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Frequently Asked Questions
about the CPA Exam



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Frequently Asked Questions about the CPA Exam

Applying, Scheduling, and Sitting for the CPA Exam

How do I apply for the CPA Exam?

Detailed information on how to apply, including state-by-state eligibility requirements and downloadable application forms can be found at becker.com/state.

1. To begin, you apply and pay a fee to either the appropriate state, jurisdiction board of accountancy or National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA), which will determine your eligibility to sit for the exam.
2. Once you have been deemed eligible, you will receive a notice to schedule (NTS), which is required before you can schedule an exam date.
3. You then have a six-month window (except in specified states) during which you must schedule your first exam (prometric.com/cpa or 1-800-580-9648). Exceptions to the six-month window include: Texas (90 days); California, Hawaii, Louisiana, and Utah (9 months); and North and South Dakota, and Virginia (12 months).

How long does the application process take?

For first-time applicants, the application process varies by state, and may take up to six weeks. Re-examination candidates can typically expect a shorter application period. Accurate completion of applications and timely submission of all required information can help avoid delays.

When should I start the application process?

As soon as possible once you've decided to take the exam, and at least four months before the date on which you actually want to take it. Completing the exam process involves very strict deadlines and limited timeframes, including receiving your notice to schedule, the window for scheduling, and the 18 months you have to successfully complete all four parts of the exam.

The American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) and Prometric recommend locking in a specific exam date at least 45 days

in advance. For example, if you want to sit for an exam on May 15, you should contact Prometric by April 1 to make sure your chosen date is available. To ensure receipt by April 1, you should begin the application process in early to mid-January.

You will not be permitted to schedule your exam fewer than five days in advance of its date. For any specific date and testing site, candidate demand and site capacity may affect availability.

How, when, and where is the exam administered?

The CPA Exam is offered only in a computer-based format at authorized Prometric test centers located throughout the United States and its jurisdictions, Japan, Brazil, Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon, and the United Arab Emirates. It is administered year-round, five or six days each week, except during the third month of each quarter.

Prometric offers a "Test Drive" prior to the exam date to familiarize yourself with the look and feel of the exam environment. For more information or to schedule, visit prometric.com/testdrive.

Must I meet the educational requirements before I take the exam?

Some jurisdictions allow candidates to sit for the exam before completing all educational requirements provided the requirements are met within a certain time period. Each jurisdiction determines the rules under which its candidates may sit. For more information about each jurisdiction's educational requirements, refer to becker.com/state.

May I physically sit for the exam outside of my state or jurisdiction?

You may sit for the exam at any Prometric location regardless of your jurisdiction of application. However, you can only be registered with one state at a time. You must meet the licensing state's requirements, regardless of the physical location in which you choose to sit for the exam and verify all pertinent information with the state board of accountancy to which you are applying.

How much does taking the exam cost?

The cost for the exam will vary for each jurisdiction. Estimated costs for first-time candidates applying to take all four sections typically range between \$850 and \$1050 (becker.com/state).

How many sections may I take at a time?

You may sit for one or more exam sections during a given testing window, but you may not take the same section more than once in a given testing window. A failed section may be retaken in the next testing window, provided a new NTS has been secured. Candidates can sit for the exam in the first two months of every calendar quarter.

Q1	Jan-Mar 10 Open	Mar 11-31 Closed
Q2	Apr-May Open	Jun Closed
Q3	Jul-Sept 10 Open	Sep 11-31 Closed
Q4	Oct-Dec 10 Open	Dec 11-31 Closed

During the anticipated launch window of the next version of the exam (April-June 2017), the 10-day extension will be suspended. Suspending the extension for the launch window will be necessary to allow time for the AICPA to properly calibrate the exam for scoring. The 10-day extension will be reinstated for Q3 and Q4 of 2017.

What if I must change my scheduled exam date?

You may reschedule appointments with Prometric up to 30 days in advance of the scheduled date at no additional charge, or within 6 to 29 days for a fee of \$35. Otherwise, you must pay the full Prometric fee for the section you wish to reschedule. If you cancel an appointment without rescheduling or fail to show at the scheduled time, you will not receive refunds of any fees.

Key CPA Exam resources

AICPA (cpa-exam.org)

The American Institute of Certified Public Accountants is responsible for developing and scoring the CPA Exam.

NASBA (NASBA.org)

The National Association of State Boards of Accountancy maintains the National Candidate Database, provides candidates with NTS, and keeps records of candidates who have passed the exam.

Prometric (prometric.com/cpa)

Prometric is the organization in charge of the test centers where the CPA Exam is given and is responsible for scheduling exam appointments, administering the exam, and sending the results to the AICPA for scoring.

State Boards

Regulate the accountancy profession in the U.S. and serve as the licensing body for CPAs.



CPA Exam Sections



Financial Accounting and Reporting

Encompasses the largest volume of information on the exam, covering financial accounting and reporting for commercial entities under U.S. GAAP, governmental accounting, not-for-profit accounting, and the differences between IFRS and U.S. GAAP, as well as the skills needed to apply that knowledge.



Auditing and Attestation

Encompasses the entire audit process, other services including compilations, reviews and attestation engagements, and the AICPA Code of Professional Conduct, as well as the skills needed to apply that knowledge.



Regulation

Examines federal taxation, including the taxation of property transactions, individuals and entities, ethics, professional and legal responsibilities, and business law topics, as well as the skills needed to apply that knowledge.



Business Environment and Concepts

Covers knowledge of general business environment and business concepts that candidates should know to understand the underlying business reasons for—and accounting implications of—business transactions including operations management, economics, financial management, and information technology.

CPA Exam Structure and Content

The CPA Exam focuses on the skills necessary for newly licensed CPAs. Per the AICPA, newly licensed CPAs must possess the following:

Analysis and application skills, including critical thinking, problem solving and analytical ability

Effective communication skills

A strong understanding of the business environment and processes

Professional skepticism

A thorough understanding of professional and ethical responsibilities

Skill levels tested on the CPA Exam

Evaluation

Examination or assessment of problems and the use of judgment to form conclusions. Examples of how this skill may be evaluated: Justify, Critique, Conclude, Judge, Detect, Verify, Recommend, Assess

Analysis

The examination and study of relationships between different areas to identify causes and find evidence to support inferences. Examples of how this skill may be evaluated: Reconcile, Deconstruct, Validate, Deduce, Imply, Integrate, Distinguish, Organize

Application

The use or demonstration of knowledge, concepts, or techniques. Examples of how this skill may be evaluated: Calculate, Implement, Test, Represent, Prepare, Use, Execute, Carry Out

Remembering and Understanding

The comprehension of the significance of an area using knowledge gained. Examples of how this skill may be evaluated: Identify, Classify, Recall, Explain, Categorize, Clarify, Compare, Define

Exam time allotment

You can use as much of the time allotted to complete each part as you wish. The testing computer screen displays a countdown of the remaining time.

A standardized, 15-minute break will be offered after the first Task Based Simulation testlet, which is approximately the exam mid-point, two hours. In addition, candidates may choose to take an optional break between any two testlets but it will count against the total testing time as the exam clock will continue to run.

Auditing and Attestation	4.0 hrs
Financial Accounting and Reporting	4.0 hrs
Regulation	4.0 hrs
Business Environment and Concepts	4.0 hrs
Total Exam Time	16 hrs



What types of questions are found in each of the sections?

Each section of the CPA Exam will have a total of 5 testlets, or groups of test questions: 2 multiple-choice question (MCQ) testlets and 3 task-based simulation (TBS) testlets. In BEC, the first 2 TBS testlets will include task-based simulations while the third TBS testlet will include 3 written communications (WC).

As a candidate completes each testlet and submits it for grading, the next testlet will appear. The candidate will not be able to return to a previous testlet or look ahead at a subsequent testlet or simulation until the current one is submitted for grading. However, within each testlet, a candidate will have the ability to “mark” questions to go back to for further review before submission.

	Question Type	MCQ		TBS		WC	
		Question Count	Scoring Weight	Question Count	Scoring Weight	Question Count	Scoring Weight
Exam Section	AUD	72	50%	9	50%	-	-
	FAR	66	50%	9	50%	-	-
	REG	76	50%	9	50%	-	-
	BEC	62	50%	5	35%	3	15%

Does the exam include essays?

The Business Environment and Concepts section includes 3 written communication tasks which require you to write a memorandum or letter on a specific topic.

Only writing samples that are generally responsive to the topic will be graded. If the response is off-topic or offers advice that is clearly illegal, you will not receive any credit for the response. Written answers are scored on organization, development, and expression. For more information, refer to cpa-exam.org.

How are written communication questions scored?

Most responses are scored by a computer grading program, while others are scored using a network of readers (all CPAs). If your score is close to the passing score, your written responses will be automatically re-graded by human graders.

What are task-based simulations?

Task-based simulations are condensed case studies designed to complement the multiple-choice questions. The simulations test application, analysis and evaluation skills by requiring candidates to complete tasks that are likely to be performed by newly licensed CPAs.

Candidates can encounter two types of problems — one that requires candidates to select the correct option from a drop down menu or one that requires candidates to type the answer into a cell.

Typically, the simulations include the ability to use a mouse, check boxes, basic spreadsheet skills (not specific to types of software), form completion, fill in the blanks, use of tables, and research (using professional literature).

TBSs can cover any of the topics that are testable on the CPA Exam. For example, FAR can include government and not-for-profit accounting topics, REG generally covers tax-related topics including tax forms; and AUD can cover audits, reviews, compilations, attestation engagements and other topics.

New types of task-based simulation

Document Review Simulation (DRS) TBS

Each DRS will feature a primary document and related source materials. Candidates are required to select appropriate edits to highlighted words, phrases or paragraphs in the document based on the source documents.

Enhanced TBS

Includes an increased amount of background information, such as sourced documents and other data. Candidates are required to determine whether or not the information is relevant to the question, with some of the information not being needed to solve the problem.

Integrative TBS

Includes content from other exam sections. These TBSs will be based on the content knowledge and skills of the particular exam section, but will also draw on a candidate's basic knowledge — the level covered in typical college coursework — of general accounting, auditing, tax and business concepts.

Do all questions in a testlet have the same numerical value?

No. The difficulty levels of the test questions are determined through statistical analysis of candidate responses. At the question level, difficulty is not quantified as a category (e.g. moderate or difficult), but as a numeric value along a scale. Testlets are classified as either medium or difficult based on the average difficulty of the questions within that testlet.

Do all candidates in a testing window receive the same exam?

The CPA Exam is a computerized multistage adaptive test. This means that as candidates complete each testlet, their performance is evaluated and the difficulty of the subsequent testlet is adjusted. All candidates start with a medium (difficulty) testlet, those that perform well will get a more difficult second testlet while those that do not will receive a second medium difficulty testlet. Similarly, the third testlet can be a medium or a difficult based on your performance on the first two testlets.

Task-based simulations are not chosen based on your performance on the multiple-choice questions; they are pre-assigned. The scoring procedures take the difficulty of all questions into account so that candidates are scored fairly regardless of the difficulty of the testlets they take.

What are the rules about testing new accounting and auditing pronouncements?

An accounting or auditing pronouncement can be included in the exam in the testing window that begins the later of six months after its effective date, or six months after its issuance date. Changes in federal taxation, Internal Revenue Code and tax regulations may be included in the testing window beginning six months after the change's effective date or enactment date, whichever is later.

For other materials covered in the Regulation and Business Environment and Concepts sections: federal laws can be included in the window beginning six months after their effective date, and uniform acts in the window beginning one year after their adoption by a simple majority of the jurisdictions.



Auditing and Attestation (AUD)

Exam Structure

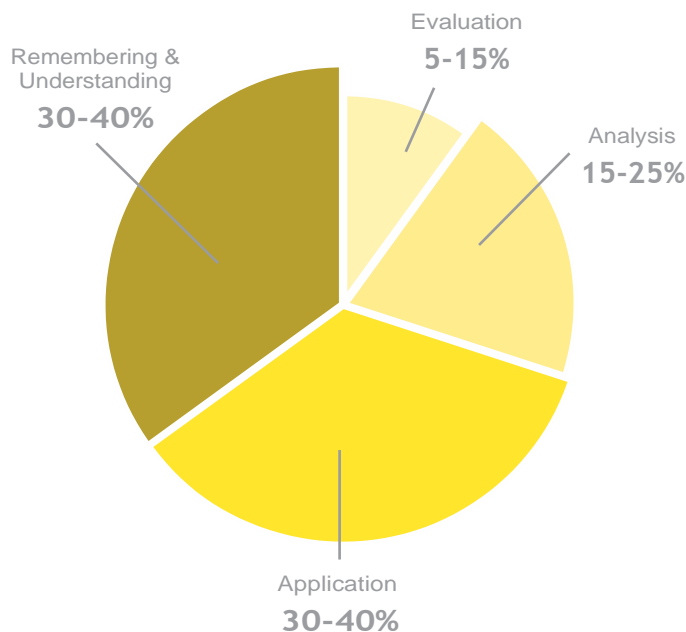
Contains 72 multiple-choice questions and nine task-based simulations.

50% of your overall score is on MCQs and 50% is on TBSs.

No written communication tasks will be included.

Exam Content		Skill Level			
Content Covered	Scoring Weight	Remembering & Understanding	Application	Analysis	Evaluation
I Ethics, Professional Responsibilities, and General Principles	15-25%				
II Assessing Risk and Developing a Planned Response	20-30%				
III Performing Further Procedures and Obtaining Evidence	30-40%				
IV Forming Conclusions and Reporting	15-25%				

Skill Allocation Weight



Question Breakdown By Testlet

Skill Level	Question Type
Testlet 1	36 MCQ
Testlet 2	36 MCQ
Testlet 3	2 TBS
Testlet 4	4 TBS
Testlet 5	3 TBS



Financial Accounting and Reporting (FAR)

Exam Structure

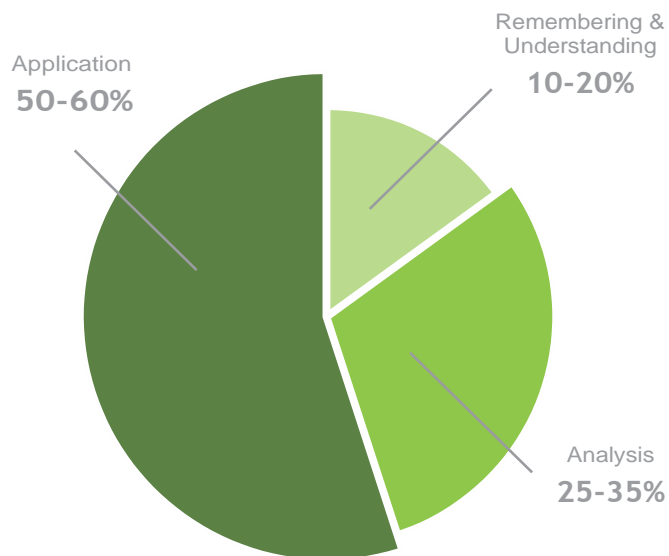
Contains 66 multiple-choice questions and nine task-based simulations.

50% of your overall score is on MCQs and 50% is on TBSs.

No written communication tasks will be included.

Exam Content		Skill Level			
Content Covered	Scoring Weight	Remembering & Understanding	Application	Analysis	Evaluation
I Conceptual Framework and Financial Reporting	25-35%				
II Select Financial Statement Accounts	30-40%				
III Select Transactions	20-30%				
IV State and Local Governments	5-15%				

Skill Allocation Weight



Question Breakdown by Testlet

Skill Level	Question Type
Testlet 1	33 MCQ
Testlet 2	33 MCQ
Testlet 3	2 TBS
Testlet 4	4 TBS
Testlet 5	3 TBS



Regulation (REG)

Exam Structure

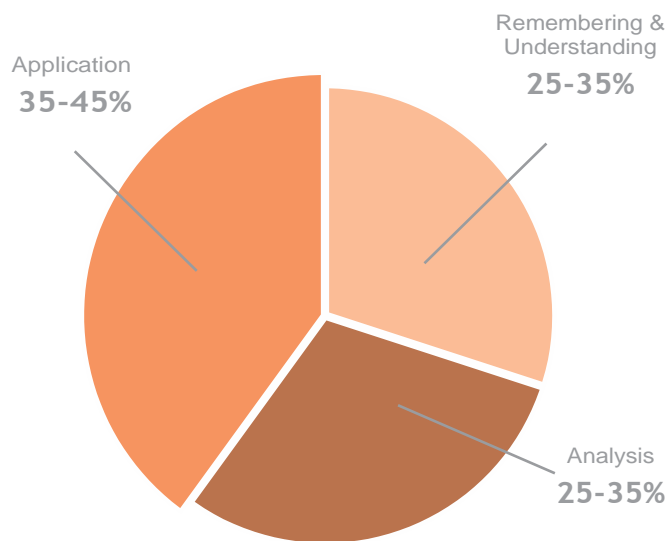
Contains 76 multiple-choice questions and nine task-based simulations.

50% of your overall score is on MCQs and 50% is on TBSs.

No written communication tasks will be included.

Exam Content		Skill Level			
Content Covered	Scoring Weight	Remembering & Understanding	Application	Analysis	Evaluation
I Ethics, Professional Responsibilities, and Federal Tax Procedures	10-20%				
II Business Law	10-20%				
III Federal Taxation of Property Transactions	12-22%				
IV Federal Taxation of Individuals	15-25%				
V Federal Taxation of Entities	28-38%				

Skill Allocation Weight



Question Breakdown by Testlet

Skill Level	Question Type
Testlet 1	38 MCQ
Testlet 2	38 MCQ
Testlet 3	2 TBS
Testlet 4	4 TBS
Testlet 5	3 TBS



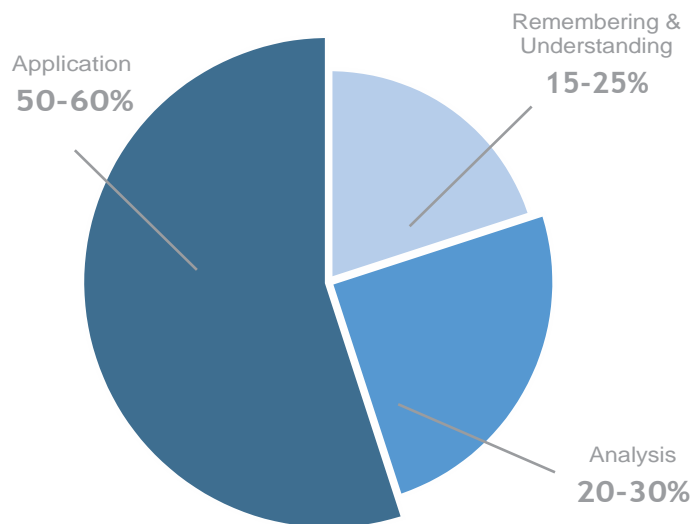
Business Environment and Concepts (BEC)

Exam Structure

Contains 62 multiple-choice questions, five task-based simulations, and three written communications.	50% of your overall score is on MCQs, 35% is on TBSs, and 15% is on WC.	Written communications are only found on the BEC Exam, requiring candidates to read a situation and then write an appropriate “constructed response” relating to it.
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Exam Content			Skill Level			
	Content Covered	Scoring Weight	Remembering & Understanding	Application	Analysis	Evaluation
I	Corporate Governance	17-27%				
II	Economic Concepts and Analysis	17-27%				
III	Financial Management	11-21%				
IV	Information Technology	15-25%				
V	Operations Management	15-25%				

Skill Allocation Weight



Question Breakdown By Testlet

Skill Level	Question Type
Testlet 1	31 MCQ
Testlet 2	31 MCQ
Testlet 3	2 TBS
Testlet 4	3 TBS
Testlet 5	3 WC

Taking the CPA Exam

What should I do on exam day?

Arrive at the exam site at least 30 minutes prior to the appointment time, or risk denial of permission to sit. If you are denied permission, you will not be eligible for a refund of fees paid. **Bring your NTS form.** The name on the NTS must match the identification you present (verify this as soon as you receive the NTS). Without your NTS, you will not be admitted into the test center, and you will forfeit all examination fees for that exam section.

How much time should I allocate for each testlet?

The exam does not suggest a time period for testlets. The testing computer screen countdown clock shows the overall time remaining for each section (for example, 4.0 hours for Auditing and Attestation). You can allocate and track your time as you see fit. It has been suggested, however, that on average a task-based simulation would take about 15 to 30 minutes depending on the section, topic, and analysis required. For MCQs, the recommendation is that you allow about 1 minute to 2 minutes per question.

May I use a calculator during the exam?

Hand-held calculators are not allowed in the testing room. The testing software includes a computer calculator that has basic functionalities for your use. To familiarize candidates with this feature as well as the format and functionality of the examination, a tutorial and sample tests are provided by the AICPA at cpa-exam.org.

What are “pretest” questions?

Pretest questions are used to develop future examinations; they are NOT used in computing examination scores. Each testlet, whether composed of multiple-choice, task-based simulations or written communications, may include pretest questions. You will not know which are pretest questions and which are actual test questions for which you'll be graded. Don't be discouraged if you see something that is unfamiliar to you. The number of pretest questions is expected to stay the same with the 2017 Exam Changes: 10-15 MCQs and 1 TBS/Written Communication per section.



How is the computer-based exam graded?

What is a passing score?

Grades on the exam range from 0 to 99 with a scaled 75 as the passing score. States can issue scores in any form they choose. Some, New York for example, have issued only pass/fail results. Exam questions, other than the written communication tasks, are formatted to allow responses to be scored electronically. A combination of human graders and electronic scoring will be used to score written communication responses.

When and how will I be notified of my scores?

Scores will be released after the first month of testing in a window, with subsequent score releases every two weeks for the remainder of the window. The AICPA expects a 10-week delay in the release of scores following the close of the initial testing window for the new exam (second quarter of 2017). For the third and fourth quarters of 2017, scores will be released approximately 10 days after the close of the testing window. In 2018, the AICPA expects to move back to the original timeline. Some candidates who take the BEC section might receive their scores approximately one week following the target release date.

Does the AICPA offer additional guidance for candidates preparing for the exam?

The AICPA currently offers a tutorial on its website that allows candidates to become familiar with the functionalities of the computer-based exam. The AICPA and NASBA have indicated that candidates should be familiar with the functionality before going to the test center. This tutorial will not be available at the Prometric sites. The AICPA website offers a sample test with a few multiple-choice questions and a simulation for each section.

Will there be any changes to exam administration—dark months, 18-month rolling window, etc., still the same?

Testing windows will be extended by 10 days into the third month of each quarter to provide additional testing time. This 10-day extension will continue through the end of 2017, with the exception of the second quarter of 2017 when the new CPA Exam launches. The AICPA is considering making the following changes to exam administration: extending the 18-month rolling window to 24 months; allowing students to retest for a failed section of the exam in the same testing window. The AICPA would like to make these changes but have not set a timeline for the changes, because of the complexity of implementation and the required approval process.

What to bring on exam day

NTS Form

Two Forms of ID

Primary ID (must include photo and signature): Unexpired driver's license, state ID, passport, or military card.

Secondary ID (must include a signature):

Any of the abovementioned items or a signed credit, ATM, or debit card.

Limited Personal Items

All personal items must be placed in a locker prior to entering the test room.

Prohibited items

Mobile phones

Personal digital assistants

Papers and books

See Candidate Bulletin (cpa-exam.org) for a complete list of prohibited items.

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