



PMP® Exam Review

THE LOW STRESS ROAD MAP TO PMP CERTIFICATION

BRUCE HARPHAM, PMP

WILEY

Earning the **Project Management Professional (PMP)** certification is an excellent way to grow your career. You will be more confident in your approach to planning and delivering projects. You will also join a global community of professionals who are changing the world one project at a time. With your new skills, a six figure income will no longer be a fantasy.

Can earning the PMP certification boost your income? Yes, it can! According to salary research published by the Project Management Institute, PMP credential holders report earning higher salaries than non-PMP holders. Earning the PMP demonstrates that you have significant project management experience and understand the profession's body of knowledge. Instead of "winging it" on your projects, you will have a systematic understanding.



HOW TO OVERCOME 3 COMMON BARRIERS TO PMP CERTIFICATION SUCCESS

Each year, thousands of people register for the PMP exam but only some of them are successful. As you start the preparation process, your prospects for success may be threatened by these common barriers. Fortunately, knowing is half the battle. Once you understand these barriers, you will be ready to apply to the strategies outlined in this guide.

BARRIER 1: THE COMPLEX PMP APPLICATION

The complexity and detail required by PMI to apply for the PMP certification presents a challenge for some candidates. In particular, some candidates struggle with the project experience section. Recalling the number of hours you put into a project from a few years ago is difficult. To address that challenge, use two principles. First, make a conservative estimate of your project hours. Second, ask your reference to agree to the specific project experience you are claiming. Remember that you may be asked to provide documentation for any part of your application if you are selected for an audit. Given that reality, aim on the side of caution in all aspects of your application. Once the application is out of the way, you face a second barrier.

BARRIER 2: THE "I DON'T HAVE TIME TO STUDY" DILEMMA

The "I'll study when I have time" barrier is the most common challenge that working professionals face in studying for a professional certification like the PMP.

Professional study can be thought like an investment. You may have heard of the personal finance principle "pay yourself first" – that you should decide in advance to invest 10% of your income, into long term investments before you spend money on anything else. The same principle applies to

professional study – you decide in advance to "make time for study." Fundamentally, you are likely to struggle and make the process much more stressful than it needs to be if you only study when you "happen to have a quiet evening." This barrier can be overcome by creating a weekly study plan where you cover a certain amount of material each week.

BARRIER 3: WHAT DO I STUDY WITH?

Working with inadequate study resources makes the whole study process harder. Once you pay the PMP exam fee (and possibly join PMI), you may be wondering if you need anything else to get ready. If you join PMI, you will have the option to download a complimentary copy of the PMBOK Guide. Some candidates decide to study using only the PMBOK Guide.

Unfortunately, the PMBOK Guide is a reference document written in the style of a technical standard. That means that it's tough to read more than a few pages at a time. Beyond style challenges, the PMBOK Guide does not include exam preparation resources such as practice exam questions. Relying on a single resource makes the exam preparation process much more difficult. It doesn't have to be that way. Instead, take the time to review your options for PMP exam study resources to position yourself for exam success.

BARRIER 4: I'M OVERWHELMED BY THE PMP PROCESS. HELP!

The Project Management Institute has a multi-step process that must be followed for everyone seeking to earn certifications. Some candidates become overwhelmed and abandon the whole effort. Read on to plan next steps to overcome this barrier.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO EARN THE PMP CERTIFICATION?

The Project Management Institute defines the requirements for the PMP certification. The requirements include the following

- ✓ Document your project management experience hours (note: at the time of this writing, the amount of required experience hours varies depending on your education. Consult the PMI website for details)
- ✓ Complete a project management course (note: this requirement may be fulfilled with traditional classroom courses as well online courses)
- ✓ Complete the PMP application (there is a required application fee. You may be able to have this fee covered by your employer).
- ✓ Study for the PMP exam
- ✓ Successfully complete the PMP exam

To avoid unpleasant surprises, take extra care attention in preparing your PMP application. That includes confirming that your references (e.g. past managers and clients) will agree with the amount and type of project management experience hours you list on the application. Honesty in all the details matters for two reasons. First, you are expected to follow PMI's ethical standards in order to become PMP certified. Second, PMI audits a percentage of applicants which often involves signed statements from your references. Keep this point in mind and you will make it through the certification process with peace of mind.

NOTE: Visit the Project Management Institute website (<http://www.pmi.org/>) to confirm the requirements for the credential as the requirements change from time to time.

THE PMP EXAM STUDY CHALLENGE

Studying for the PMP exam is difficult for many professionals. With a demanding full time job, you may come home at the end of the day and simply run out of energy before you can “hit the books.” Other people have the energy but don't know how to make the most of their limited study time. Finally, exam preparation anxiety causes some people to become anxious and avoid the entire study process. How can you overcome these challenges?

Start by taking stock of your current life circumstances. Let's say you're twenty five years old, single and work as a full time project manager at a large company. In that case, you may have most evenings and weekends free for study time... Yet many people in that circumstance still struggle with studying. Why? There's two reasons: poorly defined motivation, no study plan and inadequate study resources. These three elements –

motivation, planning and study resources – are critical for everyone seeking the PMP certification.

START WITH WHY: THE MOTIVATION CHALLENGE

Why do you want to earn the PMP certification? Most answers to this question tend to follow into a few broad categories. First, career growth: earning the PMP unlocks doors to greater responsibility, additional job opportunities and increased income. Second, professional confidence: you will feel more confident on your projects when you have a comprehensive knowledge of project management tools and techniques as defined in the PMP. Third, some professionals study for the program because their employer requires it! As you might imagine, the best motivation comes from your interests and goals.

Write Down Your Reasons For Pursuing The PMP Certification

Tip: Review your study motivation notes for inspiration if you ever feel discouraged during the study process. When you're waking up on a weekend to study, it's easy to lose track of your motivation. Writing a few notes on your motivation know will help keep you going during the process.

WHO DOES WHAT WHEN: DEFINING A PLAN

If you were asked to travel from New York to San Francisco tomorrow, what's the first thing you would do? You would need to develop a transportation plan. If you decide to drive, which route will you take? If you fly, which airports and airlines will you take? Until you think through these details, you will not make any progress toward your destination.

Earning the PMP certification is no different. You need to take the time to develop a plan and then work through it. You will develop your study plan in stages as you go through this document. For now, let's start with the first few key steps which you can complete in a few short weeks (or faster if you're especially focused):

1. Read the PMP certification requirements. Decide whether you are eligible to apply for the certification.
2. Identify gaps you need to fulfill in order to complete the certification. Typical gaps include: completing a PMP education course, documenting your project management experience and getting in touch with your professional references.
3. Complete the PMP application.
4. Acquire PMP exam study resources. At the time of this writing, you can receive a free digital copy of the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) Guide when you join the Project Management Institute. In addition, enroll in a specialized program to prepare you for the exam.
5. Complete a practice PMP exam. Completing a practice exam at this point helps you to identify how much studying you will need to complete.
6. Plan for multiple study sessions such as 30-60 minutes throughout the week rather than a single "marathon" once per week. Education researchers have found that smaller steady study sessions tend to produce better learning outcomes than "cramming" or rushing through the material.

Taken together, these steps put you on the path to becoming a Project Management Professional. As a project manager, planning is a key part of your role. So why not use those planning skills to enhance your career?

WHAT DO YOU STUDY WITH? OVERCOMING THE RESOURCES CHALLENGE

Every project requires resources. For a construction project, you may have to purchase bricks, concrete, paint and the services of a home building company. Likewise, the right resources make a critical difference in earning the PMP certification. Depending on your schedule and learning style, there are several types of study resources available. Let's consider the options:

- ✔ PMP Exam Preparation Resources. The Wiley family of PMP exam preparation products are an example of this type of resource. It has the benefit of being designed specifically to get you through the PMP exam with specialized materials such as practice exam questions.
- ✔ Traditional Classroom Course. Some people prefer to take an evening or weekend course to develop their project management knowledge. The advantage to this approach mainly lies in interaction with others in the field. Schedule is a major disadvantage – you have to set aside a block of time in your schedule for a period of weeks to complete the course.
- ✔ Do It Yourself (DIY) Approach. Some aspiring PMPs prefer to buy and read a few books. If you have above average personal discipline and the drive to create your own exam preparation materials (e.g. homemade flash cards), this approach may be suitable. Otherwise, you will have a better chance of success if you use the other options described above.

Not sure which study resources are best suited for your needs? Think back to the last time you had to study for an exam, preferably a professional exam. Did you like the freedom to create and study in a quiet library every Saturday? Or did you prefer to work through a course and interact with instructors and students? The only wrong choice is to use a study method and resources that are not suited to your preferences.

EMBRACE THE PROJECT MANAGEMENT MINDSET

As a project professional, you have the opportunity to create unique results! In contrast to some professions where you do the same activities each day, project work means exposure to a steady stream of new challenges. As you start your PMP exam studies, adopt the “project management mindset” in order to achieve your goals.

- ✓ **UNCERTAINTY.** Every project has some level of uncertainty. That’s perfectly normal. You may be nervous about taking the PMP exam. You can reduce that anxiety by taking a systematic approach to your study efforts.
- ✓ **SYSTEMATIC APPROACH.** Project managers are known for their disciplined approach to work. By using checklists and other resources, project managers never need to worry about missing a step. Use the same systematic orientation to guide your studies.
- ✓ **CREATIVITY.** You may sail through certain sections of the PMP exam study material while others (e.g. cost management formulas!) frustrate you. Adopt a creative mindset to your studies by asking yourself: “What other ways could I learn this problem?” For example, you may want to cover the same concept in written material and in a video lesson.

APPLICATION

Write Down Your New Project Beliefs That Will Support Your Study Success (e.g. “I will anticipate uncertainty on the study process and overcome it by...”)

Tip: Curious to learn more about developing a systematic mindset? Read “The Checklist Manifesto” by Atul Gawande. It’s an excellent book that explains how surgeons, pilots and other professionals use checklists to prevent costly mistakes.

ADULT LEARNING STRATEGIES

There’s a major difference between taking a full schedule of courses in college and pursuing a lifelong learning program. For example, full time students typically have guidance from professors and teaching assistants and deadlines. Many colleges also offer writing and math centers to help students develop these fundamental skills. It’s a rich learning environment that offers numerous supports to help students to learn well. Once you transition into a full time career, your college study habits need to be revisited given your current life context.

As a working professional, you face challenges that can be overcome by using insights from the latest in education and learning research. First, adult learners tend to perform better if they are self-motivated and understand the value of what they’re learning. That’s why the motivation section above is critical. Second, a large learning objective is easier to manage when it is deconstructed into smaller components (i.e. a study plan and schedule). Third, the best way to add information to long term memory is spaced repetition (i.e. regularly repeating and reviewing the material over a period of time). Finally, taking care of yourself with the proper amount of sleep, exercise and quality food is important. If you’re exhausted, you will tend to struggle with focus and find the study process much more difficult.

Use this checklist to prepare yourself for maximum learning productivity:

- ✓ Sleep seven to eight hours a day
- ✓ Eat a healthy diet with minimal or no junk food
- ✓ Use a mix of passive (e.g. reading a textbook) and active (e.g. completing a practice quiz or using the material at work) learning methods
- ✓ Review your motivation statements to renew your motivation during difficult times
- ✓ Identify opportunities when you have peak energy to study such as early in the morning before you go to work and study at those times.

Resource: For additional insight on how to manage yourself for optimal energy, read “The Power of Full Engagement” by James E. Loehr and Tony Schwartz.

PHASE 1: INITIATION

Initiate your project “earn my PMP certification” by using the following steps. These steps are inspired by the PMBOK Guide.

1. **Develop Project Charter.** Write up some high level notes on why you are seeking the PMP certification. You may also want to include a few notes on the resources and time required to study.
2. **Identify Stakeholders.** At first glance, you may think that you are the only person who cares about your project to earn the PMP. In fact, there are other stakeholders to consider. You may need to consider your family and friends as stakeholders because your need for study time may impact them. Further, your employer is another important stakeholder to keep in mind especially if they are serving as a reference or providing support to help you earn the certification. Finally, you may have friends and colleagues in a PMP exam study group to consider as stakeholders

STUDY INSIGHT: HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW?

If you have the work experience hours required to study for the PMP exam, you probably know quite a bit about projects. That’s the good news. Unfortunately, your project management vocabulary and process may be specific to your organization. That means you may not use project terms like “project charter” the way PMI defines and uses them in certification exams.

Given this challenge, how do you determine your current level of PMP understanding? Simple. You simply need to take a practice exam and then review your results. For the best results, recreate actual exam conditions including the time limit as closely as possible. If you find yourself wanting to review your study resources over and over again while taking the practice exam, that situation indicates you have a long way to go in studying.

PHASE 2: PLANNING

To plan your project “Earn PMP certification,” you can use project management tools, tips and techniques. Since we’re not building a nuclear submarine, this approach will use a streamlined version of the planning processes described in the PMBOK Guide. Use the following X step process to plan your studies.

1. Foundation: Review PMP certification requirements
2. Foundation: Complete the PMP education certification requirement
3. Foundation: Complete the PMP application

STUDY INSIGHT: WHAT IS YOUR STUDY CONTEXT?

You come to the PMP certification process with different skills, time availability and resources. Answer the following questions to understand your study context.

- ✓ How predictable is your schedule on weekdays and weekends? If your schedule is highly predictable, it will be easier to schedule study time in advance.
- ✓ How confident are you in your study skills? If you last took an exam five years ago, recognize that your study skills may be rusty so you will have a learning curve to get proficient at studying.
- ✓ Do you have a specific quiet location(s) where you can study? You may be able to use a room in your home at certain times or you may need to look into other options such as your local public library.

Taken together, these points inform you about your constraints in studying. If you find that you lack a dedicated study location and time each week, aim to address those issues. Otherwise you may find fall victim to procrastination.

Develop the Initiation section of your PMP Exam Study Plan

1. Create a blank document in Microsoft Word, Google Docs or your app of choice and name it “PMP Exam Project Charter.” As you work through this white paper, you will write informal notes on your project plan.
2. Create a section heading in the Project Charter called “Stakeholders.” In this section, list the stakeholders who will be impacted by your PMP certification project. At a minimum, you will likely want to list: your employer/ manager, your spouse and children, and any certification study colleagues.

4. Complete Pre-Exam Readiness Review
5. Exam Logistics: Locate An Exam Location Schedule An Exam
6. Study for The Exam
7. Complete Practice PMP Exam Questions
8. Schedule the PMP Exam
9. Celebrate Your PMP Exam Success!

Let’s work through the plan in detail so you understand each and every step.

CREATE THE FOUNDATION FOR PMP EXAM SUCCESS

During this step of the planning process, you will review the PMI requirements for the certification in detail. Some applicants find the application overwhelming due to its length and complexity (especially the experience hours requirement!). Don't let the formalities discourage you from going through the process.

Plan to block a weekday morning of uninterrupted time to review the application and work through it. Make a note of any areas where you need clarification from other people such as the experience hours requirement and contact information. In the next week, complete the outstanding "to dos" required for your application such as requesting confirmation for experience hours on the application and related points.

The next planning decision is to make a decision on how you will fulfill the certification's education requirements. If you are keen to progress through the certification process with speed, an online self-paced training is the best way to go. That way, you have the option of working through the material as you make time for it.

- ✓ Foundation: Review PMP certification requirements
- ✓ Foundation: Complete the PMP education certification requirement
- ✓ Foundation: Complete the PMP application

COMPLETE PRE-EXAM READINESS REVIEW

Assuming your PMP exam application is approved, you may be excited to book your exam. Before you take that step, you need to estimate how much study time and effort you need. Some applicants are already well versed in the PMP concepts and take the exam as soon as possible. In other cases, candidates take months to get up to speed. For your plan, how do you estimate how much time you need?

- ✓ Complete a practice PMP exam before you access any study resource.

Why?

It will give you a measure of your current knowledge and understanding and identify your gaps. For example, you may find that you are strong on technical components such as earned value management. Or you may find that you struggle with the PMBOK Guide's concepts such as inputs, outputs and process groups.

After you complete the practice exam, take the time to review your exam score. In particular, examine your performance in two areas: knowledge areas (e.g. quality management, risk

management and cost management) and the process groups (e.g. initiating, planning, executing, monitoring and controlling and closing). The exam is designed to measure your competency across all of these areas. For that reason, your success may be put at risk if you have one area that is particularly weak.

Organize your practice exam results using the categories below. With this knowledge, you will know where to focus the majority of your study efforts – namely the areas where you have the lowest score.

MY HIGHEST SCORING EXAM KNOWLEDGE AREAS

MY HIGHEST SCORING EXAM PROCESS GROUPS

MY LOWEST SCORING EXAM KNOWLEDGE AREAS

MY HIGHEST SCORING EXAM PROCESS GROUPS

- ✓ Complete Pre-Exam Readiness Review

EXAM LOGISTICS

Strictly speaking, exam logistics do not take much time to complete. However, many aspiring PMP procrastinate on booking their exam and paying the fee. It's important to take this step as soon as possible. Marking the exam date on your calendar will give you added motivation. As a project manager, you appreciate the power of deadlines after all.

If possible, choose an exam location close to your home. Visit the exam location one or two days before the exam to confirm travel time and the exact location. This pre-work will reduce your exam day anxiety considerably.

- ✓ Exam Logistics: Locate An Exam Location
- ✓ Exam Logistics: Schedule Your Exam Date

STUDYING FOR THE EXAM

It's time to sit down to study for the exam. Your plan and resources increase the likelihood of success – think of them as ingredients sitting in your kitchen. Vegetables, olive oil and other groceries will not become an interesting meal unless you execute your recipe. In contrast to full time students, your studies are not your only priority in life. That's why we recommend you experiment with several study strategies to see which works best for you.

Not all learning strategies are created equal. Some approaches tend to create better results than others. Fortunately, the “dirty hands” principle is here to help you focus your efforts. Reading about a project management topic is helpful, but that's usually not enough to retain the information for the long term. Instead, you need to get your hands “dirty” to applying the concept. Use the following strategies to get deepen your learning:

- ✓ Read the a section of the PMBOK Guide related to that day's study focus.
- ✓ Watch an instructional video from an online course such as WILEY PRODUCT to give yourself an audiovisual experience of the same material.
- ✓ Write a summary of the ideas in your own words in a notebook
- ✓ Explain how you would use the concept at work to a colleague, ideally to a person who is interested in helping you earn the PMP
- ✓ Write your own Q&A style flash cards related to the concept

As you approach the same concept with different learning methods, you will earn several benefits. First, you are much more likely to remember the concept under the stress of exam conditions. Second, you are much more likely to be able to use the concept in a variety of situations. In the long term, the second benefit is what will ultimately improve your career.

ARE YOU SUFFERING THE CURSE OF KNOWLEDGE?

As you study for the PMP exam, you may become confused at some of the terms and processes. Your company might use “business case” instead of the PMBOK Guide concept of “project charter.” This confusion of terminology causes difficulties for many project managers seeking the PMP certification. Some candidates assume that they already know project concept and terminology from their work experience. Based on this assumption, they minimize study time and simply show up for the exam. Invariably, this overconfident approach often leads to poor performance on the PMP exam. Your past project experience does not have to be a liability if you prepare in the right way.

How do you escape the curse of knowledge in your PMP studies? Start with regularly reading and reviewing the definitions of terms and processes from the PMBOK Guide. More than any other single source, the PMP exam draws on the concepts and terminology of the PMBOK Guide. In a sense, you may consider it the “Bible of PMP exam studies.” However, many people find the PMBOK Guide difficult to understand without commentary and context. In the same way, exam study resources such as Wiley's PMP exam study products play an important role in providing additional context to the PMBOK Guide's approach.

CHOOSING THE BEST PMP EXAM STUDY RESOURCE FOR YOUR NEEDS

Let's review what you've achieved by using the guide. You have completed the PMP application. You have scheduled your exam date. To gauge your understanding, you have completed a practice exam. You have also probably started to read the PMBOK Guide. At this stage, many aspiring PMPs lose their way. Why? They forget to seek support in the form of PMP exam preparation resources. Creating your own study materials such as flash cards and notes from the PMBOK Guide are valuable. However, this do-it-yourself has a critical flaw.

The do-it-yourself approach to studying for a professional exam like the PMP is subject to your blind spots. You may be overly confident about the sections of the exam relating to formulas because you are generally good with numbers. This approach will lead you to miss the subtle points of the exam and jeopardize your exam success. Instead, use the following questions and criteria to guide your selection of study materials.

- ✓ **PUBLISHER REPUTATION.** When you use a study resource, you are entrusting your time and money to them. That's why it pays to ask whether the creator of the study resource is reputable. Questions to ask: how long have they been in the PMP education business? What other professional education resources have they created?
- ✓ **FLEXIBILITY.** A PMP exam study resource is useless if it does not fit into your life. That's why "on demand" study resources have become so popular. If you have half an hour of down time over your lunch break, you can fit in a study session when you have a flexible resource.
- ✓ **MIXED MEDIA.** Did you know that you can deepen your learning experience by using a variety of media and methods? On Monday, you might decide to read a cost management section from the PMBOK Guide. On Tuesday to Thursday, you can review instructional (and replay them, if needed). On Fridays, you could give yourself practice questions with flashcards.
- ✓ **PRACTICE QUESTIONS & PRACTICE EXAMS.** Without practice exams and questions, it's hard to know if you're actually learning the material.

TAKE ACTION:

Visit <https://www.efficientlearning.com/pmp/products/> now to select the best Wiley PMP product for your needs.