

AICP STUDY GUIDE

Podcast

Episode 3: What to Expect When You're Expecting...to take the Exam

And welcome! To the third episode of the VERY UNofficial AICP Study Guide Podcast.

I'm Jonathan Miller - thanks so much for joining. Last time we talked a bit about the application process, and today, we will pick up on what you can expect heading into the exam; after you've applied and received a confirmation that you're good to go, of course.

We'll hit on things like how many questions, what type of questions, some time management tips, and what you're expected to know. And more generally, what you just got yourself into.

To help us sort through all of this stuff, I talked to Shane and Alex of Planning Certification.com to gain some of their expertise.

(00:48)

Jonathan: Well thanks for joining me today guys. I know you're probably super busy preparing for the next wave of test takers since the application window just closed a few weeks ago for the November exam. So, I really appreciate you guys taking the time out for us.

Alex: Thanks for having us

Shane: Yeah, thank you.

Jonathan: So, first things first, how many questions can test takers expect to see on the exam?

Alex: So there are 170 questions on the exam. 150 of them are actually scored and count toward your pass rate. 20 of them are APA trying to test out whether the questions are successful. So, if most of the test takers don't successfully answer that question, then it'll kind of get trashed, and the ones that do really well will roll over to the next test cycle and be used in future exams.

Jonathan: Do you know what kind of format are those in? Is it like a fill-in-the-blank, or are there any fill-in-the-blank ones, or like, you know, matching ones or anything like that? Or just multiple choice?

Alex: It's entirely multiple choice, so you're always going to, you know, see the answers that you need right in front of you. The format does change between the types of multiple choice. So, APA loves their all-or-nothing, all-of-the-above, none-of-the-above, or sometimes they'll do the format where it's like 1 and 2, 2 and 4; that kind of thing.

Jonathan: Okay, yeah, those ones always kind of trip me up a little bit. What kind of time do the test takers have to work with to get all of that completed?

Alex: It's three and a half hours once you sit down and start your test.

Jonathan: Okay then. So, you obviously have plenty of time to hopefully, at least, get through the 170

questions?

Shane: Yeah, it goes by quicker than you think. I mean, I'm a pretty fast test taker, so for me it was plenty. But, you do want to go through and kind of check your answers. So on the test there's a mark - there's a function - on the test when you take it that lets you know what you've answered and what you haven't, so you can go through and answer what you know, and then spend time on questions that you're not as sure on. So you can devote a lot of that three and half hours to questions that you need to spend more time on. It is a long time, but it does sneak up on you.

Jonathan: I know I'm actually - I personally - unfortunately am terrible at this. Is there, what's your train-of-thought at least on going back and reviewing answers at the end?

Alex: I'm a big fan of it because I think instead of getting stuck in the middle of the test - and that kind of slowing you down - I like to just kind of mark it, answer it, move on, and then go back and review it.

(03:22)

Jonathan: I know this is a pretty broad question, so I apologize for being so vague with it, but what are the - what are some of the main topics that the exam covers?

Shane: So, the main test topics - we call those the big five - and they are fundamental planning knowledge, plan-making and implementation, areas of practice, leadership and administration, and ethics. In the test the questions are broken down between those big five topics; 25% of the test is on fundamental planning and knowledge, 30% is on plan-making and implementation, 30% is on areas of practice, 5% is on leadership and administration, and 10% on ethics.

Jonathan: Can you tell me a little bit more about those topics that are included in those areas?

Alex: Yep, so it's always going to kind of touch on the range of what a planner would be, and what kind of job a planner would hold. So, you're going to get questions on transportation, comprehensive planning, your current planning, and economic development. The list goes on, but basically if a planner can have a job in that role, there's basically going to be at least one question that touches on it.

Jonathan: Yeah, I know that was an issue for me. I had had basically zero experience doing environmental planning, so I had to spend a considerable amount of time trying to catch up on you know, NEPA, Clean Air Act, and all of that stuff.

Alex: Yeah, I think that's definitely a test taking strategy because if you are a current zoning planner every single day, you clearly don't need to study subdivision review in the same way that you'd need to study environmental planning.

Jonathan: Right, I know, oh man, environmental planning.

Shane: It's funny, because when Alex took the test she was a NEPA planner, so that was one area that she had in the bag from the beginning.

Jonathan: Oh really, that's interesting. Mine, the ones I had pretty easy were transportation and comprehensive planning.

Shane: Yeah, Same for me too.

(05:20)

So, to recap Alex and Shane's points, it looks like you'll have 170 questions over a 3 ½ hour period.

Unfortunately, 20 of those won't count, and since you don't know which 20 questions those are - probably the easiest ones - they will still end up taking time away from the ones that do count.

And just a side note, don't be too miffed by that. It's a pretty standard component of just about every professional or standardized exam. That's how they figure out which questions to fold into the next round and how to score them.

The good news here is that it's all multiple-choice, so you will - on some level - have the ability to use the power of the process of elimination to help narrow it down. The bad news - on the other hand - is there really is a wide range of material that's covered.

But it also sounds like you can - to some degree at least - count on your existing experience to help out: By saving you time and energy studying those particular topics, or at the VERY least you can go ahead and leave studying those topics to the end. That way, you can brush up on some of the finer points after you've tackled the unfamiliar topics.

(06:36)

Jonathan: Alright, so then - just as a final question for you guys - and this can be related to the exam or not: totally up to you. What advice would you give a young planner at the beginning of their career.

Alex: Well, one of the things that I think is amazing about having an urban planning degree and then pursuing an AICP, is that you can really use planning in so many different areas. So my biggest advice to any young planner is to really think about the type of quality of life that they want from their career because the private sector and the public sector both have their pros and cons. So, when you're kind of setting out/submitting job applications, it's really important to think about what type of hours do you want to work, what kind of work do you want to work on, what type of pay are you looking for; the work environment itself.

Jonathan: Yeah, I actually - that happened to me a lot. I had actually started out in the private sector and then switched over to public because one of the things I did not like about the private sector was I would get phone calls from my boss at like 8:30 at night or something like that saying, "Hey, can we get these things together by tomorrow morning?" And I'm like, "Well, you know, it's 8:30 at night." So it's always a give and take.

So where can listeners go to get more information from you guys on the exam?

Shane: So they can visit us at www.planningcertification.com. They can find our instagram, @planningcertification, or even just shooting us a general email at planningcertification@gmail.com. We're happy to answer any questions, help out with studying leading up to the exam, so we hope people use us as a full resource as they're studying for the test.

Alex: And I will say by the time this podcast airs, we'll be launching a new product of quizzes and exams for everyone too.

Jonathan: Well, thank you guys again. You guys have been awesome, and I really appreciate the time you took to share some of this information with us.

Shane: Thanks for having us.

Jonathan: Take care.

Shane: You too.

(08:39)

Well, thanks again for tuning in!

As always, all of the links for the references we talked about here can be found in the show notes. If you have any questions that you want to follow-up on, feel free to reach out to me at theveryunofficialaicpguide@gmail.com, no spaces.

Thanks again to Shane and Alexandra for taking the time to walk us through the structure of the exam. Be sure to check out their website at www.planningcertification.com to check out the materials they have there. It's really well put together, certainly affordable, and a great place to start once you decide you're going to go for it.

Also, don't forget to subscribe to this podcast so you can follow along with future episodes, help prepare for the exam and supplement your other study regimens. Thanks again, 'till next time.

Links:

www.planningcertification.com

