



Beyond Skills Checklists:

What New Graduates Really
Need to Succeed

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Meet Sally



Sally is a new graduate CVT that started her very first job in vet med 2 weeks ago. This was her morning...



Team Demands

- Lead surgery tech calls off sick, it is now her and one other technician until noon
- The DVM needs help doing pre-op exams on the surgery patients

Patient Needs

- The 9am appointment shows up 30min early
- An urgent walk-in patient needs bloodwork and x-rays
- Spicy cat nail trim tech appointment is here
- The German Shepherd neuter is ready for surgery but his IVC blew

Client Pressure

- The phone is ringing non-stop
- Owner is dropping her dog off for a spay and needs to
- Another owner is picking up a prescription





What was Sally expected to do? What skills did she need to be successful?



Prioritize

Delegate

Communicate

Adapt

Document
Appropriately

Think Ahead

Decision Making

Objectives



Identify

Identify common challenges experienced by newly graduated veterinary technicians beyond technical competencies

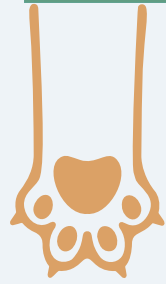
Differentiate

Differentiate between technical competencies and the professional competencies that contribute to success in clinical practice

Apply

Apply practical teaching strategies that better prepare students for the realities of veterinary practice while supporting confidence and long-term career success

Statistics



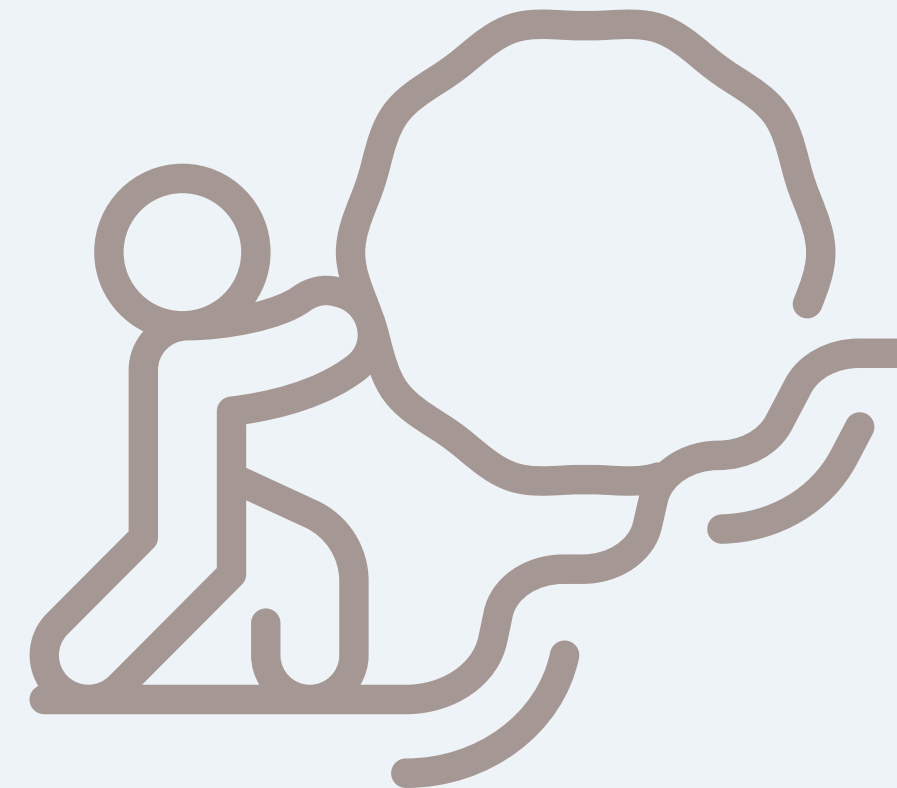
Retention

- Career lifespan of a vet tech is 5-7yrs
- Around 30% of veterinary professionals plan on leaving clinical practice - AAHA 2023
- On average, it takes 13 months to fill a CVT role - AAHA 2022



Challenges as a Vet Tech

- Low pay/financial concerns
- Burnout
- Compassion Fatigue
- Staffing issues
- Bullying
- Underutilization



Common Challenges



Across 150+ practices, these are the common themes I see and hear from clinical leadership...



Critical
Thinking

Workflow

Communication

Professional
Growth



The Gap



In School	In Practice
One patient	Multiple patients
Structured labs	Constant interruptions
Time to think	Decisions under pressure
Faculty guidance	Independent decision-making
Simulated cases	Unpredictable cases
Individual skills	Team-based care



Why Does This Matter?



The Transition is Vulnerable

New graduates are simultaneously learning a new hospital, new systems, new coworkers, new workflows, new communication norms, and a new professional identity — all at once.

Without Support, Consequences are Real

- Reduced confidence and emotional exhaustion
- Disengagement and job dissatisfaction
- Frequent job changes
- Leaving clinical practice or the profession entirely



Support during the first year influences whether a graduate merely survives the transition or begins building a sustainable career

Technical Competency Vs. Professional Competency



Technical Skills

Restraint and Handling
Venipuncture/IVC
ILab Procedures
Radiology Positioning
Medication Administration
Bandaging
Surgical Assisting
Medical Calculations



Professional Skills

Workflow Management
Prioritization of Tasks
Professional Communication
Client Interactions
Giving and Receiving Feedback
Adaptability
Situational Awareness
Confidence



The READY Framework



R

Recognize Priorities

Is this the most urgent task? What patient information affects priority? What must happen before the procedure?

E

Engage the Team

Who needs an update? Who can assist? What information should be handed off before and after the procedure?

A

Adapt to Change

Introduce a realistic disruption: patient condition changes, supply unavailable, doctor changes the order, emergency arrives.

D

Document and Close the Loop

What must be documented? Who needs to know the task is complete? How will the student verify information was received?

Y

Your Reasoning

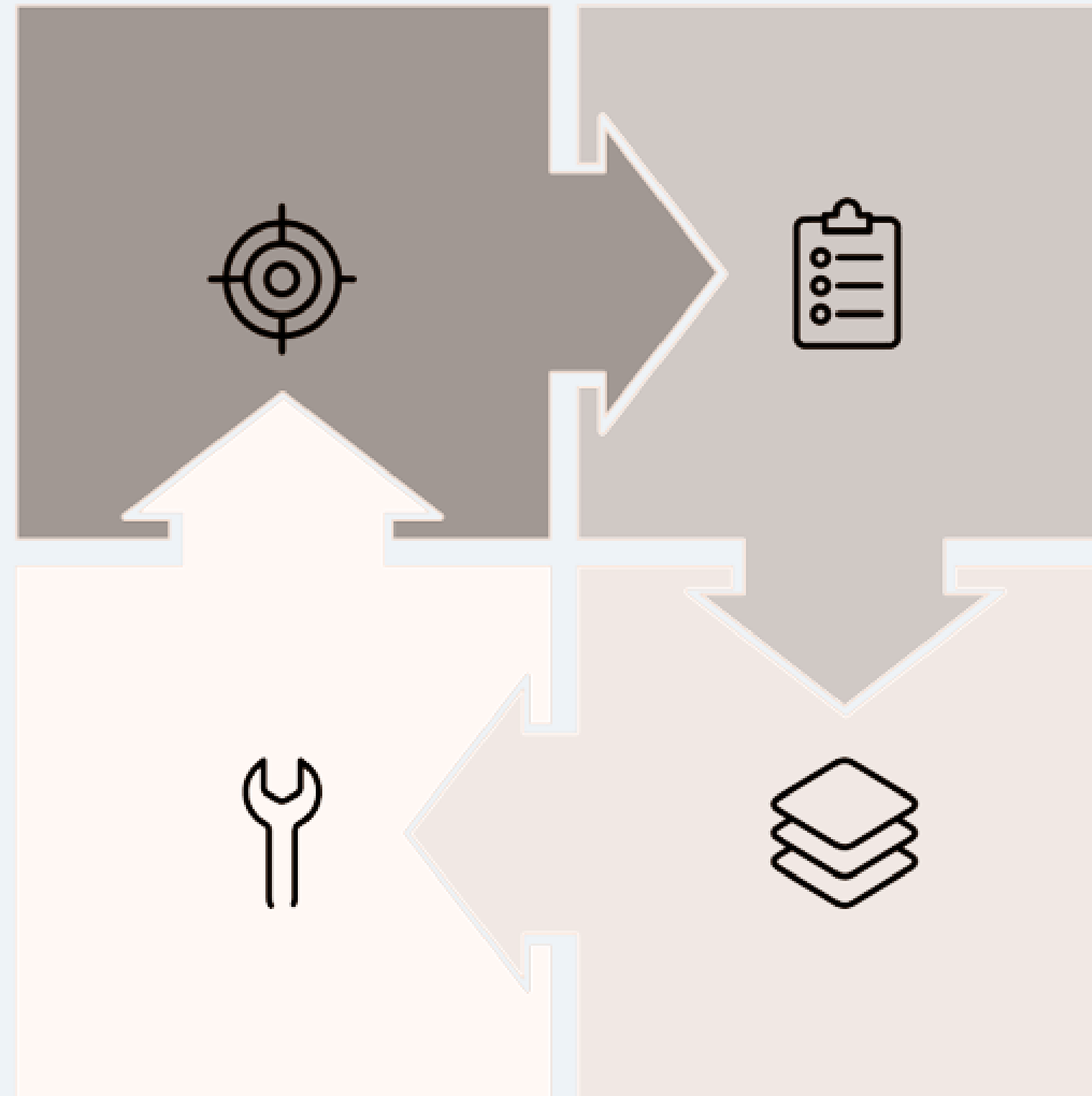
Why did you prioritize this task? What risks did you consider? When would you ask for help? What would change your plan?

Activity: From Competency to Readiness



Select Competency:
Choose 1 technical
skill

Build Revised Activity



Identify Activity:
Look at how you currently
teach this skill

Add READY Layers

Strategies For Educators



Use Realistic Scenarios

Move beyond "What is the correct answer?" to "What would you do next?"

Simulate Workflow

Have students experience the pace and sequence of real clinical practice—not just individual procedures.

Build Reflection into Learning

Use guided debriefs to strengthen clinical reasoning and confidence.

Normalize Uncertainty

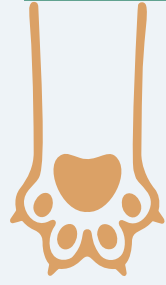
Practice adapting to changing patient conditions, competing priorities, and unexpected challenges.



Think-Aloud Exercises

Have students explain why they're making a decision—not just what they're doing. Encouraging students to verbalize their clinical reasoning helps instructors identify gaps in thinking and reinforces decision-making skills.

Back to Sally



Sally has the same busy morning, but she is now feeling less overwhelmed. What has changed for Sally now that she has developed those professional competencies?



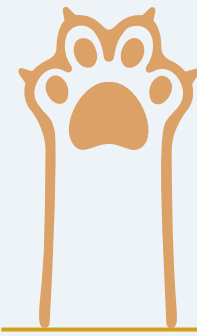
She feels confident in adapting to the situation

She is able to prioritize

She asks questions when she needs help

She communicates effectively with her team





Thank You!

