



Searching for **answers?**



The Uniform CPA Exam

Overview and FAQs



www.icpas.org

The Illinois CPA Society
would like to acknowledge
the members of the
CPA Examination Transition
Task Force for developing
the content of this important
and timely brochure.

CPA Examination Transition Task Force

Chairperson: Debra R. Hopkins, CPA
Director, CPA Review at Northern Illinois University

Jeannie M. Folk, CPA
Professor, College of DuPage

Elizabeth A. Murphy, Ph.D., CPA
Professor, DePaul University

Frank Nekrasz, Ph.D.
Lecturer in Accountancy, University of Illinois
at Urbana-Champaign

Ram Ramakrishnan, Ph.D.
Head, Department of Accounting, University
of Illinois at Chicago

Julie B. Sassano, CPA
National Director of Firm Recruiting, KPMG LLP

Jean C. Sztajer, CPA
Professor, Augustana College

Penelope J. Yunker, Ph.D., CPA
Professor Emeritus, Western Illinois University

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The Uniform CPA Exam Overview and FAQ Sheet

INTRODUCTION:

The information provided in this brochure is intended to inform candidates about the application process, administration, and general format and structure of the computerized uniform Certified Public Accountant (CPA) exam. Much of this brochure's content is intended to assist Illinois examination candidates. Since state regulations vary, CPA exam candidates are encouraged to apply to sit for the exam in the state in which they plan to practice. The CPA exam format and content does change periodically. Accordingly, candidates should review the information posted on the websites listed below; information about the CPA exam is updated periodically.

Website	Site Content
www.ilboa.org	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Illinois educational requirements to sit for the CPA exam and receive authorization to test (ATT) in the state of Illinois ▶ Illinois exam application materials ▶ Contact information: Illinois Board of Examiners 100 Trade Centre Drive, Suite 403 Champaign, IL 61820-7233 Phone: 217-531-0950 Fax: 217-531-0960 E-mail: help@ilboa.org
www.cpa-exam.org	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ CPA candidate booklet with exam structure, content, and grading policies ▶ CPA exam tutorial and sample exams ▶ Registration for free database research software
www.Prometric.com/cpa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ List of test centers available ▶ Test center policies and procedures ▶ On-line exam scheduling
www.FutureCPA.org	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Illinois CPA Society student website ▶ Link to AICPA tips for taking the CPA exam

Since 1917, the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) has written and graded the CPA exam. Individual states are responsible for establishing the educational requirements to sit for the exam. The exam is offered in a computerized format at Prometric test sites during the first two months of every quarter (referred to as "testing windows"). The following questions have been designed to assist Illinois candidates in understanding the application process and CPA exam structure and format.

1. When is the CPA exam offered? When are the testing windows?

Candidates may sit for one or more sections of the CPA exam during any of the following four annual testing windows:

January-February

April-May

July-August

October-November

2. What educational requirements must candidates meet to sit for the CPA exam?

Illinois CPA candidates must have a bachelors degree and a total of 150 semester hours of coursework (with some specific coursework requirements). Note that quarter-based hours must be converted to semester hours. One quarter hour is equivalent to two-thirds of a semester hour. For a complete list of the Illinois educational requirements, see the Illinois Board of Examiners' website at www.ilboa.org.



3. How do candidates get their transcripts reviewed? When should they do it?

Candidates should have their transcripts evaluated by the Illinois Board of Examiners at the **beginning** of their last term of study **AFTER grades are posted for the prior term**. The form to request transcript evaluation may be found at www.ilboa.org/forms.html. *International candidates should be aware that the Illinois Board of Examiners conducts its own international credential evaluation. The Illinois Board of Examiners does not accept results from other evaluation services. An additional evaluation fee is charged and an additional four to eight weeks is required for the transcript review process.*

4. Are candidates able to apply to sit for the CPA exam prior to completing their coursework?

Yes, at this time, provisional approval for courses in progress taken at domestic institutions will be allowed for first-time candidates who sit for the CPA exam prior to July 1, 2005. Candidates will be allowed 60 days from the date of taking the first section of the CPA exam to provide evidence that all educational requirements have been completed. No grades will be released until all final official credentials are received and eligibility verified by the Illinois Board of Examiners. Only one provisional approval will be issued to any one candidate. If final transcript(s) verifying completion of all courses for eligibility to sit are not received within 60 days of taking the first section of the CPA exam, scores for all exam sections authorized with provisional approval will be voided.

5. Do candidates need to apply to the Illinois Board of Examiners to sit for the CPA exam?

Candidates should apply to sit for the exam in the state in which they plan to practice and become licensed. The requirements differ from state to state. Candidates who plan to practice and be certified or licensed in Illinois need to apply to the Illinois Board of Examiners to sit for the CPA exam. Generally, if a candidate wishes to become licensed in another state, the candidate must have fulfilled that state's educational requirements as of the date they sat for the first exam section. Such candidates should contact that state's board of accountancy or examiners; contact information is available at www.cpa-exam.org/global/boards.html.

6. How do candidates apply? How far in advance should candidates begin the application process? What is the process?

After the candidates credentials have been evaluated (which takes approximately one to two months), candidates need to apply to sit for the CPA exam. The application form is available at www.illinois-cpa-exam.com/files/application.pdf. After credentials have been evaluated, **first-time** CPA exam candidates should allow another four to six weeks for the application process.

The application process for Illinois CPA exam candidates incorporates the following steps:

- ▶ A candidate submits an application and fee to the Illinois Board of Examiners to be authorized to take **one to four** different sections of the CPA exam. (See Question #17 for discussion of the number of sections to include in the application.)
- ▶ The Illinois Board of Examiners issues an approval letter to the candidate. An Authorization to Test (ATT) is sent to the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA), which maintains a national database of CPA candidates. The ATT will be valid for 90 days.
- ▶ After receiving the Board's ATT, NASBA contacts the candidate requesting payment of their fee. This fee covers the costs of computer test time, digital photo taken at the test center, scoring fees, etc. The full fee must be paid for all sections authorized regardless of when the candidate intends to take each part in the six-month time period.
- ▶ After receiving the requested fee from the candidate, NASBA issues a Notice to Schedule (NTS) to the candidate and also informs the Illinois Board of Examiners. The candidate is instructed to contact a Prometric testing center to schedule a day and time for testing. The NTS is valid for six months. **The candidate must schedule and take those sections that were authorized within six months of the NTS issue date.**
- ▶ The candidate will take the authorized section(s) at a Prometric testing center. (See Questions #21 through #24 for additional information.)
- ▶ Candidate CPA exam responses are sent from Prometric to the AICPA on a daily basis. The AICPA grades the candidate responses and sends scores to NASBA as each part is graded. NASBA sends the scores to the Illinois Board of Examiners, which approves the scores and releases them to the candidate. A candidate will receive a score notice from the Illinois Board of Examiners for each testing window.

7. What are the sections of the CPA exam?

The CPA exam has four sections:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Auditing and Attestation (AUDIT) – 4.5 hours | 3. Financial Accounting & Reporting (FAR) – 4.0 hours |
| 2. Business Environment & Concepts (BEC) – 2.5 hours | 4. Regulation (REG) – 3.0 hours |

8. What is the general structure of the CPA exam?

Sample CPA exams and a tutorial are provided by the AICPA and are available on the CPA exam website at www.cpa-exam.org. The AICPA tutorial and sample CPA exams provide candidates with the opportunity to familiarize themselves with each of the question formats used in each of the four CPA exam sections. As of the printing of this brochure, BEC is comprised entirely of multiple-choice questions included in three sections called testlets. The other three parts of the CPA exam are comprised of multiple-choice and simulation testlets. (A simulation is a case study that tests candidates' knowledge and skills using real-life, work-related situations.) **Candidates should consult the AICPA website at www.cpa-exam.org for new information as it becomes available since the CPA exam format does change periodically. For example, the BEC section is expected to change at some point in 2005 to include simulation testlets.**

9. What is the content of the CPA exam?

The AICPA provides CPA exam content details, referred to as "Content Specification Outlines" (CSOs) on its website at www.cpa-exam.org. The CSOs contain a listing of general topics, the approximate weights of testable topics for each exam section, and reference sources for candidates. Note that the CPA exam now includes economics, finance, and technology topics. Candidates are also required to demonstrate research and communication skills by completing simulations. **Candidates should consult the AICPA website at www.cpa-exam.org for new information as it becomes available since the CPA exam content does change periodically.**

10. How do candidates get free software to practice database research skills for FAR and AUDIT simulations?

To access the AICPA professional literature package to practice database research skills for FAR and AUDIT simulations, visit www.cpa-exam.org. Please note that there is currently no free software to practice tax research skills for REG simulations. Free software is not needed for BEC since at this time the BEC exam is all multiple-choice.

11. What areas of study are most important to pass the CPA exam?

The following table presents suggested areas of study that candidates, at a minimum, should have completed prior to sitting for the CPA exam. This is not intended to be an all-inclusive list, as professional work experience, previous college coursework, and general level of preparedness varies among candidates. Note that Illinois does require the completion of at least one course in each of the following subjects: financial accounting, auditing, taxation, and managerial accounting.

Exam Section	Suggested Areas of Study
Auditing and Attestation (AUDIT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Financial statement auditing performed by external auditors▶ Statistical sampling and auditing with technology may be helpful
Financial Accounting & Reporting (FAR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Intermediate accounting or financial reporting▶ Advanced financial accounting covering partnership accounting, combinations, and consolidations▶ Governmental and nonprofit accounting
Regulation (REG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Business law including professional and legal responsibilities and the AICPA Code of Professional Conduct▶ Individual income taxation▶ Corporate and partnership taxation▶ Taxation of estates, trusts and exempt organizations may be helpful
Business Environment & Concepts (BEC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Micro and macro economics▶ Corporate finance▶ Formation, operation, and dissolution of various business organizations▶ Information systems▶ Managerial and cost accounting

12. Are there review courses available to help candidates prepare for the CPA exam?

Yes, there are a number of CPA review courses available. For a list of review courses in the state, visit the Illinois CPA Society's student website at www.FutureCPA.org.

13. Will the exam content continue to be confidential?

Yes, the CPA Examination will continue to be a non-disclosed exam. Candidates are required to agree to a statement of confidentiality prohibiting the disclosure of any examination information, content, or format.

14. May candidates select the order in which the four CPA exam sections are taken?

Yes, candidates are free to sit for the four exam sections in any desired order. There is no recommended sequence.

15. Is there a time limit within which candidates must successfully complete all four sections of the CPA exam?

Yes, once a candidate passes their first exam section, an 18-month rolling time period begins. This means that all remaining CPA exam sections must be successfully completed within 18-months from the date the candidate sat for the first successfully completed section.

16. Must a candidate sit for all four CPA exam sections within a single testing window?

No, a candidate may schedule between one to four different exam sections in each testing window. A candidate can only schedule the section(s) approved in each application. (See Question #6 regarding the application process.)

17. Is it advisable to apply for all four sections on the initial application to sit for the CPA exam?

When a candidate wants to use the full 18-month rolling time period to successfully complete all sections, the candidate should *not* apply and pay for all four sections at once (even though applying for four sections at once costs less).

18. What strategy should a candidate follow with respect to the timing of taking the exam sections?

Candidates are encouraged to carefully plan the timing of their test-taking. Accordingly, before completing their application to the Illinois Board of Examiners, candidates should anticipate when they plan to take each section of the exam. Candidates apply to sit for one to four different CPA exam sections on the application form. Even though the fees are lower when applying for four sections at once, this may not be the best strategy for most candidates. Candidates must remember that the NTS is effective for only six months. Thus, candidates who apply for multiple sections must schedule and take them within six months. If a candidate's NTS expires, the candidate must then reapply and pay the all related fees again in order to be able to schedule. On the other hand, candidates who plan to take only one exam section in each testing window will use up approximately 12 months of their 18-month rolling time period; that would leave only approximately six months for retaking any section(s) not passed. For these reasons, whenever possible, candidates are encouraged to sit for all four exam sections within two consecutive testing windows to allow adequate time for retake(s), if needed.

19. If a candidate is approved to take and pay for multiple CPA exam sections at once, must the candidate sit for all sections within a single testing window?

No, candidates are not required to sit for all sections within one testing window. Illinois candidates should be aware that each approval letter and subsequent payment coupon issued by NASBA is valid for only 90 days, and the NTS is valid for only six months. Therefore, an Illinois candidate who applies for and pays for multiple sections at one time must take all sections within six months.

20. How many times may a candidate sit for an exam section?

There is no limit on the number of times a candidate may retake a failed exam section administered in different testing windows. However, candidates who do not successfully complete all four exam sections within the 18-month rolling time period described above will be required to retake the earliest section passed until all four parts are passed within a given 18-month period.

21. As an Illinois candidate, must candidates sit for the CPA exam at a Prometric test site located in Illinois?

No. Over 300 Prometric test centers throughout the United States are authorized to offer the CPA exam. To date, Illinois has eight approved CPA exam Prometric centers with 187 testing seats. Visit www.prometric.com/cpa or www.ilboa.org for a complete list of test centers.

22. Are there any particular dates when scheduling at Prometric test centers is more difficult?

Yes, candidates seem to prefer the latter part of the second month of each testing window. Those dates are booked more quickly than others.

23. What are the Prometric test center hours?

Hours of operation will vary among Prometric test centers. Some Prometric test centers will offer evening and weekend hours. Please consult www.Prometric.com/cpa for the test center hours and days of operation.

24. What rules must candidates follow at the Prometric test center?

Candidates are not permitted to bring any outside materials into the examination room. Personal items such as purses and coats are stored in a locker outside of the examination room. A digital photo of each candidate is taken prior to the candidate being allowed to enter the examination room. The test center will provide scratch paper for use during the examination. Hand-held calculators are not permitted as an on-screen calculator may be accessed during the examination. Food and drink are not permitted. Candidates cannot wear watches, but a timer displaying exam time remaining is displayed on each candidate's monitor during the entire exam. Candidates may exit the room during the examination only upon completion of an exam testlet. **Candidates are not permitted to exit the room for any reason while working within a testlet.** While a candidate is on break outside of the examination room, the exam time continues to run. While in the examination room, candidates are monitored via closed-circuit cameras and viewing windows.

25. Are special accommodations available for candidates with learning and/or physical disabilities?

Candidates requiring special accommodations should notify the Illinois Board of Examiners when applying. Professional documentation of the existence of a disability will be required to be submitted along with the original Illinois exam application materials.

26. Will candidates receive a numeric score for each CPA exam section?

Yes, Illinois candidates will receive a numeric score for each exam section ranging from zero to 99. A score of 75 or higher indicates successful completion of that exam section. In addition to the score, candidates will receive exam performance information.

27. When may candidates expect to receive their scores?

As of the printing of this brochure, exam section scores are expected to be released to the Board office approximately two to four weeks after the end of each testing window.

28. If necessary, when may candidates retake a CPA exam section?

Candidates who do not pass an exam section within a testing window may not retake that section until the next available testing window. The application form for Authorization to Retest and related fee information are available at www.ilboa.org. Processing times can only be estimated. Re-examination candidates reapplying in Illinois should allow at least two weeks.

29. How much do Illinois candidates pay to sit for the CPA exam?

As of the printing of this brochure, the Illinois fee for a first-time candidate with only domestic credentials, applying for all four sections is \$765.

Illinois Board of Examiners credentials evaluation fee	\$175
Illinois Board of Examiners administrative fee	\$120 (if paid all at once for 4 sections of exam)
NASBA, AICPA and Prometric fees	\$470 (not paid to the IL Board of Examiners)

TOTAL: \$765

International candidates requiring an evaluation of international coursework will pay a total of \$840. The fee for Illinois re-examination candidates authorized to take all four parts is \$590. Candidates whose Authorization to Test (ATT) are sent to the National Candidate Database after July 1, 2005, will pay higher examination fees to NASBA. Instead of \$470 above, the fee for a four-part Notice to Schedule will increase to \$547. Re-examination candidates will pay \$667 instead of \$590. Detailed information about fee increases will be posted at www.ilboa.org as it becomes available.

30. Are there any other certification requirements for Illinois candidates who have successfully completed all four sections of the CPA exam?

Yes, effective January 1, 2005, Illinois candidates are also required to pass a separate exam on the rules of professional conduct before they will be certified by the Board as CPAs. This requirement does not need to be met within the 18-month rolling time period. For more information, www.icpas.org/icpas/advocacy/ethics-requirement.asp. Currently, the exam requirements are fulfilled by completing the AICPA Code of Professional Conduct Self-Study Course, a 'take-home' AICPA Examination. CPA candidates who have completed the exam prior to successfully passing the CPA exam can have their scores forwarded to the Board office. All inquiries about the ethics exam should be directed to Illinois Board of Examiners. Candidates are encouraged to complete the ethics requirement before they complete the CPA exam requirements.

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