

Strategy for Passing the CBAP Version 3 Exam

Apr 21, 2019

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Becoming a Certified Business Analysis Professional (CBAP) has been one of the most rewarding and challenging endeavors for me as a business analyst. The purpose of this article is to help other business analysts pass the CBAP exam on the first try by sharing the strategy that I used. Hopefully, it will be of great service to many business analysts and aspiring CBAPs. Below is an outline to navigate you through studying for the CBAP and absorbing the BABOK material.

1. [TAKE BABOK SIMULATION EXAMS](#)

This is probably the most important factor in passing the CBAP exam (outside of reading the BABOK Guide). A good set of simulation questions will prepare you for the types of questions that are on the actual CBAP exam. The explanation of answers displayed during the simulation test results will make you aware of your strengths and weaknesses and help you identify what information in the BABOK Guide is important. Below is a guide for looking for CBAP simulation tests

- Ensure questions are aligned with BABOK version 3
- Aim to get a question bank from an IIBA approved entity
- Try to get simulation questions written by contributors of the BABOK Guide, test question writers for the actual CBAP exam, or individuals who are active with IIBA
- Ensure that full simulations have 120 question so that you can begin managing your time the way you would on the actual exam
- Try to get simulation questions that give you detailed explanations of the correct answers (this is important for step 2 and 5)
- Ensure the simulation format has long case study questions (1 -1.5 pages) as well as plenty of short case study scenarios (short paragraphs) as this is the format of the actual CBAP exam. Remember CBAP is competency based, not memory based. You will not need to memorize every definition exactly but you will need to have a deep understanding of all of the BABOK concepts.

2. [STUDY ALL OF THE SIMULATION TEST RESULTS EXPLANATIONS](#)

In order to get a good mix of questions and scenarios for the CBAP exam, I recommend taking 4 to 6 full simulation exams. Create a list of ALL of the exam questions explanation of answers and study them. This applies to questions you've answered correctly and incorrectly. For example, let's say you have completed an exam. The simulation will likely list the following items for each question after you have answered all the questions:

- Your answer
- The correct answer
- An explanation of why your answer was right or wrong – For example: *The business case should be revised because the solution approach has changed.*

The *explanation* of why your answer was right or wrong is what you will want to add to your list of explanations. If you go through 6 full simulations you will likely end up with a list of 200 -300 explanations to study, assuming that some of the questions are repeated amongst the simulations. This will provide insight into how the test writers are interpreting the BABOK material. Unfortunately, many of the concepts that are important to pass the exam are implied and not explicitly

stated, therefore those who aspire to be CBAPs must be able to interpret the BABOK material and understand the general concepts. This technique is very effective in uncovering the implicit concepts within BABOK.

3. TAKE A CBAP EXAM PREPARATORY COURSE

This is not groundbreaking advice; however, it is very important. The material covered in the BABOK Guide may seem straightforward to some but the design of the exam formatting makes it critical to have a more in-depth understanding of the concepts. Having discussions with a facilitator who can offer expert advice on what to look for on the exam will greatly increase your chances of passing the exam. Also, the discussions that are had about the material will further embed the concepts in your memory. This will be beneficial for you as a BA even beyond passing the CBAP exam. Some individuals may be able to pass the CBAP without a prep course; however, I believe the investment will significantly increase your chances of passing the exam on your first try. Below is a guide for selecting a CBAP prep course:

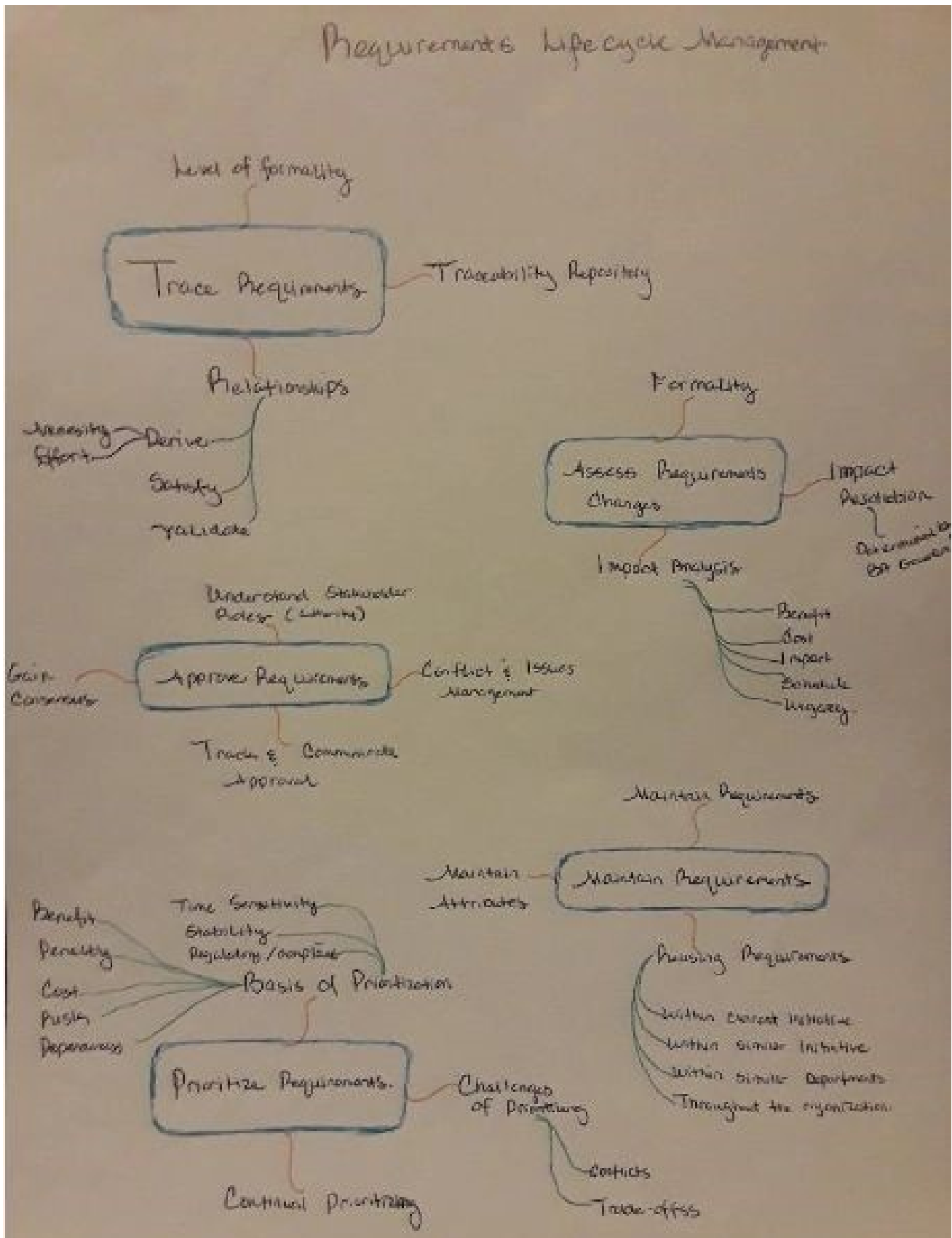
- Ensure the facilitator is a CBAP and is familiar with BABOK version 3
- Seek CBAP courses from an IIBA approved entity
- Look for facilitators who are contributors to BABOK, test writers for the actual CBAP exam questions, or who are actively involved with IIBA
- A CBAP course that comes with simulation exams is a plus (usually standard)

4. CREATE BABOK MIND MAPS

There is a LARGE amount of material to absorb in BABOK and mind mapping is a great way to organize the information and most importantly, visualize how that information relates to one another. I recommend creating at least 12 mind maps. Below is the approach I took:

- A high-level mind map for each of the 6 knowledge areas (KAs) with the KA as the main idea and branches for the tasks within the KA. This is to help memorize the 6 KAs and the key tasks for each
- A lower level mind map for each of the 6 KAs with each of the tasks within the KA as a separate main idea then branches for each of the elements within each task. This helps you associate the elements with the appropriate task and knowledge area. This will help you tremendously when you have to use the process of elimination on the multiple choice questions.

Below is an example of the lower level mind map I made for the Requirements Life Cycle Management knowledge area.



5. READ BABOK AT LEAST THREE TIMES

Below is the formula I recommend for passing the CBAP:

- Prepare your mind for the BABOK Guide material by reading IIBA's Global Business Analysis Core Standard. It's only 50 pages and outlines the core content of the BABOK Guide in a concise manner.
- If you are new to business analysis, I'd recommend going through the BABOK glossary first to familiarize yourself with some of the terms.

- Pay attention to the *Structure of the BABOK® Guide* section in the *Introduction* chapter of the BABOK Guide. It defines the key components of each chapter and will help you navigate through the knowledge areas and tasks without getting lost.
- Read the entire BABOK Guide thoroughly within one month. You will need to allocate reading time each day to accomplish this.
- After taking 3 or 4 simulation exams and studying the answer explanations, read the entire BABOK for the second time. You will notice that when you are reading, the answer explanations from the simulation tests are more prominent throughout the BABOK than they were before. The concepts will start to have more meaning to you.
- After taking the 5th or 6th simulation test, completing your CBAP prep course (if you choose to take one) and creating your mind maps, briefly read the BABOK for the third time. This time, the information will be more comprehensive and you should be able to absorb the information much more easily due to the context you've gained from steps 1-4. Assuming that you are now consistently scoring around 80% on the simulation tests, you should be ready for the exam.

6. BASIC EXAM TIPS

- Look out for negative questions (those that contain NOT). These typically include:
 1. Asking for items that are *missing*
 2. Asking for *least* likely approach to take
- Be wary of answers that contain *definitive* words in the approach. BABOK encourages flexibility in approaches. The following are examples of definitive language:
 1. *All* stakeholders must approve
 2. *Mandate* that stakeholder use the solution
 3. *Only* use a brainstorming to generate ideas
- Generally, options that suggest that more information is needed to answer the question is the best answer
- Usually, options that suggest that multiple approaches/techniques can be used for an activity is the best answer
- For case study questions, focus on the last paragraph or two when reading the question
- Choose answers that use BABOK terminology. Be aware of fabricated/fancy terms
- Know the purpose of each knowledge area and task
- Understand how to apply techniques and know which technique to use for a scenario
- Pace yourself to answer each question in 90 seconds (40 questions per hour) to allow for time to review the answers at the end
- If you cannot answer the question in 90 seconds, choose your best guess, mark the question for review and move on. Revisit the questions marked for review after you have answered every question
- Avoid breaks during the exam. The clock does not stop!!

Again, I hope this strategy is beneficial in helping you reach your goal of becoming a Certified Business Analysis Professional. Best of luck on the exam!!!!