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Tips on Applying for
and Passing the PMP®
or CAPM® Exam:
Updated for PMBOK®
4th Edition

Tips on Applying for and Passing the PMP® or CAPM® Exam: Updated for PMBOK® 4th Edition

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Introduction

The Project Management Institute's (PMI) Project Management Professional (PMP) certification is hot and the Certified Associate in Project Management (CAPM) is growing in popularity. With almost 361,000 active PMPs worldwide (reported in September 2009), the field is still an elite one. The number of Project Managers getting certified is growing every year as more organizations than ever are requesting, and often requiring, their Project Managers to become certified. With the current economic environment, certification helps Project Managers differentiate themselves from their co-workers or other job applicants. Having certification also provides credibility for the Project Manager, assuring the client or organization that the fundamentals of successful management of projects are understood and, presumably, practiced.

As organizations become more sophisticated users of Project Management (PM) principles, more consistent and successful processes are desired. To implement these consistent, good practices organizations are relying more heavily on certification for their Project Managers as well as creating Project Management Offices (PMOs), where individuals are often required to become PMPs. PMI has expanded their certification offerings to include the Program Management Professional (PgMP®), PMI-RMP (PMI Project Risk Management Professional®), and PMI-SP (PMI Scheduling Professional®), in addition to the PMP and CAPM. The PMP and CAPM are the focus of this white paper.

This white paper discusses the following:

- The application process to take the PMP or CAPM exam under the PMBOK® 4th edition
- Tips to make the application process less arduous
- The types of exam questions
- Tips for successfully passing the exam
- Requirements to maintain certification

PMP Exam Requirements

A comparison of the requirements to be eligible to take PMI's various credential exams, including the PMP, are listed on PMI's website at <http://www.pmi.org/CareerDevelopment/Pages/AboutPMIsCredentials.aspx>. Prior to applying for the exam, it is recommended that you read the *PMP Handbook*, found at http://www.pmi.org/PDF/pdc_pmphandbook.pdf, which contains the requirements to take the PMP exam. The application form can be found at <http://www.pmi.org/PDF/PMP%20Application%20Form.pdf>. Even if you intend to submit your applica-

tion on-line, which is the preferred method, use the paper form to compile and organize the information needed beforehand. Once the information is compiled, entry of that information online goes very quickly.

Applicants with a bachelor's degree or global equivalent must meet the following requirements. (Note: a Masters degree or higher does not decrease the following requirements and an associates degree is not enough.)

- Minimum 4,500 hours PM experience leading and directing projects, including experience in each of the five process groups
- Minimum 36 unique months PM experience within the prior 96 months
- Minimum 35 contact hours of PM instruction

Applicants who have a high school diploma or global equivalent must meet the following requirements. (Note: the major difference here is to increase the PM experience needed and the minimum time allowed to obtain that experience.)

- Minimum 7,500 hours PM experience leading and directing projects, including experience in each of the five process groups
- Minimum 60 unique months PM experience within the prior 96 months
- Minimum 35 contact hours of PM instruction

Contact hours can be obtained from a university, a training company or consultant, a course offered by a PMI-recognized Registered Education Provider (REP) or employer-sponsored classes. I think of unique months of experience as actual calendar months of PM experience. For example, if two projects were worked during one month, it counts as one unique month, not two.

Some potential applicants misunderstand the requirement for PM experience. PMI's requirements is that candidates have experience leading and directing project tasks, the detail of which is explained in the PMP Application section below. This does not only include experience as a Project or Program Manager, but also experience working on projects from other vantage points, such as a team or functional or technical lead, SME (Subject Matter Expert) where you directed progress or work, Sponsor, meeting facilitator, etc.

PMP Application

Documenting your personal PM experience will be the most difficult part of the application process. PMI requires the following information for each project:

- Project name
- Project title
- Start and end date
- Project role
- Your job title
- Organization name, address, and phone
- Contact information for your primary contact on this project; this can be used to verify work experience

- Total hours spent leading and directing tasks by process group, broken out as follows:
 - Initiating
 - Conduct project selection methods
 - Identify and perform stakeholder analysis
 - Define scope
 - Develop project charter
 - Identify and document project risks, assumptions, constraints
 - Planning
 - Identify project team and define roles and responsibilities
 - Create the work breakdown structure (WBS)
 - Identify risks and define risk strategies
 - Obtain plan approval and conduct kickoff meeting
 - Define and record requirements, constraints, assumptions
 - Develop change management plan
 - Executing
 - Manage resource allocation
 - Execute tasks defined in the project plan
 - Ensure common understanding and set expectations
 - Improve team performance
 - Implement quality management plan
 - Implement approved changes
 - Obtain project resources
 - Implement approved actions and workarounds
 - Monitoring and Controlling
 - Measure project performance
 - Verify and manage changes
 - Monitor status of risks
 - Ensure deliverables conform to quality standards
 - Closing
 - Finalize and obtain final project acceptance
 - Identify, document and communicate lessons learned
 - Archive project records
 - Obtain financial, legal and administrative project closure
 - Release resources and provide performance feedback
 - Create and distribute final project report
 - Measure customer satisfaction of the project
- Summarize project tasks led and directed on the project. This is limited to 500 characters so be brief and focus on PM tasks.

To expedite the calculation of the detailed breakout of hours by category, use an Excel spreadsheet. If you do not have a current and complete list of the projects you have worked on over the prior 5 years or so, start with your resume and list all the projects you have worked on along with their date ranges. If you worked on many small projects and have enough PM experience to meet the requirement, focus on the larger ones. Order the projects beginning with most recent and working backwards. Estimate the number of hours per week you spent on each project, and then extend that to the number of hours per month. Multiply the monthly hours by the number of months to get your total hours worked on a project. (Excel will really help here.) Make sure your estimate of hours truly indicate the hours spent on the project, not just at work. For example, if you generally work 40 hours per week, it is not realistic to assume all 40 hours were spent on the current project, since some time will be spent on administrative tasks, other meetings, your "real job," personal issues, etc. If you have a university degree, PMI states that experience should be gained over a minimum of three years and a maximum of six years. In other words, you cannot state that you have earned 5,000 hours of experience in two years.

Estimate the percent of time spent in each Process Group (Initiating, Planning, Executing, Monitoring and Controlling, Closing), tweaking the percentages until they add up to 100%. Let Excel then calculate the number of hours per Process Group. Then, estimate either the number of hours or the percentage of your time spent in each activity within each Process Group, ensuring that the totals work. Again, let Excel work for you here. The individual numbers are what you will input into the online application, the system will add up the total hours on each project.

Some applications, approximately 10%, are randomly selected for audit. You cannot schedule an exam until you pass the audit. Once an application has been approved, PMI will send an authorization letter, allowing the applicant to pay for and schedule their exam. Once the authorization letter is received, the applicant has one year to take the exam.

CAPM Exam Requirements

The requirements to take the Certified Associate in Project Management (CAPM®) exam are listed in the CAPM Handbook located on PMI's site at <http://www.pmi.org/CareerDevelopment/Pages/AboutCredentialsCAPM.aspx>. The CAPM® certification is a newer certification with approximately 9,000 people having attained the CAPM® certification (as reported in September 2009). It is designed for practitioners who do not have enough PM work experience to meet the PMP® qualifications. This allows them the opportunity to obtain some sort of certification while gaining the necessary experience.

Applicants with a high school diploma or equivalent must meet the following requirements:

- Minimum 1,500 hours of work on a project team

OR

- Minimum 23 contact hours of PM instruction

Once an application has been approved, PMI will send an authorization letter, allowing the applicant to schedule their exam. Once the authorization letter is received, the applicant has one year to take the exam.

CAPM Application

Documenting training rather than experience on the CAPM application is the easiest method to document your qualification to take the exam. But even if you choose to document experience rather than PM education on the application, the process is still simpler than on the PMP application. Every every project requires the following:

- Project name
- Start and end date
- Your role on the project
- Your job title
- Organization name, address, and phone
- Contact information for your primary contact on this project; this can be used to verify work experience
- Hours Spent in the following:
 - Initiating
 - Planning
 - Executing
 - Monitoring and Controlling
 - Closing
- Summarize project team experience by process group. This description is limited to 500 characters, so be brief and focus on PM activities.

Examination Fees

The status of the applicant at the time that the on-line application process begins determines the fee that will be charged to take the exam. If you intend to lower your fees by joining PMI, then join PMI and receive your member number before beginning the application. The fees are as follows:

Exam	Fee
PMP	
Initial Certification Fee (member of PMI)	\$405.00
Initial Certification Fee (non-member of PMI)	\$555.00
Re-Examination Fee (member of PMI)	\$275.00
Re-Examination Fee (non-member of PMI)	\$375.00
CAPM	
Initial Certification Fee (member of PMI)	\$255.00
Initial Certification Fee (non-member of PMI)	\$300.00
Re-Examination Fee (member of PMI)	\$150.00
Re-Examination Fee (non-member of PMI)	\$200.00
PMI Membership Fee	
PMI New Member Fee	\$129.00
Annual PMI Renewal Fee	\$119.00

Notice the difference in fees that being a PMI member makes. When paying for the PMP exam, members save \$150.00. Joining PMI costs \$119.00 plus a \$10.00 application fee, so if you join, it costs \$129.00 and saves \$150.00. Not only is that a good investment, but the applicant can take advantage of the benefits that PMI membership provides for one year. However, some organizations cannot or will not reimburse membership fees, so they knowingly pay the more expensive non-member fee.

Overview of Exam Questions

The format of the test is multiple choice with four answer choices per question. The questions come from the following five process groups plus professional responsibility (also called the six domains):

	PMP ?s	PMP %
Project Initiation	23	11%
Project Planning	46	23%
Project Execution	55	27%
Project Monitoring and Controlling	42	21%
Project Closing	17	9%
Professional and Social Responsibility	17	9%
Total	200	100%
Time Limit	4 hours	

	CAPM ?s	CAPM %
PMBOK® Chapter 1	6	4%
PMBOK® Chapter 2	6	4%
PMBOK® Chapter 3	16	11%
PMBOK® Chapter 4	16	11%
PMBOK® Chapter 5	16	11%
PMBOK® Chapter 6	16	11%
PMBOK® Chapter 7	14	9%
PMBOK® Chapter 8	11	7%
PMBOK® Chapter 9	11	7%
PMBOK® Chapter 10	11	7%
PMBOK® Chapter 11	16	11%
PMBOK® Chapter 12	11	7%
Total	150	100%
Time Limit	3 hours	

The PMP exam is psychometric in that it applies knowledge, application, and analysis, including situational questions. The CAPM exam is knowledge-based.

The questions are randomly generated from a database of questions, so no two tests are alike. Once the test questions are generated, they are static and do not change based on questions answered correctly or incorrectly. In other words, this is not an adaptive exam. The exam is reviewed and revised periodically. All potential test questions go through rigorous scrutiny by a global team of PMPs prior to being offered in the exam to ensure consistency, accuracy and fairness. Some are also tested as pre-test questions first. Pre-test questions are not scored, but instead are used for testing to determine whether a question is fair. There are 25 pre-test questions on the PMP exam and 15 pre-test questions on the CAPM.

Exam results are provided immediately upon completion of the exam, if it is taken online at a Prometric testing center. You will be provided an overall pass/fail result as well as proficiencies by domain. Within each domain, a proficiency level of **proficient** (above average knowledge), **moderately proficient** (at the average level) or **below proficient** (below average level) is provided.

Overall, don't assume that the test is easy to pass. Test questions are reviewed by a panel of experts to ensure that they truly test your knowledge. Questions are subtle to determine whether you really understand and can apply good practices while adapting to different scenarios. Memorizing the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK®) or lots of lists will not ensure a passing score on the exam, nor will experience alone. One of the more often-cited reasons for candidates not to pass the exam on their first try is due to their reliance on experience alone. Often, that is not enough to get you through the exam unless you understand PMI's terminology, processes, and way of thinking. This is where formal education or study guides come in handy.

Types of Questions

There are a number of different types of questions on the exam, which fall into the following broad categories:

- **Situational** – Analyze the situation described in the question and choose the most correct answer by using knowledge, experience, and judgment.
- **Mathematical** – Approximately 8-10 formula-related questions will be on the exam.
- **Recall** – Fairly short, often easier questions that test memory or knowledge.
- **Diagram** – Either draw a network diagram or interpret drawn-out graphs or diagrams to determine the correct answer. It is possible that more than one question may use the same diagram.
- **More Than One Correct Answer** – In cases where multiple answers could be correct, choose the most correct or most appropriate one according to PMI.
- **Double Negatives** – The test uses double negatives or questions asking you to remove the false statement. Sometimes it is easier to read the question by turning it into a positive. For example, if the question states, "All of the following statements are false except..." look for the one true statement.
- **Wordy Questions** – Some questions will take valuable test time to read and interpret or may include extraneous information to take up time and throw the reader off track. Sometimes this happens because the same scenario is used for multiple questions and thus some of the information will be extraneous in one question and relevant in another. In these cases, it is helpful to read the question first

to know exactly what is being asked and what information to focus on. A string of wordy questions may create the false perspective that you are falling behind.

- **Correct Answers to Another Question** – In this case, more than one of the answers offered will be a correct statement but will not answer the question that was asked. Make sure to read all answer choices carefully and keep the actual question in mind.

Exam-Taking Tips: Stress-Enhancers and Possible Fixes

- **Clock Ticking** – This is not referring to a physical clock ticking on the wall (although there may be one), but rather to a clock that is tracking the time spent and time remaining on the exam. While it helps you pace yourself during the exam, it can also add stress if you fall behind on time. Be aware of this. Pacing yourself is very important. To ensure you do not fall behind on time, work through the questions fairly quickly. However, do not read the questions or answers too quickly and miss the finer points. Use the clock as a general gauge of your progress but do not dwell on it unnecessarily. Keep in mind that you have 1.2 minutes per question on average. Most people have no trouble finishing the test, with normally enough time to review answers, as long as you remain cognizant of the time.
- **Noisy Testing Center** – You will be in a testing room with other people who will be typing, stretching, coughing, entering and leaving the room, etc. This could be noisy and distracting. Be mentally prepared for this. Most test centers will provide earplugs that you can use to help minimize these distractions. If desired, you can call your center ahead of time to see if your center does this and, if not, bring your own.
- **Uncomfortable Testing Center** – In addition to lots of movement, the center may be warm or cold. Dressing in layers helps alleviate this problem. The layers can also be used as a lumbar support or a chair cushion, if necessary.

Exam-Taking Tips: Stress-Relievers

- **Arrive Early** – Avoid additional stress by knowing the location of the test center, directions to get there, existing construction, and by arriving early.
- **Rest Up** – Get plenty of sleep the night before the exam. Finish studying early the evening before the test to give your brain a chance to absorb all the information. If the test is scheduled later in the day, take it easy before the exam. Don't try to study or work hard all day and then take the exam in the late afternoon. Scores typically decline after long periods of study or work.
- **Formulate a Plan** – Do not underestimate the physical, mental, and emotional strain of a four-hour exam. Be prepared by having a plan, such as standing up and stretching every hour, or leaving the testing room to eat a snack bar that you brought or to drink something halfway through the exam. Also, while taking the test, have a plan as to how you will mark and track questions for future review. For example, let's say you narrow the possible answers for a particular question down to two, but are not sure of the one best answer. In addition to 'marking' the question in the computer for future review, you can also write the number of this question and the two answers you are left with down on your scratch paper, saving yourself time when you come back to review the question later. Also, write down a keyword or note of what the question is about, as some questions are answered elsewhere in the exam. If and when you find an answer elsewhere, you will then not have to search to update your answer. You may find that anywhere from two to four questions are answered elsewhere in the exam.

- **Get Ready for a Brain Dump** – Just before entering the testing room, review any formulas or notes as necessary, then put your notes away in the locker provided. Once you enter the testing room, use the scratch paper provided to record formulas, notes, memory joggers or any other info you want to have at your disposal during the test. Once this is put on paper, it eases your mind, allowing you to fully concentrate on the test question at hand rather than worry about remembering formulas or getting confused later.
- **Flash Cards** – Adults learn once they see or hear information on average three times. To get this repetition, utilize several different study techniques. For example, read through whatever study materials you have, noting areas of further study needed. For items requiring further study, create a flash card for each item, putting the question on the front and answer on the back. Flash cards can be useful because they can be shuffled to avoid memorizing items in a certain order. Also, once an item is learned, the card can be removed, saving you time and allowing you to focus on items you still need to study. It is also extremely gratifying to see the stack of cards to study shrink and the stack of known items grow.

Additional Exam-Taking Tips

- **Answer All Questions** – Unanswered questions count as a wrong answer.
- **Fill in the Blanks** – Sometimes, the correct answer is not grammatically correct when filled in the blank on a question.
- **Take the Tutorial** – Be sure you understand the computer system for the exam. The tutorial that is offered only takes a few minutes to complete, but you are given up to 15 minutes for it. Use the extra time to calm down and write out your brain dump.
- **Read All Answer Choices** – Before selecting an answer, read all the choices. Don't select the first option that sounds correct. Sometimes there will be more than one correct answer or sometimes the answer is correct but does not answer the question that was asked.
- **Use Mnemonic Devices** – These are techniques that are used to increase memory recall by creating a silly picture in your mind, devising a clever saying to help recall facts, or remembering a series of words by taking the first letter of each word to create a personal acronym or memorable phrase. The sillier the picture or phrase, the easier the item will be to remember.

Maintaining Certification

After passing the exam, PMPs must accumulate 60 Professional Development Units (PDUs) over a three-year period beginning on the date they pass the exam. Examples of a PDU are one hour of training time spent in a Project Management class offered by a Registered Education Provider (REP) or one hour of a lecture by a guest speaker at a local PMI chapter meeting.

Unlike the PMP, individuals holding the CAPM certification do not have to acquire PDUs to maintain certification. CAPMs can hold this certification up to five years, after which they can either re-take the CAPM exam or apply for PMP certification. The CAPM is intended to be a one-time certification, to be held while experience is gained to allow the individual to qualify to take the PMP® exam. Individuals holding the CAPM certification do not receive special treatment or get any short cuts when they apply for and take the PMP exam. They still have to complete the PMP application and take the exam at the normal fees, just like everybody else.

Summary

This white paper discussed the application requirements, the exam and post-certification requirements for both the PMP and CAPM certifications issued by PMI. Tips and techniques were offered to help provide a more efficient application process as well as to pass the actual exam.

Good luck!

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About the Author

Vicki Wrona, PMP is the founder and President of Forward Momentum, LLC, an 8(a) consulting and training company found at www.forwardmomentum.net. She has been managing projects and mentoring individuals and organizations for over 20 years, has trained over 4,500 people and has authored multiple training courses, white papers and blogs. She developed the Global Knowledge part of the program that won PMI's Professional Development Product of the Year Award in 2007 and served on PMI's *PMBOK® Guide – 4th edition* creation and review team.

Additional Information

Additional information regarding the PMP and CAPM exams can be found at PMI's web site: www.pmi.org