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Your PMP Class is Over … What's the Best Way to Study Down the Home Stretch?
Advisory Article
by Jeff Furman

"Your PMP Class Is Over … What's The Best Way To Study Down The Home Stretch?"
(My Top 11 <u>FINAL</u> Study Tips)

by Jeff Furman, PMP®

You've completed your PMP Prep Class, and you have some time before your exam. What's the best way to do your final studying? (So much material… where to begin?)

After teaching more than 150 PMP Prep classes, plus many other project management courses for NYU SPS, the US Army, and I.T. training companies in New York and California… here are my best tips that have helped many of my students cross the finish-line for their PMP®.

11) Skim for the <u>*Key Test Tips*</u> in Your Book –

Most PMP books highlight their best tips in *call-out boxes* or *side-bars,* or in summaries at the end of each chapter. After you've gone through your main book, a good way to review is to go back and re-read **ALL** these highlighted tips. And when you come to one you're not 100% sure about, drill-down in the book and study the corresponding sections.

10) The *'How To Pass The Test'* Chapter –

Besides the chapters on all the Knowledge Areas & processes, most PMP books offer a good chapter devoted exclusively to the test. In my book's *'How To Become PMP Certified'* chapter, I give test tips, mnemonics, a guide to the exam logistics, plus several unique activities and exercises which my students use in my PMP Prep classes. Whichever book you're studying with, devote quality-time to its '*How To Pass'* chapter!

9) 'The Brain Dump' – <u>NOT Just The Formulas</u>!

Many test-takers take advantage of the *'brain-dump'* – using your scrap paper and 15 minutes before the test starts to jot down the formulas you studied in class (making them 'open-book'). But beyond just the formulas, it's recommended to also write down any keywords, mnemonics, or even quick diagrams that gave you trouble in your class. Having all this in front of you on the test keeps you from stopping to dig things out of your memory as you go through the questions, saving you time. And doing the memory dump also makes you feel confident and well-prepared for your test.

8) Study The Heck Out Of Every Question You Got Wrong!

Now that the class is over, it's good to re-take every practice question you had trouble with in class, making sure you review the *'rationale'* for the best answer. The

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goal is <u>NOT</u> to try to memorize answers (the real questions will be different anyway). It's to be sure you understand the key concepts, angles, and *'gotchas'* behind any question that tripped you up.

7) Do A LOT of Practice Questions – And From Different Sources

The PMP test is always changing, with new questions being added into the test pool all the time by PMI. So after your class, it's helpful to branch out and try questions from various question banks. This will give you more variety of content, helping you keep up with the moving target. I recommend the list compiled by PMP expert Cornelius Fichtner, which you can find at this link: *My Top Recommended Websites for Free PMP Exam Sample Questions for Your PMP Exam Prep*.

6) Practice Till You're Hitting 85%

Some of the PMP resources explicitly tell you that it's recommended to keep doing practice questions until you're averaging at least in the 85% range. The passing score on the PMP exam is lower than that. But ***it's magical thinking to assume you'll do better on the real test*** than on practice quizzes in the comfort of your home. So you want to boost your score on the practice questions to a higher level than you're likely to get under real test conditions. It's like practicing your baseball swing with a 'donut weight' on it – when game-time comes, and all kinds of pitches come at you, it's easier to swing without the donut.

5) Use a Second Book –

Many students hit a burnout point slogging through the same book over and over. Once you've done a lot of studying with your primary book, I recommend switching-off to a second textbook. The fresh perspective will be mentally-stimulating, making your final study-time more productive. And it will offer different examples, which will sometimes deliver that *'a-ha moment'* on areas you might not have been clear about.

4) Free Videos & Blogs – Supplement Your 'Book-Learnin!'

There are many free videos and blogposts you can find on the Internet, about PM topics, as well as about the certification exams. Two experts I recommend highly are Cornelius Fichtner and Elizabeth Harrin. These well-known PMs have products to sell, but they also offer a lot of excellent free content. It's also very useful to search the Web for terms that are giving you trouble. Wikipedia and YouTube both have a lot of good material on PM -- you'll find a wealth of short, bite-size lessons. And a very robust online source of free info is http://www.projectmanagement.com/ (formerly Gantthead.com, and now affiliated with PMI).

3) ITTOs –

I agree with the PMP experts who recommend <u>NOT</u> trying to memorize ALL the Inputs, Tools/Techniques & Outputs. However, I would say that *some studying of the*

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ITTOs is key for the test. For some of the processes, once you know the outputs, you basically know the process. And for others, especially in the Quality Management and Risk Management areas, it's largely the tools & techniques that are key to understanding each process. A way that has helped a lot of my students with the ITTOs is to use a 'fill-in-the-blanks' grid, for ITTOs by process. I provide a sample grid for the ITTOs in my book.

2) Ethics and Professional Conduct –

Part of what makes the test tough is that, although there is no longer a section on Ethics, some questions will have an ethical angle. For example, a question might ask: *"What's the best thing a PM should do here?"* And *'best'* can mean the action most likely to lead to <u>long-term success</u> for your company and customer (not just a 'quick win'). So it's recommended to take time to study the free resource PMI provides called: <u>The Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct</u>®.   And for more help, in my book, I provide a '1-Pager' summary of the PMI Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct, which I created as a study aid, with PMI's approval / authorization.

1) Integration Management – First But Last!

The Integration Management Knowledge Area can be tough on the test, because:

a. It's the only Knowledge Area with processes spanning all 5 Process Groups, from Initiating to Closing. Also,

b. Several of the Integration processes are *'high-level,'* meaning they are associated with *'drill-down processes'* in the other nine Knowledge Areas. But those are covered much later in the class. So at first, you're studying the high-level, but with no exposure to the detail-level.

So a tip is that ***toward the end of your studying, it's worth going back and doing an in-depth review of Integration Management***. You'll find that the more you review Integration, the more it will reinforce your understanding of the other nine Knowledge Areas and their processes.

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Jeff Furman, PMP® is a highly experienced I.T. Project Manager and Project Management Instructor.

Jeff currently teaches six project management courses for NYU's School of Professional Studies, and also teaches *PMP* Prep for the U.S. Army, on bases around the United States.

He has led many software projects for Fortune 100 firms in the NYC area. And for many years he managed a mission-critical I.T. change management system, which handled application changes 24 x 7 for a large brokerage in Manhattan.

The 2nd Edition of his book, *"The Project Management Answer Book"* was just published by Management Concepts Press in January, 2015

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