

PMP® and CAPM® Exam Tips and Requirements

By Vicki Wrona, PMP

This white paper will explain the requirements you must meet in order to qualify to take the PMP® exam or CAPM® exam as well as the studying tips and exam-taking tips that have earned Forward Momentum's students a first-time pass rate of 92%, well above industry average.

How to Apply for PMP® / CAPM® Certification

Application Requirements

When applying for PMP® certification, there are two categories of requirements, which are differentiated by education level. If you have a baccalaureate-equivalent degree, then you must document 4500 hours of leading and directing tasks. Note that an Associate's degree does not count, and a Master's degree or PhD does not give you extra credit.

PMI requires a minimum span of time for this documented experience. They require at least 36 unique months of experience within the prior 96 months, or 8 years, to allow you to gain the breadth and depth of knowledge needed while also ensuring that your experience is current. Our industry is changing, and PMI wants you to keep up. A unique month is a month where one or more projects occur. If you worked on two projects within one month, it counts as one unique month, not two.

If you do not have a bachelor's degree and have a high school diploma or equivalent, then you have to document more hours of experience. In this case, you must document 7500 hours of leading and directing projects over 60 unique months within the prior 96 months (8 years).

Both categories also require 35 contact hours of project management instruction. A contact hour is one hour of training, not including lunch.

If you find that you do not meet the requirements necessary to obtain PMP® certification, the CAPM® certification may be for you.

CAPM® stands for Certified Associate in Project Management. It is a way of getting certified and showing your clients and/or employer that you have credibility and some project management knowledge while you gain the experience necessary to get PMP® certified.

To get your CAPM® certification, you need to have a high school diploma or global equivalent, and either 1500 hours of experience or 23 contact hours of project management (PM) instruction. Since you do not need both, it is easier to document the training rather than the experience. A contact hour is one hour of training, not including lunch.

All the information about the requirements you must meet to qualify to take the PMP® can be found in the [PMP® Credential Handbook](#),¹ and information about the CAPM® can be found in the [CAPM® Credential Handbook](#).² You may also want to read the [PMI® Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct](#),³ since the PMP® exam will contain some questions on ethics. Once you have gathered all the info needed, you can complete your [application online](#).⁴

How to Document Your Experience

The most time-consuming part of the PMP® application is documenting your experience, so let's talk about how to do that.

For your experience, you must document experience in each of the five process groups, which are: Initiating, Planning, Executing, Monitoring and Controlling, and Closing. However, you do not have to have experience in all of the process groups for every project. This is reasonable, since you may have joined a project after it started or left a project before it was complete.

To do this, find and list all the projects that you worked on over the years. Pull out your resume (which hopefully is fairly up to date), any work samples you have from over the years, any work history from company databases, etc., and try to recreate the projects you worked on chronologically, working backwards. You want to work this way because you do not want to spend more effort documenting hours than is necessary. Once you reach the required number of hours, you can stop.

Once you have a list of project names, list the start date and end date of each project. Calculate the number of weeks that project took and enter that into Excel. Estimate the number of hours per week worked on this project, and let Excel calculate the total hours worked on this project.

Next you have to break down your hours by process group.

For every project, you need to list how many hours were spent in each process group of initiating, planning, executing, monitoring and controlling and closing. Let Excel work for you here by determining the percent of time spent in each process group, adjusting the numbers until they add up to 100%. Remember you must have experience in all process groups, but not on every project. Let Excel calculate the number of hours per process group based on the percentage multiplied by the number of total hours spent on that project.

You must also include a description of the tasks conducted within each process group. Remember the character limit mentioned earlier and let Word work for you here by typing your descriptions into Word to ensure they fit within the limit.

Next, you must include a description of your experience leading people or directing project tasks by process group. You must do this within 350 to 550 characters following the format PMI requires. This is not a lot of space, so write in phrases rather than sentences to get to the point and convey the appropriate information within the character limit. Do not dwell on what the project did but instead about what you did on the project.

The format requires that you include a short statement on the project's objective, the project's outcome, and then specifically what you did or led for each of the process groups. To do this within the character limit, abbreviate the project objective as "Obj:" followed by a short description. After that, you can abbreviate each process group by its first letter (I, P, E, M&C, C) and then the project's outcome or result as "Res:". You can use a good [spreadsheet](#)⁵ to help you gather and verify your application information prior to completing the [application online](#).⁴

For every project, you must provide the contact information of someone who can verify the work that you did. If you are chosen for an audit, that person will automatically be contacted by PMI. If possible, contact this person when you submit your application and let them know what you plan to submit regarding project name, responsibilities, etc. This way, they are not taken by surprise and will know up front what you told PMI so you can 1) find out prior to submitting your application if they do not agree with what you said and 2) ensure the information they provide to PMI will be consistent with the information you provided.

I recommend this because I have seen people who ran into problems during an audit because they couldn't get in touch with their contact person or because they found out their contact person was not going to be as supportive as they thought.

You are now armed with the information required to populate the online application.

Here are a few more tips to help the application go smoothly:

- Become a PMI® member first. If you join PMI, you pay lower fees to take the exam and, if necessary, to retake the exam.
 - Your fees are based upon your status at the time you begin the application. If you are not a PMI® member and want to get the lower exam fee, then you have two options:
 - Join PMI, get a PMI® identification and then begin your application; or
 - Submit the PMI® application and exam application at the same time.
 - If you join PMI while completing the application, you can either be charged the higher non-member fee (PMI will not reimburse the difference) or you can discard what you have input into the system and start all over with your new

PMI® number. PMI does not have the capability to change your status from guest to member while the application is in process. Your initial record will simply be deleted.

- Sometimes your business units will reimburse for your application fee but not a membership fee. Before joining PMI or applying for the exam, check with your business unit first regarding what they will reimburse, so you can do what makes sense.

Scheduling Your Exam

Once you get your eligibility letter via email, you will have one year to take the exam. Within that year, you can take the exam a maximum of three times. If you do not pass the exam within three times, you must wait a year before reapplying to take the exam. This means you will have to begin the application process from the beginning again. The eligibility letter contains payment instructions and a code that allows you to schedule your exam.

For more information on scheduling your exam, go to <https://www.pmi.org/-/media/pmi/documents/public/pdf/certifications/exam-schedule-pearson-vue.pdf>. It is suggested that you schedule your exam as soon as you have a good idea of when you want to take the test, for several reasons:

1. Centers can fill up, especially the coveted Saturday slots and certain times of the year.
2. The CAPM® and PMP® exams are long, and it may be difficult to find an extended open period of time. Other people will be taking a variety of other, shorter exams at these centers.
3. If you will be flagged for an audit, it's better to know early. While PMI reserves the right to audit you at any time, even after you pass the exam if there is cause, a random audit is likely to occur when you schedule your exam. Approximately 15% of applications are randomly audited. If you are selected for a random audit, you will receive an email from PMI informing you that PMI has cancelled your test date until you pass the audit, which can take anywhere from one day to multiple weeks. You can track the audit process online at www.pmi.org. At the same time, your contact person is notified of the audit, if the item to be audited involves them. After you pass the audit, a center may or may not have a time slot available when you want. It is very unfortunate to finally feel like you are ready to take the exam and then find out you cannot test because you are being audited. Therefore, scheduling a test serves two purposes:
 - It lets you know if you will be triggered for audit; and
 - It provides a goal date for you to hit. After all, nothing happens without a deadline, right?

Exams that are rescheduled within 30 days of the exam date are charged a fee, which at the time of this writing is \$70. The exam date does not count as part of the 30 days. You may be able to

waive this fee by calling the testing center directly to reschedule the exam. Some centers will reschedule without a fee. If you cancel your exam within two days of your test date, you forfeit the entire exam fee and cannot reschedule the exam until a reexamination fee is paid.

What to Expect and How to Study for It

Types of Questions

There are many different types of questions on the exam. They are:

- **Situational** – By far, the most prevalent type of question on the exam is the situational question. Approximately 80% of the PMP® exam is situational. PMI provides a scenario and you have to decide what is missing or what to do next. Here you analyze the situation described in the question and choose the most correct answer by using knowledge, experience and judgment. None of the answer options may be what you would do, but you have to choose the best answer based on what they give you... and based on PMI®'s way of thinking.
- **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. PMI reuses scenarios so the same scenario may be used for multiple questions. This means that it is possible (or even likely) that there is extraneous information in the question. Read the question first, then the scenario, to allow you to focus on the pertinent information.
- **More than One Correct Answer** – Always read all answer options. It is possible that you will be presented with more than one viable answer, in which case you have to choose the one that is most correct or most appropriate according to PMI®. If you can identify the process being described in the scenario and you know the goal, or main output, of that process, this will often point you to the best answer.
- **Mathematical** – These questions are nice, even for the math-phobic or math-challenged, because, unlike situational questions, you know you have a correct answer if you know and can apply the formula. Figure out the formula and the answer before looking at the answer list. PMI® will put all the commonly miscalculated answers in the answer list, and you may second-guess yourself if you look at the list rather than work out the problem.
- **Recall** – These questions are typically short and straightforward, although they could be longer questions as well. They test memory or knowledge. Approximately 10% of PMP® exam questions and a higher percent of CAPM® exam questions will be recall. That said, don't fall into the trap of believing that the CAPM® exam is an easy test.
- **ITTOs** – Approximately 10% of the PMP® exam and a much higher percentage of the CAPM® exam asks about the inputs, tools and techniques and outputs for the project management processes. One tip for the exam is to eliminate impossible answers. For

example, if you are asked to identify a tool and technique, look at the list to see if any inputs or outputs are listed. If they are, you can rule out those answers, which narrows your options and improves your odds of getting the question right. While there has been a decreased emphasis on recalling the PMP® ITTOs, you still need to understand the items and pick the appropriate item to refer to or to use for a given situation.

- **Diagram** – You may be asked to draw a project schedule network diagram or interpret pre-drawn graphs or diagrams to determine the correct answer. This may also include a decision tree. Again, it is possible that more than one question may use the same diagram, so if you have to draw a diagram, draw it neatly enough on your scratch paper so you can read it if it is used again. Sometimes the diagram is drawn out for you, and sometimes you have to draw it and interpret it to get the answer. Note that the “network diagrams” on this exam are not of the IT context with computers, routers, switches and people, but instead are about logistical scheduling or the flow of work through the project.
- **Double Negatives** – A double negative question is tougher to answer than a straightforward question. 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...” then 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. It is helpful to read the question first to know exactly what is being asked and what information to focus on.

How can you use the *PMBOK® Guide* when studying? The CAPM® questions come directly from the *PMBOK® Guide*. For the PMP® exam, the 6th edition is good reference for specific items or questions, and a better source than earlier editions for studying, in my opinion. For a good overview on key points for each knowledge area, read the following four sections found in the beginning of each knowledge area (chapters 4-13):

- Key Concepts (also listed in Appendix X4)
- Trends and Emerging Practices (also listed in
- Tailoring Considerations (also listed in Appendix X5)
- Considerations for Agile/Adaptive Environments

Other sections of the *PMBOK® Guide* that is helpful in studying are:

- Appendix X3, which provides a short overview of agile, iterative, adaptive, and hybrid environments and how the process groups apply to those environments.
- Appendix X6, which lays out all of the tools and techniques so you can more easily see where each occurs.

That said, it may not be the best use of your time to read the *PMBOK® Guide* from start to finish, because it is very general and written in a somewhat vague manner. For example, it mentions the tools to use but does not explain how to use them. Also, there are items on the PMP® exam that are not covered in the *PMBOK® Guide*.

The latest information known is that PMI® sets the exam score so that 74% of people will pass the exam. It is a best practice within the certification industry to have between 65% to 75% of people pass a certification exam, and PMI® aims for the upper end of that range.

The PMP® exam contains 200 questions. You are scored on 175 questions. 25 questions are pre-test questions, which are in the exam bank for research purposes (e.g., to test: is it a fair question, do people understand it, is it worded appropriately, what is the most common answer on the question, etc.). These questions are automatically scored as correct as long as you answer the question.

The CAPM® exam contains 150 questions, of which 15 questions are pre-test questions.

Studying Tips

So far, we have talked about the types of questions and the exam structure. Now we will discuss how to study.

- **Take notes.** If you [attend a class](#)⁶ or listen to an audio, when you hear something said, your brain registers that as hearing the concept one time. When you take notes, it registers that concept a second time. If you read your notes, that is a third time. Studies show that adults learn after seeing or hearing something three times. Taking notes shortens that process.
- **Take practice tests (especially online) from multiple, good study guide authors.** This is because the exam is written by a global team of PMP®-certified individuals and is written from multiple viewpoints, so it helps to get used to reading questions written by different people. Good exams can be found in study guides, online, and through apps. Some are free, some are low cost. Take practice tests online whenever you can, because it is harder to take an online exam than a paper exam. Also, take the exam in an environment similar to the testing center, such as a library. Libraries are quiet, but also involve movement and some noise, just like the testing room.
- **Use flash cards that you create.** The breadth of material on this exam is very wide. No matter how long you have been managing projects, there are probably areas on the exam that you have not done. Using flash cards will help. The beauty of using index cards to create flash cards is that you only create a card for those concepts you do not already know. You can shuffle the cards so you are always learning things in a new order. As you learn something, you can put that card aside and not waste time studying it anymore. It is very encouraging and extremely gratifying to see the stack of things you do not know

shrink and the stack of things you do know grow. Also, not re-reading the things you already know saves study time, which is one benefit of studying from flash cards.

- **At first, read the explanations to all practice test questions, even if you answered the question correctly.** It may be that you got the answer right but for the wrong reason. Therefore, especially when taking a practice test for the first (and possibly second) time, read the solution explanation, even if you picked the right answer.
- **Practice the brain dump.** Create a master brain dump of those items you think you will want to write down when you first enter the testing room, before your exam begins. Once you create a master brain dump, practice writing it over and over. Depending on how extensive your brain dump is, it could take between 8 and 15 times before you have everything memorized. When taking a practice test, write the brain dump from memory, take the test, and when you score the exam also check your work on the brain dump page. Did you remember everything you wanted to write down? Did you write it down accurately? Is there anything else you should add to your master brain dump? Practice writing your brain dump until you can get everything down in less than 10 minutes. You want to keep the time needed to write out your memory items to a minimum.
- **Anticipate study time.** Be realistic about the amount of study time you will need to put in outside of a class. It will take an average of two hours per knowledge area to review your notes and to take and grade a practice test. With 10 knowledge areas, this means that reviewing all material one time will take approximately 20 hours. It takes two to three passes through the material to be ready. On average, people spend 40 hours studying outside of class.
- **Use mnemonic devices.** A mnemonic device is whatever silly slogan, picture, sentence, cartoon characters or graphics you use to remember something. For example, some people think of syrup of IPECaC to remember the five process groups: Initiating, Planning, Executing, Controlling (for Monitoring and Controlling) and Closing.

Taking the Exam

The Setting

Before being able to take the exam, you will have to sign in and present approved identification. The instructions from PMI will include the number and types of i.d. that are acceptable. Make sure the name listed on each i.d. matches the name submitted on your PMI application. If you go by your middle name and your identifications list your first name or if you submitted the application under a shortened name (like TJ) and your identifications lists a full name, you will be turned away and will not be able to take the exam.

The Pearson VUE testing room will have rows of computers with dividers between each testing station. Dress in layers in case the testing center is warm or cool. In most centers, you must be wearing all the layers, so if you want to bring a jacket into the center, you will have to tie it around your waist.

You cannot take food or drink into the test center. If you need food or drink during the exam, there is typically filtered water and vending machines at facilities. If you want to access food that you brought, you can typically leave it out somewhere, such as on top of your locker. If you leave the testing room to take a break, you will have to go through the security screening again before re-entering the room.

What will be provided to you before you go into the testing room generally includes:

- Blank paper with #2 pencils or an erasable vinyl sheet with a thin, black Sharpie marker
- Either earplugs or headphones or both (you can sometimes bring in your own earplugs)

If you prefer to use a handheld calculator rather than one that is on the screen, ask for a calculator. If a calculator is available, the testing center will provide one if you ask for it.

Exam-Taking Tips

Here are a few more tips for a successful exam:

- Have a plan. This can include looking away from the computer screen every hour and focusing your eyes elsewhere for a minute, rolling your head and shoulders to relax the neck and/or standing and stretching for a minute. At the two-hour mark, check your progress to make sure you will have time to answer all the questions and to possibly leave the room and take a break.
- Take the computer tutorial. This will explain how to use the testing interface and provide peace of mind.
- Watch your progress but do not dwell on it. There is a little clock on your computer screen, which is encouraging if you are ahead of schedule but will cause more stress if you fall behind. Make an effort to move quickly but do not rush questions and make silly mistakes.
- Use this strategy for marking questions. You have the ability to mark a question for later review. When you mark a question, write down on your scratch paper the question number, the narrowed list of possible answers and a keyword or phrase as to what that question was about. This will come in handy if you find this answer in another question. It also helps when you review the question, so that you only look at the narrowed-down answers.

- Know your strategy on changing your answers. Sometimes the answer for one question will be given in another question, so remember you can go back and change your answer. Also, prior to taking the exam, you can use your performance during the practice tests to see if it makes sense for you to change answers once you initially answer a question. For some people, it can improve their performance; for others, it does not.
- Answer all questions. Any question left unanswered will be scored as wrong, so take a guess if you must. You have a one in four shot of getting the answer right.
- Read all of the answers. Even if you think you have the right answer, look at the other options to see if there is a better answer.
- Disregard grammar. When filling in the blank on a question, do not rule out an answer just because the answer does not fit grammatically.
- Read the question first. On the longer or more complicated questions, reading the question first will help you focus on the pertinent information in the question.
- Take a more formal approach. When in doubt, err on the side of formality in your PM practices. Follow more formal PM practices and use proper and complete documentation.
- Act in the best interests of the project. As project managers, we exist because of the project. Always act in the best interest of the project.
- Think like PMI. This is the key to passing the exam. This is why we buy study guides and take [preparation classes](#).⁶

And the Verdict Is...

When you are finished with the exam, the screen will go blank for a few seconds, which feels like an eternity. When the screen is live again, it will tell you if you passed or failed. After that, you will leave the test room and return to the front desk, where they will give you a notarized printout of your performance. Your performance will be evaluated as *Needs improvement*, *Below target*, *Target*, or *Above Target* by process group.

If you passed, congratulations! If not, you will need the code at the top of the notarized report that you receive (plus a credit card) to schedule a retake of the exam.

Forward Momentum offers exam preparation courses with a verified 92% first-time pass rate based on the result of a study of all class participants over a 2-year period. More information can be found at <https://forwardmomentum.net/pmp-courses/>.

Good luck on your exam!

NOTES

¹ PMP® Handbook: http://www.pmi.org/certification/~media/pdf/certifications/pdc_pmphandbook.ashx

² CAPM® Handbook: http://www.pmi.org/~media/PDF/Certifications/pdc_capmhandbook.ashx

³ PMI® Code of Ethics:

<https://www.pmi.org/~media/pmi/documents/public/pdf/ethics/pmi-code-of-ethics.pdf>

⁴ PMP® Certification Application: <https://www.pmi.org/certifications>

⁵ PMP® Application Spreadsheet:

<https://www.pmlearningsolutions.com/blog/probably-best-pmp-spreadsheet-world>

⁶ Forward Momentum PMP Courses: <https://forwardmomentum.net/pmp-courses/>

About Forward Momentum, LLC

Forward Momentum, LLC is a woman-owned small business (EDWOSB/WOSB) and Project Management Institute® (PMI) Global Registered Education Provider (REP) #2727 providing project management and instructional design services. Since 2000, Forward Momentum's real-world experiences, coupled with practical application of theory, have helped realize project management, leadership and learning potential within commercial, government and non-profit organizations. As a boutique firm, we pride ourselves in understanding your business, analyzing your learning and development needs, and driving efficiencies and growth through consultative engagement.

Let us show you how our approach can optimize your learning experience, improve your processes or empower your team by emailing dobusiness@forwardmomentum.net.

Visit www.forwardmomentum.net or www.linkedin.com/company/forward-momentum to learn how our experience can maximize your bottom line.

About the Author

Vicki Wrona, PMP, is the founder and President of Forward Momentum, LLC. She has over 20 years of leadership and project management experience, more than 15 years public speaking, and more than 15 years training and development experience. She has trained thousands of people, has mentored individuals and organizations and has authored multiple white papers and blogs. She was selected to serve on PMI's committee to write and review the *PMBOK® Guide* 4th edition and co-developed the program that won PMI's Professional Development Product of the Year award. She has served on the Board of Directors for the Texas Soaring Association. Her passion is equipping individuals and organizations with practical knowledge and tools so that results – and bottom-line impact – are consistently achieved.