

CMP –How do I find the right way to study—for me?

By Joanne Dennison, MSEd, CMP

This is the year.... the year you earn your CMP. You've thought about it, but it was never "a good time". It never will be until you decide ***this is the time***.

So you have applied, or maybe are still gathering the CE hours and will soon, and you are now wondering—how are you going to pay for everything? Look for money to help you with expenses—your employer, your professional association chapter, and scholarships such as the Timothy Lan scholarship (information on EIC website about this one).

Now you are thinking about how to study and prepare for the exam—are the three books still sitting in the shrink wrap? They are pretty intimidating sitting on the corner of your desk aren't they? Where and how do you start?

Determine the best way for you to study. All options are not equal and most importantly you need to find the ***right one for you***.

Before we talk about options here are some key things to take into consideration.

The exam is not based around memorization. This is important to know when you talk to people about their preparation. Not that long ago it was a lot of memorization so people who took it then had to prepare differently than you do now for an exam that is now based around concepts. It's studying a lot of the same material (although that has changed a lot even in the past four years), but in a very different way. As Carol Norfleet, CMP, DMCP says--"it's not the what, it's the why."

Every question on the exam you will take in the testing center will be documented back to one of the three books. If it is not in one of the three most current books (CIC/EIC Manual and Glossary, PCMA PMM), it is not on the exam. Every time a new edition of the books is published the questions in the question bank are retagged to show they are still in one of the three current books. These are your most important prep tools.

Preparation Options

First take into consideration how you learn best—do you like discussing the material with others? Do you like to have someone who teaches? Facilitates? Shows how it is applicable to your real life? Or do you prefer to sit and analyze everything by yourself?

Studying by Yourself

This is challenging for many. You need to be very self-motivated to stay on tasks to read the three referenced materials. Also, because the information needs to be based on concepts it is a different way of studying than most of us have done in our lives.

Groups or Classes

Scheduling: Think about how the logistical schedule of the ones you are considering will work for you. Some are done weekly for about 8-15 weeks, some are done one day on multiple weekends, some are done in a few (long) days making it an immersion. What is realistically going to work with your schedule? It may sound better to do 3 hours every week for a few months, but will your work and personal schedule really allow you to block out 15 Wednesday nights? Most people once they start missing them.... stop going.

Expense: Some are free. Some you pay. Look at the ROI not just how much.

Content: EIC does not endorse or have guidelines as to what material must be covered, or how. Each person who is teaching/facilitating/presenting has created their own material. Sometimes where chapters of professional associations are presenting the classes, the material has been put together by more than one person, and some is carried through year to year.

Logically, or at least to me, the options should include material that is based on the most up to date CMP-International Standards (as of May 2017) and the most recent referenced resources--the books listed for studying. Sadly, I have seen material being taught in classes that has not been on the exam in years.

Ask questions—what is being done to keep the information relevant, up-to-date and accurate?

Most groups fall into a few categories:

- Virtual/On Line: a few versions although not many. Some are completely on your own, some you are in a group.
- Convened and the group “teaches”: someone convenes a group, chapters/topics are assigned to each person who reads and comes back and “teaches” the topic.
- Facilitated: CMPs volunteer to be there and not teach directly, but answer questions and facilitate the conversation.
- Taught by a variety of people: Usually CMPs who are in certain parts of the industry and are familiar with the topic. Ex.: A Director of Food and Beverage teaching the Food and Beverage area. Although some teach year after year, because it is usually volunteer based, there is turnover to some extent every time it is taught.
- Taught by an instructor: A CMP who are teaching the entire class. Some teach it through an industry association and others teach it as part of their business. Although there are very few who fall into this category of single instructor, many of them have been teaching it for many (many) years.

To sum it up: Know what works for you and ask lots of questions before you commit time and money.

About things you will find online and the app store:

There are no courses online, or apps in the app store, sanctioned by EIC/CIC no matter what it says. Even if it has EIC or CIC CMP Prep in the name, it is not from, or approved by EIC. In the apps especially, most appear to have been not created by, or with anyone, from the industry. They are not familiar with the CMP, the content or how the questions are created. Many people find they spend hours of time, and sometimes money too, and walk in and find that the material that was covered, is not on the exam including the way the questions are written. Again, the best source of material for studying are the three books.

Yes, I know...you want to see questions.

There is no source for current questions on the exam. That would be cheating.

Let's talk about the sources that you will find questions that represent themselves as practice exams, tests, quizzes and a lot of other names. Until you have the chance to write official CMP exam questions, you will never see what an art---and science it is, and very difficult. You cannot just sit down and write a question that is framed correctly. There are fine details that make it a well. written question. Because of that many (many) of the questions you will see on the “practice exams/quizzes/tests” are not really written like the real questions on the real exam. One word can totally change a question or an answer as the testing experts can tell you. I have also seen many where the question, answer or both are not correct in content. Therefore when people use these they

frequently get a false sense of positive (or negative) and are totally shocked when they take the official exam.

Also people frequently study from these “practice quizzes”. Let me repeat. These questions are not and will not ever be, on the exam. Yes, the topics and subject material may be. Study the material and the concepts, not practice quizzes.

And also...

Read the books! No matter if you have 35 years in the industry you need to read the books--- completely. The exam and Certification is based on “if we could plan the perfect meeting or event how would we do it? What would it look like?” The books are written from the view of best practices of hundreds, if not thousands, of industry professionals, world wide, cumulatively over the years. Yes, a lot of it will not be the way you currently do it. The purpose is to learn the best way, even if you cannot always apply it all at work at the present time.

Taking the Exam:

It's hard, very hard. If it was easy everyone would have it—that's what makes it so special. You are never going to feel completely ready, so strategically prepare so you use what time you have in the best way. And do everything you can to keep calm—or as calm possible. In my experience more people don't pass by getting in their own way.

If you do not pass it is not the end of the world, your life or your career. I am fond of saying “If no one is sick, hurt, dying or dead keep it in perspective”. Your friends and family will still love you. Lick your wounds, dust yourself off, get help to figure out what to do differently and take it again, preferably in the next exam cycle so you can build on everything you have already learned. I know many people who have taken it more than once –in fact even three or four times. Never give up!

Looking forward to hearing from you when you pass and meeting you at a future CMP Conclave!

Joanne Dennison, MSEd, CMP is passionate about educating in the meetings and events profession. She has taught CMP preparation courses for 20 years in North America and even China and Thailand. Her free video Study and Test Tips are YouTube. Contact her for information about upcoming classes at joanne@joannedennison.com.

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