

Exam Study Tips

Focus Your Study

You are already an experienced project manager, or you wouldn't be sitting for the certification exam. Your knowledge and experience will help you answer a number of questions correctly—perhaps up to 50 percent—without even studying! However, 50 percent is a failing score, so the key is to find out what you don't know (or know by a different name) and then focus your review on these areas. Areas to focus on fall into three categories:

- Things you need to memorize, such as the math formulas for earned value analysis; the names and sequence of the *PMBOK® Guide—Sixth Edition's* 49 processes; the *PMBOK® Guide—Seventh Edition's* Performance Domains, the principles from *The Standard for Project Management*, and a few key terms.
- Things you do on a regular basis but do differently than the *PMBOK® Guide* promotes (including the use of different names for things). Unlearn what you know and learn the PMI process and terminology in these areas, at least until you pass the exam.
- Things you do not do on a regular basis and need to learn or refresh.

This *Learning System* provides a number of ways to help focus your study time. The online pre-test provides a report that breaks down the areas on which to focus your attention. If you are taking a classroom training course, your instructor can also give you feedback on what to study. However, be sure to study everything at least once.

Develop a Study Plan and Pace Yourself

Developing a generic study plan involves determining when you want to take the certification exam and then giving yourself some daily reading goals and undertaking some daily activities so that you can study at an ordered pace rather than trying to “cram.” A rule of thumb is to study 45 to 60 hours prior to sitting for the exam, which is often about two to three weeks of study. Since the exam requires some classroom (or virtual classroom) training, determine when you would benefit from this training the most if you haven't already satisfied this requirement. Some students learn best by taking the classroom training before doing much self-study, while others study up front and then take the training course as a refresher just before the exam. You will want to do significant self-study before sitting for the exam, before or after classroom training, or both. Self-study gives you time to learn the details, and the details are where the testable content is found.

Also, be sure to take the exam soon after your studies are complete. Waiting too long can dull your memory.

Most exam candidates find it helpful to be methodical in their study time. Figure out your reading pace and set aside some time every night to study. Flag areas in the text that you know you will want to revisit. Break up your learning by doing different things to keep your interest level high. For example, you could read a chapter and then go online and take the chapter quiz and review the flashcards, or you could complete one of the review worksheets included in the online materials. You could even write your own exam questions to help reinforce concepts and see how they might be tested.

Gain Confidence and Practice with Multiple-Choice Questions

Use Sample Test Questions

Essential to self-study is using sample test questions. Reviewing significant quantities of sample questions, answers, and explanations will help you prepare for the PMP exam. Going through questions will improve your confidence and give you a refresher on how questions are constructed, what might be used to distract you from the correct answer, and so on. This *Learning System* provides a number of different online tests, including a practice exam that is timed to determine whether you are answering questions at the pace needed to complete the certification examination within the time allotted. Go through all of these tests once or twice. Note that these tests are not designed to be a substitute for mastering the content on which they are based. Study the material first and then take the tests to see which concepts require further review.

You can find some additional exam questions online from various free sources. (However, quality levels may vary.)

Be careful not to take the same quiz too many times. You will start to memorize the correct answers and your score will artificially improve.

While it is not a good idea to study solely using exam questions, they are a critical component. Take the time to review why the correct answers are correct, especially for questions you get wrong.

Pay Attention to Details

A few tips on how to find the right answers for multiple-choice questions follow. Most of these tips involve paying attention to details. A question often hinges on a single word (e.g., if you think something says project but it actually says process, you could get that question wrong).

Often an incorrect answer will be mostly correct but there will be one part of the answer that is wrong. Learning to reject answers based on just one false component is a key test-taking skill. Look for the following key words on exams, as they are often used to make an otherwise correct answer incorrect:

- “Only,” “always,” “never”: These convey an absolute that may have important exceptions.
- “First,” “next”: See where you are at in the process and then determine the next step. Some answers may be steps that should already be done and are therefore incorrect.

Logic can help you answer many questions. If the question is asking for a process, look for an answer that starts with an action verb and seems familiar. The exam will not test alternate or odd-sounding names for the same process. These will be incorrect answers. If the question is asking where to look for something and it is in a subplan or baseline of the project management plan, the project management plan might easily be the correct answer as it contains subcomponents. A project document might be listed and would be incorrect because project documents are not part of the project management plan.

Note that the PMP exam questions may have more than one correct answer. In these cases, you will need to select the **best** answer. This may be something that is most in line with PMP good practices or ethical conduct. Always assume that PMP-certified project managers never take shortcuts, always take the high road, document everything, and go through official channels, especially integrated change control. They also take ownership of their responsibilities, handling conflicts themselves first before escalating them.

When a question has a long introduction, a good practice is to read the final sentence of the question first to determine what is being asked and then read through the whole question. This will help you focus on relevant points while reading the longer part of the question. It may be that some of the information presented is irrelevant.

In addition, train yourself to read the questions a bit slowly. If you read a question too quickly and thus need to go back and reread it, you’re losing valuable time. This exam is a marathon, not a sprint.

Practice Memorization Daily

Set aside some time every day for two to three weeks before the exam to write out the materials that require memorization. Everything you need to memorize is presented in these online study materials along with some worksheets to help with this activity.

Most people have some gaps when they first try to see what they have memorized. This is why making memorization practice a part of a regular routine is so helpful. Rather than this becoming a source of additional stress, you can think of the areas you put in the wrong

place or forgot as a useful way to see what you need to focus on the next day. Correct your study sheet by circling the things that you got wrong or forgot, but do not worry about gaps in your memory for the first full week. Each day you will see some improvement if you do it every day.

You can make this process easy at first and then harder. For example, start by using the workbook memorization study aids presented in these study materials, but get to the point where you are writing these things out on blank sheets of paper. As mentioned elsewhere in this course, it's a good idea to take some time at the beginning of the certification exam to write out all of the things you have memorized. Having these things written down can give you a boost of confidence and will be a useful reference throughout the exam. (Remember that the 15-minute orientation period prior to the exam cannot be used for this.)

Learn What Works for You and Do More of That

Remember that everyone learns differently and the best study plan is one that works for you. This might mean focusing on visual learning, learning by doing, developing a case study, inventing rhymes or other mnemonics, reading and taking practice exams, or forming a study group where each person takes turns teaching some content to the other person(s).

Take some time to see what is working for you and emphasize that. Mixing it up is also a good way to maintain your interest level.