

New PMP® Exam Scoring, Eligibility Criteria, and Credentialing Process Announced by PMI®

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New PMP Exam Effective September 30, 2005

On March 25, 2005, PMI announced the timing details for the transition to the updated Project Management Professional (PMP®) examination (referred to as the “2005 Examination”) The new exam will deploy globally at 14.00 GMT on Friday, 30 September 2005. Five days prior, a “blackout” period (beginning on Sunday, 25 September 2005) will commence during which the PMP credential examination will be unavailable.

Candidates who do not receive a passing score on the current (2004) Examination, 68.5% of the questions correct, will be permitted to re-take the 2004 examination for a period of one year from the date of their last attempt. Those taking rewrites will be the only candidates allowed to write the 2004 exam after September 24, 2005.

It was further announced on May 17, 2005, that there will be a substantially higher passing score on the new exam: 81.7% of the questions correct. By July 18, 2005, the new passing score was amended down to 81.1 % of the questions correct. I have made an analysis, using historical data on exam performance, which suggests that out of a sample of 152 PMPs who passed the current version of the exam since March, 2002, 79 (52%) would have failed if the new passing score, 81.1% of the questions correct, had been in effect!.

A summary of this analysis is presented below.

There is a strong incentive for candidates to write the 2004 exam by the September 24, 2005 deadline. In the worst case, a candidate who fails an attempt to write, or re-write, the current version of the exam will gain a period of one year for further re-write attempts at the lower passing score of 68.5% correct.

Candidates who plan to write the current 2004 examination have been strongly advised by PMI to apply early and to schedule their examinations immediately upon receipt of their eligibility notice to ensure they can reserve a seat to test on the existing examination. This is because PMI cannot guarantee space at any test center.

Application and scheduling

Applications to take the current PMP examination (referred to as the “2004 Examination”) will be accepted until Monday, 29 August 2005. Candidates submitting applications after 29 August will take the 2005 Examination. Candidates who do not receive a passing score on the 2004 Examination will be permitted to re-take the 2004 examination for a period of one year from the date of their last attempt; however, these will be the only candidates permitted to take the 2004 Examination after the release of the 2005 Examination.

On Tuesday May 17th, 2005, PMI sent a memo to education providers, giving more information on the changes to the exam; and to the PMP exam application process. The following information was taken from the memo, and from subsequent postings on the PMI website, covering five specific areas:

- Changes to the PMP Examination Content
- Changes to the Passing Score
- Changes to the Eligibility Criteria
- Changes to the PMP Exam Application and Audit Processes
- Changes to Eligibility Periods for Exam and Rewrites

I have added my comments to the information.

Changes to the PMP® Examination Content

PMI has issued the following blueprint of the examination content. It can be found on the PMI website at :

http://www.pmi.org/prod/groups/public/documents/info/pdc_pmpcredchanges.asp . The version of this table issued on May 17, 2005 showed slightly different percentages and numbers for the questions in each of the six domains

The Revised PMP Credential Examination will Test Knowledge in the Following Six Domains		%
Initiating the Project- 19 Questions		11
Tasks	Conduct Project Selection Methods	
	Define Scope	
	Document Project Risks, Assumptions, and Constraints	
	Identify and Perform Stakeholder Analysis	
	Develop Project Charter	
	Obtain Project Charter Approval	

(Table continues on next page)

Planning the Project – 40 Questions		23
Tasks	Define and Record Requirements, Constraints and Assumptions	
	Identify Project Team and Define Roles and Responsibilities	
	Create the WBS	
	Develop Change Management Plan	
	Identify Risks and Define Risk Strategies	
	Obtain Plan Approval	
	Conduct Kick-off Meeting	
Executing the Project – 47 Questions		27
Tasks	Execute Tasks Defined in Project Plan	
	Ensure Common Understanding and Set Expectations	
	Implement the Procurement of Project Resources	
	Manage Resource Allocation	
	Implement Quality Management Plan	
	Implement Approved Changes	
	Implement Approved Actions and Workarounds	
	Improve Team Performance	
Monitoring and Controlling the Project – 36 Questions		21.
Tasks	Measure Project Performance	
	Verify and Manage Changes to the Project	
	Ensure Project Deliverables Conform to Quality Standards	
	Monitor all Risks	
Closing the Project – 16 Questions		9
Tasks	Obtain Final Acceptance for the Project	
	Obtain Financial, Legal, and Administrative Closure	
	Release Project Resources	
	Identify, Document and Communicate Lessons Learned	
	Create and Distribute Final Project Report	
	Archive and Retain Project Records	
	Measure Customer Satisfaction	
Professional and Social Responsibility 16 Questions		9
Tasks	Ensure Individual Integrity	
	Contribute to the Project Management Knowledge Base	
	Enhance Personal Professional Competence	
	Promote Interaction Among Stakeholders	
TOTAL	175 Questions	100.00

As shown in the table, candidates will be scored on 175 questions. However, there will still be 200 questions in the exam. Twenty-five pre-test questions will be randomly placed throughout the new examination to gather statistical information on the performance of these questions in order to determine whether they may be used on future examinations. These 25 pre-test items are included in the 200-question examination, but will not be included in the pass/fail determination.

This blueprint will appear in the 2004 *Project Management Professional (PMP®) Examination Specification*, which was to be available for purchase at PMI's Online Bookstore early 3rd Quarter 2005. This publication will detail how the updated PMP credential examination was built.

Previous announcements from PMI have indicated that the 2005 exam will be "aligned" with the *A Guide to Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide)* –Third Edition. Candidates for the 2005 exam were encouraged by PMI to include the Third edition as one of their study references. This publication is currently available from the bookstore.

Comment: While there have been changes in the proportion of exam questions in each of the six domains, it appears that the list of tasks in the specification is very similar to those that were described in the 2000 *Project Management Professional Role Delineation Study* which contained the Test Specifications for the current version of the exam. Some tasks have been moved to other domains, explaining in part the changes in proportion. Pending a review of the 2004 Test Specification when it is published, only minor changes in the subject matter content of the exam are anticipated.

Changes to the Passing Score

To pass the 2005 PMP examination, candidates must answer a minimum of 141 of the 175 scored questions correctly. It is possible to fail one or more of the domains, yet still pass the exam.

Comment: This appears to be those most dramatic and drastic change associated with the 2005 exam. Unless the 175 scored exam questions are substantially less difficult than the questions in the current exam, **it is anticipated that the proportion of exam writers who succeed in obtaining the PMP will fall by more than half!**

This conclusion is based on an analysis of a sample of 157 candidates who wrote the current version of the computer based PMP exam from March of 2002 through July of 2005. March 2002 was the last time when a new version of the exam was introduced. It corresponded to the "alignment" with the 2000 Edition of the *PMBOK Guide*, and was the occasion when 29 questions on the new domain of Professional Responsibility were incorporated in the exam.

All but three of the 157 exam writers in the sample attended a preparatory course similar to the Certification Preparation Seminar. The others followed structured programs of self-study using similar resource materials. The candidates in the sample reported their exam scores to me on the understanding individual identities would not be revealed. Eighty percent of the sample provided a breakdown of the score by the six domains.

The following table summarizes the distribution of individual scores:

Scores on Computer PMP Exam 200 Questions March 2002 through July 2005 N=157			
Score Interval	Freq.	Cum Freq.	Cum %
116 to 120	1	1	0.6
121 to 125		1	0.6
126 to 130	1	2	1.3
131 to 135	2	4	2.5
136 to 140	5	9	5.7
141 to 145	9	18	11.5
146 to 150	14	32	20.4
151 to 155	29	61	38.9
156 to 160	23	84	53.5
161 to 165	33	117	74.5
166 to 170	19	136	86.6
171 to 175	13	149	94.9
176 to 180	3	152	96.8
181 to 185	3	155	98.7
186 to 190	2	157	100.0
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The mean score for the sample was 159 questions correct, with a standard deviation of 11.1. The median is identical with the mean, and a visual inspection indicates the distribution to be highly symmetrical. As data were accumulated over the 40 month period, it was noted that the calculated sample mean and standard deviation remained highly stable. This suggests a high degree of consistency in the degree of difficulty over time among the individual question sets in the computer based exam.

The five highest scores reported were 187, 186, 183, 182, and 181.

The five lowest scores reported were 136, 135, 135, 127, and 116.

Of the 157 candidates, 152 passed the 200 question exam with a score of 137 questions correct, or higher, and obtained the PMP designation on the first attempt. The corresponding pass rate was 96.8%. If the passing score was set at 81.1% correct, as it will be for the 2005 exam, a candidate would have needed 161 correct on the 200 question exam to pass. For a passing score of 161/200, only 73, or 46.5% of the candidates would have succeeded. Alternatively, of the 152 new PMPs, there would have been 79, or 52%, fewer.

Between June 10 and July 18, 2005 PMI reduced the passing score for the new exam from 143 correct to 141 correct out of 175 questions. This change apparently was introduced through an amendment to the information posted on the PMI website, with no other announcement.

Although the reduction of the passing score by just two questions may seem minor, it represents a considerable shift in the proportion of candidates expected to pass the exam. For the originally announced passing score of 143/175, or 81.7% correct, only 56, or 35.7% of the candidates in the sample would have succeeded. Alternatively, of the 152 new PMPs, there would have been 96, or 63%, fewer.

If the degree of difficulty of the questions in the 2005 PMP exam remains the same as it has in the past, we can anticipate a dramatic reduction in the pass rate on the PMP exam, and a marked decline in the rate at which new PMPs are certified. There is no reason to think that the degree of difficulty will be reduced. Based on roughly a dozen years of gathering data and observing performance on several versions of the PMP exam, there are many indications that the level of difficulty has remained steady over time. The 2005 exam will apparently draw questions from the existing data base of validated questions. Further, PMI now offers a junior Certified Associate in Project Management (CAPM) designation, which uses a set of “easier” exam questions. PMI has cancelled its plans for senior designations, so it is reasonable to assume that the PMP questions will remain at least as difficult as they have been in the past.

Changes to the Eligibility Criteria

The May 17, 2005 announcement outlined changes in the information which must be submitted as part of the PMP exam application. Currently, the breadth and depth of project management experience must be described by listing the “deliverables you have managed” as the outputs of one’s qualifying experience. Beginning 30 August, candidates will be required to document experience in performing tasks within the six domains set out in the exam specification as part of the application process. Apparently the tasks listed must correspond exactly to those in the exam specification.

According to a PowerPoint presentation by the Manager of Certification on May 14 2005, for each project submitted, candidates must apparently indicate that they have “Led and Directed” some these tasks, and can only claim hours for tasks that they have “Led and Directed”. The language of the May 17 announcement on the other hand simply says that the candidate must have “performed” the task. In the event of an audit, a referee will have to verify this description of experience.

PMI has announced that a new PMP Certification Handbook, specifying the application requirements for the 2005 exam, will not be published until August 29, 2005. The new handbook will contain the forms and detailed instructions for documenting one’s experience.

However, the hours required to meet the project management education and project management experience requirements for the PMP will remain the same as they are now.

Comment: It appears that there may be a change in the experience required to qualify for the 2005 PMP exam; specifically, that the candidate has had experience as a task leader or director, or at least that the candidate has performed the tasks which by definition constitute leading and directing . This remains to be clarified. However, it will certainly be necessary to provide a more detailed description of one's experience, and to use a more rigorous set of categories to present the description.

Changes to the PMP® Application and Audit Processes

Changes to the application review and audit processes in conjunction with the new exam include:

A new and improved online application. To be released with the release of the new examination, this easy-to-use system will enable users to view their status throughout the credentialing process.

Evaluation period. All applications submitted will go through an enhanced review process.

Comment: In recent years PMI has streamlined the application review process to the point where exam applications were accepted in a day or two. In fact some applications were accepted overnight, raising the perception that no one reads the content. Apparently this will now change. The PMI policy has been to process applications within two weeks of receipt, and likely this policy will remain.

Collection of project contact information. Applicants will be required to provide contact information for each project that is submitted as part of the application. During the application evaluation review period and if an application is selected for audit, PMI will contact manager(s) indicated on the application to validate the documented experience.

Comment: The experience verification forms for individual projects have always required the listing of the organization which can vouch for the claimed experience, along with contact information. However, the instructions were vague It appears that now individual referees will have to be named and current contact information will have to be provided. In the event of an audit, PMI will contact the referees directly. Currently, it is up to the candidate under audit to make the contacts and to collect certifications of experience from the referees. This requirement will create more work in preparing the exam application, but does not change what an applicant must be able to provide in any event.

Instant audit notification and increased audit frequency. Applicants selected for audit will be notified electronically. Automated follow-up reminder notifications will be issued to candidates electronically throughout the audit process. The PowerPoint slides from the Certification Manager's May 14, 2005 presentation indicate that PMI plan to increase the audit frequency to more than the current 10% of all applications.

Comment: These are not major changes. Electronic communication is already being used. In 2003 PMI that announced it would increase its audit activities, with a target is 5% of all applications. For the first time this year we have seen evidence of auditing at this level. It turns out that the process is straightforward. The audit consists of collecting documentary confirmation of claims made in the application: university diplomas or transcripts, certification of experience from referees, and certification of project management education by providers. Once the information is submitted, PMI has been very prompt in accepting the application and closing the audit – usually within days rather than weeks.

Changes to Eligibility Periods for Exam and Rewrites

The May 17 announcement also included these changes to eligibility periods:

One-year eligibility period. All candidates will be given one year to take the examination. This one-year eligibility period begins when a candidate's application is approved.

Comment: This is not new. The eligibility period has been six months from the date of acceptance, but PMI has had a policy of granting a six-month extension if it is requested.

Limit on the number of times candidates will be permitted to test. Candidates will have three opportunities to take and pass the PMP examination within their one-year eligibility period. If candidates do not succeed on the third attempt, candidates will have to wait one year from their third unsuccessful attempt before being permitted to test again.

Comment: Currently, there are no limits on the number and frequency of re-writes. Most of the small number of candidates, who have failed on the first attempt, are successful on the second attempt, typically with a considerably higher score. The need for two or more re-writes has been extremely rare. Maybe PMI is now expecting a greater demand for serial re-writes because of the higher passing grade for the new exam.

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