iKompass PMP® Exam tips

Taking an exam can be a daunting task for people of any age. The unique structure of the PMP exam which involves rules like being sensitive to the clock ticking, choosing one right answer, answering from a PMI perspective etc., can make the exam feel more difficult than it is. We have compiled a list of best practices from hundreds of successful PMP certification Singapore exam takers over the past 2 years.

> THE PMP EXAM IS 4 HOURS IN DURATION AND CONTAINS 200 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS. QUESTIONS HAVE VARYING LEVELS OF DIFFICULTY.

With more than half a million project managers certified as Project Management Professional (PMP)'s worldwide and thousands on their way, there is no doubt that the trend to get certified is not going to lose steam anytime soon.

The PMP certification is the de facto symbol of one's skills and expertise in the domain of project management. The growing demand for skilled project managers is reflected in the numerous job advertisements requiring a potential candidate to be PMP certified. Ascertaining one's skill is a difficult task and the PMP exam offers a valuable tool for employers to confidently gauge a person's level of knowledge.

While one gets to regularly hear stories of a colleague or acquaintance successfully passing the PMP exam, stories about failures rarely make for good party conversations.

PMI does not disclose the official failure rates for the PMP exam but a recent study of PMP training in Singapore with a sample of 100 random exam takers, who based their preparation on self-study instead of attending a course, revealed a failure rate close to 46 percent.

PMP EXAM TIP 1

Think best practice perspective

It is always a good idea to find out how others have successfully prepared and taken the exam. Why not benefit from others' success stories. There might be techniques and tips that you can use in your preparation. Of course, what works for others may or may not work for you. But to try and fail is better than not trying at all. While answering a situational question think how would PMI want you to answer and not how you currently handle the situation in your company.

PMP exam tip 2:

Quality over quantity

Its not how much time you spend in preparing for the exam. Rather, it is about how you are spending that time. You can spend hours, and achieve only a fraction of how much you hope to. On the other hand, even if you spend 45 minutes in 'the zone', you can achieve far more. The key is to set a realistic objective, and also determine the time frame you can achieve that result in. To determine the time frame, you must know your own attention span. How long can you spend on a task with complete focus? Remove yourself from all possible distractions for that small window of time, and you will be amazed at the result.

PMP exam tip 3:

Do not speed read questions

More often than not, the problem in getting answers wrong is not concept related, but with the way the questions are read. When the clock is ticking, we sometimes tend to speed read, hoping to save time. But in doing so, the brain has to fill in the blanks left by the eye, and in the process, misread the essence of the question itself. And this in turn results in an incorrect answer choice. While speed reading seems to save time, it is best to exert caution while doing so.

PMP exam tip 4:

Don't let the clock scare you

Yes, it is quite scary to know that one is on the clock, and even more unnerving to see it constantly on the screen. Such anxiety may lead one to make mistakes, like reading the questions too quickly. It is key to consider the time constraint while not rushing through the questions. One can train oneself to not look at the clock, except to check in after every 15-20 questions. This should help with the anxiety. Remember, time is not the enemy.

PMP exam tip 5:

Second Guessing

A silent threat to success is second guessing ones choices. It happens to everyone, at some point. Think back to the times when you picked the right answer the first time, and then changed it after reviewing it. Yes, reviewing ones answers is good, but there is a thin line between being conscientious and paranoid! There is something to be said about trusting our instinct. Of course, one must apply due diligence in determining which ones require our second attention. A good trick is to not review the ones that you are absolutely certain of. You will know which ones those are at the time of answering them.

PMP exam tip 6:

Process of elimination

With multiple choice questions, for some questions, one just knows which the right option is. The trouble arises when one has no idea or some idea, but are just not that certain. That is when one applies the process of elimination. So instead of picking the right one, you arrive at the right option by eliminating the incorrect ones. In most multiple choice question formats, it is fairly easy to eliminate 2 out of the 4 options. It gets tricky choosing between that last two.

It would be good if you had some idea about the concept tested, else it will have to be a coin toss!

PMP exam tip 7:

Do not memorize

These kind of exams do not test one's memory. Rather, they are testing comprehension of the material. The questions are largely situational in nature, which means that you are presented with a scenario, and then given four options. It is obvious that memorization of the concepts are not going to help in this situation. What will help is a firm grasp of the concept itself. Of course, once it is understood, then one can use techniques to retain the information. So, retention should follow understanding, not the other way around.

PMP exam tip 8:

Don't Jump the Gun

When one is running against the clock, it is easy to rush through steps without even realizing it. For instance, reading the question too quickly, speed reading the answer choices, doing the calculations a bit faster than one ought to, etc. Choosing the right option is the clincher. Picking one too quickly may result in the wrong outcome. This choice may be because of the clock, or because one is not open to the possibility of another 'more' right option. The fix is of course, to slow down. Read all options completely, and with an open mind before arriving at a decision.

PMP exam tip 9:

Finish the exam at all costs

No matter what the situation, submitting a completed exam is very important. If one hasn't completed all the questions by the end of the assigned time, the exam will submit itself, incomplete. This means that the unanswered questions are definitely going to be marked incorrect. The ideal scenario, of course, is that one completes the exam with time to spare. This requires a good time management strategy which allows one to complete all questions, with time to review the ones you are not sure about. If that strategy has not worked, and you find yourself stuck at the 150'th question with 5 minutes to spare and 50 questions to go, you are now in the worst case scenario. Stop reading the question, and start randomly checking options for each question. The goal- to ensure all questions have an answer checked.

PMP exam tip 10:

Questions with Calculations matter

Some of us love calculations, some hate them. Well, if you fall in the category of hating them, well you better learn to make calculations your new best friend. On this exam, not all questions are created equal. Some carry a higher weightage than others. And surprise, surprise, calculations carry a high weightage. This has its pros and cons. As opposed to the other questions on the exam where there could be more than one right answer, and the real task is to identify the best one. The good thing about calculations is that there is no 'best fit'. Two plus two is always four. There are no situations where it could be any other result. Hence, if you know your formulae, these questions are easy to get. Plug and play, and you're set. But that's where the cons come in. You have to know your formulae!

PMP exam tip 11:

First few questions

The first few questions are very important, from a psychological perspective. If you get stuck there and have no idea what the questions mean, you will feel anxious and demotivated, and that will set the mood for the rest of the exam. It is very very important to start the exam on a positive note. Our advice, especially for the first few questions, attempt those that you know, and tag the rest for review. Example, if question 1 is a very lengthy complicated question, and you just know that it's a tricky one, don't attempt it right away. Tag it for review, and move on. Find the ones that you are familiar with, and attempt those. This will go a long way in boosting your confidence.

PMP exam tip 12:

Take breaks

Most people forget the element of endurance required to take an exam. 4 hours is a long period of time. Throw in the fact that one is supposed to be focused for every minute of those 4 hours, and you have a ready recipe for stress. The adult attention span averages between a few minutes to about 30-45 minutes. This means that if you attempt to continue with any task beyond that time, your brain will take twice as long to process information, leading to tiredness, fatigue and rework. It will be a disaster if one attempts to take the exam in one sitting, without breaks. There may be many reasons for doing this. Losing track of time, worrying about running out of time, and so on. But one must consciously take breaks. Yes, you will still be on the clock But it is worth it. A couple of minutes after every 40-50 questions to stretch your legs, clear your head will do you a world of good.

PMP exam tip 13:

Get used to the environment

Don't undermine the influence that the environment can have on the exam experience. Unfamiliar surroundings can affect your performance without you even realizing it. Be aware that there will be other people in the room, taking other exams, just like you. Know what tools are available to you, what support you can ask for. Even knowing where the restroom is will free your mind to focus on the important task ahead- the exam.

PMP exam tip 14:

Beware of your Achilles heel

We all have our areas where we are most vulnerable. For example, reading questions too quickly, spending too much time on each questions, not good with time management, calculations, anxiety, and so on. The first step to beating our own personal Achilles Heel, is to be aware of them. Then its all about catching and correcting them For example, if your problem is reading too quickly, every time you practice, force yourself to slow down. If you do this enough times, it will become the norm. Practice is the only way to conquer these vulnerabilities, so they don't raise their ugly head during the exam.

PMP exam tip 15:

Getting stuck with difficult questions

One cannot cruise through all 200 questions without getting stuck at some points. It is natural. Beware of the trap of spending too much time on these questions on the first attempt. The trick is to recognize these questions, and tag them for review at a later point. This way, you can complete all the ones that you do know, and then you are able to spend more time on the tricky ones at the end. Of course, be careful not to tag every question!

About iKompass

iKompass is a Project Management consulting and training company dedicated to enhancing skills for anyone involved in project activities. iKompass has the highest recorded independently audited pass rate for the PMP certification training in Singapore. With its main Asia office in Singapore, iKompass runs PMP certification classes in Malaysia, Philippines, Indonesia and Singapore. iKompass is a registered Global Education Provider for the Project Management Institute USA.

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