

Follow up commentary on the article “25 Tips to Pass Your Certification Exam” – Ed Tittel

"Here's some commentary on the article you can post as well:

As I re-read this article for the first time since I wrote it in 2002, I kept finding myself nodding and agreeing with the content, even though I'd written it myself! Will Harper did a service to his students and all those who visit this Web site in reproducing these materials, because they remain as true today as they were when I first started to develop a sense of how best to prepare for IT certification exams.

With those items in mind, here are a few other tips I've learned over the years that may be helpful:

1. Give yourself enough time to prepare for the exam. If you're working 40 or more hours a week, and have family or other responsibilities to uphold—and who doesn't?—make sure to leave yourself enough time to prepare for the exam. If you assume it will take you 3-4 hours per question to prepare for an exam (a general average I've observed for my own prep; YMMV) and the exam has 60 questions, that means 180 to 240 hours to prepare. Think about it: if you can put 20 hours a week into exam preparation (and that's an upper bound that most people have trouble meeting), that translates into 9 to 12 weeks! Double that time frame if you can only put in 10 hours a week.

2. Do what it takes to master the material. I like to build cheat sheets, construct clever acronyms to help me remember collections of items, and take lots of notes while I'm studying. Others I've worked with find that building diagrams or tables helps them organize and recall necessary blocks of detailed information for a test. Try these techniques, and anything else you can think of, to help you marshal and deploy the information you will inevitably have to memorize to prepare for most exams.

3. If you can't learn enough on your own, take a class. If you take an exam and don't pass, don't beat yourself up too much about it. It happens to all of us, including me. Although classes cost more than self-study and require a bigger commitment of time and energy, they may be just the ticket to earning the credential(s) you seek. Beyond the commitment you make to show up, the learning you achieve in a well constructed and delivered training situation provides many benefits above and beyond mere cert preparation. Access to an instructor is a terrific boon to those with questions to get answered, or who need to overcome doubt and confusion. Shared learning with a group of motivated students often helps to improve scores, and develop relationships that persist beyond taking and passing exams.

4. Join a study group if you can find one, or if not, start your own [if you are taking a class - there is your built-in study-group - W]. As I mentioned in the article, user groups and professional associations often maintain ongoing study groups to help people prepare in concert for various exams. Use your personal network and the Web to look for a study group in your area, then join and attend regularly. This can help in all kinds of ways, not least of which is exposure to multiple perspectives on what's important, what's difficult, and what you must know and do to pass the exam. A study group works well enough for most people that if you can't find one, it's probably worth the effort of forming one, and recruiting at least four or five others to participate.

5. Practice, practice, practice. Lots of people suffer from anxiety when they walk into the test center. For some, this escalates beyond butterflies in the stomach to something more serious. If

this sounds like you, talk to your doctor or a mental health professional about how to cope with test anxiety. If things aren't quite that extreme, recognize that by taking as many practice tests and working through as many drills that mimic the exam situation as possible, you are desensitizing yourself to the exam situation. In this case, familiarity helps to make you more comfortable, and more able to concentrate on understanding what's being asked of you, and matching that up to what you know and can do.

Please consider this an added 5-tip bonus to the original story. Best of luck in preparing for your exams! If you have any further tips, please share them with me or Will Harper, and we'll do our best to expand this list to include the ones we find worthy of adding to it.

--Ed--"