The Short Guide to Becoming a PMP®

A Guide for Busy Project Managers

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The Short Guide to Becoming a PMP

A Short Introduction

Want to study for the PMP Exam? Don't know where to start? This guide will help you.

Don't want to read this guide? No problem. Click here to watch it on YouTube…

Note that this guide will not make studying any easier or simplify passing the PMP exam. But it will give you a step-by-step approach to preparing for and passing the PMP Exam.

8 Steps to Your PMP Exam

Here are the 8 steps to consider as you are preparing to become PMP certified:

Step 1: Not everyone is eligible to take the Project Management Institute's exam toward PMP certification. Here's a breakdown of the requirements.

Step 2: Filling out the application for the PMP exam can be a project in itself. You'll get some tools and learn some best practices that will help you fill out the application efficiently.

Step 3: Studying for the exam toward PMP certification will be a much less daunting task if you apply your project management skills to it and create a project plan. Here are the essential elements to include in your PMP study plan.

Step 4: Passing the PMP certification exam requires a considerable amount of studying. Here's a list of essential study materials you'll need to be successful.

Step 5: The amount of material you need to master to pass the PMP certification exam may seem overwhelming, but it's doable. Just follow this simple, four-step study process.

Step 6: Despite all the studying you've done for the PMP Exam you may be nervous about taking the test. Here's how PMP sample questions and PMP Exam Simulators can help test your knowledge and prepare you for the big day.

Step 7: Don't blow your chances of passing the PMP exam and earning PMP certification by failing to prepare for the exam day. Here's how to make sure you're ready mentally, physically and logistically.

Step 8: Earning professional development units is key to maintaining your PMP certification after you received your certification. Here are tips on staying PMP certified over the years.

Let's look at each step in detail:

Step 1: Assess Your Eligibility.

Project management remains one of the hottest career options for IT professionals. CIOs report quarter after quarter that project management skills are among the most sought after IT skills for their organizations.

Project managers are responding to this demand by increasingly seeking out project management certification. According to the Project Management Institute (PMI), the number of professionals who hold the PMP credential has doubled over the past five years. The Project Management Institute offers the most popular project management certification in the U.S.— the Project Management Professional or PMP credential. It signifies that an individual is proficient in PMI's project management framework, A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (*PMBOK® Guide*). It also indicates that the individual possesses significant project management skills and experience.

According to the PMP Credentials Handbook, the PMP exam "objectively assesses and measures experience, education and professional knowledge—the foundation of competent practice as a project manager."

PMP certification can give project managers an edge in the job market, as more employers note in ads for project manager jobs that project management certification is highly desirable, if not required. Project managers who are certified tend to earn higher salaries than project managers who lack credentials, according to a salary survey conducted by PMI.

But not everyone is eligible to take the PMP certification exam. Interested parties must meet certain requirements established by PMI. Here's the low-down on those requirements.

Determining Your Eligibility to Take the PMP Exam

PMI requires that people who wish to take the PMP exam possess project management-related experience and have received formal project management training or instruction. The organization outlines its criteria for taking the PMP exam in the **PMP Credential Handbook**.

Download The PMP Exam Credential Handbook:

www.pm-prepcast.com/pmphb

This free publication is downloadable from the Project Management Institute's website. In it, you'll find a description of the PMP certification, an explanation of who is eligible to apply, and how to go about it. Read the first 20 pages and you will know all there is to know about the exam from an administrative point of view.

Here are the basic requirements for taking the exam:

Either	Or
A four-year degree (bachelor's or the global equivalent) and at least three years of project management experience. Of those three years of project management experience, 4,500 hours should have been spent leading and directing projects. You also require 35 hours of project management education.	In the absence of a four-year degree, a secondary diploma (high school or the global equivalent) is required, along with at least five years of project management experience. Of those five years of project management experience, 7,500 hours should have been spent leading and directing projects. You also require 35 hours of project management education.

Project Management Experience Hours vs. Contact Hours

The questions project managers ask me about the PMP exam most often concern the required "Project Management Experience Hours" and "Contact Hours." Somehow, the PMP Credential Handbook makes both sound more complicated than they are, and applicants seek a clearer explanation.

"Project management experience hours" refers to the number of hours an applicant has spent leading and directing project management-related tasks. The applicant does not have to have been a project manager but must have played a *significant* role in the portion of the project in which he or she was involved and must have led or directed project tasks. The applicant could have been a team lead, functional lead, technical lead, project sponsor, meeting facilitator or subject matter expert.

The number of project management experience hours an applicant will need depends on whether the applicant holds a bachelor's degree or high-school diploma. In either case, the applicant must have accrued his or her project management experience hours within the last eight years.

Applicants also need experience in initiating, planning, executing, monitoring and closing a project—what PMI defines as its five "process groups."

The online application for the PMP exam provides a limited amount of space (500 characters) in which to describe the project management tasks the applicant led or directed for each project. Be sure to provide concise descriptions since space is tight and one sentence is rarely enough for PMI to determine a project's eligibility.
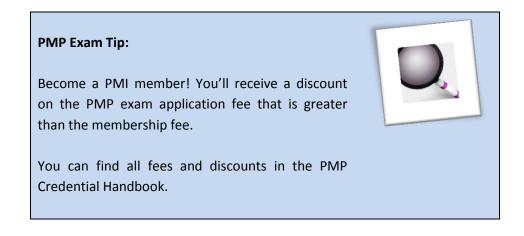
"Contact hours" refers to the total amount of time an applicant has spent in formal instruction. Contact hours are earned by attending project management-relevant training, either in a classroom or online. While project management experience hours must be accrued within the last eight years, any project management-related training an applicant took in the past can

count towards the PMI's requirement for contact hours. There is no expiration date on any project management training an applicant has undertaken.

Is PMI Membership Mandatory?

Another question I often get asked is whether one has to be a PMI member to take the PMP exam. The answer is no, you don't have to be a PMI member to apply for and take the exam, but there are at least two financial benefits to becoming a member:

1. PMI members receive a significant discount on their PMP exam application fee. This discount is greater than what it costs to become a PMI member.

2. PMI members receive a free PDF copy of the *PMBOK® Guide*, which is needed to prepare for and pass the exam.

What's more, many local PMI chapters offer discounts on their PMP exam prep workshops to PMI members.

PMP Exam Tip:

Become a PMI member! You'll receive a discount on the PMP exam application fee that is greater than the membership fee.

You can find all fees and discounts in the PMP Credential Handbook.

Step 2: Filling out the Application

Once you've determined that you're eligible to take the PMP exam, your next step is to fill out and submit the application.

The biggest hurdle aspiring PMPs face before taking the exam is filling out the application. Although the application is straightforward, it requires you to provide **a lot** of detailed information about your project management experience. Gathering all of this information can be a project in itself and can take days if not weeks. Consequently, many people who start filling out the application never finish it, and thus their hopes of earning their PMP certification are dashed before they even take the exam.

In this section I will show you how the application process works and introduce you to the actions you'll have to go through. You'll also get some tools and learn some best practices that will help you fill out the application efficiently.

The First Action: Fill Out the Application for the PMP Exam

Too often, I see professionals decide to take the exam, but then life intervenes, and filling out the application for the PMP exam becomes the last item on their list of priorities. Your best bet, then, is to fill out and submit your application as soon as you have confirmed that you meet all of the eligibility requirements. Don't procrastinate. Filling out the application and paying the application fee is a great motivator and will keep you focused on your goal: earning PMP certification.

PMP Exam Tip:

Apply as soon as possible for the exam and pay the exam fee. The "pain" of paying the fee will be your best motivator to keep your studies going and get certified.

PMI prefers that you apply online. A printable version of the application is available, but doing applying online is simple and convenient. You have 90 days to complete your application from the moment you start filling it out, and you can save what you've written between sessions.

The application is broken into three major sections. The first section asks for your contact information, educational background and what industry you work in. Section two requires you to list your project management experience hours (e.g. the amount of time you've spent leading and directing project management-related tasks). In section three, you record your contact hours—the amount of time you've spent in project management training or education programs.

Section two will take up most of your time because you will need to provide detailed information about all the projects that you have worked on. For each project you must document your title, the organization where you worked on this project, your primary contact, describe the tasks that you led and directed and the number of experience hours you gained during project initiation, planning, execution, monitoring and controlling as well as closing.

The total number of experience hours that you need to document in this section depends on your educational background. See comparison table in Step 1.

Gathering all the necessary information about your project management experience hours and contact hours can be a project in itself. I therefore recommend the following best practice: First collect all of that information offline using the **Experience Verification Worksheet**, a tool that I provide to all my students for free. Gathering that information ahead of time makes filling out the application a much smoother process.

Before you can submit your application, you must read and agree to the Project Management Institute's **Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct**. You can find this code in the PMP Credential Handbook that you downloaded earlier. The acceptance is just a small box on the actual application that you have to check, but it is very important. By ticking this box you agree to manage all your projects according to very high ethical standards.

Download The Experience Verification Worksheet (XLS document):

[Click here to download from The PM PrepCast…](#)

The Second Action: The "Application Completeness Review"

When submitted online, you should receive the results of your "Application Completeness Review" five days after you submit your application (or ten days later if you submitted your application on paper).

The Third Action: Pay the Fee

Once PMI verifies that your application is indeed complete, the organization will send you an e-mail requesting that you pay the fee to take the PMP exam. You cannot schedule the exam until you have paid this fee. You can submit your payment online and at the same time select your examination delivery method (which is either computer-based or paper-based), language translation aid (if needed) and special accommodations for applicants with disabilities.

The Fourth Action: Prepare for a Random Audit

Your application may be randomly selected for an audit. PMI elects to audit some of the applications it receives for the PMP exam to ensure that only qualifying candidates take the exam.

If your application is selected for an audit, you will be notified by e-mail after PMI receives your payment. From the day PMI notifies you of the audit, you have 90 days to send in your audit materials. For instance, you'll have to provide copies of your training certificates to show that you have the 35 required contact hours. Once PMI receives them, reviewing and processing them takes five to seven days.

The audit is nothing to worry about as long as you are prepared for it. You should prepare for it while you're gathering information for your application. Maintain a folder with documents that support the work you did on each and every project you list on your application, whether those documents be e-mails, project plans, meeting minutes or project charters.

As you fill out your application, be honest about your project management experience. Don't embellish it. If you do, PMI will find out during the audit that you've stretched the truth. How? For each project that you include in section two of your application, you have to name a "contact person." During the audit, PMI will give you a form that you have to get signed by each contact person to confirm that the information on your application is accurate.

PMP Exam Tip:

Proactively prepare for being audited. Communicate early with your "contact persons". Show them the number of experience hours from "their" projects that you will submit. Ask if they agree. Now you can be certain that they will back you up if you are audited.

The Fifth Action: Schedule Your PMP Exam

After your application has passed the completeness verification and you have paid your credential fees, PMI will send you an electronic notification informing you that you are eligible to schedule the test. You have one year to take your test, and you can take the exam two more times should you not pass it the first time.

The PMP exam is administered by Prometric, a provider of testing services. You will also have to schedule your exam on Prometric's website. Once you are on the website, simply locate the Prometric office closest to your hometown and find an available date that fits your schedule. Some Prometric offices are very busy, and you may have to wait weeks or months to take your exam. Scheduling your exam well in advance not only guarantees that you have a seat, it also puts a big red X on your calendar, which is a great motivator to keep on studying.

Go here to schedule your PMP Exam:

http://www.prometric.com/PMI

Step 3: Build a PMP Exam Study Plan

Do yourself a favor and approach preparing for the PMP exam as a project. Create an appropriate project plan. Like any project plan, your project plan for passing the PMP exam needs to outline your mission, schedule, weekly goals, and communication efforts. Putting in place a project plan for your PMP exam preparations will help you stick to a study schedule and

greatly increase your chances of earning that coveted PMP certification. Here are six essential elements of your PMP exam preparation project plan.
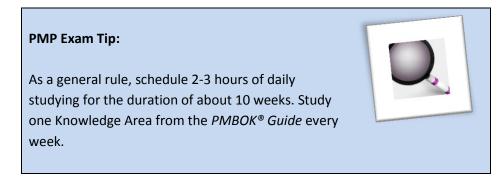
1. Assess Your Mission

Ask yourself, "What is my motivation for earning the PMP certification? How will being PMP certified affect my life, my job, my self-esteem and my bank account?" Understanding why you want to become PMP certified will be a great motivator in reaching your goal. Take some time to write down what having a PMP certification means to you.

2. Establish a Daily Study Schedule

A daily commitment to studying for the exam can make a big difference in your progress and greatly enhances your chances of passing the PMP exam with flying colors. Set aside study time on your calendar for each day, and organize your study materials so that they are ready to go when you are. Take into consideration major personal and professional events that will affect your ability to study and schedule your studies around them.

> **PMP Exam Tip:**
>
> As a general rule, schedule 2-3 hours of daily studying for the duration of about 10 weeks. Study one Knowledge Area from the *PMBOK® Guide* every week.

Also, set goals. For example, decide how many pages of the *PMBOK® Guide* you will study each day, what chapters in your PMP prep book you will read, and the number of sample exam questions you will answer every day.

Make time for study breaks, too. Cramming too much into a study session can be counterproductive. Find a balance between the quantity of material you cover each day and what you can reasonably retain from daily your studies.

3. Set Weekly Study Goals

Set reasonable goals regarding the amount of material you hope to cover each week. Feedback from my students shows that with between two and three hours of in-depth study per day you'll be able to go through one main chapter of both the *PMBOK® Guide* and your prep book per week. This will also leave enough time for you to test yourself on about 200 sample questions during the same time and complete your exam preparation in around 10 weeks.

Create a burn-down chart (a graphical representation of work left to do versus time) and hang it on your refrigerator so that you and your family can track your goals and progress. This can

be a great visual motivator. It's also a fun way to create buy-in for your family, so that they can support you in your goal of earning PMP certification and help keep you accountable for achieving it. Meeting your weekly study goals are small victories that you should celebrate on your path to PMP certification.

If you find yourself slipping against your weekly study goals, you'll know you need to either buckle down and stick to your study plan or re-evaluate it if it's not realistic.

4. Select an Appropriate Study Location

Give some thought to your ideal study environment. Do you require complete quiet or prefer to have some light noise in the background? Do you prefer to study in a dimly lit space or a bright room? Your ideal study location should prevent (or at least) minimize interruptions and distractions. Studying in a place where you feel energized and can concentrate is critical to your success. Preparing for the PMP exam is not something you want to do in front of the TV or in your living room with your family buzzing around.

5. Communicate with Your "Stakeholders"

Your stakeholders in your effort to earn PMP certification are the people who are likely to be affected by your study schedule, such as family members, friends and some co-workers. Set expectations with them early about your study needs, and communicate with them often. Make sure they understand why becoming PMP certified is so important to you and why you need to devote some time away from household or social obligations to prepare for the exam. To ensure your stakeholders buy into your efforts, can you explain how *they* will benefit from you achieving PMP certification? You're going to be studying many hours during this process— mostly on your own, possibly with a study group, but probably not with your family and friends.

Make sure family members know about your study schedule so that they know when you're unavailable to take phone calls and cannot be disturbed.

PMP Exam Tip:

Do you have small children? Hang a red rope in front of the door where you study, so your child knows that mommy/daddy may not be disturbed right now.

6. Stay Flexible

After you define your PMP exam study plan, do not forget to remain flexible. Changes are a normal part of any project. Having a plan will help you quickly get back on track. Remember

that being able to gracefully handle changes and uncertainty is what will make you a great project manager.

Step 4: Essential Study Materials

Most certified project management professionals (PMPs) will tell you that passing the PMP certification exam requires a considerable amount of studying
It is not surprising, then, that you'll need numerous study materials. The good news is that you can choose from a variety of resources and formats designed to fit your individual learning styles and preferences.

PMP Exam Tip:

Don't buy the same type of study materials from different vendors. For example: one study guide from one reputable source is enough. Studying with multiple guides just takes longer and can be confusing.

Here's a short list of the must-have study materials.

1. The PMBOK® Guide

The *PMBOK® Guide* is an essential resource. If you use no other study material to prepare for the PMP exam, use the *PMBOK® Guide*. You cannot pass the exam without it.

The *PMBOK® Guide* is also available in a hard copy from online and local bookstores. By the time you are ready to take the PMP exam, you will have read most of this book at least twice, if not three times.

Download your free *PMBOK® Guide*:

Click here to download it from PMI…

(Note: Must be PMI member. Must be logged in to PMI website for download)

2. PMP Exam Prep Book (a.k.a. PMP Exam Study Guide)

Most certified Project Management Professionals (PMPs) will tell you that they used a PMP exam prep book in addition to studying from the *PMBOK® Guide*. PMP exam prep books complement the *PMBOK® Guide*, and I highly recommend using them.

How I did it:

I used "Achieve PMP Exam Success, 4th Edition: A Concise Study Guide for the Busy Project Manager" by Diane Altwies and Janice Preston. It helped me pass the exam and it contains a CD with sample questions.

Click here to get your own copy…

(Disclosure: Affiliate link. We earn a commission if you click & buy.)

Click here for more recommendations…

PMP exam prep books explain the *PMBOK® Guide*, a dry, scholarly reference book, in plain English and systematically take you through its concepts. Many give you tips about what to expect on test day and come with a CD full of sample questions.

3. PMP Exam Prep Workshops

PMP exam prep workshops are a good option if you prefer a classroom setting and need more one-on-one interaction. They are also great places to network with other aspiring PMPs, and project managers who register for them sometimes end up forming study groups with other participants. Another benefit of these workshops is that they usually satisfy the 35 contact hours required to apply to take the PMP exam.

Download The Contact Hours Worksheet:

Click here to download it from PM PrepCast…

Many local PMI chapters offer a series of weekend classes. Make sure that your teacher is PMP certified and that the presentations are based on the current *PMBOK® Guide* and current exam.

4. Online PMP Exam Prep Workshops

PMP exam preparation courses are also available online. They tend to be less expensive than the in-person workshops. Some online prep courses are instructor-led, while others are self-paced. Choose the option that best suits your study style. Do lots of comparisons and read testimonials before you commit to one.

5. Downloadable PMP Exam Prep Videocasts

Successful PMPs will tell you to have your study materials with you at all times. That way, when you're stuck in a waiting room, you can study for the exam. Thanks to PMP exam prep videocasts, you don't have to lug your *PMBOK® Guide* and exam prep book everywhere you go.

Go here for your PMP Exam Videocast:

www.pm-prepcast.com

PMP exam prep videocasts are powerful learning tools that reinforce concepts from the *PMBOK® Guide* through audio-visual training. You can download them to your smartphone, MP3 player or laptop so that they're always handy and portable.

6. Flash Cards

Flash Cards, whether paper or electronic, are tried, tested, portable and cost-effective. You can download electronic flashcards that you can then flip through on your computer or smartphone. Others you can print out from your computer.

Creating your own flash cards can be an incredibly helpful study activity. Creating your own cards means that you have to research the topic (for instance Earned Value) and then design the question and answers for each of the formulas that you need to know. This forces you to deeply analyze the concepts.

PMP Exam Tip:

Flash Cards are a great way to include family and friends into your studies: hand them your cards, and they instantly become your study partners.

7. Online PMP Exam Simulators

Don't prepare for your PMP exam without a good, commercial PMP exam simulator.

Exam simulators are basically practice PMP exams. They pose the same style of questions that you'd find on the actual PMP exam, and they aim to replicate the exam environment so that you can get comfortable with the pressure and timing associated with the exam.

PMP exam simulators are an excellent way to measure your ability to apply *PMBOK® Guide* concepts to questions you've never seen before. What better way to find out what you don't know and to build your confidence before your actual exam day?
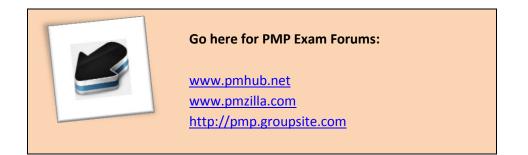
8. Free Online Resources

When it comes to free online resources, you get what you pay for. Not all of them are very useful or credible. Before you use any study materials (whether they're free and web-based or whether you pay for them), confirm that the content comes from a reputable provider and is based on the current version of the *PMBOK® Guide*, which has significant changes over the previous edition.

The online resources that I recommend are PMP exam discussion forums. These forums are a great place to interact with others who are also preparing for the exam. Many PMPs, including myself, continue to visit these forums even after we've become certified. We answer questions about our experience before and after the exam and help out with the practical application of the PMI framework.

> **Go here for PMP Exam Forums:**
>
> www.pmhub.net
> www.pmzilla.com
> http://pmp.groupsite.com

These forums are a great way to build your professional network so they're well worth your time and effort—as long as you don't use them as an excuse not to pick up your books and study.

Step 5: Study Tips and Techniques

Studying for the exam toward your PMP certification requires a tremendous amount of time and diligence. This is not a test you can pass by "cramming" with one overnight study session. I know many project managers who have devoted two hours a day for three months toward studying for the PMP exam. I am one of them.

If you are established in your career, it may have been years since you last had to study for any kind of a test, let alone one as rigorous as the PMP exam, and your study skills may be rusty. Fear not: it is possible to master all of the material required to earn PMP certification; you just need to take a systematic approach toward studying for the exam. Let me share an effective, step-by-step process you can follow, as well as study tips and techniques.

How I did it:

I spent 2-3 hours studying every day for 12 weeks. I studied the complete *PMBOK® Guide* 3 times. I participated in an online study group and attended a PMP Prep Class from my local PMI Chapter. I answered about 2,000 sample exam questions.

Four-Step Study Process

I recommend applying the following basic study process to preparing for the PMP exam.

1. Survey: At the beginning of each of your study sessions, survey the material you're supposed to cover. Review all the charts, graphs and headings in both the *PMBOK® Guide* and your prep book. Familiarity with the topics you need to cover will give you a better "map" of where to find specific concepts, both for your initial study and later review. It will also make it easier for you to put the information into a sensible order that you can more easily retrieve from your memory.

2. Motivation: Identify your motivation: What do you want to learn from the day's material? If your particular PMP preparation material has recap questions or study goals, read them first. If you are reading the *PMBOK® Guide*, create your own questions.

3. Read: Don't start reading until you have a set of questions in mind pertaining to what you want to learn. This transforms you from a passive reader to an active researcher, which is particularly helpful while you are studying the very dry *PMBOK® Guide*.

4. Disengage: People tend to best remember the first and last elements of any study session. Make the most of this fact by breaking up your study sessions into smaller chunks. For example, if you've set aside two hours to study, do so in four half hour sessions, with short breaks between each session. Periodically disengaging from your studies makes it easier to recall what you studied. I also recommend disengaging at a point in your reading that you find particularly interesting. Doing so will make picking up where you left off that much more inviting.

Tips and Techniques for Studying the PMBOK® Guide

Since the PMP exam is based largely on the *PMBOK® Guide*, use the structure of the Guide as your roadmap for your studies.

Plan on studying one *PMBOK® Guide* Knowledge Area each week. First study it in the Guide itself, then study the same topic in all of your other study materials. This will increase your comprehension because the other study materials will present the same concepts from different angles.
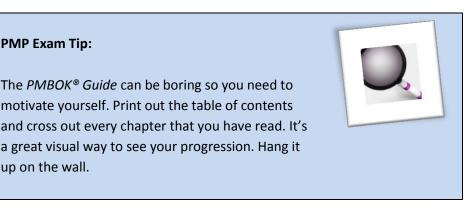
How I did it:

The *PMBOK® Guide* has 42 processes. On each study day I focused on one of these processes. It usually added up to one Knowledge Area per week.

Breaking down the study material into chunks gives you a clear daily and weekly focus and allows your studies to progress at a reasonable and achievable rate.

It is not enough to simply *read* the study materials. You have to actively **study** them. Go through everything with focus and concentration. Internalizing each concept is critical because the PMP exam questions will test how well you apply the principles and ideas found in the *PMBOK® Guide*. Many questions are situational descriptions of a problem. These situations contain enough information to help you arrive at the best answer, but they also include irrelevant information to purposely throw you off course.

If you don't adequately study the principles of the *PMBOK® Guide*, you will be unable to identify the concepts illustrated in the exam questions. You may also find it particularly difficult to determine exactly what is being asked and what information is applicable to the answer.

PMP Exam Tip:

The *PMBOK® Guide* can be boring so you need to motivate yourself. Print out the table of contents and cross out every chapter that you have read. It's a great visual way to see your progression. Hang it up on the wall.

Visual representations of your progress (see tip above) show you where you are on your path. Seeing your progress—and the distance from where you are to where you need to go getting smaller and smaller—will keep up your morale and motivation.
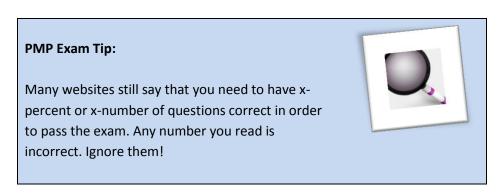
One last suggestion: once you have studied the *PMBOK® Guide* a first time, you must study it a second and possibly even a third time. You will understand it much better the second time, and it actually gets easier to read. It is so important to know how to apply *PMBOK® Guide* concepts because the PMP exam questions test your ability to recognize situations and apply the right concept.

Step 6: Using Practice Tests and Sample Questions to get Ready

Just like a competitive athlete, a PMP candidate sets out a training course with the actual test as the final event of that preparation. Preparing for the PMP Exam is more like preparing for a marathon than preparing a 100-meter sprint, because preparing and passing the exam is an accomplishment in itself. The certification can make a significant difference, exponentially, from the day "PMP" follows your name.

How Will You Know That You Are Ready?

PMI doesn't tell us how many questions must be answered correctly in order to pass. All we are told in the PMP Credential Handbook is that "The passing score [...] is determined by sound psychometric analysis."

PMP Exam Tip:

Many websites still say that you need to have x-percent or x-number of questions correct in order to pass the exam. Any number you read is incorrect. Ignore them!

So how do you get around the Catch 22 situation of wanting to know when you are ready, when nobody tells you what "ready" really means? My recommendation is to apply the 85% rule.

Keep track of your score as you answer PMP exam sample questions. If you consistently answer at least 85% of sample questions correctly on your first attempt (subsequent attempts don't count), then you can probably consider yourself ready for the real exam.

Exam Questions: What to Expect

Next to studying the *PMBOK® Guide*, practice questions are your most important study activity. After all, the PMP exam is not a simple memory-recall, multiple-choice test. You have signed up for a four-hour, 200-question multiple-choice exam with up to five question types. These include complex situational questions, short situational questions, formula-based questions, knowledge-based questions and interpretive questions. Each question type has its own purpose and pitfalls, which makes knowing how to get the most out of each question crucial.

Situational questions test your ability to identify the relevant and ignore irrelevant content. These questions tend to be lengthy so it is especially important to read and accurately identify the ACTUAL question, so that you can eliminate insignificant information.

Formula-based questions are more than just "solving for the median" or calculating earned value. There are about 49 PMP formulas that you must know and understand comprehensively, ranging from simple averages to Probability and Depreciation. You must know both the formula and how to perform the calculation in order to get the answer right.

Knowledge-based questions require you to know facts—most often from the *PMBOK® Guide*. These questions also occasionally ask which processes belong to which Knowledge Area, or which Inputs, Tools & Techniques or Outputs go with which process. Sometimes you are asked to identify an example chart or graph, such as recognizing a RACI or Pareto chart.

Download PMI's official 3 Sample Questions:

Download them from PMI…

(Yes, this PDF document really only contains 3 questions. That's all PMI gives us.)

Interpretational questions test your ability to deduce a situation or condition. For example: "If your project has an SPI and a CPI both greater than 1, how well is your project performing?"

Specific Technique questions will contain a tool or technique like a network diagram and ask you to provide an element that's inherent in that diagram such as forward pass or backward pass.

While there are some free PMP exam sample questions available online, that is just a start. As you move further along in your studies, you will probably want more (and more difficult) questions. Your best bet is to get quality questions in an exam simulator.

PMP Exam Simulators

A good way to gauge your readiness to take the actual PMP exam is to practice using a PMP exam simulator. There are a variety of them on the open market, and some students choose more than one PMP exam simulator. Consider these points when shopping around for a PMP exam simulator product:

Look for an online PMP exam simulator that fits your budget. Do not be fooled into thinking that just because a simulator has a reasonable price that it does not offer a comprehensive product. Compare features, costs, reputation, and take advantage of any free trials offered.

> **Go here for your Free PMP Exam Simulator:**
>
> http://free.pm-exam-simulator.com

Confirm that your prospective online PMP exam simulator is based on the *PMBOK® Guide*. Don't waste time using an exam simulator that isn't based on the most recent *PMBOK® Guide*! It sounds simple, but be sure to check that the PMP exam simulator you are looking at is actually based on the latest version. If it isn't, you could waste a lot of time on questions (and answers) that will not accurately reflect what the exam will be like.

Ask if the PMP exam questions were written by more than one person. Make sure that the questions were written by multiple, certified PMPs, and that the questions parallel the actual PMP exam. PMI sought out PMPs to volunteer from all over the world to write the exam questions and another body of volunteers to review. This gives the actual PMP exam its reputation of being unpredictable. The best simulators will have the same variability in the background of the people who created them.

Look for an online PMP exam simulator that helps you learn the material. This means that the product should allow you to review the exam questions and explanations after taking the exam ("exam" mode) and question by question during the study or "learning" mode. Reviewing questions right away will help you to identify and focus on specific Process Groups and Knowledge Areas from the *PMBOK® Guide*. Make sure your exam simulator gives you access for at least 90 days so you can go back and review the questions and re-take the exam.

Look for products offered by PMI Registered Education Providers (R.E.P.). These companies are thoroughly screened by PMI. R.E.P.s provide quality programs which must align and keep current with PMI standards.

Step 7: Getting Ready for Your Exam Day

By this time you have devoted months to studying for the PMP exam. You've spent hard-earned money on study materials and classes, and you've sacrificed your social life all in the name of earning your PMP certification. Don't blow all that time, money and effort by failing to prepare for exam day logistics. Understand the check-in process at the test center, know what identification you need to bring, and always expect the unexpected.

To ensure that you'll perform at your best the day you take the PMP exam, make the following mental, physical and logistical preparations both before and on the day of the test.

Before the Exam

1. Get a good night's sleep. If you don't know the material by the night before you're scheduled to take the exam, cramming with an overnight study session is not going to further your chances of passing. Instead, set a time the day or evening before the exam when you are going to stop studying. The best thing you can do to make sure you're rested and ready for the big day is to get a good night's sleep.

2. Take the WHOLE day off. If you're taking the PMP exam on a work day, plan to take that entire day off from work. You don't want to have to worry while you're taking the exam about all the tasks that will greet you at the office when you rush to work after taking this four-hour, 200-question test.

3. Eat a healthy breakfast. Food and drinks are not allowed in the test area. Be sure to eat a quality breakfast the day of your exam—something with protein and carbohydrates that will stick with you for the four hours you will be in the exam area. Avoid eating any type of food that you would consider "exotic." I failed to heed this advice, tried a new dish for lunch, and felt sick during most of my PMP exam.

PMP Exam Tip:

Try and visit the testing center a week before your actual exam. Get a feel for the place. Ask questions. Find out what you can and cannot bring.

4. Dress comfortably. You're going to be seated at a computer for four hours, so wear comfortable clothes. Bring a sweater with you in case the testing center is chilly. You may need to remove your sweater at check in for security purposes, but you should be able to wear it during the test if the room gets cold. Just ask.

5. Cancellations. If you need to cancel or reschedule your PMP exam for any reason, do so at least 48 hours in advance. Otherwise, you will forfeit your full PMP credential fee and have to pay it again to take the exam.
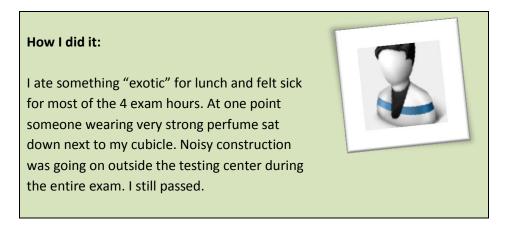
The Day of the Exam

1. The check-in process. On the day of your examination, arrive at least 30 minutes before your scheduled appointment. You will need to sign in, present a government-issued identification, and provide your unique PMI identification code. You may also be asked to provide the confirmation number you received when you scheduled your exam.

If your government-issued ID does not have a photograph or signature, you will need a secondary identification with your photograph and signature, whichever is missing from the primary ID. For a list of acceptable identifications, see the PMP Credential Handbook.

The name on your government-issued ID must match your name exactly as it appears on your PMP exam scheduling notification. If it doesn't, you will not be permitted to take the test. Neither PMI nor Prometric (the test administrator) will make any exception, so save yourself a lot of heartache and confirm it as soon as you receive your scheduling notification.

2. What not to bring. The testing center will provide you with paper, a pencil and a calculator (on the exam computer). You may not bring anything—or anyone—with you into the exam room. This includes your cell phone, your own calculator, a coat, dictionary, eye glasses case, etc. Some test centers have lockers for your personal items. The complete list of items that you cannot bring in is in the "Exam Site Requirements and Instructions" section of the PMP Credential Handbook.
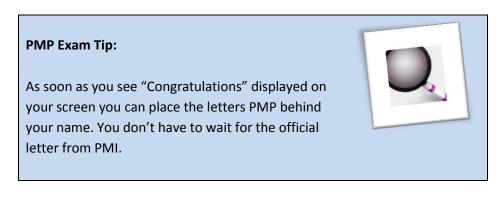
3. Expect Murphy's Law. Since every testing center is different, you should expect the unexpected. A student from South Africa wrote to tell me that he wasn't allowed to take any breaks for any reason. He was told that if he stood up from his chair, this meant that he was done with the exam. So whatever comes your way, roll with it. Concentrate on what is really important, which is taking and passing the exam.

How I did it:

I ate something "exotic" for lunch and felt sick for most of the 4 exam hours. At one point someone wearing very strong perfume sat down next to my cubicle. Noisy construction was going on outside the testing center during the entire exam. I still passed.

4. Ready, Set, GO! Before you begin your test, you must familiarize yourself with your workstation. Go through the tutorial. Its purpose is to inform you about the logistics of the computer-based PMP exam. You will probably be familiar with it if you studied using a PMP exam simulator that paralleled the PMP exam logistics. Even so, watch it to make sure there are no surprises.

You have 15 minutes for the tutorial, but you should be finished in about five. Use the rest of the time to get ready. For instance, since you cannot bring your notes with you, do a "brain dump" by writing down the most important facts for you to remember on your scrap paper before you begin the test. Then, take a deep breath and click "Start Exam."

5. After the Exam. Your exam result (pass or fail) will be available to you on your computer screen almost immediately after you take the exam. You will also receive a printed examination report with proficiency ratings in each project management process group. If you don't pass, you will know where you fell short and will know what to study if you decide to retake the exam.

PMP Exam Tip:

As soon as you see "Congratulations" displayed on your screen you can place the letters PMP behind your name. You don't have to wait for the official letter from PMI.
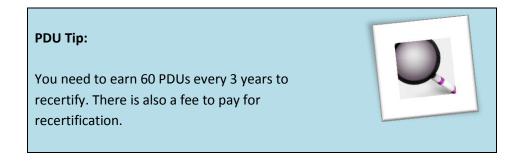
If you have passed, congratulations! You are now a certified PMP and can place those three letters after your name. But your professional journey doesn't end there because the PMP certification does not last for life. It is valid for three years, after which time you have to re-certify.

Let's see what that means.

Step 8: Getting Recertified

Congratulations! You passed the Project Management Institute's PMP exam, and you're now a certified Project Management Professional! Unfortunately, your PMP certification does not last for life. After three years, it will expire unless you take steps to get recertified.

The good news is, you never have to take the PMP exam again as long as you maintain your certification. Getting recertified shows that you're keeping up with the latest trends and best practices in the ever-evolving field of project management.

PDU Tip:

You need to earn 60 PDUs every 3 years to recertify. There is also a fee to pay for recertification.

In order to keep your certification active, you need to pay a recertification fee, and more importantly, earn and document Professional Development Units (PDUs) every three years. PDUs are a measure of the time you've put into professional development as a PMP. PMPs earn one PDU for each hour of qualified project management instruction they receive.

How to Earn PDUs

To maintain your PMP certification, you need to accumulate 60 PDUs by the third anniversary of the date you received your initial certification, and every three years after that.

PDU Tip:

You can earn 30 free PDUs by listening to Project Management related podcasts. Learn how here:

www.pm-podcast.com/pdu

The PMP Credential Handbook lists six categories in which you can earn PDUs. You can earn them through self-directed learning, by taking project management classes, volunteering at your local PMI chapter, giving presentations on project management, writing books on project management, listening to podcasts as well as many other qualifying activities.

You even get them just for doing your job. By working as a project manager for at least six months per calendar year, you can earn a total of 15 PDUs in three years.

How to Document Your PDUs

PMI's Continuing Credential Requirements System (CCRS) is the place to report your PDUs. In most cases, when you are attending an activity that qualifies for PDUs, the organizer will hand you some form of a PDU receipt. Input your PDUs into the CCRS, and the system will track your progress for you. Here are step-by-step instructions on how to register your PDUs with the Continuing Credential Requirements System:

Go here for the CCRS:

https://ccrs.pmi.org/

1. Log on to the CCRS with your PMI username and password.

2. Select "Report Professional Development Units" from the panel on the left side of the screen.

3. Over a series of online screens, this option will allow you to enter the PDU category, activity type, provider name or number, activity name or number, the start and completion dates, your evaluation of the activity, and the number of PDUs you earned from the activity. It will also ask you to attest that the information you have submitted is correct.

4. Check the "I agree" box, then click "submit" to credit your PDUs.

Be sure to save all of your PDU supporting documents and receipts just in case you are audited.

How to Earn Free PDUs

There are dozens of ways to earn free PDUs and hundreds of resources that offer them.

One of the most rewarding ways to earn free PDUs is by volunteering at your local PMI Chapter. I have been an active volunteer in my chapter, and it has allowed me to network with my peers, teach PMP exam prep classes, find a job, improve my leadership skills, and (oh yes) earn free PDUs.

Go here for Project Management Podcasts:

www.pm411.org
www.thepmopodcast.com
www.project-management-podcast.com

Another great way to earn free PDUs is by listening to project management-related podcasts. There are currently about ten free ones available online, such as *PM411* by Ron Holohan, *The PMO Podcast* by Mark Perry, and my own *The Project Management Podcas*t. Start downloading their interviews, listen to them on your way to and from work, and earn your free PDUs.

Free webinars provide a third way to earn PDUs. You can find a PDU webinar happening almost every day of the year. Rico's List from Andi Levin and Julie Kingand and my own The PDU Insider will help you locate many free and inexpensive PDU webinar opportunities.

Be Proactive About Your PDU Requirements

Three years may seem like a long time, but it will pass in the blink of an eye. Don't wait until year three to start accumulating PDUs. Once you've earned your PMP certification, set out a three-year plan to accumulate your PDUs consistently over the next 36 months. That's about 1.5 PDUs per month. Be sure to read up on the six categories of PDUs as outlined in the PMP Credential Handbook because PMI imposes some limits on the number of PDUs you can claim from each category.

Go here to find free PDU opportunities:

www.ricoslist.com
www.pdu-insider.com

About the Author

Cornelius Fichtner, PMP, is a noted PMP expert with nearly 20 years of project management experience in various industries. He has helped over 15,000 students prepare for the PMP exam with *The Project Management PrepCast*, a downloadable and portable exam prep video workshop available at http://www.pm-prepcast.com.

A former PMI Chapter President, Fichtner is currently an active volunteer in his local PMI chapter and a member of PMI's New Media Council. He is also the host of the Project Management Podcast and the PDU Podcast.

He currently lives in Silverado, California, USA, with his wife and their three computers.

Product Overview

OSP International LLC is a project management training company headquartered in Silverado, California, specializing in exceptional products to help candidates prepare for the PMP exam. OSP International LLC has been reviewed and approved as a provider of project management training by the Project Management Institute (PMI). As a PMI Registered Education Provider (R.E.P.), the company has agreed to abide by PMI established quality assurance criteria.

The PM PrepCast is a PMP exam prep video Workshop that you download to your portable media player like an iPod, Android or Blackberry. This gives you the freedom to study for the exam wherever and whenever you want. It is a complete PMP exam study approach that increases your chance of passing the PMP exam. It will shorten your study time because it keeps you focused and you don't have to read dozens of other books to prepare. Watch the 42 hours of video and you'll be ready to tackle the exam.

The PM Exam Simulator gives you an insider's view of the actual PMP exam. With this PMI R.E.P. approved exam simulator, you have the opportunity to practice on 1,800 highly realistic PMP exam sample questions based on the current *PMBOK® Guide*. Practice with the 90-day access as often as you want. Read detailed explanations alongside all answers and learn why your answer was or was not correct. Practice and learn effective test taking strategies with The PM Exam Simulator and pass the PMP exam on your first try.

The PMP Exam eFlashCards™ are portable flash cards and can be used on any device that can display *.png or *.jpg images. They are easy-to-use tools that will place you head and shoulders above the others in the gruelling marathon of the PMP exam. Receive a total of 1,750 PMP exam eFlashCards™ divided into 15 categories. The PMP exam eFlashCards™ run on most smartphones.

The PM StudyCoach is a 10-week long coaching course in which you are taught exactly what you have to study for the PMP exam. It's your study roadmap to PMP certification. Each session is a recorded MP3 file that you can play on your computer or portable player. The course takes you step by step, chapter by chapter through the *PMBOK® Guide* and your PMP exam prep workbook and points out specific areas of focus in every coaching session. In total you will receive over 7.5 hours of recorded coaching.

The PMP® Exam Formula Study Guide and Cheat Sheet is a complete approach to the PMP exam formulas, values, and acronyms and you even get sample questions to test yourself. It's your reference to all the math you need to know in order to pass the PMP exam. You will receive more than just a list of the bare bones formulas as they are usually presented in PMP prep books and on free PMP prep websites. We'll explain the formulas, the concepts behind them and you'll learn how to interpret the results. And the 90-page PDF document with 105 free PMP exam questions then allows you to practice this deep understanding. Our Formula Study Guide contains the correct formulas and is an authoritative source.