Testing Excellence

Tell me more about...

Test prep options
for test takers

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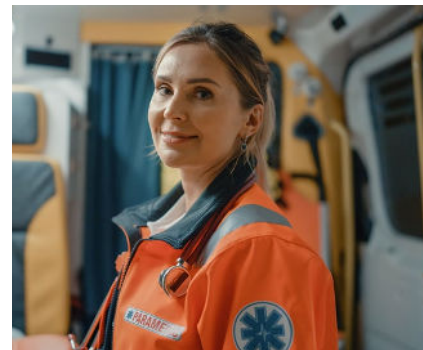
Contents

Introduction

Failing to prepare

There's an old adage, often attributed to Benjamin Franklin, that failing to prepare is preparing to fail. The 6P Rule conveys a similar message, that Prior Proper Planning Prevents Poor Performance.

Anyone who has ever had to take a test, exam or assessment will know this is sound advice. That's why test preparation is such a fundamental stage of the test taker journey for any certification program. Getting test preparation right will support your test takers – and your testing programs – to succeed.

Flexible preparation options

Certification testing has become more flexible and convenient, with a multitude of options available to both testing organizations and test takers alike. And the tools available to help test takers prepare have transformed in line with these changes. For example, online courses and study materials with accessible practice tests on offer anytime, anywhere. All supported by interactive resources in different formats to suit different learning styles.

But how can testing organizations make decisions about the most appropriate and effective test preparation options for their certification programs and their test takers? Again, proper planning and preparation is the answer.

This guide covers the key test preparation options currently available. Including tools, technology and techniques that effectively demonstrate:

☑ **How** a test taker will be tested.

☑ **What** they will be tested on.

With advice to develop a sound strategy for the test preparation element of your certification program. And insights into the future of test preparation and where the latest technology is taking us.

> **By effectively answering those questions, a testing organization will set up their test takers – and their testing programs – to succeed."**

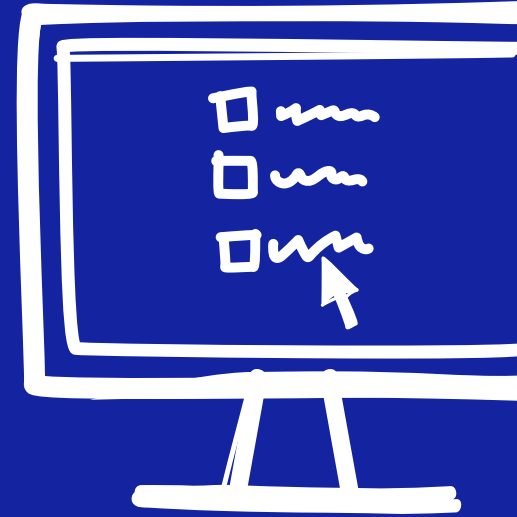**Isabelle Gonthier, SVP**
Content Science, PSI

The international standard on delivering assessments in the workplace ISO 10667 states:

"The service provider shall... provide guidance on ways in which the assessment participant might prepare for the assessment, including access to approved or recommended sample and practice materials."

How am I going to be tested?

What the test will look like

The experience of taking a practice test comes with numerous benefits for test takers. Practice tests provide the opportunity to preview the test day experience:

Under **test conditions** in a controlled environment.

In a **limited time** that replicates the actual test.

With the advent of secure remote testing and online proctoring, practice tests now also give test takers the chance to get used to the:

Test delivery platform and how to navigate around their online test.

Online proctoring technology and the processes involved.

The increased familiarity and ease with technology that comes with practice tests goes a long way to reducing test taker anxiety. It also minimizes issues on test day and makes it far more likely a test taker will achieve their full potential. With the opportunity to take multiple practice tests, these benefits will be realized even further.

Test taker myths...
Practice makes perfect

When it comes to testing, practice does not make perfect – but it does make progress.

Taking a practice test or even multiple tests will not guarantee a successful test outcome. Test takers still need to study to understand the topics and subtopics within the certification program content outline.

- Practice tests **are** intended to help test takers get more familiar and comfortable with taking a test under controlled conditions.

- Practice tests **are not** a substitute for proper learning. Your test takers still need to hit the books!

Develop your practice test strategy

For testing organizations thinking about adding practice tests to their portfolio, or enhancing their practice test offering, it might be useful to consider some key questions.

What do you want your practice tests to achieve?

- Is the primary purpose to enhance the **test taker experience?**

- Are you hoping to **reduce the administrative burden** by decreasing test taker queries and issues on test day?

- Do you want to make practice tests more of an interactive experience that **contributes to learning**, with explanations and rationale for test results?

- Do you need your practice tests to engage test takers with content and appeal to **different learning styles.** For example, with audio or video?

The response to all these questions will inform the type of practice tests you choose to offer your test takers.

Examples

Example 1

Here is an example from a real estate practice test, where the rationale walks the test taker through the solution step-by-step.

In this question, we are asked to calculate the monthly interest on a straight term loan of $480,000 with a 4% interest rate. To solve this problem, we need to understand the formula for calculating monthly interest and apply it to the given loan amount and interest rate.

Step 1: Understand the formula for calculating monthly interest
The formula for calculating monthly interest is as follows:
`Monthly Interest = (Principal x Interest Rate) ÷ 12`

Step 2: Apply the formula to the given loan amount and interest rate
Now, we will apply the formula to the given loan amount of $480,000 and the interest rate of 4%. First, we need to convert the percentage interest rate to a decimal by dividing it by 100:
`4% ÷ 100 = 0.04`

Next, we will plug in the values into the formula:
`Monthly Interest = ($480,000 × 0.04) ÷ 12`

Step 3: Calculate the monthly interest
Now, we will perform the calculations:
`$480,000 × 0.04 = $19,200 (annual interest)`
`$19,200 ÷ 12 = $1,600 (monthly interest)`

Key Takeaway: The correct answer is $1,600. To calculate the monthly interest on a straight term loan, we use the formula `Monthly Interest = (Principal × Interest Rate) ÷ 12` and apply it to the given loan amount and interest rate.

Example 2

Here is an example from an insurance practice test, where a key takeaway is provided for the question / topic.

≙ Key Takeaway

An **Umbrella policy** is a type of insurance policy that provides coverage beyond the primary insurance policy limits and is usually written in increments of $1 million, with a single limit per occurrence covering claims in excess of the insured's underlying policy limits.

An umbrella policy is a type of insurance policy that provides coverage beyond the primary insurance policy limits. It can serve as a protective layer over the insured's underlying policy limits and provide coverage for claims in excess of those limits. It is usually written in increments of $1 million, with a single limit per occurrence.

Umbrella policy is *correct* because it provides coverage for claims in excess of the underlying policy limits and is usually written in increments of $1 million. When an insured purchases an umbrella policy, the limit of liability is set at the insured's discretion, typically beginning at $1 million. This $1 million limit applies to the total limit for all claims made per occurrence, regardless of the number of individuals or entities involved in the claim.

Supplementary payments is *incorrect* because supplementary payments are typically provided under a primary policy, and they are payments made to the insured in addition to any liability limits or coverage provided. Supplementary payments do not provide coverage beyond the primary policy limits and thus cannot be used to cover claims in excess of those limits.

Amendment of policy provisions is *incorrect* because amending policy provisions is a process of modifying the terms of an existing policy to better suit the needs of the insured. This process is usually used to clarify the language of a policy or to add additional coverage. It does not provide coverage for claims in excess of the underlying policy limits.

Personal injury protection is *incorrect* because personal injury protection (PIP) is a type of coverage that provides coverage for medical expenses, lost wages, and other costs associated with an injury. It does not provide coverage for claims in excess of the underlying policy limits.

Example 3

Some testing organizations choose to offer a more robust explanation, which helps test takers understand why the correct answer is right and the incorrect answers are wrong.

Example 4

Here is an example where an audio clip is used in a practice test, both in the mobile app and on the testing platform.
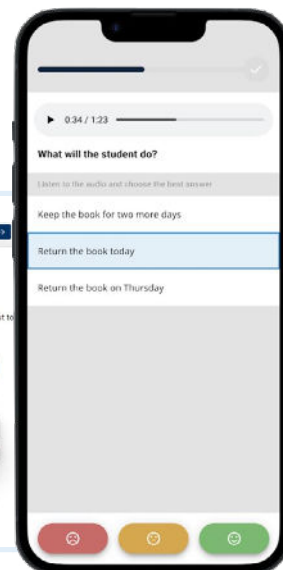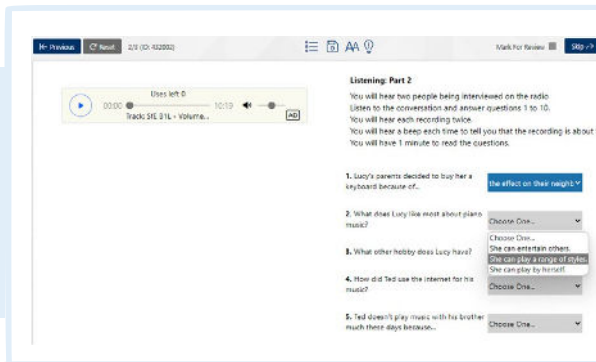
Are practice tests a **marketing tool** for your programs?

Practice tests can be an effective marketing tool for your certification program. They are a vehicle to help you get the word out about your program content and benefits. Online quizzes and test simulations, for instance, will attract potential customers. This presents a valuable opportunity to start a relationship with those who are new to your profession. As well as individuals developing their career or considering a career change.

Practice tests have been shown to support the conversion from training to testing. For example, encouraging greater test take up in industries such as IT where certification may not be mandatory. Micro-credentials are also worth considering, as they serve a similar purpose by providing an accessible introduction that often leads to further training and testing.

Improving the accessibility and convenience of your practice tests will help you stay one step ahead of your competitors. For instance, one option to consider is a mobile test prep app with short bite size tests. Optimized for mobile, practice tests can be accessed from anywhere. If you do plan to use practice tests as a marketing tool, they should be priced accordingly.

Are practice tests a **revenue raiser** for your organization?

For many certification programs, practice tests are a valuable revenue raiser. If revenue is a key objective for your practice tests, this should be considered in your pricing strategy.

Some organizations use practice tests as a value add or promotion to boost sales of their certification. For example, if a test taker books a test within a certain timeframe they get a practice test or tests in their bundle when they check out.

Do you use practice test data to inform decision making?

Practice tests provide useful data and information about:

- **Who has registered –** numbers of tests purchased and the profile of purchasers.

- **Pass / fail rates –** for topics, subtopics and individual items.

- **Your content outline –** identifying gaps that need to be filled.

What type of practice tests?

The answers to these questions will help you identify the type of practice tests you need to achieve your objectives. From standard practice tests that provide test takers with a last-minute confidence check, to more advanced tests that feature a test readiness indicator, item rationale and a comprehensive scoring report.

The **importance** of high-quality testing

The aim of certification testing is to assess whether a test taker has achieved the required competence in their chosen profession – and will uphold these standards in practice.

A well-designed and securely delivered test will not reward a test taker whose soul aim is to pass the test. It will only reward those with the standard of knowledge and skills required to hold the certification. This is crucial for the reputation of the certification and awarding body.

"Test preparation that includes more practice opportunities can have a statistically significant effect on test score gains."

Appelrouth & Zabrucky, 2015

Read our guide

How to develop the right test content for your certification program

Download ↗

"Equity and fairness can be affected by how familiar a test taker is with testing technology and processes. The chance to use the technology in a practice test levels the playing field and reduces anxiety around the testing process."

Isabelle Gonthier, SVP
Content Science, PSI

How to set up your **practice tests**

When you have decided the purpose and strategy for your practice tests, there are some questions you should ask of your certification testing partner – or potential partners – to ensure practice tests are beneficial for your organization and your test takers.

Due diligence at this stage will ensure you are extracting the maximum value out of your practice tests and delivering the best possible test taker experience.

1. Self-service capabilities and ease of administration

- Can access to practice tests be limited or restricted if required?

- Can the platform automate with little or no hassle?

- What is the plan for addressing test taker questions and technical issues?

- Does the platform allow for hands-on or hands-off administration from our team?

- Can a test and practice test be purchased as a bundle or kept separately?

Pro tip

If you plan to take a hands-off approach, ask important questions upfront to ensure test taker concerns are addressed promptly and accurately.

2. Scalability

- Can the platform handle any volume of practice tests, small or large?

- Can login credentials for users be created on-demand?

- Can login credentials automatically turn off after a predetermined timeframe?

- Are settings flexible and easy to change, even after initial set-up?

Pro tip

Flexibility and being able to change functionality after launch is important to make the most out of a partnership.

3. Ease of reporting

- What reporting is available from the platform?

- Can the data be broken down to item-level?

- Can individual items be categorized by topic and subtopic?

- Can references be included within items, to books or resources linked to the topic?

Pro tip

Being able to drill down into the data reveals specific areas where test takers may be struggling, allowing for changes in teaching materials if necessary.
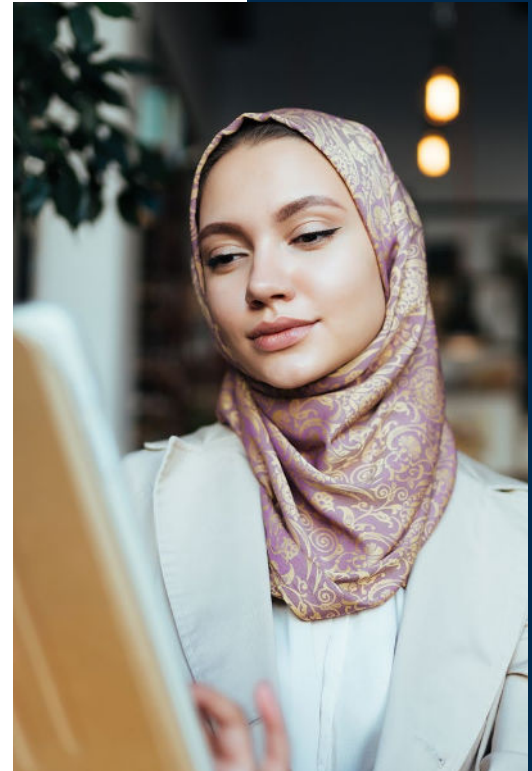
The **future** of practice tests

Machine learning to improve practice tests

Machine learning has the potential to take existing test items and reconfigure them to create new items. This creates a larger item bank for your practice tests without increasing exposure of your live test items.
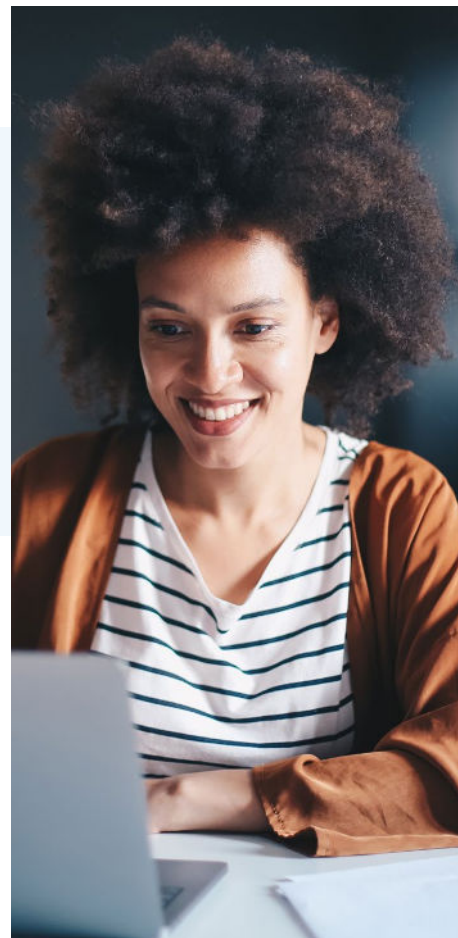
Fully integrated testing and learning

We are improving practice tests all the time and they are increasingly becoming an integrated part of the learning experience.

For example, the ability to provide a detailed explanation and rationale to support learning when a test taker gets an item wrong. As well as the ability to present a wider variety of materials at this stage of the test taker journey to support different learning styles, which might be video or audio resources.
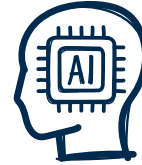
AI generative tools

Going even further than machine learning, AI generative tools like ChatGPT offer significant opportunities for driving advancements in the pre-testing preparation process.

For example, by coupling subject matter expertise with GPT-4 content creation capabilities, PSI is innovating a comprehensive suite of test prep and practise test products designed to drive more positive test taker outcomes. By offering a real-world testing experience and targeted study opportunities, while ensuring no live test questions appear outside of the actual test, PSI is developing a scalable suite of pre-knowledge products that simultaneously supports test takers and protects high-stakes test integrity.

What am I going to be tested on?
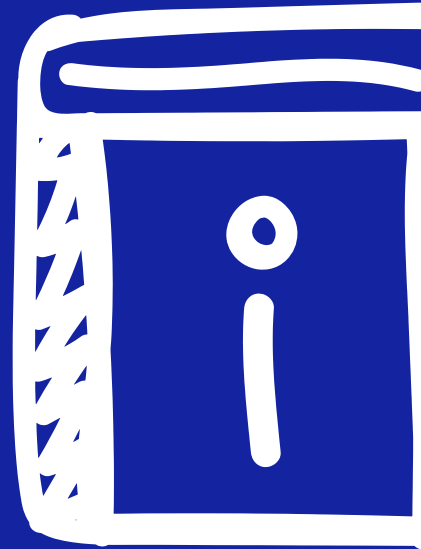
Clear guidance on what the test will cover

As well as preparing test takers for how they will be tested, certification programs also play an important role in providing information about what they will be tested on.

Best practice in this area starts with your candidate or test taker information bulletin. As well as information about test booking and delivery, your test taker information bulletin should contain the test content outline – a list of topics and subtopics that will be covered in the test.

Read our guide

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Download ↗

Additional
study materials

There is huge potential to add value for your test takers by offering further test preparation materials during the test taker journey. This might include additional study materials – such as books, textbooks, workbooks, online courses, and other resources – as well as practice tests. Your practice test strategy will determine the most appropriate materials for your program.

Study materials in **different formats**

An individual's learning style should not impact their chance of achieving a successful test outcome. Providing study materials in a variety of formats is a way to improve the equity and fairness of your tests. For example, a visual or auditory learner will find it harder to study from a traditional textbook than a reading / writing learner.

"Video is increasingly popular with all audiences. YouTube is now the second largest search engine and the global number of YouTube users is forecast to increase to 1.1 billion in 2028." [i]

[i] Statista, 2021.

Support
visual learners...

Study materials that use diagrams and images, for example flashcards, are helpful for visual learners. Visual learners also often use educational videos as a learning resource to understand key concepts and topics.

Support
auditory learners...

Study materials that use video will be helpful for auditory learners, along with audio recordings and educational podcasts.

In 2022, **62% of the US population over 12 years of age has listened to a podcast** and 79% are familiar with the medium. 73% have listened to online audio in the last month. [ii]

[ii] Infinite Dial, 2022.

Test taker
communications

When it comes to study materials and practice tests, it's not a case of build it and they will come. Make sure your test takers are aware of the test prep materials available to them – and that they are easy to find.

It's a good idea to start offering test prep options as early as possible in your test taker's journey, before a test taker has completed the booking process. Signpost and create links from your website to where test takers can purchase test prep materials online. And include links to test prep resources in your test taker emails in the lead up to test day. It's the perfect time, as your test takers are gearing up for test day.

The team at PSI has created a range of email and webpage templates that can be adapted to suit your needs. For more advice about test taker communications download our guide: How to make the test taker experience exceptional.

Download ↗

Discounts **and bundles**

Some organizations choose to give discounts on study materials, as well as practice tests, when they are added to a bundle with a test booking. The most popular bundles we see are a built-in retake, a bundled practice test, or a prep bundle that includes practice tests along with the additional training materials.

A *great* online shopping experience

psioninestore.com ↗

We're all used to shopping online – and we expect that anything we want to buy will be available on the internet. Test preparation materials are no different. Not only do your test prep materials need to be available to purchase online, but they also need to be easy to find, with a smooth and seamless purchasing process.

The PSI Online Store brings together the test prep materials for our clients in one place, with dedicated areas for specific professions, industries and sectors. On the PSI online store, test takers can search for and easily purchase practice tests, textbooks, manuals and other training resources. As well as access discount codes and find links to partner websites for further continuing education resources.

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Conclusion

Test preparation materials offer myriad benefits for both your organization and your test takers. And PSI has already delivered over 100 million practice tests to test takers around the world.

For certification programs, practice tests are a potential revenue raiser, marketing tool and opportunity to gather valuable data to inform future strategy.

For test takers, they are an opportunity to get familiar with test content and testing technology, be more prepared, and reduce anxiety on test day.

Your test takers want to gain a certification in their chosen profession, and you want to give them the best possible opportunity to succeed. Use test preparation options to support your test takers, your organizational goals, and future program growth.

Your trusted testing partner

Every day our clients support millions of people to realise their dreams, reach their potential, and improve their life chances. They care about their test takers – and we share that responsibility.

Our unwavering focus is on delivering frictionless and fair test taker experiences, without compromising test integrity, through...

Dreams...
Deserve PSI

Secure test delivery

- Authorised global **test center** network.
- Secure and scalable **remote testing**, Live and Record & Review **online proctoring**.
- Flexible **multi-modal** test delivery.
- Testing **windows or continuous testing** on-demand.

Rigorous test development

- Legally defensible and **valid test content.**
- **Job analysis** and test content specifications.
- **Subject Matter Expert** (SME) meeting facilitation and guidance on engagement and management
- Secure **item authoring, banking and test generation** software.

Expertise in testing science

- Experienced **psychometricians.**
- Specialised **test developers.**
- **Dedicated team of data scientists** working on data forensics and web crawling

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