**Certification Exam Study Kit**

So you’ve decided to take the CPCS or CPMSM certification exam, but you’re not sure where to start? You’re not alone! Taking the certification exam can be daunting, but we’ve compiled a short study kit to help you get started.

In the next few pages, you’ll find the following information:

1. Study Group Tips
2. Sample Study Group Schedule
3. Test Taking Tips
4. Resources

The information in this kit is based on our personal experiences taking the certification exams. We highly recommend that you use a variety of resources as you study, including reaching out to others who have taken the exam for their experiences.

**Study Group Tips**

Studying with a group is a great way to prepare for the exam. You can hold each other accountable and get different perspectives. Here are some ideas to get the most out of your group.

1. **Follow a schedule.** When everyone knows what to expect, you can keep discussions focused and productive.
2. **Do your homework.** You won’t be able to absorb all of the information in one session, so study the scheduled topic ahead of time.
3. **Ask questions.** Take this opportunity to bring up what’s confusing you. There just might be a URAC (or NCQA, or CMS) expert in your midst! If not, you can work through the problems together.
4. **Use sample questions.** These can be found in study books, inherited from other study groups, or you can make them up. Sample questions are a great tool that test your understanding and help you get a feel for what the exam will be like. Try asking each participant to bring three questions for that session’s topic.
5. **Debate.** You might not have the answers to all of your sample questions, and that’s fine! Take a stand and defend your opinion – this can help you figure out what you know and solidify your understanding of the key concepts.

**Sample Study Group Schedule**

**Week 1:** Joint Commission and CMS

**Week 2:** NCQA and URAC

**Week 3:** AAAHC and HFAP

**Week 4:** NPDB and Legal Issues

**Week 5:** Roles and Responsibilities

**Week 6:** Robert’s Rules of Order, Meeting Minutes, and Review

**Test Taking Tips**

1. **Know the standards.** The accreditation standards are a big part of the exam, especially The Joint Commission, NCQA, and CMS. Make flashcards, have your spouse/partner/kids/coworkers/neighbors/carpoolers quiz you - do whatever it takes to memorize those standards!
2. **Memorize less common accreditation standards in terms of “The Big 3.”** If you’re having problems with some of the less common accreditation organizations, try to align them with one you’re more familiar with and focus on memorizing the differences. For example, URAC and NCQA are somewhat similar. If you think of URAC in terms of NCQA you can focus on the areas where URAC is substantially different from NCQA.
3. **Take your time.** The CPCS exam has 150 questions and you have 3 hours to complete it. The CPMSM exam has 175 questions and you have 4 hours to complete it. That’s over a minute per question. You’ll probably have plenty of time to complete the exam, so don’t rush.
4. **Read each question and ALL of the answer choices.** Even if you think you’ve found the answer, read all of the choices. There may be a better answer further down.
5. **Use keywords to eliminate answer choices.** Find clues in the question that will help you eliminate choices right away. For example, if a question references the Medical Executive Committee, you can probably eliminate any answer choices that refer to NCQA or URAC.
6. **Use your experience, but don’t be limited by your experience.** If you’re stuck on an answer, definitely use your experience working in the field to choose an answer. Don’t be limited by the specific way you do your work, though. The credentialing process and the role of the MSP vary greatly from organization to organization. It’s important to reference the standards and think about how the question could apply to different situations. Remember, the test is about all MSPs, not just your particular work experience.
7. **Pick out the BEST answer choice.** If more than one answer choice seems correct, pick the answer that best suits the question. Think about what the person writing the question was trying to emphasize.
8. **Answer all the questions.** There’s no penalty for wrong answers, so there’s no point in leaving any blanks. If you don’t know the answer, try to narrow down the possible answers and make your best guess. If you really can’t narrow it down, a random guess is better than no answer at all.
9. **Trust yourself.** If you are confident in an answer, there’s a good chance you’re right. Revisit any questions you weren’t sure about (you can mark them in the online test to review later), but don’t spend too much time going over each answer again and again or you’re likely to change a correct answer to an incorrect one.
10. **Cut yourself some slack.** You won’t know the answer to all of the questions. The test is designed that way. Don’t beat yourself up; concentrate on your strengths and focus on the questions you know you’re getting right.

**Resources**

**From the** [**NAMSS Store**](https://members.namss.org/eweb/DynamicPage.aspx?Site=NAMSS&WebCode=COEMerchandiseList&pager=10)**:**

* NAMSS CPCS Study Guide
* NAMSS CPMSM Study Guide
* NAMSS Comparison of Standards

**Other Resources:**

NAMSS Candidate Handbook: <http://www.namss.org/Portals/0/Certification/NAMSS%20Candidate%20Handbook.pdf>

NAMSS Certification FAQs: <http://www.namss.org/Certification/CertificationFAQs.aspx>

CPCS Practice Test ($50): <http://www.namss.org/Certification/ExamInformation/CPCSPracticeTest.aspx>

CPMSM Practice Test ($50): <http://www.namss.org/Certification/ExamInformation/CPMSMPracticeTest.aspx>

NPDB Guidebook: <http://www.npdb.hrsa.gov/resources/NPDBGuidebook.pdf>

Quizlet - try searching NAMSS, CPCS, CPMSM, NCQA, TJC, Robert’s Rules, etc.: <https://quizlet.com/>

Robert’s Rules Quiz: <http://www.rulesonline.com/quiz.htm>

NCQA: <http://www.ncqa.org/tabid/58/Default.aspx>

URAC: <https://www.urac.org>

TJC: <http://www.jointcommission.org>   
  
AAAHC: <http://www.aaahc.org>

HFAP: <http://www.hfap.org>