

Preparing for the ICCFP Certification Exam?

Consider forming a Study Group.



Why be in a Study Group?

People who are preparing for exams often find that a small study group helps them learn more efficiently. Learning with a group has several advantages over learning alone:

LEARNING ALONE

You use only one learning style: reading and note-taking.

You bring only your own background and point of view to the subject.

If you need an answer to a question, you have only your own network of experts to consult.

You rely on your own self-discipline to stay on task.

You worry because it's been a long time since you took an exam.

LEARNING WITH A STUDY GROUP

You use multiple learning styles that reinforce your learning: reading, note-taking, recalling, discussing, questioning.

You benefit from multiple professional experiences and points of view.

The group has a larger network of experts.

The expectations of the group reinforce your personal motivation.

The support of the group builds your confidence.

How do I start a Study Group?

Network with your chapter to get in touch with others who are planning to take the exam. Ask your chapter's Education chair if he or she has heard from others expressing interest in forming a study group. Even if you identify only one other person, you can enjoy the benefits of group study.

Don't put off starting. Last-minute cram sessions are just as ineffective for groups as they are solo. If you start a study group some months in advance of the exam, the group can help you structure the available time and use it more productively.

What should we do at our first meeting?

Start by setting a regular schedule of meetings and planning your curriculum. Look at the list of exam topics on pp. 8-9 of the Candidate Information Bulletin and choose the dates when you'll cover each topic. Choose different group members as the "experts" on different topics, and divide up very large topics. Save a meeting at the end of the available time for overall review.

Also, use the first meeting to set the ground rules for how you'll function as a group. For example, groups tend to stay more focused if one person serves as the facilitator or discussion leader. Many groups rotate this position, assigning it to the "expert" on the topic currently being covered. In addition, choose times and places for your meetings that will be free of distractions.

What should happen at a Study Group meeting?



Since the goal of the group is to prepare for the exam, ask the current “expert” on the topic to prepare a few questions in advance about the key points in the material. (For some suggestions on how to write these questions, see below.) The others in the group then take this mini-test and discuss their right or wrong answers. What’s important is not each person’s score, but how the subsequent discussion clarifies the topic for everyone. (Some groups prefer that everyone prepare practice questions, since the act of writing questions is a useful exercise in thinking about the subject matter.)

Now that everyone’s thinking is stimulated, review your study notes together and agree on the most important points in the material under review. Don’t focus solely on factual recall, but apply the topic to real situations. For example, it can be helpful to share examples of how the material connects to your job, but the facilitator should be constantly alert to keep the discussion from wandering into unrelated shoptalk. Some groups prefer to do this review segment before they take the mini-test. Use whatever order works for your group.

Save some time at the end of each meeting to set the assignments for the next meeting.

What guidelines should I follow when writing practice questions?

The practice questions should both facilitate your review of the subject matter and familiarize you with the mindset needed for the actual exam. Both of these purposes will be well-served if you follow the same guidelines that were used to develop the actual questions in the exam. Here are some important points to keep in mind:

- ✍ Try to create questions that require more than just recall of facts, definitions, and basic concepts. Think about actual job situations and try to develop questions that require someone to use knowledge to analyze a situation, base conclusions on a set of information, solve problems, or recommend the best course of action.
- ✍ Attempt to follow the actual format of the test questions, offering four possible answer choices: A, B, C, and D. If you use this format, try to ensure that the wrong answer choices, while definitely wrong, at least seem plausible. They should use real industry terms and be about the same length and level of detail as the correct answer.

I have some test anxiety. Can a Study Group help counteract this?

You’re already taking a step in the right direction: By participating in a study group, you are doing something positive about preparing for the exam. The best way to counteract test anxiety is to be well-prepared when you sit down for the exam – and a study group can be a powerful way to master the subject matter.

If your study group uses practice questions as a way of going over the subject matter, the experience of answering these questions will help you feel more relaxed when you take the test. You will be familiar with the format of the questions and the style of thinking required to answer them.

Study groups can also build the confidence that comes from working in a team. Other team members can remind you that you’re not competing against anyone else to pass the exam. Be careful, however, not to let your study partners alarm you with unfounded rumors about the exam. All the important facts about the exam are in the Candidate Information Bulletin; for any other questions, call Jim Bartsch at 609-452-8000, ext. 246.