



# CPH Study Tips

preparing for a certification exam

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**CPH** Certified<sup>in</sup>  
Public Health

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# Where do I begin?

Taking a certification exam can be stressful and challenging. NBPHE has provided several strategies to help you confidently prepare for and take the test. These include studying for the exam, preparing yourself mentally and physically, and test-taking strategies to use during the exam.

## Studying for the Exam

Studying for a certification exam is one of the most important things you can do to prepare for the exam. This process requires you to know where you are currently, where you want to be, and how you will get there. Here are some tips for studying, and you can use the CPH Personal Action Plan worksheet to guide your strategy to prepare for the CPH certification exam.

### 1. Familiarize yourself with the test and your current knowledge.

Get familiar with the types of questions on the CPH exam. A great place to start is reviewing the content outline, answering sample questions, and taking one of our practice exams.

While you may be nervous about taking a practice exam before preparing, it is important to determine a baseline score to ensure you are improving with practice. If you take the practice exam and do well, you can target certain question types and maximize your score. If you take it and don't score well, don't worry, you know what you need to work on to prepare.

At the end of your self-assessment, you will know which domain areas are your strongest and which ones you may need to focus on a bit more.

### 2. Understand how you learn to determine how to study.

Everyone learns differently. Understanding your learning styles can help you know your weaknesses and strengths. You can use this information to your advantage when you study by using approaches that work well for you.

There are many different learning styles, but the most common are:

- Visual: You learn best by looking at images.
- Auditory: You learn best when you hear and say the information.
- Read/Write: You learn best when reading and writing about the information.
- Kinesthetic: You learn best by touching and interacting with the materials.

Your approach to studying should match your learning style. Here are some examples of what different study approaches might look like based on learning styles:

- **Visual Learners**
  - Use colors to categorize information.
  - Draw pictures.
  - Make flashcards.
  - Create graphs, charts, and diagrams.
  
- **Auditory Learner**
  - Read aloud.
  - Listen to podcasts and lectures.
  - Schedule a study group where you can explain concepts and discuss them with peers.
  
- **Read/Write Learners**
  - Write and rewrite your notes.
  - Reword the main ideas and points in your own words.
  - Organize graphs, charts, and diagrams into statements.
  
- **Kinesthetic Learners**
  - Use real-life examples and case studies to summarize abstract concepts.
  - Redo projects and problems.
  - Use pictures and photographs that illustrate a concept.

Everyone's learning style and study approach are personal, so pick the best for you.

### 3. **Find study resources.**

As you review the available information, think about which resources will be the most valuable to you. There are many resources out there, and collecting everyone will be time-consuming and may not be the best use of your time. Focus on the resources you can access, address topics you may need to concentrate on, and best fit your learning style.

A great place to start with resources supplied by NBPHE is on the [CPH Study Resources](#) page. These resources include on-demand webinars covering each domain, links to study guides, and upcoming review sessions (virtual and in-person).

#### 4. **Develop a study plan.**

The CPH exam is a comprehension-based exam, and you should have a solid understanding of the exam content. The best way to prepare is to create a study plan for yourself.

When making a study plan:

- Organize your time around the topic areas you need to cover and estimate how much time each will take. Estimating time will help you determine the amount of time you need to prepare for the exam and assist in establishing priority times for areas you need to concentrate on the most.
- Create a weekly schedule, including the number of study hours per day, to stay on track and avoid cramming at the last minute.
- Pick a specific place to study to keep your materials organized in one place and stay in the proper mindset for learning.
- Schedule several smaller study sessions to pick your most alert times and help prevent fatigue.
- Set aside a few minutes to review the material from the last session at the beginning of each study session.
- Review what you have just covered at the end of each study session.
- Be sure to schedule breaks to stretch your legs and clear your mind.

You can organize yourself by using the CPH Personal Action Plan to write down your study plan, including the timeframe and strategy for each topic you want to devote time to study.

NBPHE typically recommends beginning to study about six months before you plan to sit for the exam. This recommendation depends on your familiarity (or lack thereof) with the exam subject and how much time you can devote daily. If you're new to the subject, you need to start preparing several months ahead. If you have professional experience, you may need less time. Everyone's study plan is unique. Many candidates devote fewer hours per day during the first few weeks and increase study time gradually, spending maximum time during the last two or three weeks before the exam.

## Mental and Physical Preparedness for the Exam

In addition to a study plan, it's essential to familiarize yourself with the exam logistics and be physically and mentally prepared. Here are NBPHE's suggestions to be in the right mindset on exam day.

**1. Know the rules.**

Make sure you are familiar with the information about what is permitted in the test center/at-home testing space, identification requirements, and the time allotted for the test. The best resource to find this information is the Candidate Handbook.

**2. Get organized the night before.**

Have everything you need ready for your exam the night before. Set an alarm to allow time for a healthy breakfast and to get to your exam destination with ample time or boot up your computer.

**3. Get a good night's sleep.**

Get a good night's sleep for several nights before the test. Do not cram the night before. It is much harder to concentrate and retain information when we are tired.

**4. Eat a healthy meal and stay hydrated.**

Eat a healthy meal before the test, and make sure you are hydrated. Dehydration can cause fatigue and memory loss, making the test-taking process more difficult. Avoid sugar, too much caffeine, and heavy foods that may make you drowsy.

**5. Show up early for the exam.**

At a testing center, the check-in process at the testing center requires that you sign in and present a valid ID, usually a government issue photo ID such as a driver's license or passport. Plan on arriving at least 30 minutes before the exam. Also, consider traffic patterns and unexpected traffic jams.

If you are taking the exam online, do a system check ahead of time to ensure your computer will work with the testing portal.

You want to start your exam relaxed. If you show up late or have technical difficulties, you may lose valuable time you could be spending on the exam.

**6. Be confident.**

Remember that you are well prepared to take the exam. Candidates for the exam have completed graduate-level degrees in public health. The exam assesses your overall comprehension of the general principles of public health—you should consider yourself an expert in many areas of public health.

And remember, if the worst occurs, there are always options to retest.

# Test-Taking Strategies During the Exam

You've studied and prepared yourself physically and mentally. Now it's time to take the exam! The following are NBPHE's suggested strategies to use while taking the exam.

## 1. **Manage your time well.**

The CPH exam is approximately 200 questions and four hours long. You need to average a little more than one minute per question. Because some questions will be scenario-based, you must account for additional time to read through the questions and answer them. Be sure you move along steadily and spend only a little time on each question. Keep in mind that the average candidate spends two hours and fifty minutes on the exam, so in most cases, four hours is plenty of time to answer the questions at a comfortable pace.

Start by browsing the exam and noting which questions seem easy to answer. Then start with those questions.

If you are stuck on a question, spend only a little bit of time on that question. Either answer it to the best of your ability or mark it and move on and return to it before you leave that section of questions.

Remember, any single question is less than one percent of the exam content, so it is essential that you spend only a little bit of time on any given question.

## 2. **Read questions carefully.**

The most common error people make on a multiple-choice exam is to misread and misinterpret the questions. Avoid jumping to conclusions about what you think the question asks. Read through each question and response option twice if necessary.

## 3. **Focus on the keywords.**

Make note of the keywords in the question to ensure you grasp the meaning of the question. Also, watch out for qualifying words. Words like *must*, *all*, and *always* are more restrictive and absolute than words like *may*, *most*, and *frequently* which have greater latitude.

Questions with negatives (e.g., *avoid*, *least*, *except*) can affect the overall meaning of the question. Try rephrasing the question yourself to ensure you understand it before answering it.

## 4. **Predict the answer.**

Cover the answers and read the question. Try to predict what the correct answer will be. Once you have an answer, scan the response options to see if your prediction is one of the choices. Check the other answers to be sure, but most likely, it is your initial answer.

**5. Eliminate response options you know to be incorrect.**

Ask yourself, "What is this question asking?" and "What do I know about that?". Asking yourself those questions will start you thinking about the subject, and you can jot down what you can remember. Now look at the answers and mark out those you know to be incorrect. You can usually narrow it down to two answers.

**6. Look for context clues.**

Look for and understand the context of the question. More than one answer may look right, but one will fit the context better. Look at the options you think may be correct and ask yourself, "What makes those two options different?" then go back to the question to test each option again.

**7. Guess if you don't know.**

There is no penalty for answering questions incorrectly. Your score is based on the number of correct answers. You are better off guessing than leaving the question blank if you do not know the answer. Try to use the strategies above, but if nothing else, pick an answer.

**8. Double-check your work.**

Before moving on to the next question, double-check your answer for any mistakes. You may feel nervous and second-guess yourself. If you want to change an answer, determine why your first response is incorrect. If you decide there is a good reason to change it, then do it.

**9. Relax.**

Standardized exams can be nerve-racking, and you must maintain your confidence. In the first few minutes of the exam, you may wish to answer only the questions you consider easy and skip the more difficult ones until you have found your rhythm and then start tackling more complex questions.

Remember, if you've followed the tips above, you are prepared.