



STUDYING FOR GROWNUPS

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Are you studying for certification exams, or perhaps licensing exams? Are you brushing up on the new Title 24, or learning to represent a new product? Chances are, it's been a while since you needed to study. Here are some fresh study techniques that might keep you motivated and help you lay a rock-solid base of knowledge for your next endeavor.

READING WITH A PURPOSE

Reading the test material can, in itself, be a challenge in our busy lives. Use your study guide to make a calendar of reading, with plenty of time for review in the last week or two before your test. Consider changing the order; if you need encouragement to get started, study something you already know something about, but if you want to get the hard part done quickly, "swallow the frog" and start with the module you know the least about. Here are some active reading techniques to get you started.

Taking Notes: By taking notes, you boil the information down into your own words, as concisely as you can. Try writing an outline of the text you're studying, or preparing flashcards from the text. Besides being effective tools for studying and memorizing later, the act of creating them is itself effective.

Highlighting and Scribbling: Try printing expendable copies of the source material, such as chapters of the PRM from the included CD-ROM, so that you can highlight, underline and diagram right on the pages. I know people who color-code the information, and I like to write outlines of it right into the margins.

Read To the Questions: Use a study guide to form questions, and then read to find the answers to those questions. For instance, if there's a term in the study guide you don't recognize, ask

yourself, "What does that term mean, and what's important about it?" Read the source material with the specific intent to find out the answers. You may read the material several times this way, but with a different question in mind each time.

MEMORIZING

Memorization is particularly important for the CSI certification exams. You will be tested on putting events in the proper order, knowing what items belong together, and understanding when something is out of sequence or inappropriate. If you can reproduce whole diagrams or lists from memory, you can confidently meet those challenges on Exam Day. Here are some ideas for memorizing. Try combining them; I used all three to memorize SectionFormat.

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San Francisco Chapter Construction Specifications Institute

Vol. XXXXII No.2 February 2006 Newsletter of the San Francisco Chapter, Construction Specifications Institute

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Memorizing By Hand: Study a list or a diagram, and then cover it up. Try to reproduce it from memory. Then correct it from the source, being sure to distinguish what you missed from what you remembered. Do this several times, until you can reproduce the whole source without looking.

Chanting: Some of us learn well by singing, rhyming, or rhythmic speech. You can use this to your advantage by making up short chants, songs or cheers for lists you need to memorize. You will sound ridiculous if anyone catches you reciting it, but the SectionFormat Cheer worked for me and might work for you. Sum Ref Def! Sys Sub Qual! Del-sto, pro-co, seq sched war! (If this makes no sense to you, look it up. If you want a copy, email me.)

Use Your Imagination: Some of what you're memorizing, especially in design and construction, has a natural sequence. Imagine performing each step on a specific project, the simpler and more entertaining the better. For instance, my project for memorizing Part 3 of SectionFormat was the yearly installation of the giant cowboy at the Texas State Fair, complete with giant dungarees and a fresh coat of face paint. Be sure that there are enough elements in your scenario to jog your memory for all the steps in the sequence.

PEOPLE WHO NEED PEOPLE

While certification or licensure is ultimately an individual achievement, going it alone can be daunting. Here are some ideas for banding together for success.

Study Buddy: Find someone you can study with regularly, in small groups or just a pair. Plan to teach each other portions of the subject matter. The act of teaching someone else cements knowledge for the teacher, and auditory learners will also benefit from hearing the information spoken aloud. Be sure to use your first meeting to agree on a schedule and some techniques, and don't be afraid to take stock after a few weeks and make adjustments.

Mentor: Find someone who practices in the field you're entering, or who has already passed the test you're studying for, and set up regular meetings in person or by phone. Use the first meeting to agree on a schedule of topics. Study each topic before you meet, and ask your mentor to help you understand the parts you weren't clear on, or to prioritize the most important information. This person's commitment to your success should motivate you to be ready for each session, and the sessions themselves will help cement the knowledge.

Virtual Study Buddy: Even if you can't study together in person, a partner can work wonders. My virtual study buddy and I live some 50 miles apart and were studying for different tests, but we traded study ideas and progress reports a couple of times a week by phone or email. She knew my daily study routine, and I knew hers, and it helped us keep our commitments to ourselves, just knowing we had company.

I hope you are inspired to try some of these ideas, or to make up some of your own. I wish you success!



Mike Rice and Joe Winandy