



Top 10 Mistakes to Avoid in Getting Your CBAP or CCBA

I've been helping people obtain their CBAP since 2007, so I've seen a number of approaches. Most have been successful I'm happy to say. A few others have not been, either because candidates stressed out or were underprepared. The individuals were understandably disappointed. This article is a summary of the top mistakes people have made in working towards their CBAP, including my own experience with the CBAP and PMP.

1. **Not enough study time.** One of the few individuals I know (let's call him Larry) who didn't pass did not allow enough time for studying and failed. He confided that he spent the week before his exam studying, which he admitted was clearly not enough time. Our company conducted research of CBAP candidates and it revealed that successful candidates spent an average of around 100 hours studying for their CBAP. If you are like most people, you will need to spread that out over several weeks, if not months. Whether it's from over-confidence, lack of planning, or life events interfering (like Larry's baby and new house), the end result is the same if you don't devote enough time to studying.



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2. **Applying too soon (or too late).** You have one year to take the exam after your CBAP/CCBA application is approved, which in most cases is sufficient. If you are not sure, then wait until you have gotten comfortable with the BABOK and then submit your application. It took me two years to complete my PMP, so I know that life and work can get in the way. One milestone might be to apply for the exam after you have 50 hours of study time completed. (Yes, that means you should track your time – it’s like a project, after all!) A student of mine waited until two weeks before her one-year deadline to take a class and to begin studying in earnest. I’d like to say she passed, but she didn’t. Her deadline and insufficient study time were the culprits.

2016 UPDATE: Are you are thinking about getting your CBAP or CCBA under BABOK version 2? You should apply now since the exam will change to version 3 later in 2016 and the exams will be more difficult.

3. **Using only one Method of Study.** A prime cause of stress over the CBAP that I have observed is relying on one primary method of study. In my case, I relied solely on the BABOK, and only read it once at that. During my CBAP exam I felt a dread come over me and thought I was going to fail. There were several questions I felt completely unprepared for and more than once wished I had studied using more than my one method. That is one of the reasons I have committed myself to helping others pass the CBAP exam.
4. **Relying on the Wrong Method of Study.** There is no one study formula that works for everyone. The Insights Learning Corporation¹ has a 4-color framework of learning styles based on personality. We use this framework in all of our classes to help understand our students’ learning preferences. For example, study groups are popular in IIBA chapters and they will help many people pass the CBAP or CCBA exam. They work best for those who enjoy working with others while studying, and who like time to reflect and review what they have studied. Insights calls this the “Green” or what I call the “Reflective” style. Another learning style likes to read (and re-read) the BABOK and to study supporting books and research while immersing themselves into details and facts. Insights calls this the “Blue” or “Analytical” style. A third style likes to get right to the point and quickly focus on the task at hand. This style – called the “Red” or “Practical” style – prefers answering practice questions above all other study techniques. The fourth general study type are people who love to interact with others while studying and who prefer spontaneity and involvement. Classes and study groups can provide what the “Yellow” or “Interactive” style needs. Using non-compatible methods (such as re-reading the BABOK for a practical learner) will tend to de-motivate you and may even prevent you from finishing your certification.
5. **Not Answering Enough Practice Questions.** It may sound like a sales pitch, but it is essential to practice answering as many sample exam questions as possible. (Full disclosure: we offer a CBAP/CCBA Online Study Exam.) It gets you into the right mind-set so you are not surprised by the “tenor and tone” of the

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real exam. Many of us have not taken a lengthy exam in a while, if ever, and a 3.5 hour, 150-question exam is downright intimidating. You can also learn important things by answering questions and learning from your mistakes. It also helps focus your study in the areas you are less proficient on (this feature really helped me to prepare for my PMP exam.) One person I know who failed the CBAP exam only answered one set of 150 practice questions before taking her exam. People who passed the exam report they practiced answering 10 times that number or more.

6. **Trying to Reconcile the BABOK with Your Work Experience.** I have seen many people become stressed over comparing the BABOK with their “real life” experience. It’s understandable because we want it to be “real” and meaningful. A discussion of how the BABOK differs from “real life” has happened in every CBAP Prep class I have taught. The BABOK is a wonderful Guide, and contains a broad array of knowledge, tasks, and techniques that people around the world have found successful in doing business analysis. There is no way anyone has encountered it all or has used all the same terminology as in the BABOK. My advice: set your personal experience aside and concentrate on mastering the content in the BABOK, which is what the CBAP and CCBA exams are based on. Then, after you pass, work on either changing your work practices to match the BABOK or work to change the next edition of the BABOK as a volunteer on the update or review committees.
7. **Answering Questions Based on Your Work Experience.** A related mistake is to take your experience into the exam and use it to answer questions. The CBAP exam has numerous “distracters” to tempt you into answering according to your individual experience and not with the “generally accepted practice of business analysis.” If you don’t use the latter to guide you, it will be a mistake that could cause you to incorrectly answer questions and worst of all, fail the exam.
8. **Trying to Memorize the BABOK.** True, it is helpful to commit to memory some of the key BABOK concepts and terms. But, you will need to apply them to situational questions in the CBAP exam. (The new CCBA exam contains more knowledge-based questions and rote memorization *may* help you more with this one.) There will be many problem-solving types of questions on the CBAP exam and you will be asked to apply your knowledge to answer these types of questions. The only way I know of how to prepare for situational questions is to take practice exam questions. Besides ours, there are other products on the market to help you do this.
9. **Not Starting.** I know several people who have said they want to get their CBAP or CCBA certification, but have many reasons why they have not pursued it. It could be not enough time to prepare, the lack of a study group, the cost, or not enough hours of BA experience. (The IIBA helped on that one by introducing the CCBA, which requires half as many hours of experience to qualify.) These are all reasons to avoid starting, but you will never receive the benefits of certification if you don’t start. Among the benefits people tell me they have gotten from their CBAP credential include: personal satisfaction, greater

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credibility, selection on better and higher-profile projects, getting hired as employees and consultants, and higher pay.

10. **Not Finishing.** I know other people who have started the CBAP certification process, but have stalled out. Again, it could be because of time pressures at home or work. I can relate to that, because I kept postponing my PMP exam and it took me two years to finish. The key is to not lose sight of your goal and keep at it when you do have time. It is a lot of work, but then it would not mean as much if were easy, right? The results and sense of accomplishment are well worth the effort.

Hopefully, reading about these mistakes will help you to avoid making them yourself. If you know of other mistakes, I'd like to hear them and share them with others. Please write me at Richard.Larson@WatermarkLearning.com with your ideas and tips.

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