Preparing to write the CKE1 or CKE2:
Advice from the Registrar

To summarize:

1. First piece of advice: Go to the source
2. Have a plan
3. Know what the exams are measuring and how the exams were developed
4. Acquiring and retaining the relevant knowledge
5. Develop test-taking strategies, but avoid 'tricks'
6. Manage exam anxiety
7. Choose exam prep methods that are right for you
8. On the day of the exam

1. First piece of advice: Go to the source

The first piece of advice is to get your information about the exams from the *source*—this means HRPA's website or Office of the Registrar staff.

We know that many exam candidates get their information from course instructors and others. Although these individuals are well-meaning, we have found that some of their advice is either outdated or incorrect.

The reality is that anyone who has anything to do with the content of the exams is bound by a non-disclosure agreement. The only individuals who see the exams before they are used are (1) members of the CHRP and CHRL Exam Validation Committee, (2) our psychometrician, and (3) HRPA staff on the Exam team. Even question writers do not see the exam. They do not know if the questions they wrote were chosen to be on any given form of the exam. Prep program providers do not have access to any insider information.

On the other hand, HRPA publishes a lot of information about its exams:

- the *HRPA Human Resources Professional Competency Framework*
- the exam blueprints,
- the question-writing guidelines,

- the technical manuals for the exams.

The basic page for the CKE1 and CKE2 exams can be found at
https://www.hrpa.ca/hrdesignations_/Pages/CKE1-CKE2-Comprehensive-Knowledge-Exam.aspx

The HRPA Human Resources Professional Competency Framework can be found at
https://www.hrpa.ca/Documents/Designations/Professional-Competency-Framework.pdf.

The exam blueprint for the CKE1 can be found at
https://www.hrpa.ca/hrdesignations_/Documents/HRPA-CKE%201-Blueprint-FINAL-2.3.pdf.

The exam blueprint for the CKE2 can be found at
https://www.hrpa.ca/hrdesignations_/Documents/HRPA-CKE-2-Blueprint-FINAL-2.3.pdf.

The CKE1 and CKE2 question-writing guidelines can be found at
https://www.hrpa.ca/PublishingImages/Designations/Item-Writing-Style-Guide-Sept-2019.pdf.

Links to the CKE1 and CKE2 technical manuals can be found at
https://www.hrpa.ca/hrdesignations_/Pages/CKE1-CKE2-Comprehensive-Knowledge-Exam.aspx#passrates

No one has 'insider information' on the content of the exams—be very suspicious of anyone who claims otherwise.

2. Have a plan

Let's recognize from the start that preparing to write important exams such as the CKE1 and CKE2 is highly individualized. Not everything works for everybody.

Keep in mind the four aspects,

1. Knowing what the exams are measuring and how the exams were developed
2. Acquiring and retaining the relevant knowledge
3. Processing multiple-choice questions efficiently
4. Managing exam anxiety

Conduct a self-assessment. What has been your experience with important exams? What has worked for you and what hasn't? How would you assess your current level of knowledge in each sub-domain?

Three months seems to be a sweet spot for exam prep. The idea is to distribute your efforts across that time.

3. Know what the exams are measuring and how the exams were developed

The CKE1 and CKE2 measure *basic knowledge* in Human Resources.

The questions are written by course instructors—diploma course instructors for the CKE1 and degree course instructors for the CKE2. But that is just the starting point:

1. HRPA staff review questions for adherence to style guidelines,
2. HRPA's psychometrician reviews the questions for soundness,
3. HRPA's copy editor reviews each item for consistency of style and clarity of expression,
4. A panel of Human Resources professionals reviews questions for relevance to the practice of Human Resources,
5. Exams forms are assembled by their respective Exam Validation Committee according to the blueprints,
6. Questions are included as test questions existing forms and their psychometric performance is reviewed by HRPA's psychometrician.

Only then are questions and exams ready to be used. It may not be obvious to the 'naked eye' but there is a lot that goes into creating a high-quality certification exam.

The questions are referenced to the competencies in the *HRPA Human Resources Professional Competency Framework*. Question writers start from a given competency and then consider the knowledge would be required to be able to demonstrate the competency.

All questions are *fact checked*, meaning that correctness of the question is verified against major textbooks. All CKE1 and CKE2 questions are reviewed for having one clearly correct answer. There are no *best answer* questions. For each question, there is one and only one correct answer.

The CKE1 and CKE2 Review panels comprised of Human Resources professionals ensures that the questions tap information that is relevant to Human Resources practice. Questions that deal with knowledge which is too obscure to be considered basic knowledge will be set aside. Finally, in a final review, the CHRP or CHRL Exam Validation Committee will review the question for relevance and appropriateness.

So, the questions derive from the *HRPA Human Resources Professional Competency Framework* but are verified against major textbooks and are reviewed for relevance and appropriateness.

The exam blueprints provide a listing of the major content areas and cognitive levels intended to be included on each exam form. It also includes the number of questions each exam form should include within each of these content and cognitive areas. All our exam blueprints are published on the HRPA website. The CHRP and CHRL Exam Validation Committees use the exam blueprints as their guide to assemble exam content.

The CKE1 and CKE2 are developed such that it does not matter which textbook your instructor chose for your course—there is no advantage for having used this or that textbook.

4. Acquiring and retaining the relevant knowledge

Although the different sub-domains are not equally weighted in the exams, the differences are not such that they should impact your approach. Don't count on stronger scores in one area to compensate for a low score in one area. In fact, the CKE2 has non-compensatory scoring that requires candidates to mean a minimum threshold on each of the sub-domains. In fact, the sub-domain where you are least knowledgeable are your 'low lying fruit.'

Consider glossaries

This is perhaps the most underutilized strategy. Many textbooks have glossaries. Alternately, you may consider making a list of all specialized terms as you come across them in reviewing textbooks.

- Human Resources has a lot of specialized terminology
- If you can define all the specialized terms and describe of each relates to other specialized terms you should be well prepared.

5. Develop test-taking strategies, but avoid 'tricks'

There are many aspects to exam preparation. The first, of course, is mastery of the content domain (acquiring and retaining basic Human Resources knowledge). The second is all the rest, which includes:

- Processing multiple-choice questions efficiently
- Pacing and stamina

Processing multiple-choice questions efficiently

All questions have a four-option multiple-choice format.

HRPA exams:

- Do not use '*all of the above*' or '*none of the above*' options
- Do not use negative options
- Does not use 'best option' questions

There is a lot of advice on the internet regarding multiple-choice exams. For example:

https://www.educationcorner.com/multiple-choice-tests.html

Be careful however. Some of the advice on this website will simply not apply to HRPA exams.

Don't count on tricks to answer questions.

No doubt that some of the tricks listed below will sometimes work with exams that are not professionally developed. The CKE1 and CKE2 are professionally developed exams. They are designed to minimize the impact of any other factors other than knowledge of the domain.

"when in doubt pick option b or c"	The order of appearance of the correct answer is randomized.
"when there is a typo, the option is incorrect because more care and attention is given to correct the correct response"	Our copy editor reviews all options and does not know which is correct. Should there be a typo, it would be at random.
"the longest answer is most often the correct one because the language is more careful"	All questions are reviewed to ensure that answer options are of approximately equal lengths.
"when there is an 'all of the above' option it is usually correct"	HRPA exams do not use 'all of the above' or 'none of the above' options.
"the correct answer won't be in the same position more than three times in a row"	The order of appearance of the correct answer is randomized—runs will happen just by chance.

Here are some correct pieces of advice:

- There are no points deducted for incorrect answers, if you do not know the answer to a given question you should guess from among the options you think might be correct
- You know more than you think you know. Even when you think you are guessing, you may not be guessing.

Pacing and stamina

Pacing—making sure that one gets through the exam within the time allotted.

- The CKE1 and CKE2 are designed to be 'all power and no speed'—meaning that candidates should have no problem in completing the exams. Indeed, 95% of the candidates writing the CKE1 and CKE2 have no problem completing the exams within the time limits.
- The standard is one minute per multiple-choice question.
- The advice here is to learn to pace oneself. For instance, if you have answered 30 question in the first half hour or 60 questions in the first hour, you know you are on track.
- Our computer-based exams have a timer that counts down so you can pace yourself using this feature. Exam-writers also get 30, 15 min alerts.
- But this is an average, not a limit. It is OK to spend more time on a question because you will be spending less than one minute on other questions.

Some find that scheduling breaks during the exam to be helpful. For example, every half-hour some will close their eyes, take a few deep breaths, go through a relaxation routine.

6. Manage exam anxiety

The web page linked below gives useful advice in this respect.

https://www.lib.sfu.ca/about/branches-depts/slc/learning/exam-anxiety/reducing-exam-anxiety

Exam preparation: 8 strategies for reducing exam anxiety

1. Maintain a healthy lifestyle
2. Get accurate information
3. Study effectively
4. Prepare to write the exam
5. Adjust your attitude
6. Change unhelpful thoughts
7. Use test-taking strategies
8. Use anxiety reduction techniques

Note that some of the anxiety management strategies are things does well before the exam itself, other strategies can be used during the exam.

- Remain focused on the exam and not getting distracted by extraneous thoughts. Don't think about how well you are doing.

7. Choose exam prep method(s) that are right for you

Let's look at the strengths and weaknesses of different exam prep methods:

- o Self-study
- o Study groups
- o One-on-one mentoring
- o College and university test centres
- o Commercially available prep programs

Approach	Strengths	Weaknesses
Self-study	Flexible Can be efficient (maximum return for time invested)	Depends on one's study skills Requires self-discipline
Study groups	Moral support Extra motivation to follow up on commitments Sharing of resources (textbook, notes, etc.) Useful to share workload	Not too big, not too small Develop terms of reference beforehand Careful not to let the social aspects take over Depending on the study group. It may be difficult to address individual needs Sometimes, incorrect information might be shared ("*I heard that…*")

One-on-one mentoring by someone who has passed the exam	Depends on mentor Moral support Extra motivation to follow up on commitments	Depends on mentor Other than the fact that they passed the exam, the mentor may not know more than you do about the exam What might have worked for mentor may not work for you
College and university test centres	Some college and university test centres will also provide services to recent graduates Especially useful for students with accommodations of special learning needs Great for information on test-taking skills	May not be available to you
Prep programs	Not all prep programs are the same None have seen the 'real' exams Focus on content Can include practice exams	Expense $$$ Prep programs cannot do the studying for you The questions on the exam will be different—careful not to develop an expectation that questions on the exam will be similar

Writing your own practice exam questions is a good idea, but do keep in mind some limitations

Writing your own practice exam questions is a good idea, but don't develop an expectation that the 'real' questions will be like those you developed or that your performance on the real exam will be like your performance on practice exams.

Writing exam questions is a learning experience in its own right. One can learn to think (and read textbooks) like a question writer.

What is the issue then?

The issue is calibration. For the CKE1 and CKE2 every item is calibrated meaning that we know the probability that a minimally qualified candidate will answer the question correctly. A minimally qualified candidate is a candidate at the threshold of proficiency. Passing scores are set by adding these probabilities for the questions included in the exam. This is what it means for a question to be calibrated.

Questions developed by a study group (or exam prep program providers for that matter) are uncalibrated. This means that it is impossible to make inferences as to how one will do on the 'real' exam based on how one did on the practice exam. Calibrating exam questions is a lengthy and expensive process.

Developing practice questions… great idea but…

- Don't develop an expectation that the 'real' questions will be like those you developed or that you may have come across in any of the prep programs. If you have seen the question somewhere, you can be sure that it won't appear on the exam. None of the questions in any of the prep programs will appear on any of the exams.

- It is hard to tell how one will do on the real exam based on 'homemade' exams. This is because the questions are uncalibrated.

Practice exams are good for developing pacing skills, however.

The reason why HRPA does not offer practice exams is that if HRPA did offer practice exams, the expectation would be that performance on practice exams would be highly correlated with performance on actual exams. For this, the questions would need to be developed to the same quality standard as actual exam questions and calibrated. This practice exams would be as costly to develop as the actual exams.

8. On the day of the exam

- Arrive 30 minutes early
- Make sure you know where the test centre is and work out parking arrangements beforehand if you are going to drive
- Bring ID for identification
- If you are sensitive to temperature, dress in layers and bring a sweater
- Read through the confirmation of registration email sent by HRPA and the appointment confirmation email sent by Prometric to ensure you aware of all exam rules and regulations along with the security procedures