

# My Experience Writing the PMP Exam

By Joanne Gumaer, PMP

After writing and passing the PMP exam, I received many congratulations from friends and colleagues. Also I received numerous e-mails picking my brain for tips on writing the exam. I would like to share these tips with you. There are three main topics covered in this article: 1) identify and learn the PMI mindset, 2) study for the exam, 3) learn how to answer multiple-choice questions.

**Identify and learn the PMI mindset:** Many of the exam questions give you a typical project situation that a project manager faces and then you need to choose the best answer. In order to choose the best answer, think best practices according to PMBOK not your situation. This means you need to understand the role of the project manager from PMI perspective. Assume that you are in an environment where best practices rule. Where you have a project charter according to PMBOK. Where the project managers have the support that they so richly deserve. It's a world where the PMBOK is the true guiding force and where team members perform. Where functional managers answer you when you call. This is the frame of mind I put myself in when I studied for the exam and the day I wrote the exam.

**Study for the exam:** I started the process of preparing to write the exam by taking a PMP Prep class from the Southern Ontario Chapter of PMI. This course helped me know which topics to study as well as point out my strong and weak PMBOK knowledge areas. I was glad that I memorized all the definitions of each process and sub process as well as all the inputs, tools and techniques, and outputs for each process. There are about 15% -20% (my estimate) of the questions that can be answered from straight memory. More important that memory was learning why a particular input is required, how to use the tools, and when you would refer to the outputs to justify or document a situation. The "PMP Challenge!" by: J. LeRoy Ward, and Ginger Levin was particularly helpful in learning this information. I also used the books from the PMP Review package to fill in holes in my knowledge. While writing the exam I used this knowledge and deductive reasoning to answer the questions that required a project management best practice to a situation. In these cases I would first identify what the process and knowledge area was for the situation, and then I would review the choices. A lot of the time the answer was a paraphrase of a reason for an input, the use of a tool, or the contents of an output according to PMBOK.

**Learn how to answer multiple-choice questions:** My experience in the past is that I did not score well on multiple-choice question exams. Therefore, I gathered as many sample exam questions as possible. The PMP Prep course I took had a section on tips for writing multiple-choice questions. I spend a good deal of time practicing the tips and answering the questions. I answered them until they became rote and I was getting 90% in all knowledge areas. Some of the many methods I used for answering the questions are to go through them forwards, backwards, answer all the even numbered forwards, and answer the odd numbers backwards etc.

Concentrating on knowing the mindset of PMI, memorizing and knowing how to apply the inputs, tools and outputs of each process, and beating the practice exam questions to death were the most productive study time spent. This has been my experience and my opinions on writing the PMP exam. Study smart and GOOD LUCK to you!!!

Joanne Gumaer, PMP is president of ILLINIAQ Inc., a Toronto based project management training and consulting company.