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PMP Test Taking Tips

Tips for Passing Your PMP Exam

Test taking can seem overwhelming at times. Especially something as important as PMI's PMP exam. Our quick six tips for passing your PMP exam is based on experience from both PMP exam instructors and PMP's who have scored well with the exam. Although everyone has their own unique study habits, you're sure to find some of our tips helpful to you. These same tips not only apply to taking the PMP exam, they easily apply to all other exams you have to take during your professional career.

Read through our tips and apply some, or all, of our tips to your study routine. With a bit of organized studying you'll find that taking the PMP exam isn't too difficult. Before long you'll have your PMP Certification. We all wish you good luck on your exam!

The Project Management Professional (PMP) credential is widely recognized as one of the most challenging certifications, requiring coursework and years of experience in order to sit for a challenging examination. About seventy percent of those taking the exam pass. Here, we provide tips to help assure you aren't in the thirty percent bracket. With care and diligence, you should do well, but you can't enter the exam blindly.

Having decades of experience is not enough to pass. You must understand the examination and certainly be able to speak the underlying language. In fact, the establishment of a common language for communication is one of the prime benefits afforded by the Project Management Body of Knowledge® as embodied in the Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK Guide). That is, there is a body of knowledge that is described in the associated book, a key distinction.

Tip #1 - Make a Study Calendar

Making a study calendar is a critical step in your journey to the credential. After all, that's exactly what the consummate PMP would do. Your total elapsed time will determine on your available free time and your experience and prior knowledge but will generally fall between several weeks and a few months. Keep these points in mind.

Early on, concentrate on reading and understanding the PMBOK Guide terminology, processes and Knowledge Areas. Quizzes during this time are helpful for recall. Schedule or document your required formal training, including a prep class if at all possible.

Schedule a test date for a couple of weeks or so after you are answering situational test questions with eighty percent or more of them correctly answered. Note: The exam is not graded in that way, but rather with a more sophisticated method. However, if you are answering with that degree of correctness, you are likely ready for the exam.

Tip #2 – Take a Formal PMP Prep Course

Many of us rely on self study in our careers; however, when it comes to taking your PMP exam it is advisable to attend an exam prep course. It's best to take an instructor led training to guide you through the require body of knowledge. With so much to take in we recommend a course that gives you a self-paced option. This will ensure that you have as much time as you need to take in all the material. You will need plenty of time for practice questions after you are familiar with the material. Also, resist the not-unusual urge to postpone the exam for fear of failure.

Tip #3 - Sequester Yourself

Twenty four hours prior to the scheduled exam time, you should check into a hotel or other quiet place near the exam facility and sequester yourself with nothing but your study materials. Many of us have outside interruptions in our daily lives: wife, kids, work, hobbies, chores, etc. This privacy ensures that you focus entirely on studying and isolate yourself from outside disruptions.

Turn your cell phone off, don't bring your laptop unless you have online study material (if you do then don't use email or do anything but study with the laptop). And of course, don't turn on the television.

Tip #4 - Take Practice Tests then Take Practice Tests then Take...

Take as many practice tests as you can, particularly later after you know the underlying material fairly thoroughly. Just make sure that those questions are largely situational in nature rather than recall oriented. That is, the exam will measure your ability to apply the knowledge in the PMBOK Guide more so than your ability to recall it. So, early in your study, “information recall” questions are acceptable. Later, the questions must be more situational.

Everything else you do in preparation is directed toward your ability to answer questions quickly. Practice taking exam questions. Next, practice taking different exam questions. Then practice taking some different exam questions. You can't take too many practice questions during this period. Later, be sure you practice at “game speed” – that is at a rate of at least an average of one every fifty seconds, the rate you must complete them on the examination with two hundred multiple choice questions (each with four possible answers), in four hours.

Key points for answering questions:

- Concentrate first on finishing all two hundred questions in the allotted time. That means you will have to abandon some perplexing questions until later. If you time your progress

correctly, you will have time to come back and reconsider questions you skipped. You may often find that your subconscious mind has made progress toward the correct answer while you were finishing other questions.

- If all else fails, your first thought of the correct answer is a best bet.
- Long questions may be misleading. A key skill acquired with practice is to learn to x-ray questions, leave out unnecessary fluff, and concentrate on the grain (the real intent) of the question. Excessive detail is sometimes included, just like in real life situations.
- When an answer makes an absolute statement, consider that it is likely inappropriate in the context of the question and thus a strong clue to the correct answer.
- Beware of “close-but-no-cigar” terms. The exam often tries to throw you off by slightly changing the name of a process or knowledge area, or calling a knowledge area a process. The same is true of terminology encountered throughout the PMBOK® Guide. Your best bet here is not necessarily to memorize terms, but rather to recognize them properly.
- Remember to answer questions in a manner indicating that you know that you, as project manager, are in charge. That also means that you will always go to superiors with a solution or good proposed alternatives for a solution.

Tip #5 - Have a Test Taking Strategy that is Second Nature by Exam Time

PMP exam test takers often find that they “hit a wall” and become discouraged early in the exam, then gain a second wind and finish with a flourish. The four hours certainly pass more quickly than you would expect.

The “tutorial” presented at the first of the examination time, and before your two hours begin, explains how to use the keyboard and mouse. Assuming you have already mastered those skills, the allocated tutorial time can best be used for writing down key formulas that you might need later.

- Temporarily skip questions you can’t quickly answer, marking them onscreen. If your pace is good, you will have time to come back to them after reaching the final question, and the user interface will make this technique easy.
- Check your progress versus time at multiple points during the test. You may be surprised at how things either seem to speed up or slow down at various points and may need to adjust accordingly.
- If you find that you are running out of time, go back and quickly answer all questions you skipped. That way, you have at least a twenty-five percent chance of choosing the correct answer.

Tip #6 - Test Day Essentials

Would-be exam takers who are a no-show on the exam day at the appointed time forfeit the exam fee. That's a gamble one should not take. Be sure to read-up on these facts in the PMP Credential Handbook. Be totally positive of the location and plan to show up early!

Get enough rest on the night before the exam. Plan your schedule accordingly.

Depending on your exam location, you may have to schedule your exam date well in advance. That means that you will have to plan your study carefully so that you are somewhere near your peak of preparation on test day.