

Is There Benefit in Taking a License Prep Class?

"If you believe you can accomplish everything by "cramming" at the eleventh hour, by all means, don't lift a finger now. But you may think twice about beginning to build your ark once it has already started raining."

— Max Brooks, *The Zombie Survival Guide: Complete Protection from the Living Dead*

Preparation for licensure exams is not a venture to be entered into on a whim. Whether it be LSATS, MCATS, the Bar Exam, or the medical board exams. Mainly in part because test candidates are frequently unclear about what to expect on the exam. Exam readiness requires time, diligence, focus, and a fair amount of faith and trust to prepare for a largely unknown. Most candidates need time to identify, process, and study essential exam concepts. Few will willingly choose to commit to refresher courses, learn study strategies, read through the content, and develop methods to practice. All added on top of the giant pile of this thing called life, work, friends, and family, time to decompress...time is a valuable resource. Once time has been spent or lost, it cannot be recovered. The same goes for people in the trades who look forward to sitting for the licensure exam.

Over several Saturday mornings, apprentices in the sheet metal and pipe fitter trades have engaged with GCI teachers to become better educated on what to expect when taking their respective exams. These individuals elected to participate in an exam prep class, hoping to gather enough information to develop a plan that might lead to greater confidence, effective time management, and applying hints during the stressful exam session. Many come to hear that they can do it, prepare, study, and pass an exam of considerable weight and knowledge.

When it comes to being experts in their trade, that is not an issue with these potential licensed tradesmen. They have the years of hands-on, real-life experiences that have enabled them to become confident, professional apprentices. The area they lack is in their belief that they can take an exam and pass it. Maybe history has told them that they have experienced more frequent failure rates than success when it comes to studying and test-taking. Possibly they were never taught the skills that go into taking a test. Often, when a test is placed in front of them, they overthink the exam, read into questions too literally, or are unable to process what is being asked of them. The common factor that groups these students together is too often, they are scared of taking a test and the disappointment of coming up short.

"Guys, I am going to tell you straight up, if you do not prepare diligently, you will fail the exam. Not only will you have to retake the exam, but you will have wasted the money you spent to take this class. If you aren't going to put in the work, I recommend that you leave

now," says the sheet metal teacher leading a class. Eyes grow larger, heart rates increase, and more than a few thoughts of quitting before getting started are entertained. The good news is that no one left the room. They stayed to hear what would be said with the belief that taking an exam will bring different results.

From this point forward, exam prep classes have three main goals that can turn into avenues to success. The first goal of any exam preparation class is to foster confidence and decrease anxiety. Followed closely by presenting strategies to manage the amounts of content and develop methods that will work for each individual candidate as they prepare. The final goal is to provide the individualized attention and support the TLC the apprentices need.

Many who sign up for an exam prep class are immediately disappointed to learn that the short hours they have with the class teacher will not be dedicated to teaching the content for the exam. Content is taught and known, or not, during the years of classes. Now is not the time to start learning content. Now is the time to understand they will see results; even a little preparation can lead to increased scores, but they will have to work for it. Using Jedi mind tricks will not work out very well.

The name of the game with any exam preparation class is to guide students toward the notion of preparing for the unknown. Most exams test subject content as well as mental agility and adaptability. The questions force students to use their ability to think and comprehend quickly under the pressure of time - mental agility. Exam questions are rarely categorized by sub-topic, and questions are not worded precisely how the material is presented during studying. Successful test-takers can adapt to different wordings, situations, and randomness of questions. They can mentally adjust what they know to fit the question being asked. Rote memorization rarely benefits the test-taker. Instead, students focus on what a question is asking to apply their knowledge and experience.

Gould Construction Institute exam preparations are scheduled to complete their years of classes and develop around the most current exam requirements, protocols, and goals. As license boards review content and set new standards to meet the needs of the contemporary workplace environment, exam prep teachers continually reassess and revise their programs. This never-ending attention to relevancy and up-to-date information creates programs that provide answers to some of the unknowns. It offers the personal touch breaking down content into chunks that are more manageable to process and apply.

Prep students are exposed to various study strategies, hints to work smarter, not harder, and words of encouragement in a short, intense session. They leave with a better

understanding of what they will face, a greater sense of purpose, and the tools to create a plan for preparing for their test. Many leave feeling much more confident and less anxious and a belief that they can do it. They recognize that they know the content and the task has become capturing their knowledge and experience to promote their ability to read, comprehend, analyze, and answer questions on pieces of paper.

One sheet metal student commented after his session, "I feel so much better about taking the test. I appreciated the time dedicated to breaking questions down to their essential parts and learning how to face questions. I know what I need to do now, and it is up to me to do it."

"Success isn't owned, it's leased. And everyday, the rent is due." - J. J. Watt

> Jeff Cournoyer
Education Coordinator
Gould Construction Institute