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## The Uniform CPA Examination®

An overview of the CPA Exam and resources to help you prepare

This booklet contains Interactive Media\*. Please follow these instructions to take full advantage of this publication.



### Step 1

Download the CPA Exam AR application onto your smart phone or mobile device.



### Step 2

Open the application and hover over pages with the interactive icon.



### Step 3

Watch as the page comes to life with augmented reality.



\*Available on select devices

**The Uniform CPA Examination® (Exam) protects the public interest** by helping to ensure that only qualified individuals become licensed as U.S. Certified Public Accountants (CPAs). The CPA credential is the only licensing qualification in accounting and auditing in the United States.

This booklet provides individuals interested in becoming a CPA with information about the profession, testing requirements and details, and candidate resources.

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# The CPA credential is in high demand.

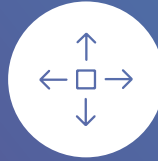
## Top five reasons to pursue the CPA.



Earning  
potential



Career  
opportunities



Stability



Flexibility



Prestige  
and respect

Accounting and auditing  
employment growth is

6%

through 2028.

Hiring managers in nearly every  
industry are scrambling to  
find skilled accounting  
and finance professionals,

especially  
CPAs.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor,  
Occupational Outlook Handbook, Accountants and Auditors,  
September 2019

Source: 2020 Robert Half Accounting and Finance Salary Guide

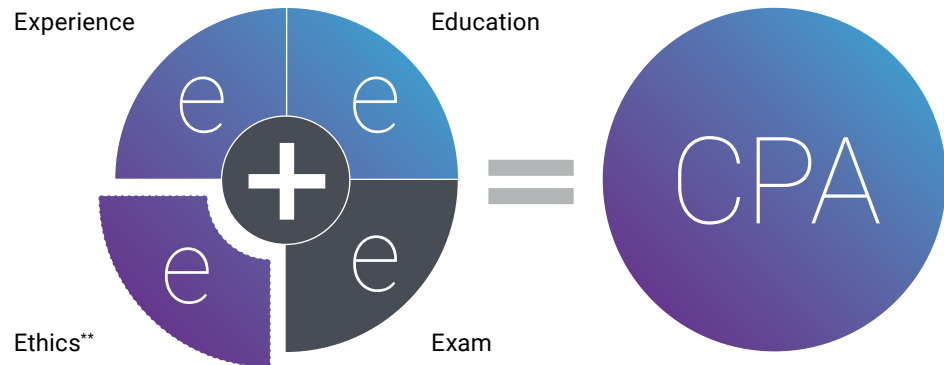
# Help protect the public interest.

**So, you want to earn your CPA? The CPA is the only licensing qualification for the accounting and audit profession in the United States. But first, you must pass the Uniform CPA Examination®.**

The Exam provides reasonable assurance to the 55 U.S. boards of accountancy (50 states plus the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam and the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands\*) that those who pass possess the minimum level of technical knowledge and skills necessary for initial licensure. The public interest is protected when only qualified individuals are licensed as CPAs.

## The 4 E's to CPA licensure

Of the four requirements, only the Exam is uniform and accepted for CPA licensure by all jurisdictions. Experience, education and ethics requirements vary by jurisdiction.



\* The Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands does not accept applicants for the Exam, but does accept scores from other jurisdictions for initial licensure.

\*\*Certain states require a separate ethics assessment in addition to what is tested on the CPA Exam.

# What can you expect from the Exam?

The Exam is a rigorous assessment of the accounting knowledge and skills that are directly connected to the work of a newly licensed CPA. Before you begin your CPA journey, it's important for you to learn the basics about the Exam.

## Four sections\*

- Auditing and Attestation (AUD)
- Business Environment and Concepts (BEC)
- Financial Accounting and Reporting (FAR)
- Regulation (REG)

\*Each section is divided into small segments called testlets. There are five testlets per section.

## Time frame

Each section is taken separately. You will have four hours to take each section, for a total testing time of 16 hours. You must pass all four sections within 18 months. The start of the 18-month time frame varies by jurisdiction.

Visit [nasba.org/cpaexam](https://nasba.org/cpaexam) for clarification.

## Test windows

You can sit for the Exam in any one of four testing windows.\* While you can take more than one Exam section in a testing window, you cannot retake a failed section in the same window. Testing dates are **Jan. 1–March 10, April 1–June 10, July 1–Sept. 10** and **Oct. 1–Dec. 10**.

\*NASBA is researching the possibility of continuous testing in 2020. An official announcement could change the testing windows as noted. Before scheduling, visit [aicpa.org/cpaexam](https://aicpa.org/cpaexam) to confirm any changes.

## Breaks

You can choose to pause or not pause the Exam timer for 15 minutes after the third testlet only. You may also take breaks after every other testlet, but the timer will continue to run. See the Exam structure on page 5 for details.

## Item types

You are tested using three types of questions (items):

### Multiple-Choice Questions (MCQ)

MCQs appear in Testlets No. 1 and No. 2 in each Exam section.

**Task-Based Simulations (TBS)** Simulations are case studies that allow you to demonstrate your knowledge and skills by working through a problem. TBSs typically require you to use spreadsheets and/or search the Exam's authoritative literature. TBSs appear during Testlets No. 3, No. 4 and No. 5.

### Written Communication Tasks (WCT)

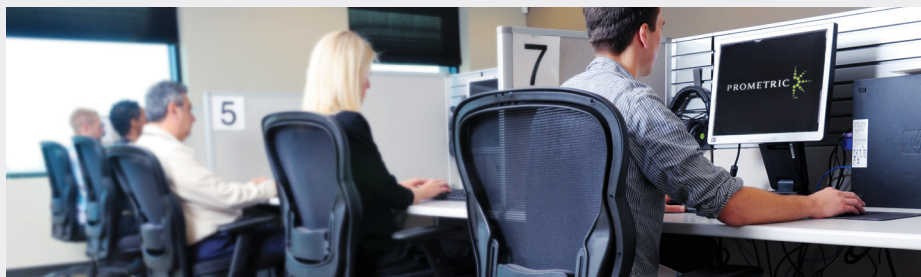
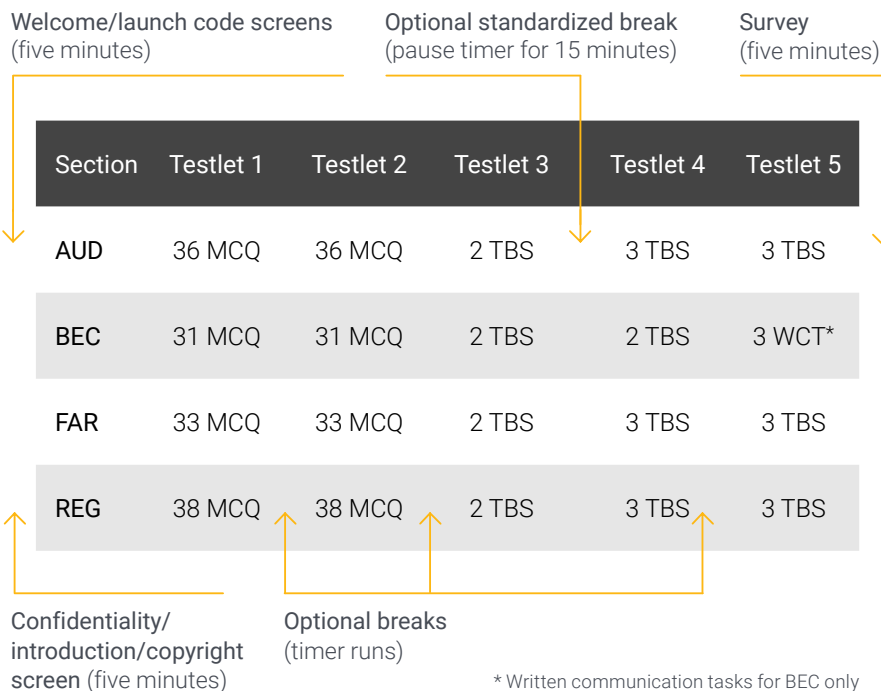
Written communication tasks are found only in Testlet No. 5 of the BEC section. You will need to read a scenario and write a clear, coherent response. The directions will explain the format of your response (e.g., memo, letter, etc.)

## Exam resources

### Authoritative literature

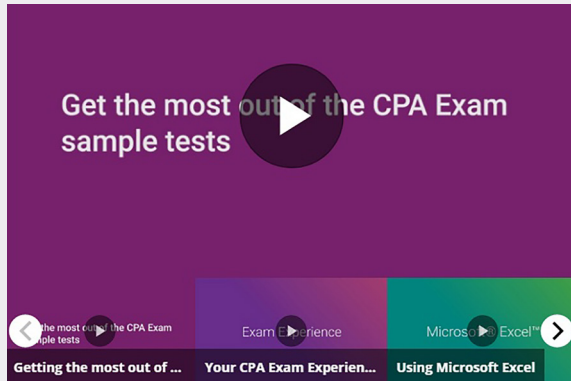
You will have access to authoritative literature in each Exam section and can search information to be used in completing simulations.

## Exam structure





# Exam resources for you



Scan here

## Sample tests

The sample tests use the same software that you will be tested on in a Prometric test center. There is one sample test for each Exam section. You can practice with the question types, tools and resources that you will experience during the live Exam.

You can answer test questions that represent all the question types found on the Exam: Multiple-Choice Questions (MCQ), Task-Based Simulations (TBS) and Written Communication Tasks (WCT). The sample questions provide an answer key (or sample answer for the WCT questions), along with an answer rationale for the TBS questions, but don't necessarily reflect your readiness to take the Exam.

Access the tutorial and sample tests at **[aicpa.org/cpaexam](https://aicpa.org/cpaexam)**.

## Tutorial and sample tests

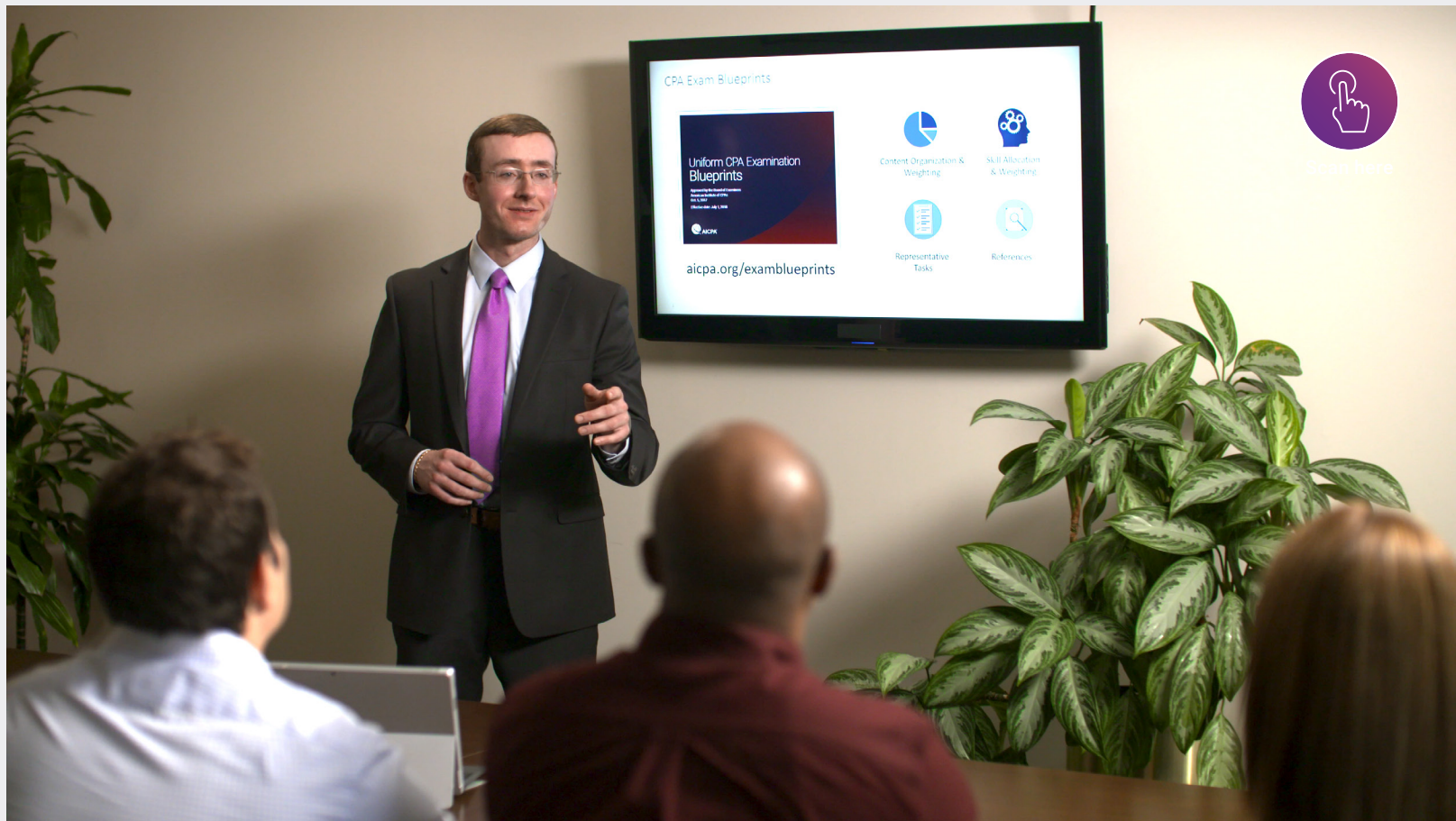
Before your actual test day, be sure to practice with the Exam's format and functionality. Also check out some helpful short videos for highlights about the CPA Exam software. You'll find various topics that discuss the functionality of tools, resources and navigation found in the Exam.

### Tutorial

The tutorial topics explain the Exam's functionality of question types, tools, resources and navigation. Tutorial topics are found under the "Help" button within each sample test. The tutorial does not contain actual Exam content.

The best starting point for any candidate preparation is the CPA Exam Blueprints, which detail the content knowledge and skills eligible for testing on the Exam.





## CPA Exam Blueprints

The Blueprints, which are published one or two times per year, outline all content that is eligible for testing in each Exam section. The Blueprints give you:

- Content organized by area, group and topic, along with score weighting
- Sample task statements that represent what you may be asked to do when testing
- Skill levels at which tasks are tested
- Reference materials that support the sample task statements
- Number of item types you must complete (multiple-choice questions, task-based simulations and written communication tasks), along with score weighting

Access the Blueprints at **[aicpa.org/examblueprints](https://aicpa.org/examblueprints)**.



# Top candidate FAQs

## Q: What's the right order to take each section of the Exam?

A: There's no right order. It varies by individual preference. It's up to you to determine the right order for yourself.

## Q: How long should I study to ensure I pass the Exam?

A: Like the answer above, this really varies by individual. Some can pass all sections with just a few hours of studying per week, while others may need 25 or more hours of studying per week to pass. As this is a rigorous test, the more time you can set aside to study and prepare, the greater your chances of success.

## Q: Do all candidates take the same Exam?

A: You will take different, but equivalent exams. The questions presented to you are drawn from a pool of test questions according to defined specifications. Although you take different exams, the specifications ensure that the results are comparable.

### Q: How do I find out when new content is eligible for testing on the Exam?

A: This is referred to as the AICPA's Policy on New Pronouncements, which establishes the time frame for when new content becomes eligible for testing on the Exam. When you study for the Exam, you are advised to check the policy, which may be found at **[aicpa.org/cpaexam](https://aicpa.org/cpaexam)** under the Exam study materials section. Additionally, the Exam Blueprints, which outline all content eligible for testing on each Exam section, are updated 1–2 times a year, and can be found at **[aicpa.org/examblueprints](https://aicpa.org/examblueprints)**.

### Q: What happens after I pass the Exam?

A: Passing all four sections of the Exam means that you have achieved one of the major milestones on the way to becoming licensed. Once you pass, all that stands between you and your career as a CPA is a state-issued license.

### Q: What are the semester-hour requirements?

A: All jurisdictions require aspiring CPAs to have 120 or 150 credit hours to sit for the Exam, depending on the jurisdiction, and 150 credit hours for licensure. Candidates generally will need at least 24 semester hours in accounting. Fourteen states allow fewer than 24 semester hours in business. This doesn't necessarily mean that you need a master's degree, although that certainly helps. You can also meet the requirement at the undergraduate level or earn your bachelor's degree and take courses at the graduate level.

### Q: What are the experience requirements?

A: Most jurisdictions require a year of experience working under a licensed CPA before they allow you to be licensed as a CPA, though some require two or more years of experience.

### Q: What are the jurisdiction requirements?

A: Each jurisdiction is different. Be sure to check their individual requirements at **[nasba.org/cpaexam](https://nasba.org/cpaexam)**.



# How does scoring work?

## What's a passing score?

Section scores are reported on a scale that ranges from 0 to 99. A total reported score of 75 or higher is required to pass each section. This is not a percentage of the correct score and cannot be interpreted as a percentage. For more information on how the Exam is scored, visit [aicpa.org/examscoreing](https://aicpa.org/examscoreing).

## When will I receive my score?

See the target score release dates at [aicpa.org/examscorerelease](https://aicpa.org/examscorerelease).



## The Elijah Watt Sells Award

The AICPA has bestowed the Elijah Watt Sells Award on candidates for outstanding performance on the Exam since 1923.



Candidates are eligible for the award in the calendar year following the year in which they completed testing. If a candidate meets all criteria for eligibility, they will be contacted by the AICPA and informed of their recipient status. The award is bestowed annually upon candidates who:

- Have obtained a cumulative average score above 95.50 across all four sections of the **CPA Exam**
- Passed all four sections of the Exam on their **first attempt**

Sells was one of the country's first CPAs. He was active in the establishment of the AICPA, and played a key role helping to advance professional education in the profession.

# Who oversees the Exam?

## Who administers the Exam?

The AICPA, the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy (NASBA) and Prometric have a contractual partnership to deliver the Exam.

For more information on the requirements to sit for the CPA Exam, visit [nasba.org/cpaexam](https://nasba.org/cpaexam).

## Who oversees governance of the Exam?

The AICPA Board of Examiners (BOE) provides oversight for the Exam. The BOE sets development and scoring policies that follow legal and psychometric standards as they relate to the profession's licensing exam. The BOE also ensures that the Exam remains aligned with the knowledge and skills of newly licensed CPAs.



In addition to being the world's largest member association representing the accounting profession, the AICPA also is responsible for developing and scoring the Uniform CPA Exam and for bringing you **ThisWayToCPA.com**, a website designed specifically for college students and Exam candidates.



After you have made your decision to sit for the Exam, NASBA is the official location to find out the specific requirements in the 55 U.S. accounting jurisdictions. It's also the place to turn to receive your official score report.

Your board of accountancy will issue your CPA license.



Prometric is responsible for the delivery of the Exam to approved test centers, scheduling test appointments, test administration and returning results to the AICPA for scoring.

# Exam application process



## Determine eligibility.

- Check with your selected jurisdiction on requirements to sit for the Exam (state requirements vary between 120 or 150 hours of education).
- Meet eligibility requirements for selected jurisdiction.

## Submit application.

- Complete application and submit required documentation.
- Application is evaluated to verify eligibility to sit for the Exam.
- Candidates receive Notice to Schedule (NTS).

## Schedule your exam.

- Schedule your exam with Prometric after receiving NTS.
- Any U.S. Prometric test center can be used regardless of jurisdiction.
- International locations require an additional fee.
- NTS is valid for six months in most jurisdictions (varies by state).

For more information on your individual state board's requirements, visit [nasba.org/cpaexam](https://nasba.org/cpaexam).

# International candidates

## Can I earn my CPA license if I'm not a U.S. citizen?

If you are not a U.S. citizen, you may earn a U.S. Certified Public Accountant (CPA) license if you meet board of accountancy eligibility requirements in one of the 55 U.S. jurisdictions. You must be able to take the Exam in English. It is not offered in any other language. For all international eligibility questions, visit [nasba.org/international](https://nasba.org/international).

## Applying to take the Exam

The application process is basically the same for international candidates as it is for U.S. candidates.

To apply, you must:

- Select a U.S. jurisdiction.
- Contact the board of accountancy (or its agent) in that jurisdiction to obtain application materials.
- Submit completed applications and required fees as instructed.
- Once you are qualified, schedule your exam.

## International testing locations

We are currently testing in multiple international locations. For specific testing sites, review the International FAQs at [nasba.org/internationalexam](https://nasba.org/internationalexam).



## International Qualification Examination (IQEX)

The IQEX is an exam for accounting professionals from other countries who wish to qualify as U.S. CPAs and whose professional bodies have entered into mutual recognition agreements with the U.S. accounting profession. We have established Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) with the following countries that enable you to qualify for the IQEX:

- Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia and New Zealand Institute of Chartered Accountants (NZICA and ICAA)
- Chartered Professional Accountants of Canada (CPA Canada)
- Chartered Accountants Ireland (CAI)
- Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland (ICAS)
- Instituto Mexicano de Contadores Publicos (IMCP)
- Hong Kong Institute of Certified Public Accountants (HKICPA)
- CPA Australia



# Top CPA Exam tips

## Finding a seat

You should schedule your appointment at least 45 days before you plan to take the Exam to ensure you get your preferred date and time.

## Late arrival

If you arrive at the testing center after your scheduled appointment time, Prometric is not obligated to allow you to test. Know where you are going well in advance.

## Cellphones

Once you enter the testing center, you may NOT access your cellphone. This includes using your cellphone during a scheduled break.

## Notice to Schedule (NTS)

Remember to take your NTS, which has the launch code printed on it, to the test center. This is not to be confused with the “Confirmation” received from Prometric after scheduling an exam. Check the date on your NTS to make sure it is the current one and not one from a previous test section.

## Introductory screens

Currently, there are two introduction screens (1. Welcome and 2. Confidentiality and Section Information). You have five minutes to complete the first screen and five minutes to complete the second screen.

## Navigation

To move from one question to another, click a question number, or click the arrow controls at the top or the bottom of the screen.

## Reporting issues

You should immediately report any technical difficulties during testing to the staff at the test center. Do not wait until the Exam has ended.

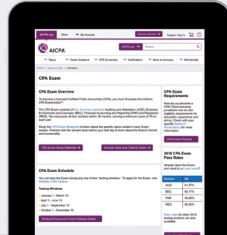
## Rescheduling

If you reschedule an appointment with Prometric, you must go to the “Reschedule Appointment: Appointment Complete” screen. This follows the “Appointment Verification” screen. Also, make sure you have received a confirmation email from Prometric verifying the new appointment time and place.

## Test experience difficulties

If you have any difficulties related to your test experience, a formal complaint should be sent to NASBA at [candidatecare@nasba.org](mailto:candidatecare@nasba.org) within five (5) days of taking the Exam. Do not wait until the score has been released.

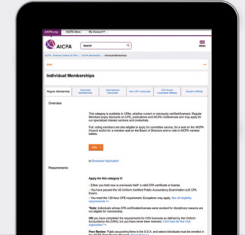
# Resources to help you prepare for the Exam



[aicpa.org/cpaexam](https://aicpa.org/cpaexam)

Learn more about the Exam and get important information and tools provided by the AICPA, including:

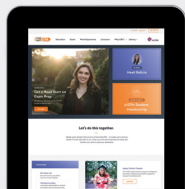
- Exam announcements
- CPA Exam Blueprints
- Sample tests and tutorial videos
- Score release dates
- Exam pass rates
- Exam FAQs



**Exam Candidate Affiliate Membership: [aicpa.org/join](https://aicpa.org/join)**

Whether you're a college student or an active Exam candidate, there are numerous benefits to signing up for membership:

- Discounts on products and services you use every day for your personal and professional needs, including travel, technology, office supplies, shipping and more
- Networking opportunities — conferences, volunteer groups and task forces — plus support through advisory service communities and the Benevolent Fund
- Professional development and Continuing Professional Education (CPE) conferences, events and opportunities
- Newsletters and magazines, from the *Journal of Accountancy* to *CPA Letter Daily*, offering the latest news and developments in the accounting profession



### ThisWayToCPA.com

The AICPA's go-to destination offers inspiration and information at every step along the journey to becoming a CPA. Here are just a few of the helpful resources you'll find on the site:

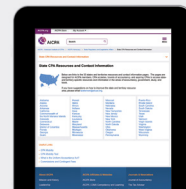
- Profiles of real-life CPAs
- Diaries from recent exam passers
- Application for free AICPA Student Affiliate membership
- Tools for finding your fit in the accounting profession
- Scholarships and relevant industry news for students
- User-generated reviews of review course providers available to those preparing to take the Exam



### nasba.org

This candidate go-to resource offers access to:

- In-depth candidate resources in the *Candidate Bulletin*
- Candidate performance and trends
- Blogs, articles and upcoming event information
- CPA Examination Services (CPAES), providing candidate information
- State-by-state requirements to sit for the Exam at **[nasba.org/cpaexam](https://www.nasba.org/cpaexam)**.



### U.S. boards of accountancy and CPA state societies: [aicpa.org/statecontacts](https://aicpa.org/statecontacts)

Your resource for news and industry updates specific to your individual state

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### CPA review courses

While the AICPA does not endorse or promote any specific review course provider, we encourage you to do your research and see if a review course is right for you.

- Review courses offer sample tests and materials
- Many review courses offer both online and in-person classes
- In some cases, employers will offset the partial or full cost of their employee's review course

## Social media

Find us on our various channels. Search for AICPA and ThisWaytoCPA.

- Get daily updates and articles related to the Exam
- Join our candidate discussion groups to share tips and advice with fellow candidates



Our Board of Examiners and State Board Committee consist of established professionals who hold CPAs, Ph.D.s and MBAs.

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#### Board of Examiners

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Diego Baca

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Allan Cohen

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Audrey Katcher

Erica Kathryn Nelson

Kathleen J. Smith

Michael Watts

Thomas Weirich

James Wollack

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#### State Board Committee

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Kent Absec

Michael Barton

Hunter Cook

Wendy Garvin

Nicole Kasin

Michael Rollage

Katrina Salazar

Begin your CPA Exam journey today with help from these resources:

[aicpa.org](https://aicpa.org) | [nasba.org](https://nasba.org) | [prometric.com](https://prometric.com) | [thiswaytocpa.com](https://thiswaytocpa.com)

This booklet was created to give an overview of the Uniform CPA Exam and its components through the initiative of the State Board Committee (SBC) of the AICPA Board of Examiners, which oversees the Exam's development and scoring.

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