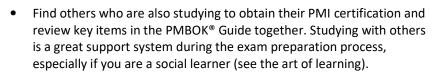# Examination Techniques

This paper is focused on PMI's computer-based examinations; however, the suggestions are generally relevant to all exams.

## Getting ready for the exam

- Find others who are also studying to obtain their PMI certification and review key items in the PMBOK® Guide together. Studying with others is a great support system during the exam preparation process, especially if you are a social learner (see the art of learning).

- Leading up to your exam day, establish a regular sleep schedule. Try and get a full 7 hours of sleep each night in the week leading up to the exam; resist the temptation to study through the night, instead study and practice taking exams at times that coincide when your exam is scheduled. But before you fall asleep, tell yourself, *'I'm going to pass the test'*; thinking positive thoughts builds positive energy.

- Answer many, many, many practice questions[1]. There are many hundreds of questions built into our courses and we have more in reserve and suggest many additional free sources[2].

- As you are nearing your exam date create a data dump sheet with key formulas, definitions, and other items you want to make sure you remember on your exam day. Practice recreating it; because that is what you are going to need to do on your exam day.

- Know where your exam site is. If you live far away from the exam site and can't drive by, make sure you have reliable directions to the Prometric test centre. Allow for plenty of time to get to the site without causing yourself unnecessary additional stress.

- The day before the exam is not a good time to learn new material. Focus on revision, memory aids such as flashcards and similar to further aid memory recall, focus, concentration, and understanding of the questions. A brisk walk after dinner to decompress is recommended. Don't forget to set your alarm clock – perhaps also set a backup.

## On the day

- Eat a healthy breakfast, it is very hard to concentrate if you're hungry.

- Plan to arrive early - plan to be at least 30 minutes early and use the time for a last cup of coffee in a nearby coffee shop.

- Remember to have the identification you told PMI you will use with you; you will need to prove who you are in order to take the exam.

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1   See more on the use of *questions in the learning process*: https://mosaicprojects.com.au/Mag_Articles/P029_PMP_Questions.pdf

2   For links to *PMP and CAPM questions*, see: https://mosaicprojects.com.au/PMKI-TPI-020.php

- Do not bring too much stuff with you. You will have to lock everything up because you can't take anything into the exam room with you. Snacks and drinks are a good idea, these are placed on top of your locker.

- You will be screened! You may be asked to pull up your trouser cuffs / shirt sleeves and turn your pockets inside out. This screening also includes the use of a metal detector. Your identification will be placed in the corner of the desk. This is done so that the proctors can confirm the identity of the person seated throughout the exam - as you will be randomly observed by different proctors at random intervals, your exam session is also recorded (PMI take exam security seriously!).

- If you are nervous about taking a computer-based exam, don't worry because there is a 15 minute tutorial at the beginning of the exam that does not count toward your exam time. Once you are comfortable with the system, you can start the exam. But, do not 'end' the tutorial until you are ready to start your exam - the 'start' is instantaneous.

- Once the exam has started, you can utilize the scratch paper/note boards for your 'brain dump'. Doing a 'brain dump' during the 15-minute tutorial period or prior is no longer allowed!

- If you start to feel nervous or overwhelmed, take a few deep breaths, tell yourself "you've got this", and keep going.

- Have a plan that includes 2 or 3 five-minute breaks - no one operates at full capacity for 3 or 4 hours straight. Take some refreshments with you (caffeine, carbohydrates, and sugars all help boost concentration) - you have to go outside to get your refreshment and use the bathroom but the boost in performance is well worth the time.

## Dealing with the exam questions

- On the first pass answer all of the questions you know and mark those you don't for follow-up. Some questions/answers later in the exam may help you answer those you had marked and you will find your memory of the course improves over time.

- **Do not waste time on questions!** Do not spend more than 20 to 30 seconds per question on the first pass - you can go back and deal with the unanswered ones second time around. You can mark questions for review and the system lets you search for unanswered questions and/or questions marked for review.

- Return to the more difficult or complex questions after taking care of the questions you know. This allows you to obtain the easy points and spend the remaining time on the questions you skipped.

- Don't allow the answers provided to confuse you if you know the answer. After you have read the scenario, come up with the answer in your head before taking a look at the answers supplied by the exam. If you know the answer and it matches one of the four provided job-done!. But.....

- Read all of the answers provided before choosing one. There is no way of knowing if you have made the best choice if you do not read all of the answers (there are always at least two plausible options offered).

- Eliminate any answers you know are not correct. There are going to be times when you are going to be able to completely eliminate an answer or two which will make answering the question a lot easier.

- Some of the ways to find the best answer (or avoid wrong answers) include:
    - Beware of answers that contain absolutes such as always, all, every, never, none, and only. These answers may look good, but remember absolutes are a dangerous area since there can be exceptions to them. Make sure you consider the restrictive nature of an answer that contains an absolute.
    - Don't Buy A Tool: Some answer choices may suggest spending money, buying a tool or software package to solve the problem, more often than not this is a red flag.
    - Take Action: Why put off until tomorrow, what you can do today? Consider the long- and short-term impacts of each answer choice. Being proactive is a strong PMI trait.
    - In every PMI exam, you will find questions which pertain to making the best possible decisions concerning people, resources, and the environment. Know and apply the PMI Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct.
    - Doubt answers that are not familiar to you. If any of the answers provided do not seem familiar to you or don't seem to fit in with the *PMBOK® Guide* language or terminology, there is a good chance this is not the answer to the question.
    - Be very cautious of overly technical answer choices - direct options are usually best.

- When two answers seem correct, compare their differences. In the case of two answers that seem to both be correct, compare the differences to determine which one is the best answer. There will be differences even if they are slight.

- Select the answer most logical to you, based on the *PMBOK® Guide* and your coursework - do not use *'how we do it here'* except as a last resort.

- Answer each question even if you just guess - near the end of the exam search for 'blanks' and fill in an answer you have a 25% chance of getting it correct if you eliminate 1 or 2 obviously wrong option your probability improves to 33% then 50%. There are no penalties for wrong answers in PMI exams and if left unanswered you have a 100% chance of getting it incorrect[3].

- For computational questions where you are familiar with the calculation required to find the correct answer, work the problem before looking at the available answers.

- For computational questions you are not familiar with work the problem backwards. Four possible answers are provided that you can use to work the problem backwards to determine which the correct answer is but be careful - several answers may be derived from one set of data, only one is correct.

- Check your answers but only change an answer for a really good reason. Your first answer is generally your best so only make changes if you are sure or if clues within the text cue you another answer.

- Remember, it is your job to find the "best" answer to the scenario provided while taking the Exam. The best method for learning how to put the strategies above to use is practice, practice, practice - see more on exam questions.

- Allow a few minutes to review your exam and make sure every question has been answered (you can search for 'blanks').

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3    See more on **how the exam scoring works**:
     https://mosaicprojects.com.au/Mag_Articles/P041_Understanding_your_PMI_Score.pdf

## Ending the Exam

- Click Submit (if you don't the exam will time out and auto-submit at the end). When you click submit, you'll be prompted to complete a short survey about the test centre and the PMI credential. Upon completing the survey, a message on screen will indicate Pass / Fail. You can then leave the testing workstation and contact the proctor for a printout of your performance.

- The proctor will hand you a printed exam summary. In two to three weeks you'll receive your Certificate from PMI.

- Take time to celebrate your success!

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