

PCIAM Candidates supported by CTP must be doing something right. They are more likely to pass than the national average, achieve twice as many merits or distinctions and include both the oldest person ever to gain the PCIAM certificate (at 70) and the candidate with the highest ever score

Philippa Grocott, Retail Director at CTP and Consultant Ian Richardson, a qualifications specialist, share with you their top 10 tips for passing PCIAM

1. **Make a study plan** – before you even pick up your books, work out when you will do your studying. It is a sad fact that if you fail to plan you will plan to fail. The Institute’s recommended study time for this exam is 200 hours and therefore this is a large commitment. Break the task down into manageable chunks, work out how many weeks remain before the exam and how you will achieve the required number of hours per week. Little and often is far more productive than seven hour stints at the weekend with nothing in between.
2. **Engage with your key stakeholders** – unless you are fortunate enough to have 200 free hours at your disposal, you are likely to need support and understanding from your colleagues, family and friends in order to achieve your objective of passing PCIAM. Let them know what you are doing, how important this is to you and how they can help you.
3. **Don’t try and do it all alone.** The syllabus and suggested reading list is extensive but don’t be overawed, help is at hand. In addition to help provided by the Institute, there are a small number of accredited training providers that can offer a stimulating mix of proven training solutions. Make sure your training consultant is qualified at the level they are training or higher.
4. **Include elements of active learning in your study plan.** Have you ever read a chapter of a textbook and then struggled to recall what it said? It could be that, like the majority of candidates, your brain needs stimulating in a different way to recall complex technical information in an exam environment. Try some of these techniques:
 - Write up your own notes using different coloured pens after each learning segment
 - Undertake multiple choice questions in order to test your understanding
 - ‘Pegging’ knowledge - think of how the information studied applies to one of your actual clients or a fictitious one if necessary
 - Use mind maps to show pictorially the subject matter and the key learning points .In the exam, many candidates find it far easier to recall the mind map they have previously drawn than the text book they have read over and over again.
5. **Read widely** – this is a very practical exam and you will be required to demonstrate up to date knowledge and the ability to apply that knowledge appropriately. The Institute publish a recommended reading list which includes periodicals as well as textbooks.
6. **Use the previous examination papers** on the Institute website as practice papers in the run up to the exam.

7. **Time management is the key to this exam**- spend the first five minutes reading the questions thoroughly and decide on your strategy for tackling the paper. You should give yourself 68 minutes for section A. 34 minutes for section B and 68 minutes for section C. We would normally recommend you do section A first, then section C and finally section B. Leave yourself 5 minutes at the end to review your answers and find some extra marks where you can.
8. **Read the question thoroughly and answer the question asked**, not the one you wanted to be asked! Consider carefully what the examiner is looking for – when asked to ‘critically assess’ a statement you will be expected to put forward both sides of the argument. Giving only one perspective will limit your maximum mark to 50% of the total marks available.
9. **Think about the structure of your answer and keep to the point**. Think about the marking key for the question and keep the scoreboard ticking over rapidly. If there are 10 marks available for a question, you can expect this to mean that the examiner is looking for at least 10 separate points . . . not the same one reorganised in 10 different ways!
10. **Reward yourself regularly** for keeping to your study plan and get some relaxation in wherever possible – your brain needs some rest as well.

Ian Richardson, Client Relationship Manager, CTP is our expert on qualifications that meet the new Level 4 or above standards required by the RDR.

Article published by Citywire August 2010