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BEGINNING YOUR CPA REVIEW PROGRAM

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To maximize the efficiency of your review program, begin by studying (not merely reading) this chapter and the next three chapters of this volume. They have been carefully organized and written to provide you with important information to assist you in successfully completing the Business Environment & Concepts (BEC) section of the CPA exam. Beyond providing a comprehensive outline to help you organize the material tested on the BEC section, Chapter 1 will assist you in organizing a study program to prepare for the BEC exam. Self-discipline throughout your study program is essential.

GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE EXAMINATION

The Uniform CPA Examination is delivered using computer-based testing (CBT). Computer-based testing has several advantages. You may take the exam one section at a time. As a result, your studies can be focused on that one section, improving your chances for success. In addition, the exam is no longer offered twice a year. During eight months of every year, you may take the exam on your schedule, six days a week and in the morning or in the afternoon.

Successful completion of the BEC section of the CPA Examination is an attainable goal. Keep this point foremost in your mind as you study the first four chapters in this volume and develop your study plan.

Purpose of the Examination¹

The Uniform CPA Examination is designed to test the entry-level knowledge and skills necessary to protect the public interest. These knowledge and skills were identified through a Practice Analysis performed in 2000, which served as a basis for the development of the content specifications for the new exam. The skills identified as necessary for the protection of the public interest include

- Analysis—the ability to organize, process, and interpret data to develop options for decision making.
- Judgment—the ability to evaluate options for decision-making and provide an appropriate conclusion.
- Communication—the ability to effectively elicit and/or express information through written or oral means.
- Research—the ability to locate and extract relevant information from available resource materials.
- Understanding—the ability to recognize and comprehend the meaning and application of a particular matter.

¹ More information may be obtained from the AICPA's *Uniform CPA Examination Candidate Bulletin*, which you can find on the AICPA's Web site at www.cpa-exam.org.

For the BEC section the Board of Examiners has provided the following matrix to illustrate the interaction of content and skills.

Content Specification Outline Areas	Skill Categories					Content Weights
	Communication	Research	Analysis	Judgment	Understanding	
I. Business structure						17-23%
II. Economic concepts						8-12%
III. Financial management						17-23%
IV. Information technology						22-28%
V. Planning and measurement						22-28%
Skills Weights	0-13%	0-13%	8-18%	6-16%	55-65%	

You should keep these skills foremost in your mind as you prepare and sit for the BEC Section.

The CPA examination is one of many screening devices to assure the competence of those licensed to perform the attest function and to render professional accounting services. Other screening devices include educational requirements, ethics examinations, and work experience.

The examination appears to test the material covered in accounting programs of the better business schools. It also appears to be based upon the body of knowledge essential for the practice of public accounting and the audit of a medium-sized client. Since the examination is primarily a textbook or academic examination, you should plan on taking it as soon as possible after completing your required accounting education.

Examination Content

The BEC section of the CPA exam is designed to test

- Knowledge of the general business environment and business concepts that candidates need to know in order to understand the underlying business reasons for and accounting implications of business transactions, and
- The skills to apply that knowledge in performing financial statement audit and attestation engagements and other functions normally performed by CPAs that affect the public interest.

Specific guidance concerning topical content of the new computer-based exam in BEC can be found in two documents prepared by the Board of Examiners of the AICPA: (1) *Uniform CPA Examination—Examination Content Specifications*, and (2) *Business Environment and Concepts: Additional Detail Corresponding to Content Specifications Outline dated June 14, 2002*. We have included the detailed content outline for BEC at the beginning of Chapter 5. The outline should be used as an indication of the topics' relative emphasis on the exam.

The Board's objective in preparing this detailed listing of topics tested on the exam is to help "in assuring the continuing validity and reliability of the Uniform CPA Examination." These outlines are an excellent source of guidance concerning the areas and the emphasis to be given each area on future exams. They are provided to each candidate in *CPA Candidate Bulletin* along with the examination application, or may be downloaded at the AICPA's exam Web site, www.cpa-exam.org.

New accounting, auditing, and ethics pronouncements, including those in the governmental and not-for-profit areas, are tested in the testing window starting six months after the pronouncement's *effective* date. If early application is permitted, a pronouncement is tested six months after the *issuance* date; candidates are responsible for the old pronouncement also until it is superseded. For the BEC section, federal laws are tested six months following their *effective* date and for uniform acts one year after their adoption by a simple majority of jurisdictions. If there is no federal or uniform law on a topic, the questions are intended to test knowledge of the law of the majority of jurisdictions. The AICPA posts content changes regularly on its Internet site. The address is www.cpa-exam.org.

Nondisclosure and Computerization of Examination

Beginning May 1996, the Uniform CPA Examination became nondisclosed. For each exam section, candidates are required to agree to a *Statement of Confidentiality*, which states that they will not divulge the nature and content of any exam question. In April of 2004, the CPA exam became computer-based. Candidates take the exam at Prometric sites in the 54 jurisdictions in which the CPA exam is offered. From April 5, 2004, going forward the CPA exam is offered continually during the testing windows shown below.

Testing Window (Exam Available)	January through February	April through May	July through August	October through November
AICPA Review & Update (Exam Unavailable)	March	June	September	December

One or more exam sections may be taken during any exam window, and the sections may be taken in any desired order. **However, no candidate will be allowed to sit for the same section more than once during any given testing window.** In addition, a candidate must pass all four sections of the CPA exam within a “rolling” eighteen-month period, which begins on the date he or she passes a section. In other words, you must pass the other three sections of the exam within eighteen months of when you pass the first section. If you do not pass all sections within the eighteen-month period, credit for any section(s) passed outside the eighteen-month period will expire and the section(s) must be retaken.

The following table compares the sections of the prior pencil-and-paper exam with the new computer-based exam.

<i>Pencil-and-Paper Examination up to November 2003 (15.5 hours in 2 days)</i>	<i>Computer-Based Examination commencing April 5, 2004 (14 hours over flexible period of time)</i>
Auditing (4.5 hours) Financial Accounting & Reporting (4.5 hours) Accounting & Reporting (3.5 hours) Business Law & Professional Responsibilities (3 hours)	Auditing & Attestation (4.5 hours) Financial Accounting & Reporting (4 hours) Regulation (3 hours) Business Environment & Concepts (2.5 hours)

Types of Questions

The computer-based Uniform CPA Examination consists of two basic question formats.

1. Multiple-Choice—questions requiring the selection of one of four responses to a short scenario.
2. Simulations—case studies that are used to assess knowledge and skills in a context approximating that found on the job, through the use of realistic scenarios and tasks, and access to normally available and familiar resources.

The multiple-choice questions are much like the ones that have constituted a majority of the CPA examination for years. **And the good news is that these types of questions constitute 100% of the BEC section. The BEC section has no simulations at this time.**

Process for Sitting for the Examination

While there are some variations in the process from state to state, the basic process for sitting for the CPA examination may be described as follows:

1. Apply to take the examination (request, complete, and submit an application)
2. Receive your Notice to Schedule (NTS)
3. Schedule your examination(s)
4. Take your examination(s)
5. Receive your score report(s)

Applying to Take the Examination

The right to practice public accounting as a CPA is governed by individual state statutes. While some rules regarding the practice of public accounting vary from state to state, all State Boards of Accountancy use the Uniform CPA Examination and AICPA advisory grading service as one of the requirements to practice public accounting. Every candidate should contact the applicable State Board of Accountancy to determine the requirements to sit for the exam (e.g., education requirements). For comparisons of requirements for various state boards and those policies that are uniform across jurisdictions you should refer to the Web site of the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA) at www.nasba.org.

A frequent problem candidates encounter is failure to apply by the deadline. **Apply to sit for the examination early. Also, you should use extreme care in filling out the application and mailing required materials to your State Board of Accountancy.** If possible, have a friend review your completed application before mailing with check and other documentation. Candidates may miss a particular CPA examination window simply because of minor technical details that were overlooked (check not signed, items not enclosed, question not answered on application, etc.). **Because of the very high volume of applications received in the more populous states, the administrative staff does not have time to call or write to correct minor details and will simply reject your application.**

The various state boards, their Web sites, and telephone numbers are listed on the following page. Be sure to inquire of your state board for specific and current requirements.

It is possible for candidates to sit for the examination at a Prometric site in any state or territory. Candidates desiring to do so should contact the State Board of Accountancy in their home state.

Exam Scheduling

Once you have been cleared to take the exam by the applicable state board, you will receive by mail a Notice to Schedule (NTS) and may then schedule to sit for one or more sections of the exam. **Make sure that your name is exactly correct on the NTS.**

You have the following three options for scheduling your examination:

1. **Visit www.prometric.com/cpa on the Internet**

This is the easiest and quickest way to schedule an examination appointment (or cancel and re-schedule an appointment, if necessary). Simply go to the Web site, select SCHEDULE APPOINTMENT, and follow the directions. It is advised that you print and keep for your records the confirmation number for your appointment.

2. **Call 800-580-9648 (Candidate Services Call Center)**

Before you call, you must have your NTS in front of you, and have in mind several times, dates, and locations that would work for you. You will not receive written confirmation of your appointment. Be sure to write down the date, time, location, and confirmation number for each of your appointments.

3. **Call your local test center**

While this method is not recommended, you may call your local test center and schedule appointments. Again, be sure to have your NTS in front of you and write down the date, time, location, and confirmation number for each of your appointments.

You should also be aware that if you have to cancel or reschedule your appointment, you may be subject to a cancellation/rescheduling fee. The AICPA's *Uniform CPA Examination Candidate Bulletin* lists the rescheduling and cancellation fees.

To assure that you get your desired location and time period it is imperative that you schedule early. To get your first choice of dates, you are advised to schedule at least 45 days in advance. You will not be scheduled for an exam fewer than 5 days before testing.

ATTRIBUTES OF EXAMINATION SUCCESS

Your primary objective in preparing for the BEC section is to pass. Other objectives such as learning new and reviewing old material should be considered secondary. The six attributes of examination success discussed below are **essential**. You should study the attributes and work toward achieving/developing each of them **before** taking the examination.

1. **Knowledge of Material**

Two points are relevant to "knowledge of material" as an attribute of examination success. **First**, there is a distinct difference between being familiar with material and knowing the material. Frequently candidates confuse familiarity with knowledge. Can you remember when you just could not answer an examination question or did poorly on an examination, but maintained to yourself or your instructor that you knew the material? You probably were only familiar with the material. On the CPA examination, familiarity is insufficient; you must know the material. Remember, the exam will test your ability to analyze data, make judgments, and demonstrate understanding of the material. For example, you may be familiar with the concepts of strategic performance measurement, but you may have difficulty linking measures to particular strategies in a balanced scorecard framework. Once again, a major concern must be to know the material rather than just being familiar with it. **Second**, the BEC exam tests a literally overwhelming amount of material at a rigorous level. From an undergraduate point of view, the CPA examination in BEC includes material from the following courses:

- Economics
- Finance
- Business Law
- Management Information systems
- Managerial/Cost Accounting

	<i>STATE BOARD WEB ADDRESS</i>	<i>TELEPHONE #</i>
AK	www.commerce.state.ak.us/occ/pcpa.htm	(907) 465-3811
AL	www.asbpa.alabama.gov	(334) 242-5700
AR	www.state.ar.us/asbpa	(501) 682-1520
AZ	www.azaccountancy.gov	(602) 364-0804
CA	www.dca.ca.gov/cba	(916) 263-3680
CO	www.dora.state.co.us/accountants	(303) 894-7800
CT	www.ct.gov/sboa	(860) 509-6179
DC	dcra.dc.gov/dcra	(202) 442-4320
DE	www.dpr.delaware.gov	(302) 744-4500
FL	www.myflorida.com	(850) 487-1395
GA	www.sos.state.ga.us/plb/accountancy/	(478) 207-1400
GU	www.guambo.org	(671) 647-0813
HI	www.hawaii.gov/dcca/areas/pvl/boards/accountancy	(808) 586-2696
IA	www.state.ia.us/iacc	(515) 281-5910
ID	www.isba.idaho.gov	(208) 334-2490
IL	www.ilboa.org	(217) 531-0950
IN	www.in.gov/pla/bandc/accountancy/	(317) 234-3040
KS	www.ksboa.org	(785) 296-2162
KY	cpa.ky.gov	(502) 595-3037
LA	www.cpaboard.state.la.us	(504) 566-1244
MA	www.mass.gov/reg/boards/pa	(617) 727-1806
MD	www.dlr.state.md.us/license/occprof/account.html	(410) 230-6322
ME	www.maineprofessionalreg.org	(207) 624-8603
MI	www.michigan.gov/accountancy	(517) 241-9249
MN	www.boa.state.mn.us	(651) 296-7938
MO	pr.mo.gov/accountancy.asp	(573) 751-0012
MS	www.msboa.state.ms.us	(601) 354-7320
MT	www.publicaccountant.mt.gov	(406) 841-2389
NC	www.nccpaboard.gov	(919) 733-4222
ND	www.state.nd.us/ndsba	(800) 532-5904
NE	www.nol.org/home/BPA	(402) 471-3595
NH	www.nh.gov/accountancy	(603) 271-3286
NJ	www.state.nj.us/lps/ca/nonmed.htm	(973) 504-6380
NM	www.rld.state.nm.us/b&c/accountancy/index.htm	(505) 841-9108
NV	www.nvaccountancy.com/	(775) 786-0231
NY	www.op.nysed.gov/cpa.htm	(518) 474-3817
OH	www.acc.ohio.gov/	(614) 466-4135
OK	www.oab.state.ok.us	(405) 521-2397
OR	egov.oregon.gov/BOA/	(503) 378-4181
PA	www.dos.state.pa.us/account	(717) 783-1404
PR	www.estado.gobierno.pr/contador.htm	(787) 722-4816
RI	www.dbr.state.ri.us	(401) 222-3185
SC	www.llr.state.sc.us/POL/Accountancy	(803) 896-4770
SD	www.state.sd.us/dcr/accountancy	(605) 367-5770
TN	www.state.tn.us/commerce/boards/tnsba/index.html	(615) 741-2550
TX	www.tsbpa.state.tx.us	(512) 305-7800
UT	www.dopl.utah.gov	(801) 530-6396
VA	www.boa.virginia.gov	(804) 367-8505
VI	www.dlca.gov.vi	(340) 773-4305
VT	vtprofessionals.org/opr1/accountants	(802) 828-2837
WA	www.cpaboard.wa.gov	(360) 753-2585
WI	www.drl.wi.gov/index.htm	(608) 266-5511
WV	www.wvboacc.org	(304) 558-3557
WY	cpaboard.state.wy.us	(307) 777-7551

NOTE: The publisher does not assume responsibility for errors in the above information. You should request information concerning requirements in your state at least six months in advance of the exam dates.

2. Commitment to Exam Preparation

Your preparation for the CPA exam should begin at least two months prior to the date you plan to schedule your seating for an exam section. If you plan to take more than one section, you should start earlier. Over the course of your preparation, you will experience many peaks and valleys. There will be days when you feel completely prepared and there will also be days when you feel totally overwhelmed. This is not unusual and, in fact, should be expected.

The CPA exam is a very difficult and challenging exam. How many times in your college career did you study months for an exam? Probably not too many. Therefore, candidates need to remain focused on the objective—succeeding on the CPA exam.

Develop a personal study plan so that you are reviewing material daily. Of course, you should schedule an occasional study break to help you relax, but don't schedule too many breaks. Candidates who dedicate themselves to studying have a much greater chance of going through this process only one time. On the other hand, a lack of focus and piecemeal preparation will only extend the process over a number of exam sittings.

3. Solutions Approach

The solutions approach is a systematic approach to solving the multiple-choice questions found on the CPA examination. Many candidates know the material fairly well when they sit for the CPA exam, but they do not know how to take the examination. Candidates generally neither work nor answer questions efficiently in terms of time or grades. The solutions approach permits you to avoid drawing “blanks” on CPA exam questions; using the solutions approach coupled with grading insights (see below) allows you to pick up a sizable number of points on test material with which you are not familiar. Chapter 3 outlines the solutions approach for multiple-choice questions.

4. Grading Insights

The multiple-choice questions within each section are organized into three groups which are referred to as testlets. Each multiple-choice testlet is comprised of approximately 30 multiple-choice questions. The multiple-choice testlets vary in overall difficulty. A testlet is labeled either “medium difficult” or “difficult” based on its makeup. A “difficult” testlet has a higher percentage of hard questions than a “medium difficult” testlet. Every candidate's first multiple-choice testlet in each section will be a “medium difficult” testlet. If a candidate scores well on the first testlet, he or she will receive a “difficult” second testlet. Candidates that do not perform well on the first testlet receive a second “medium difficult” testlet. Because the scoring procedure takes the difficulty of the testlet into account, candidates are scored fairly regardless of the type of testlets they receive.

The AICPA includes sample examinations on its Web site that allow you to get experience with the use of the actual computer tools used on the CPA exam. Also, more experience with computer testing can be obtained by using Wiley CPA Review Practice software.

5. Examination Strategy

Prior to sitting for the examination, it is important to develop an examination strategy (i.e., an approach to working efficiently throughout the exam). Your ability to cope successfully with 2 ½ hours of examination can be improved by

- a. Recognizing the importance and usefulness of an examination strategy
- b. Using Chapter 4, Taking the Examination, and previous examination experience to develop a “personal strategy” for the exam
- c. Testing your “personal strategy” on example examinations under conditions similar to those at the testing centers

6. Examination Confidence

You need confidence to endure the physical and mental demands of 2 ½ hours of test-taking under tremendous pressure. Examination confidence results from proper preparation for the exam which includes mastering the first four attributes of examination success. Examination confidence is necessary to enable you to overcome the initial frustration with questions for which you may not be specifically prepared.

This study manual, when properly used, contributes to your examination confidence. Build confidence by completing the questions contained herein.

Common Candidate Mistakes

The CPA Exam is a formidable hurdle in your accounting career. With a pass rate of about 40% on each section, the level of difficulty is obvious. The good news, though, is that about 75% of all candidates (first-time and re-exam) sitting for each examination eventually pass. The authors believe that the first-time pass rate could be higher if candidates would be more careful. Eight common mistakes that many candidates make are

1. Failure to understand the exam question requirements
2. Misunderstanding the supporting text of the question
3. Lack of knowledge of material tested, especially recently issued pronouncements
4. Failure to develop proficiency with computer-based testing and practice tools such as electronic research databases and spreadsheets
5. Inability to apply the solutions approach
6. Lack of an exam strategy (e.g., allocation of time)
7. Sloppiness and computational errors
8. Failure to proofread and edit

These mistakes are not mutually exclusive. Candidates may commit one or more of the above items. Remind yourself that when you decrease the number of common mistakes, you increase your chances of successfully becoming a CPA. Take the time to read carefully the exam question requirements. Do not jump into a quick start, only to later find out that you didn't understand what information the examiners were asking for. Read slowly and carefully. Take time to recall your knowledge. Respond to the question asked. Apply an exam strategy such as allocating your time among all testlets. Answer questions quickly but precisely, avoid common mistakes, and increase your score.

PURPOSE AND ORGANIZATION OF THIS REVIEW TEXTBOOK

This book is designed to help you prepare adequately for the BEC Examination. There is no easy way to prepare for the successful completion of the CPA Examination; however, through the use of this manual, your approach will be systematic and logical.

The objective of this book is to provide study materials supportive to CPA candidates. While no guarantees are made concerning the success of those using this text, this book promotes efficient preparation by

1. Explaining how to **maximize your score** through analysis of examination grading and illustration of the solutions approach.
2. **Defining areas tested** through the use of the content specification outlines. Note that predictions of future exams are not made. You should prepare yourself for all possible topics rather than gambling on the appearance of certain questions.
3. **Organizing your study program** by comprehensively outlining all of the subject matter tested on the examination in 8 easy-to-use study modules. Each study module is a manageable task which facilitates your exam preparation. Turn to Chapter 5 and peruse the contents to get a feel for the organization of this book.
4. **Providing CPA candidates with previous examination questions** organized by topic (e.g., cost measurement, planning, control and analysis, etc.) Since about 70% of this examination content is material not previously tested, questions have been developed for new areas. Some have been adapted from other professional exams, (i.e., the Certified Management Accountants and Certified Internal Auditors exams).
5. **Explaining the AICPA unofficial answers** to the examination questions included in this text. The AICPA publishes unofficial answers for all questions from exams administered prior to 1996 and for any released questions from exams administered on or after May 1996. However, no explanation is made of the approach that should have been applied to the examination questions to obtain these unofficial answers. Relatedly, the AICPA unofficial answers to multiple-choice questions provide no justification and/or explanation.

As you read the next few paragraphs which describe the contents of this book, flip through the chapters to gain a general familiarity with the book's organization and contents. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 are to help you "maximize your score."

- Chapter 2 Examination Grading and Grader Orientation
- Chapter 3 The Solutions Approach
- Chapter 4 Taking the Examination

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 contain material that should be kept in mind throughout your study program. Refer back to them frequently. Reread them for a final time just before you sit for the exam.

Chapter 5 (BEC Modules) contains

1. AICPA Content Specification Outlines of material tested on the BEC Examination
2. Multiple-choice questions
3. Author's explanations for the multiple-choice questions

Also included at the end of this text is a complete Sample BEC Examination. The sample exam is included to enable candidates to gain experience in taking a "realistic" exam. While studying the modules, the candidate can become accustomed to concentrating on fairly narrow topics. By working through the sample examination near the end of their study programs, candidates will be better prepared for taking the actual examination.

Other Textbooks

This text is a comprehensive compilation of study guides and outlines; it should not be necessary to supplement them with accounting textbooks and other materials for most topics. You probably already have economics, cost accounting, finance, and information systems textbooks. In such a case, you must make the decision whether to replace them and trade familiarity (including notes therein, etc.), with the cost and inconvenience of obtaining the newer texts containing a more updated presentation.

Before spending time and money acquiring a new book, begin your study program with *CPA EXAMINATION REVIEW: BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT & CONCEPTS* to determine your need for a supplemental text.

Ordering Other Textual Materials

If you want to order AICPA materials, locate an AICPA educator member to order your materials, since educator members are entitled to a 30% discount and may place Web site or telephone orders.

AICPA (CPA2Biz)

Telephone: 888-777-7077

Web site: www.CPA2Biz.com

Address: Order Department

CPA2Biz

P.O. Box 2209

Jersey City, NJ 07303-2209

A variety of supplemental CPA products are available from John Wiley & Sons, Inc. By using a variety of learning techniques, such as software, computer-based learning, and audio CDs, the candidate is more likely to remain focused during the study process and to retain information for a longer period of time. Visit our Web site at www.wiley.com/cpa for other products, supplements, and updates.

Working CPA Questions

The AICPA content outlines, study outlines, etc., will be used to acquire and assimilate the knowledge tested on the examination. This, however, should be only **one-half** of your preparation program. The other half should be spent practicing how to work questions. Some candidates probably spend over 90% of their time reviewing material tested on the CPA exam. Much more time should be allocated to working examination questions **under exam conditions**. Working examination questions serves two functions. First, it helps you develop a solutions approach that will maximize your score. Second, it provides the best test of your knowledge of the material.

The multiple-choice questions and answer explanations can be used in many ways. First, they may be used as a diagnostic evaluation of your knowledge. For example, before beginning to review financial management you may wish to answer 10 to 15 multiple-choice questions to determine your ability to answer CPA examination questions on financial management. The apparent difficulty of the questions and the correctness of your answers will allow you to determine the necessary breadth and depth of your review. Additionally, exposure to examination questions prior to review and study of the material should provide motivation. You will develop a feel for your level of proficiency and an understanding of the scope and difficulty of past examination questions. Moreover, your review materials will explain concepts encountered in the diagnostic multiple-choice questions.

Second, the multiple-choice questions can be used as a poststudy or postreview evaluation. You should attempt to understand all concepts mentioned (even in incorrect answers) as you answer the questions. Refer

to the explanation of the answer for discussion of the alternatives even though you selected the correct response. Thus, you should read the explanation of the answer unless you completely understand the question and all of the alternative answers.

Third, you may wish to use the multiple-choice questions as a primary study vehicle. This is probably the quickest but least thorough approach in preparing for the exam. Make a sincere effort to understand the question and to select the correct response before referring to the answer and explanation. In many cases, the explanations will appear inadequate because of your lack of familiarity with the topic. Always refer back to an appropriate study source, such as the outlines and text in this volume, your economics, information systems, finance and cost accounting textbooks, etc.

After you have reviewed for the BEC section of the exam, work the complete BEC Sample Exam provided in Appendix A.

SELF-STUDY PROGRAM

CPA candidates generally find it difficult to organize and complete their own self-study programs. A major problem is determining **what** and **how** to study. Another major problem is developing the self-discipline to stick to a study program. Relatedly, it is often difficult for CPA candidates to determine how much to study (i.e., determining when they are sufficiently prepared.) The following suggestions will assist you in developing a **systematic, comprehensive, and successful** self-study program to help you complete the BEC exam.

Remember that these are only suggestions. You should modify them to suit your personality, available study time, and other constraints. Some of the suggestions may appear trivial, but CPA candidates generally need all the assistance they can get to systemize their study programs.

Study Facilities and Available Time

Locate study facilities that will be conducive to concentrated study. Factors that you should consider include

1. Noise distraction
2. Interruptions
3. Lighting
4. Availability (e.g., a local library is not available at 5:00 A.M.)
5. Accessibility (e.g., your kitchen table vs. your local library)
6. Desk or table space

You will probably find different study facilities optimal for different times (e.g., your kitchen table during early morning hours and local libraries during early evening hours).

Next review your personal and professional commitments from now until the exam to determine regularly available study time. Formalize a schedule to which you can reasonably commit yourself. At the end of this chapter, you will find a detailed approach to managing your time available for the exam preparation program.

Self-Evaluation

The *CPA EXAMINATION REVIEW: BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT & CONCEPTS* self-study program is partitioned into 8 topics or modules. Since each module is clearly defined and should be studied separately, you have the task of preparing for the CPA BEC exam by tackling 8 manageable tasks. Partitioning the overall project into 8 modules makes preparation psychologically easier, since you sense yourself completing one small step at a time rather than seemingly never completing one or a few large steps.

By completing the following “Preliminary Estimate of Your Present Knowledge of Subject” inventory below, organized by the 8 modules in this program, you will tabulate your strong and weak areas at the beginning of your study program. This will help you budget your limited study time. Note that you should begin studying the material in each module by answering up to 1/4 of the total multiple-choice questions covering that module’s topics (see instruction 4.A. in the next section). This “mini-exam” should constitute a diagnostic evaluation as to the amount of review and study you need.

PRELIMINARY ESTIMATE OF YOUR PRESENT KNOWLEDGE OF SUBJECT*

No.	Module	Proficient	Fairly Proficient	Generally Familiar	Not Familiar
38	Business Structure				
39	Information Technology				
40	Economics & Strategy				
41	Financial Management				
42	Risk Management & Capital Budgeting				
43	Performance Measures				
44	Cost Measurement				
45	Planning, Control & Analysis				

* NOTE: The numbering of modules in this text commences with number 38 to correspond with the numbering system used in our two-volume set.

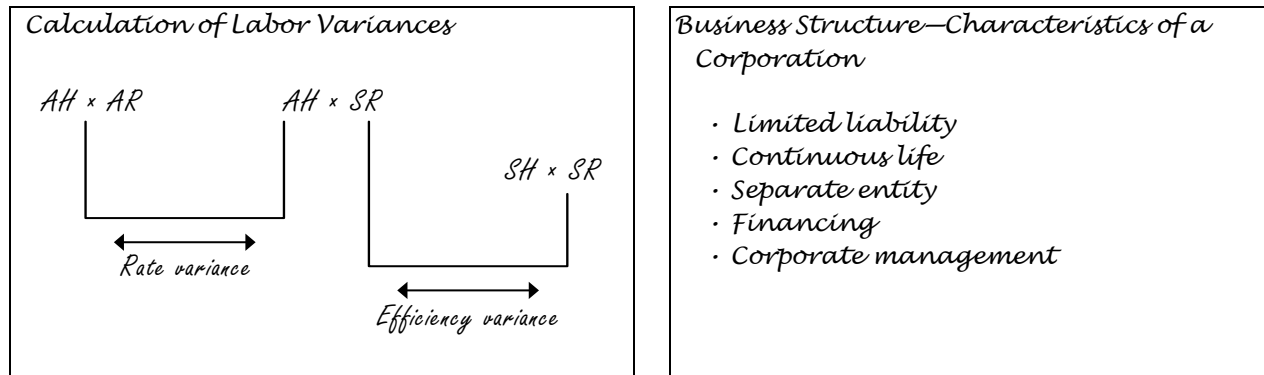
Time Allocation

The study program below entails an average of 50 hours (Step 5. below) of study time. The breakdown of total hours is indicated in the left margin.

- [1 hr.] 1. Study Chapters 2-4 in this volume. These chapters are essential to your efficient preparation program. (Time estimate includes candidate's review of the examples of the solutions approach in Chapters 2 and 3.)
- [1 hr.] 2. Begin by studying the introductory material at the beginning of Chapter 5.
3. Study one module at a time. The modules are listed above in the self-evaluation section.
4. For each module
- [5 hrs.] A. Work 1/4 of the multiple-choice questions (e.g., if there are 40 multiple-choice questions in a module, you should work every 4th question, 10 total questions). Score yourself.
This diagnostic routine will provide you with an index of your proficiency and familiarity with the type and difficulty of questions.
Time estimate: 3 minutes each, not to exceed 1 hour total.
- [27 hrs.] B. Study the outlines and illustrations. Where necessary, refer to your economics, information systems, finance, and cost accounting textbooks. (This will occur more frequently for topics in which you have a weak background.)
Time estimate: 2 hour minimum per module with more time devoted to topics less familiar to you.
- [12 hrs.] C. Work the remaining multiple-choice questions. Study the explanations of the multiple-choice questions you missed or had trouble answering.
Time estimate: 3 minutes to answer each question and 2 minutes to study the answer explanation of each question missed.
- [4 hrs.] D. Work through the sample CPA examination presented as Appendix A.
Take the examination under simulated exam conditions (i.e., in a strange place with other people present [your local municipal library or a computer lab]). Apply your solutions approach to each question and your exam strategy to the overall exam. You should limit yourself to the time you will have when taking the actual CPA exam section (2 ½ hours for the BEC section). Spend time afterwards grading your work and reviewing your effort.
Time estimate: To take the exam and review it later, approximately 4 hours.
5. The total suggested time of 50 hours is only an average. Allocation of time will vary candidate by candidate. Time requirements vary due to the diverse backgrounds and abilities of CPA candidates. Allocate your time so you gain the most proficiency in the least time. Remember that while 50 hours will be required, you should break the overall project down into 8 more manageable tasks. Do not study more than one module during each study session.

Using Notecards

Below are one candidate's notecards on BEC topics which illustrate how key definitions, lists, etc., can be summarized on index cards for quick review. Since candidates can take these anywhere they go, they are a very efficient review tool.



Level of Proficiency Required

What level of proficiency must you develop with respect to each of the topics to pass the exam? You should work toward a minimum correct rate on the multiple-choice questions of 80%. Working toward a correct rate of 80% or higher will give you a margin.

Multiple-Choice Feedback

One of the benefits of working through exam questions is that it helps you to identify your weak areas. Once you have graded your answers, your strong areas and weak areas should be clearly evident. Yet, the important point here is that you should not stop at a simple percentage evaluation. The percentage only provides general feedback about your knowledge of the material contained within that particular module. The percentage **does not** give you any specific feedback regarding the concepts which were tested. In order to get this feedback, you should look at the questions missed on an individual basis because this will help you gain a better understanding of **why** you missed the question.

This feedback process has been facilitated by the fact that within each module where the multiple-choice answer key appears, two blank lines have been inserted next to the multiple-choice answers. As you grade the multiple-choice questions, mark those questions which you have missed. However, instead of just marking the questions right and wrong, you should now focus on marking the questions in a manner which identifies **why** you missed the question. As an example, a candidate could mark the questions in the following manner: ✓ for math mistakes, x for conceptual mistakes, and ? for areas which the candidate was unfamiliar with. The candidate should then correct these mistakes by reworking through the marked questions.

The objective of this marking technique is to help you identify your weak areas and thus, the concepts which you should be focusing on. While it is still important for you to get between 75% and 80% correct when working multiple-choice questions, it is more important for you to understand the concepts. This understanding applies to both the questions answered correctly and those answered incorrectly. Remember, questions on the CPA exam will be different from the questions in the book; however, the concepts will be the same. Therefore, your preparation should focus on understanding concepts, not just getting the correct answer.

Conditional Candidates

If you have received conditional status on the examination, you must concentrate on the remaining section(s). Unfortunately, many candidates do not study after conditioning the exam, relying on luck to get them through the remaining section(s). Conditional candidates will find that material contained in Chapters 1- 4 and the information contained in the appropriate modules will benefit them in preparing for the remaining section(s) of the examination.

PLANNING FOR THE EXAMINATION

Overall Strategy

An overriding concern should be an orderly, systematic approach toward both your preparation program and your examination strategy. A major objective should be to avoid any surprises or anything else that would rattle you during the examination. In other words, you want to be in complete control as much as possible. Control is of paramount importance from both positive and negative viewpoints. The presence of control on your part will add to your confidence and your ability to prepare for and take the exam. Moreover, the pres-

ence of control will make your preparation program more enjoyable (or at least less distasteful). On the other hand, a lack of organization will result in inefficiency in preparing for and taking the examination, with a highly predictable outcome. Likewise, distractions during the examination (e.g., inadequate lodging, long drive) are generally disastrous.

In summary, establishing a systematic, orderly approach to taking the examination is of paramount importance.

1. Develop an overall strategy at the beginning of your preparation program (see below)
2. Supplement your overall strategy with outlines of material tested on the BEC exam
3. Supplement your overall strategy with an explicitly stated set of question-and problem solving-procedures—the solutions approach
4. Supplement your overall strategy with an explicitly stated approach to each examination session (See Chapter 4)
5. Evaluate your preparation progress on a regular basis and prepare lists of things “to do.” (See Weekly Review of Preparation Program Progress on following page.)
6. RELAX: You can pass the exam. About 40 to 45% of the candidates taking a section of the CPA examination pass. But if you take out the individuals that did not adequately prepare, these percentages increase substantially. You will be one of those who pass if you complete an efficient preparation program and execute well (i.e., solutions approach and exam strategy) while taking the exam.

The following outline is designed to provide you with a general framework of the tasks before you. You should tailor the outline to your needs by adding specific items and comments.

A. Preparation Program (refer to Self-Study Program discussed previously)

1. Obtain and organize study materials
2. Locate facilities conducive for studying and block out study time
3. Develop your solutions approach
4. Prepare an examination strategy
5. Study the material tested recently and prepare answers to actual exam questions on these topics under examination conditions
6. Periodically evaluate your progress

B. Physical Arrangements

1. Apply to and obtain acceptance from your state board
2. Schedule your test location and time

C. Taking the Examination (covered in detail in Chapter 4)

1. Become familiar with location of the test center and procedures
2. Implement examination strategies and the solutions approach

Weekly Review of Preparation Program Progress

The following pages contain a hypothetical weekly review of program progress. You should prepare a similar progress chart. This procedure, taking only 5 minutes per week, will help you proceed through a more efficient, complete preparation program.

Make notes of materials and topics

1. That you have studied
2. That you have completed
3. That need additional study

Weeks to go

Comments on progress, “to do” items, etc.

11	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Read Business Structure Module 2) Made notecards 3) Worked MC questions 4) Need to use solutions approach
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10	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Read Economics & Strategy Module 2) Made notecards 3) Worked the MC questions 4) Need to work more questions on types of markets
9	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Read Financial Management Module 2) Made notecards 3) Worked some MC questions 4) Need to work more capital asset pricing questions
8	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Read Risk Management and Capital Budgeting Module 2) Made notecards 3) Worked some MC questions 4) Need to work more on probability analysis
7	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Read Information Technology Module 2) Made notecards 3) Worked some MC questions 4) Need to finish Economics, Risk Measurement and Financial Management MC
6	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Read Performance Measures Module 2) Made notecards 3) Worked the MC questions 4) Need to study the balanced scorecard
5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Reviewed Cost Measurement Module 2) Completed MC for prior Modules 3) Made notecards 4) Worked some MC questions
4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Read Planning, Control, and Analysis Module 2) Made notecards 3) Worked the MC questions 4) Need to review standard costing
3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Reviewed all Modules 2) Completed all MC questions
2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Took BEC Sample Exam 2) Wrote down topics I still do not feel confident in 3) Worked variance analysis, working capital management, and balanced scorecard questions— Am now finally confident in these areas
1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Reviewed the Economics & Strategy and Financial Management Modules and worked all the MC again 2) Reviewed all notecards
0	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Tried to relax and review topics

Time Management of Your Preparation

As you begin your CPA exam preparation, you obviously realize that there is a large amount of material to cover over the course of the next two to three months. Therefore, it is very important for you to organize your calendar, and maybe even your daily routine, so that you can allocate sufficient time to studying. An organized approach to your preparation is much more effective than a last week cram session. An organized approach also builds up the confidence necessary to succeed on the CPA exam.

An approach which we have already suggested is to develop weekly “to do” lists. This technique helps you to establish intermediate objectives and goals as you progress through your study plan. You can then focus your efforts on small tasks and not feel overwhelmed by the entire process. And as you accomplish these tasks you will see yourself moving one step closer to realizing the overall goal, succeeding on the CPA exam.

Note, however, that the underlying assumption of this approach is that you have found the time during the week to study and thus accomplish the different tasks. Although this is an obvious step, it is still a very important step. Your exam preparation should be of a continuous nature and not one that jumps around the calendar. Therefore, you should strive to find available study time within your daily schedule, which can be utilized on a consistent basis. For example, everyone has certain hours of the day which are already committed for activities such as jobs, classes, and, of course, sleep. There is also going to be the time you spend relaxing because CPA candidates should try to maintain some balance in their lives. Sometimes too much studying can be counterproductive. But there will be some time available to you for studying and working through the questions. Block off this available time and use it only for exam prep. Use the time to accomplish your weekly tasks and to keep yourself committed to the process. After awhile your preparation will develop into a habit and the preparation will not seem as overwhelming as it once did.

**NOW IS THE TIME
TO MAKE YOUR COMMITMENT**
