



THE CPA EXAM SURVIVAL GUIDE

Jeff Elliott, CPA



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NOT FOR CHICKENS

I passed the CPA Exam when I was 30 and had three kids under the age of five, including a newborn baby. I know what it is like to study for the CPA Exam while trying to balance a full-time job, a marriage, family, church commitments, a mortgage, Little League, etc.

Whatever your circumstances, I can probably identify with them.

I began my long (too long) journey toward the CPA designation in late 2005. **I wanted to be a CPA, but I didn't really want to be a CPA enough to study.** I wasn't fully committed to studying. Who really wants to go home and study after a full day of public accounting? I would try to "cram" for 2 weeks prior to my exam and was coming up short. Maybe you can relate?



Balancing "life" and the CPA Exam? I've been there.

Everything changed, however, in February 2008. I said, “Enough is enough!” I devised a plan and I passed all four sections of the CPA Exam by the end of the year– each exam on my next attempt.

Whatever emotion you’re feeling right now, I’ve been there.

Just beginning and have no idea what to expect? Yes.

Frustrated and ready to throw in the towel? That was me.

Feeling stressed out trying to meet the demands of work, family, and studying for the hardest professional exam on the planet and needing a plan? Absolutely.

In 2008, I founded another71.com. It was the first true blog about the CPA Exam and people quickly identified with it. Since then, another71 has become one of the most-visited accounting websites on the Internet and gets 1M+ page views per month.

Through e-mail, phone coaching, and the popular [CPA Exam Forum](#), I have interacted with tens of thousands of CPA Exam candidates. I know exactly the problems that candidates face and how to solve those problems to find success. I wrote this book because nothing like it exists in the marketplace. It was written from the trenches and is a real depiction of what the CPA Exam is actually like.

This book is 100% free because I want it to be in the hands of every person taking the CPA Exam. If you find it useful, **please share it.**

HiYa! (become a NINJA in Chapter 5),

Jeff Elliott, CPA (KS)



CHOOSING YOUR STATE

Whether you're concerned about the "150 Hour Rule," licensing reciprocity, or are an international CPA Exam candidate looking for the friendliest place to sit, [here](#) are the state-by-state requirements to take the CPA Exam from the AICPA.

Picking a state in which to sit for the CPA Exam is quite simple: choose the state in which you're most likely to apply for a license. Don't pick some random state simply because they have easier sitting requirements. It may come back to haunt you.

On the other hand, if you have no desire to ever get licensed as a CPA, then perhaps it doesn't matter. For instance, a friend of mine is a Kansas resident who works in Kansas. He was already a Certified Management Accountant (CMA) and a Certified Internal Auditor (CIA) and wanted to add the CPA to his credentials.

Guess what? He lacked the requisite 150 hours to take the CPA Exam in Kansas.

“Don't pick some random state just because they have easier sitting requirements. It may come back to bite you.”

Did that stop him from taking the exam? No. He took it in Colorado.

Did he drive to Colorado? No. He drove down the street from his house and took it at the same place he would have if he were sitting as a Kansas candidate.

Ahhh! The beauty of the computerized CPA Exam.

Granted, there was a down side to this. Until he got his 150 hours (he finished his MBA), he couldn't present himself as a CPA in Colorado (which is a moot point because he doesn't work there). Likewise, he couldn't do so in Kansas until he applied for, and was granted, reciprocity.

What is the takeaway for you? You have options as to the state in which you take the CPA Exam. It all depends on your goals for passing and the requirements of each state. Have questions? Call the State Board of Accountancy and ask to speak to the director.



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CHOOSING A CPA REVIEW COURSE

There are a myriad of CPA review courses on the market. They all have different options, delivery styles, price points, instructor quirks, and customer service philosophies. You will read all sorts of pass rates, statistics, comparisons, articles, success stories, and a range of other statistics.

Bottom line: **Pick the CPA review course that best fits *your* needs.**

Here are some guidelines to follow when dropping some serious cash flow:

1. Establish a Budget.

I said the 'b word'. **Opportunity Cost** is at play here, folks.

If you have \$3,000 to spend on CPA Review, let's explore the options:

Option 1: Buy a \$3,000 course.

Option 2: Buy a \$2,000 course and a \$1,000 MacBook Air.

Option 3: Buy a \$1,500 course and a \$1,500 MacBook Pro.

Option 4: Buy a \$1,500 course, a \$1,000 MacBook Air, and a \$500 iPad.

Option 5: Buy a \$1,000 course, a \$1,500 MacBook Pro, and a \$500 iPad.

You get the picture. *You can get with this or you can get with that.*

Opportunity cost is often overlooked. Choose wisely.

“Pick the CPA review course that best fits your needs.”

2. Watch Course Demos

Would you buy a car (even a beater) without test driving it? Of course not.

Maybe it doesn't start. Maybe it smells like Grandma's dead cat.

So why are you going to buy the cost equivalent of a cheap used car without taking it for a spin first?

I see candidates complaining all the time in the [Another71 Forum](#) about how they can't stand the instructor's quirks. Really??? You dropped a mortgage or rent payment on a course and didn't vet with whom you were going to be spending countless hours? Don't make that same mistake.

3. Ask Important Questions

▶ What is their return or refund policy?

If “All sales are final,” then you need to take that into consideration in your purchasing decision. How many \$2,000 items sold online have absolutely no return policy? Not many.

Even the \$2,000 “build a business and get rich” courses have a 30 day return policy. So why is the CPA Review industry different?

If you buy a review course and think it is cheaply made or produced, it is too bad. Caveat emptor! (“Let the buyer beware.” - Latin proverb)

▶ Does the course expire or have special access restrictions?

Be especially wary of this with online courses. Many will have IP restrictions, so watch this if you access from work, home, mobile device, and/or while traveling. Also pay attention to the number of times you can view an online lecture.

▶ How expensive are course updates?

Are they free? \$100? \$500?

Do you have to watch xx% of the lectures, get xx% of the questions correct in the software, and jump through a bunch of hoops to get continued access without a large fee? It makes a difference.

Dig deep into these details!

Think about how long it takes you to make \$2,000.

To them, you're another number. To you, that's a lot of money.

Know *exactly* what you're getting before you buy.

4. Question: Do you really need to buy a new course?

Instead of plopping down thousands for yet another CPA Review course, consider going with the monthly \$67 subscription to **NINJA CPA Review** and buy an **iPad Mini** with the rest.

It's kind of like "*buy Term Life Insurance and invest the difference*"

... but with NINJAs and iPads.

Monthly NINJA CPA Review Subscription + iPad Mini ... or yet another boring CPA course?

(Good choice.)



WHICH SECTION TO TAKE FIRST

There are a few schools of thought regarding this.

Option 1: Take the hardest exam first.

Option 2: Take the exam that more closely aligns with your strengths.

Let's delve into each option:

Option 1: Take the hardest exam first.

This method is recommended because of the 18 month rule. If most people struggle with FAR (*they do*), then the average candidate will want to take FAR first because you want the hardest exam behind you once your 18 month clock starts ticking.

This is a perfect time to bring up the 18 month rule. Once you pass a section of the CPA Exam, you have 18 months to pass the remaining three sections or you lose credit for that first passed section.

Depending upon your state, the clock starts at a slightly different time.

- ✓ In some states, it starts running when you get your first passing score, which could be weeks after you sat for the exam.

- ✓ In other states, the clock starts running from the day you took the first exam section that you passed—not when you got your score. If you took FAR on January 2 and get your passing score of 75 on February 5, your 18 month clock started ticking January 2.
- ✓ Check with your state to make sure you know when the clock starts ticking on the 18 month rule.

You don't want to pass three exams and save FAR for last only to find that it takes you a long time to pass it. You would lose credits which were earned more than 18 months ago.

Option 2: Take the exam that more closely aligns with your strengths.

The theory behind this is that you want to get a “quick win.” It's purely psychological. It gives you a motivational boost to keep rocking.

Someone who works heavily with taxes will want to jump into REG first. An auditor will want to hit AUD under this strategy. The problem here is that FAR still lurks on the horizon. I still recommend that you take FAR first and then play to your strengths for exam #2.

One caveat to this would be if an exam is *changing* (AUD July 2013 changes, for example). In that case, I would recommend taking the exam that is changing first.

Changes usually make exams harder, not easier.



HOW TO STUDY FOR THE CPA EXAM

You open your big box of CPA Review stuff.

Books? Check. **Video Lectures?** Check. **Software?** Check.

Instructions? (Crickets. No Instructions?!?)

CPA Review courses don't come with instructions.

It might seem intuitive how to study and pass the CPA Exam, but it's not. This isn't a college final.

There are a lot of people out there who enter their credit card info and get a big box of stuff shipped to them, only to realize that they don't actually know *how* to utilize the bunch of stuff in the box that they purchased. Books? Videos? Software? Egad.

Usually candidates don't realize that they are clueless as to how to study until they get their first score back and they bombed—leaving them embarrassed and dejected.

“CPA Review courses don't come with
instructions.”

The following is the **N.I.N.J.A. Study Framework**. If you want to pass the CPA Exam, implement it.

Nail the Concepts

Intense Notes

Non-Stop MCQ

Just Re-Write It

All Comes Together

NAIL THE CONCEPTS

For a much more detailed explanation of all things related to this NINJA method, download the free NINJA Study Framework. Below will give you an overview, though.

The NINJA Framework works with any CPA Review course. The CPA Review industry says to

1. watch a video / read the book and
2. work the accompanying MCQ.

This perspective stems from the old-school approach to the paper and pencil exam where you had to sit in a live classroom and learn from an instructor on weekends.

I think the abacus was still popular back then as well.

Today, there is a smarter way to study.

“NINJA works with any CPA Review course.”

While it is true you can use any course with the NINJA Framework, for illustrative purposes we will use NINJA products in our explanation.

First, you need to Nail The Concepts. You do this by:

1. Reading the NINJA Book cover to cover - before even thinking of doing any MCQ.
2. Reading NINJA Notes instead of social media, sport sites, etc.
3. Listening to NINJA Audio while driving to work, at the gym, etc.
4. While doing this, you are taking Intense Notes (see below)

You don't have to go to a live course on the weekends anymore.

You can fire up the laptop on a Tuesday morning and knock out two hours of material before you even brush your teeth.

If you work MCQ in week 1, guess what? You will work them again in week 5 or week 6 when you review because you will forget what you learned in week 1.

If you read a book chapter in week 1 and score an 85 on the corresponding MCQ, will you be able to score an 85 four weeks later? Not likely. You will need to work them again during your review. It's not a smart use of study time.

Instead, let the NINJA Framework guide you..

INTENSE NOTES

Repeat after me: **“PUT THE HIGHLIGHTER DOWN.”**

According to **Harvard Library**, I am absolutely right:

“Throw away your highlighter: Highlighting can seem like an active reading strategy, but it can actually distract from the business of learning and dilute your comprehension. Those bright yellow lines you put on a printed page one day can seem strangely cryptic the next, unless you have a method for remembering why they were important to you at another moment in time. Pen or pencil will allow you to move to a text you have to wrestle with.”—[Interrogating Texts: Six Reading Habits to Develop in Your First Year at Harvard](#)

Which method do you think will help you learn the material better: painting printed words in a book with pretty florescent colors or writing them down using the NINJA Framework and thinking about the information?

Grab a stack of Keywords and Notes pages from the NINJA Study Framework you've downloaded for free, and, using the Cornell Method described in detail in the NINJA Study Framework, start writing. Put the highlighter down!

Many people have said that instead of taking their own study notes, they just rewrite the material inside of the NINJA Notes, which is fine too.

NON-STOP MCQ

Now is the time to start working multiple-choice questions with a focused frenzy.

Do so many MCQ that you're absolutely sick of them. As you encounter concepts that you didn't know or are prone to forget, write them down and add them to your voluminous stack of notes.

If you have a book with multiple choice questions, do some in there. You might want to do half of them (do every other question or something like that) and then move to your software.

JUST RE-WRITE IT

This is where it gets tedious. This is also where the payoff happens.

You may be familiar with the fact that if you had a choice between \$3 Million or 1¢ doubled daily for 31 days, the penny doubled for 31 days ends up tripling the \$3 Million. The payoff, however, doesn't happen until the 31st day.

“This is where it gets tedious. This is also where the payoff happens.”

The road is long but ends up being worth it in the end. The same goes for rewriting your study notes. The thought of grabbing that stack of notes and going to town rewriting what you've already written may sound like a ridiculous suggestion at first, but I am a firm believer in its impact.

Merely writing down your notes and then reviewing them before your exam doesn't have nearly the same impact as taking your furious scribbles and clearly and concisely rewriting them.

Not only will your notes mean more when you've whittled away the nonessentials, but you are actually learning the material twice. Reprocessing the material by rewriting your notes is like letting the information marinate in your mind. Just like a well-prepared steak, you will taste the payoff of this extra step.

Don't like taking notes? No problem. Instead, rewrite the NINJA Notes.

You will absorb the material better vs. reading only. Plan wisely because this will likely take a week to complete. Starting this process two weeks before your exam day sounds about right.

ALL COMES TOGETHER

You've Nailed the Concepts. You've taken Intense Notes. You've worked MCQ until you hate life. You even hate the word “NINJA” at this point. You've rewritten your notes.

This is where it all comes together.

Carry your stack of notes everywhere you go. Watch the NINJA Blitz Videos, review NINJA Plus, listen to MCQ Audio, and read through the NINJA Flashcards.

Make a list of your weakest MCQ topics and work backwards. Start with your weakest and do 20 question “mini-testlets” until you score in the 70s and move to your next weakest topic. For instance, if you're taking FAR and you know that Governmental Accounting is your weakest link, begin there.

Work “mini-testlets” of 20 Governmental Accounting MCQ in “Study Mode” (i.e. you see the answer explanations *immediately* vs. waiting until the end). Work sets of 20 MCQ and keep repeating until you are scoring in the 70% range. Then move on.

Is there anything magical about 70%? No. It's arbitrary. You can do 60% or 80% if you want, but I recommend 70-ish% as a benchmark.

After you hit 70% for a set of 20 MCQ, move on to your next-weakest topic. Maybe it's Bonds?

By the way, should you ever work a practice exam? No.

Here is why: The only score that matters is the one on exam day. A good score on a practice exam could make you over-confident. Conversely, a bad score could kill your momentum and make you think you know less than you do. Study software is great stuff but it cannot replicate the psychometrics at play on exam day: the questions are weighted for difficulty, with some questions being worth more than others.

Additionally, a practice exam doesn't give you immediate feedback on your questions. You have to wait until the end.

Dare I say practice exams are useless?



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SURVIVING EXAM DAY

There are many people reading this book who have already sat for at least one section of the CPA Exam. However, there are many people who are getting ready to sit for the first time and don't know what to expect. This is what I have learned both from personal experience as well as through talking to thousands of other candidates.

1. You will find that **the exam questions are not as “wordy”** as the questions you have practiced in your study software and will likely leave the testing center feeling like the actual exam was easier than the practice questions you worked.
2. It will be the fastest 3 to 4 hours of your life. **You'll be exhausted.**
3. You **cannot be a perfectionist** on your exam. If you get stumped and sit there stubbornly for 10 minutes trying to figure something out, that's 8 minutes that you just cheated yourself on the simulations or written communications.
4. If you're stumped and can't get the numbers to work out, **choose B or C**. Why? You have a 30% chance of getting it right. A and D are correct 20% of the time. (This is based on my own research and is not official).
5. **Don't take breaks.** Exception: If you are extremely sleepy, take a break. Go into the bathroom and literally do jumping jacks.

6. **Don't forget your NTS** (Notice to Schedule) and **two IDs that are SIGNED**. One needs to be a picture ID such as a driver's license and the other can be as simple as a signed credit card. Don't make the mistake of having all of your credit cards say "See photo ID" on the signature line like I did. It might be a good idea to **make a copy of your NTS and stick it in your vehicle's glove box** so that you know you have it with you.
7. After the facilitator at Prometric gets your computer up and running and you sit down, don't assume that you have all day to start writing mnemonics on your two "noteboards." One candidate who reads this site sent me an e-mail saying that he sat for BEC and decided to write out all of his formulas before beginning the exam. He found himself locked out due to time expiration. Why? **You have approximately 10 minutes to sign in to your computer. READ THE SCREEN**. Not only did he not get to sit for his exam that day, he forfeited his exam fee and he had to wait until the next testing window to take the exam. Talk about a nightmare exam experience.
8. When you get to the simulations, **leave nothing blank**. If one minute is left on the exam clock and you have a tab with a bunch of blanks, fill in something – anything. A wrong answer and a blank answer give you the same number of points: zero. You may get lucky if there's a drop-down menu for the answers and you guess correctly.
9. **Practice the Research tab** (FAR/AUD/REG) prior to your exam. This is very important! You will spend 10 minutes trying to figure it out on the exam if you don't. Click here to view the sample exam and tutorial.
10. Get at least **six hours of sleep** the night before the exam. Don't cut out sleep or you will pay severely two hours into your exam when you will crash. If you're a coffee drinker, **drink your normal amount of coffee** but don't pound a gallon of it 15 minutes prior to the exam. You'll be squirming through Testlet 1, praying for a restroom break.
11. **Relax**. People take this exam every day. (Actually, they can take it eight months out of the year). Give it your best shot. To use a sports cliché, *leave it all out there on the field*. You may be tempted to get lazy and rush through your third testlet because you're bored to death or because you think you're doing miserably. Don't. **Focus while you're in there**. Stay alert and work your tail off. The extra focus and extra attention to detail on the final 5-10 questions of Testlet 3 could be the difference between a 74 and a 75.
12. **Take a few days off** and enjoy life after your exam. It's in the examiners' hands now and there's no amount of worrying or second-guessing that can change anything. After a break, attack your next section (unless you're done).
13. On **Score Release Day**, if you end up south of a 75, you can either continue studying the new section you just started, or if you're only a week or two into it when scores come out, you can hit your failed section again. I always recommend starting from scratch and re-studying, so it probably makes sense to continue your progress with the new section. Ultimately, it comes down to your own exam philosophy. You will have to weigh that decision and determine what is best for you.



CELEBRATING A PASS

You did it! You passed your first section. It's a big accomplishment.

Go out and celebrate. Take three days off from studying and just *relax* at night.

Don't take any more than three days off though because three days will turn into three months and pretty soon, your 18 month clock has ticked down to 14 months.

Listen - the exam is miserable (*Breaking News!*). You may want to take an extended break, but don't do it. You obviously had a study groove going. Don't lose it.

It's like exercising. If you take extended time off, it's hard to pick up where you left off. Celebrate for three days. Stay up late goofing off. Sleep in. Go out to eat with friends or co-workers at lunch. Remember the good life?

Enjoy it while you can because after those three days are up, you're back at it.

No exceptions.

If you're not careful, three days will turn into three weeks which will turn into three months. This is exactly what I ran into, except my **FAR celebration turned into a whole year.**

Passing a section of the CPA Exam is a huge deal. Celebrate and then get back to studying again as quickly as possible.



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RECOVERING FROM FAILURE

I know that right now is a miserable time and it is easy to start believing thoughts that simply are not true. Thoughts like *you're not smart enough to pass, accounting isn't for you, the AICPA hates you and does not want you in the profession, etc.*

I personally felt all those emotions and had those thoughts going through my head as well. A few years removed from the exam process, I can tell you that being on the other side truly is worth it.

My problem was always commitment to the exam. I wanted to be a CPA, but I didn't really *want* to be a CPA.

Picture yourself three years from now. Will this momentary failure – be it a 55, a 71, or a 74, mean anything? No. It will be a distant memory and like most things, you look back at tough times with a fondness that wasn't there when you were in the middle of it.

This very well could be one of the toughest times you encounter in your career outside of getting downsized or laid off. Stay with it. It will pay off in the end. Just the sheer fact that you got this far tells me **you are more than smart enough to pass this exam.**

“Remember that failure is an event, not a person.” - Zig Ziglar

Get up and dust yourself off. You're tough. You'll be fine. Anyone can quit this thing. Quitting is simply not an option for you. It just isn't.

You scored a 60 or less:

Is it hopeless? No way! It happens all of the time. It may seem like you're the only one scoring this low, but I promise you that it happens more than you would think because I get the e-mails. They can't talk to their spouse (who isn't taking the exam). They can't talk to their co-workers or boss (too ashamed). They e-mail me.

They work through it. **They pass.**

You scored a 71-ish:

Are you 4 "points" away? No. There is a significant hole in your conceptual understanding of a few topics. You know what they are if you're honest with yourself. They are those sections of your exam that you *pray* you don't see on Exam Day.

Start your study prep over and don't cut any corners whatsoever.

The same goes for a 74:

Many people start looking for information on how to appeal an exam score when they score a 74 (or even a 73). Forget it. It's fruitless. You could take another exam and get your score back by the time you get your appeal results. Let's face it: **there is a next-to-nothing chance the AICPA is going to overturn your score.** I've certainly never heard of it happening, and if it did happen, I would have heard about it in the Another71 Forum.

As you re-study, remember this: You're not one "point" from passing. **You're 75 "points" away.** You scored that 74 more than a month ago. Start over and hit it hard. Figure out what your weak area is and own it.

Destroy it.

As the late Zig Ziglar said, *"Remember that failure is an event, not a person."*

Never forget that.

Final point: If you fail an exam, aside from a spouse or loved one, it's no one else's business unless you decide to make it their business. Tell your nosy co-worker to *pound sand*. (I have an attorney friend who says that a lot and I like it.)

You lost an exam credit:

Losing credit for a passed exam is terrible. I know this first hand.

I mentioned before that I was so elated over passing FAR that I literally took a year off from the exam to celebrate. Not a smart move. After I started rolling and passed BEC and AUD, I came to my nemesis: Regulation.

I had previously scored a 74 on REG and I was back for vengeance. My FAR credit was also on the line.

Pass REG and I was done with the CPA Exam.

Fail REG and I was back to having passed only two sections.

“If you just failed an exam, it’s no one’s fault except your own.”

Stakes were high.

I fired up my laptop. Hit refresh on the NASBA Score page. Waited. Prayed. Held my breath ...

74.

I stared in disbelief. I wanted to throw my computer across the room. Not just across the room—I wanted to throw it through the wall.

Is this a mistake?

It wasn’t a mistake. I missed the mark.

It took me several days, but I eventually owned my failure.

I pretended like I didn’t have to pass FAR again because I dreaded re-studying for that thing so much. Given a choice between being water boarded and taking FAR, I would have taken the former.

I hated FAR. I blocked it out of my mind.

I realized a harsh truth about failing REG: I was failing because there were a few areas that I flat-out refused to study. I knew which ones they were, too: AMT, LikeKind Exchanges, and 1231, 1245, and 1250 Assets. They were boring. I didn’t want to study them.

I forced myself to study them and re-studied everything else again.

92.

If you just failed an exam, it’s no one’s fault except your own.

I don’t care what happened at the exam center that day.

I don’t care how crazy work got the week prior to your exam.

I don’t care how insane the simulation topics were.

It’s *your* fault.

Study Hard.

If you fail ... **Study harder.**

If you fail again ... **Study even harder.**

I too struggled with the blame game but the faster I got over it, the faster I got back on the road to a 75 (*or a 92*).



FAMILY ISSUES & FRIEND DRAMA

One of the most difficult aspects of taking the CPA Exam is the toll it takes on personal relationships. Your family misses you and your friends don't understand why you're always "studying." Here are some strategies to help keep it all together.

If You're Married

The exam is rough on a marriage. You work, come home, and then escape to the spare bedroom or coffee shop to knock out three hours of studying after grabbing a quick bite to eat. When I was studying, my wife and I had three kids. A spouse can only take so much "loneliness" so you need to make sure that you do your part.

If you're married and studying, you absolutely cannot put your marriage on hold while you study and pass. If you do that, you'll come home to an empty house. I hope the certificate was worth it.

Through the years, I've had to put my *counseling* hat on numerous times because a couple was headed to a divorce due to CPA Exam-related issues. It isn't the exam that caused the problems. It was one person thinking that they could ignore their spouse and focus on just working in public accounting and studying. They thought they could still maintain some semblance of a marriage.

Three couples specifically come to mind as I write this.

In one instance, the wife left the husband as he was studying for REG—the weekend before his exam—and took the kids to live at her mother’s house. I am happy to say that they worked things out and are still married. I get Christmas cards from them every year.

Another couple had the reverse situation: the husband moved out because the wife was studying. She wasn’t making him a priority, and I told her as much. When a marriage is on the line, there’s no need to be anything but blunt. I told her to stop studying and take a break to restore her marriage. They got divorced.

The third couple put the exam on hold, got right with each other, moved back in together, and are still married.

If you’re married and studying—and want to stay married while you study—you have to make your spouse feel like they are still #1. Even if it means you forgo that extra study session on bonds and cut a three-hour study session short by an hour, spend time with your significant other.

You also have to embrace the reality that the CPA Exam is now your “me time” activity. Whatever activity you’re into—golfing, hunting, tailgating, girls’ nights out—it all gets put on the shelf while you’re studying. Your “me time” activity is now your spouse. Period.

If you’re not working, studying, eating, or sleeping, then you should be spending quality time with your spouse. Just embrace this new reality.

Sound extreme? So is ruining your marriage.

“If you’re not working, studying, eating, or sleeping, then you should be spending quality time with your spouse.”

With that said, there is still a place for a guys’ night out and stuff like that, but it has to become the exception rather than the rule. Taking Saturday night off from studying? Schedule a date with your spouse and go do something fun together.

Please pardon me if this section has become “preachy.” That’s not my intent. I just don’t want you to make the same mistakes that I and many others have made.

When I was studying, my wife would see me come home from a long day of public accounting and plop down in front of the TV after the kids were in bed to play video games instead of studying. After two years of going through the motions with the exam (study for a week ahead of the exam, fail with a 71, repeat), my wife came to me and said (paraphrasing), “*Listen. I support you, but if you’re going to do this and if the kids and I are going to sacrifice, then I want to see you sacrificing too. Either do it right or hang it up.*”

She was right! I had been such a lazy jerk-bag (my words, not hers). That was when I got serious and PASSED—including a 92 on REG. I wanted to be a CPA, but I didn’t really *want* to be a CPA in the sense that I was willing to do whatever it took. My wife helped me to realize that and fix it.

If You're Single

The CPA Exam is *not* the ideal time to start a new relationship. You'll either get all head-over-heels in love and never study or you'll be studying all the time, causing this person who doesn't really know you to think, "*Meh. Maybe they're not marriage material!*" In fact, you just really have to get this thing done so that you can actually have a life.

There are exceptions, of course, to every rule. I know of CPA candidates with a spouse or significant other going through law school. For them, sitting next to each other and studying is no big deal. There are also plenty of people out there who manage to pass the CPA Exam and keep relationships going with no problem.



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AFTER YOU PASS THE CPA EXAM

You PASSED. *Now what!?*

Ethics Requirement

Even *before* you pass the exam, you will need to figure out what Ethics requirement your state has, if any. I recommend visiting your state board of accountancy website to get this information. Assuming your state has an ethics requirement, you will either need to get your ethics package from the AICPA or the state, if they have their own program.

Licensing

“I Passed! I’m a CPA!!!!”

Not so fast. Even after all of that work, you are still not officially a CPA.

Disappointing, right?

This is a very big deal, so don’t jump the gun. You cannot represent yourself to the public, your neighbor, or your favorite barista that you are a CPA until you are so deemed by the state.

You can’t put it on a business card or put it in your work e-mail signature until your state grants you a license or a permit to practice. In order to get this, you likely have a lot of paperwork to fill out, experience requirement hoops to jump through, and need to scratch out a check and send it to them.

I know, I know. You have already paid a ton of money to be able to call yourself a CPA. Guess what? The expensive part never stops.

Always double-check with your state board of accountancy if you have any questions whatsoever as to whether or not you can call yourself a CPA. You don't want to incur the wrath of your state disciplinary board!

To expedite the licensing or certification process, simply go to your state board of accountancy website and download all of their forms for getting your certificate/ license (if applicable).

Fill them out, write a check, and mail it in. Don't wait for them to take their sweet time in sending some packet to you. They will probably receive your package in the mail before they can even slap the postage on your envelope.

Certificate

I was very under-whelmed when I got my CPA certificate from my state in the mail. It came protected by two pieces of cardboard and a corner was bent.

A bent corner? *Really?*

(Can you tell I'm still not over it?)

I promptly found a local framing shop and dropped \$100 on a nice frame. (I also made sure they did the matting to hide the bent corner.) I know co-workers who were blasé about the whole thing and never framed theirs. I never understood that.

You worked this hard. Don't go cheap on a frame.

Joining the AICPA

I joined the AICPA for no other reason than just to *join the AICPA*. It seemed like the next logical step. The AICPA certificate is impressive and also worth the investment in a frame. I have kept my AICPA membership current to date mostly due to the topic of the next section: CPE.

CPE

At first, I thought Continuing Professional Education was the worst. You go to some hotel banquet hall with marginal coffee to hear some dude rocking a polyester tie talk about stuff you *really* don't care about. You just want the CPE hours as painlessly as possible.

That was when I found CPE Express from the AICPA. It costs about \$300 a year with an AICPA membership and is a glorious "All You Can Eat" CPE buffet.

No more ugly tie guy for me.



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cpaexam@nasba.org