist

Six quick habits that catch the errors behind most PT failures.



01

Read handling instructions in the set



02

Use routine methods, staff, and instruments



03

Verify calibration and QC for the batch



04

Check dilutions, units, and sample numbers



05

Have a second person review the entries



06

Submit before the deadline - then save the record

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Make good habits routine

1

Treat PT like a client sample

No shortcuts, no special handling — same people, methods, and instruments.

2

Most failures are avoidable

Clerical, handling, and deadline errors cause more failures than instrument limits.

3

A checklist and calendar win

A named owner, verified QC, and a second reviewer to catch problems before you submit.

Ace PT by getting it right on every sample every time.