

Chapter 1

Understanding the PRINCE2 Exams

In This Chapter

- Understanding the background to the exams – a brief history
- Keys to success
- The format of the exams: Foundation, Practitioner and Re-registration
- Tackling exam nerves
- Handling special requirements and problems on the day

Good news! You've probably bought this book to give yourself the best chance of passing either or both of the PRINCE2 exams. Well, the good news is that the exams are passable and although good preparation won't guarantee success, it will give you a very good chance. Most people who understand the method well and who have prepared thoroughly pass. It's great for me in the 'trainer' part of my job to have an exam sitting with a 100 per cent pass rate. With a recent series of four large in-house courses with a prestigious client – actually a royal institute – in London, two had 100 per cent pass at Practitioner in the exam sittings, and only a couple of people missed in the other two, and one only narrowly. I hope that the high pass rate reflects the quality of my training, but what it also reflects is the candidates' determination and very hard work.

Grasping the Exam Basics

At Foundation, it's rare indeed for anyone to fail, provided they've prepared properly, and most pass with strong marks. The exam authority intends that nearly everyone should pass this exam, but don't imagine that means the questions will be easy. The acceptance of a high pass rate is in the context of everyone preparing thoroughly.

If you're a bit worried about the exams, then be comforted by the knowledge that they're a concern for nearly everyone, daunting for many, and a severe problem to a few. Part of the problem is that it may be quite some time since you took an exam and you may feel 'rusty' about the whole process. These things are all thrown into sharp relief if your future – such as a new job, a new contract or a promotion – hangs in the balance and depends, at least in part, on your success. If you do suffer from exam nerves, you'll find a bit of help in the section 'Managing Exam Nerves' later in this chapter.

The not-so-good news – sorry, but I need to warn you – is that the PRINCE2 exams are a bit . . . er . . . awkward. They are not the same as exams at school or university where papers have been written by academic specialists. The PRINCE2 exams are written and

controlled by people in the PRINCE2 community who wanted to become involved but who were not required to have a specialist background in the educational psychology of testing. Instead, the people have largely learned on the job. Inevitably that means that the exam has seen more than its fair share of problems.

The non-specialist background is often visible in the papers where questions are not well phrased or are simply strange. I have often heard candidates say after the exam that it was 'hard to see what they were getting at' in some of the questions. Sadly, this factor occasionally leads to failure. The exams have been criticised by some PRINCE2 trainers over the years, too; one who does have a qualified educational background (but not me this time) said at one trainer conference, 'We are supposed to be testing PRINCE2 knowledge and understanding, not language comprehension.' Now this negative slant isn't included here to depress you, but rather to make you aware of the nature of the exams that you'll face.

Going back to the good news again, practice with the question styles will be a real help, and this book has lots of practice questions. If you can get really good marks overall, then losing one or two on any poorly worded questions won't be too much of a concern for you.

Taking exams on a training course – or not

If you're not on a training course as you read this book, and haven't already booked on one, you may be asking yourself whether a course is necessary. The answer is no, you don't need a course. You can learn PRINCE2 by yourself from books and by getting hold of practice papers from the exam authority. For many people a training course is preferable, though, for a couple of reasons. First of all, you put time aside and focus on learning PRINCE2. Second, you can ask questions if you don't understand something and, hopefully, you'll get a knowledgeable answer from a course tutor who does understand the method properly. On the other hand, if you don't go on a course, you can fit in your study of the method around other things, and work at your own speed.

Face-to-face training and distance-learning packages usually include the exams in the cost. If you're learning on your own though, you can take the exams at an open centre – there's more about that in a moment.

If you're thinking of booking a training course, you need to be a bit careful. In the UK there are now a lot of PRINCE2 Accredited Training Organisations (ATOs). You might imagine that if companies are all accredited then the courses are pretty much the same. In reality, there's a wide spectrum ranging from those training companies that only teach what they think you need to know to pass the exams to those that set out to give you a solid practical understanding of the method in addition to preparing you for the exams. Accreditation is a minimum standard, not a uniform standard. In terms of tutors' experience there are those who bring many years of practical PRINCE2 project experience into the training room through to those who have only recently qualified themselves and have hardly ever use the method in practice (if at all). I know this to be true having turned away many accredited PRINCE2 trainers over the years who were already doing some work for other ATOs and wanted to deliver Practitioner courses for my company. Trainers with little or no experience don't add much value, and sometimes when you ask a question they can only tell you what's in the PRINCE2 manual; you can read that for yourself anyway.

In short, be careful out there. If you opt to take a course, choose it with care and find a company that can help you really understand the method so that you can tackle the exams from a position of strength. Don't pick one that will merely rehearse you in exam answers. If you do, you're then likely to feel very vulnerable in the exams, because you don't really understand what the method is all about. Instead, you just end up hoping that you can associate the answers that the company taught you with relevant questions in the exam. Even if you get through the exams, you'll then have trouble applying PRINCE2 intelligently during projects, when with better training you could have done both well.

Taking exams at a public centre

As indicated in the previous section, you can learn PRINCE2 independently using a distance-learning course or just by studying on your own. Distance-learning courses often include exam provision as part of the package, but in any case there's an option to sit exams at public centres.

The organisation currently contracted to run exams is APMG, and you should contact it to find out where the current centres are and when the exams will be running. APMG can also advise on taking the exams outside the UK should you need to do that. APMG's contact details are in the Introduction to this book.

Unlocking Exam Success

The three main keys to success are:

- ✓ Knowing the method well
- ✓ Revising thoroughly
- ✓ Practising with sample questions

If you're unclear on any part of the method and can't fathom that bit of the manual, you might like to get a copy of the companion to this book, *PRINCE2 For Dummies*. Lots of people have commented very kindly that *PRINCE2 For Dummies* makes the method easier to understand and they've found it a real help when learning. It explains the method in a much more practical way than a manual can. For thorough exam preparation . . . well that's where this book fits right in. To help you find relevant explanations in *PRINCE2 For Dummies* and the appropriate section of the PRINCE2 manual, cross references are included in the text of the book.

Practising with questions is essential. You'll find practice questions throughout this book, but in addition sample papers are available from the PRINCE2 exam board. If you're attending a training course or have purchased a distance-learning package, the practice papers should be given to you by your course provider. If you're studying on your own, you should contact the exam administrators, APMG, for sample papers, because they can't let you take an exam without you knowing what you'll be facing. Again, APMG's contact details are in the Introduction to this book.

If you think that you're at a disadvantage with the exams because you don't have significant project management experience, don't worry. Having such experience can be a help, but remember that the exams are about PRINCE2 not project management. Many people who learn PRINCE2 and are successful in the exams work in areas such as project support or are managers who supervise staff running projects but don't actually run them themselves. Strangely, perhaps, extensive project management experience can actually be a drawback if that experience has been with an approach that is significantly different to PRINCE2. Such people often have to do some 'unlearning' before they can take on board the detail of PRINCE2. When learning PRINCE2 then, you'll find things easier if you forget the past and focus on how the method works.

A second point for learning the method well, and related to the point made in the last paragraph, is to temporarily forget about your own projects. The human brain works powerfully by trying to relate everything new to something that is already familiar. That can really work against you here. While you're learning PRINCE2, try not to work out how to apply the method to past projects or indeed your current project. Over the years, I've seen a few people fail to heed that warning only to lose the thread completely and become thoroughly confused. At the point that they've reached, it seems the method won't work well on their projects and they get distracted from learning as they try to think through how they might fix it. Actually, things later in the method resolve the apparent problems. It's a much better strategy for learning to focus first on learning PRINCE2. Later, when you thoroughly understand the method and how it all fits together, you can go on to consider how you'll apply it to your live projects, adjusting it if necessary.

Understanding the Exams and Levels

There are two main exams: the Foundation and the Practitioner. Then there's the Re-registration exam which you need to take at intervals of from three to five years to keep your Practitioner qualification up to date. Foundation and Practitioner exams are aimed at slightly different things, although there's an overlap.

The Foundation Certificate is intended to show that you understand the terminology of the method and the how all the elements of PRINCE2 work, for example how themes are used during projects, and also how the elements work together. For example, how does the principle of 'manage by exception' fit into the processes?

The Practitioner Certificate, as the name suggests, is intended to show that you can apply the method to a project. The Practitioner level overlaps with Foundation in that the exam also checks for understanding of how the method is used. The Practitioner exam then goes on to test your ability to apply the method to a project by giving you a description of a project (the project 'scenario') and basing many, but not necessarily all, of the Practitioner questions on it. The same project scenario is used throughout a particular Practitioner paper. To put your mind at rest a bit, the pitch of the exam is that you can apply the method to a non-complex project.

The Re-registration exam is, obviously enough, at Practitioner level.

Understanding the Foundation exam

The PRINCE2 Foundation Certificate, then, is intended to show that the holder understands the principles and terminology of the method. The questions are fact based, not opinion based, so the 'right' answer will have been taken from the manual. The logistics of the exam are set down in the panel.

Understanding the structure of the paper

The 75 questions cover all parts of the method and are not in any particular order; they're not grouped by subject, for example, or project sequence.

Checking that you've covered everything

As you use this book, you'll see that each subject chapter has a revision checklist for Foundation. The list will help you make sure that you've got to grips with the areas in that subject that are significant for the Foundation exam, including those which appear on the exam syllabus. If you feel a bit uneasy about any item in the list, that's a prompt to go and have another look at that area.

Avoiding timing out

You may be concerned that you'll not have enough time to answer all the questions, particularly if it's been a while since you last sat an exam. Time management is significant in the Foundation exam, but timing isn't usually a big problem. You should have enough time to answer all the questions. In all the years I've been teaching PRINCE2, I've only ever known four or five people time out in the Foundation exam. If you end up being another one though, in Chapter 2 you'll find some advice about managing your time in the closing minutes of the exam.

Foundation exam

One hour.

Seventy-five questions, of which 70 are live, with the remaining 5 being questions that the exam board is testing. You won't know which five are the experimental questions, and they won't affect your mark in either direction; they simply don't count.

Questions are all the classic style of multiple choice, usually with four options: a, b, c and d. The style is explained in Chapter 2.

There's only one right answer to each question – allegedly – but there's more on this point later in this section.

The pass mark is 50 per cent. So of the 70 live questions you need to score 35 or more to pass.

No levels of pass. You'll be told your mark, but the official result is simply a pass or a fail, and there are no 'honours' or 'you only just scraped it' levels.

Your result can be given to you immediately by your training company, but the result is provisional. The paper will be re-marked by the exam authority for the final result.

There are no trick questions – allegedly. If there's a poor question, then it may cause you a problem, but there is no deliberate intention to trip you up.

Going on to Practitioner

In order to sit the Practitioner exam, you need to have passed Foundation. If you've booked both exams in the same course event, don't worry that the result of the Foundation exam won't be available in time. The Foundation is marked immediately, and you'll be given your result. Although that result is provisional, it's accepted by the exam authority; if you pass, you can go on to the Practitioner exam.

You may wonder what happens if your provisional mark is a pass but when the paper is machine marked it throws up a miscount and you fail. Well, you've got to be right on the boundary for a miscount of a mark or two to make a difference. As explained in the next section, if you don't score good marks in the Foundation and you're not well clear of the pass mark, then it's not looking good for the Practitioner anyway.

Building a firm foundation for the Practitioner level

If you're planning to take the Practitioner exam, you need to be aware that there's a strong correlation between good Foundation marks and success at Practitioner level. In my company, Inspirandum, we did some checks and found that those with fewer than 50 marks out of the 70 in the Foundation exam are very unlikely to pass the Practitioner. That's a high pass mark of around 70 per cent.

You may think that this correlation sounds a little odd, since the two exams are targeted at rather different things. However, it makes more sense when you think it through. Although you can look at your manual in the Practitioner exam, unlike the Foundation where you can't, you don't have time to refer to it a lot. Put simply, you can look at the manual to confirm something, but you don't have time to start reading lots of it in order to find answers. You need to be fluent in the method to pass the Practitioner, and if you need to look up lots of detail because you don't know it, then you're not fluent. That flows on nicely to the next section, 'Leaving a gap between a PRINCE2 training course and sitting the Practitioner level'.

Leaving a gap between a PRINCE2 training course and sitting the Practitioner level

Many people who take both exams as part of a training course sit the exams in the same training event run in the same week. However, there's an option to delay taking an exam. For the Practitioner exam in particular, you may want to think about leaving a gap for three reasons:

- ✓ **Some people learn more quickly than others; however, those who learn more slowly often remember better and keep their knowledge for much longer.** If you take things on board more slowly, then you may find it an advantage to leave a gap between the exams to give you more time to absorb PRINCE2 and be sure that you understand it before you go on to take the Practitioner. That's often much better than taking it too soon only to fail, then having to do it a second time knowing that you've already failed once.
- ✓ **The Practitioner Exam is getting steadily harder.** There's an unfortunate mechanism whereby the exam authority has focused, at least in the past, on having the 'right' number of people pass. As training companies have put more effort into preparing people for the exams (sadly usually at the expense of training them how to run projects

well with PRINCE2), the pass rate has risen. To compensate for that, the exam has been made more difficult. Whereas it used to be fine for most people to sit the Foundation and Practitioner exams in the same week, there's now a distinct advantage for many in leaving a gap to allow more time to check things over and, even more significantly, get in more practice with sample Practitioner questions.

- ✓ **You really need to have reached the right level.** If you didn't get about 50 marks or above in the Foundation, although you passed, then you aren't quite fluent enough in PRINCE2 and you'll benefit from having more time to brush up before you attempt the Practitioner paper.

Leaving a gap between the exams doesn't mean you need to leave a gap in your learning though. If you're attending a course, then you may find it better to learn the method to its full extent in one go and take the Foundation. Then go away and practise with Practitioner questions before tackling the Practitioner exam. In my company, we've always made it possible for people to do that. We used to find that about 10 per cent of people found it helpful to leave a gap, but the number is now much greater for the reason I've already explained in this section: the exam is tougher, and you also need to be familiar with the different multiple-choice question styles. When I had the superb results mentioned earlier in this chapter, I put part of the success down to the fact that the Practitioner exam followed on a week after the main training event.

Judging the gap between a course and the exam

If you're considering a gap, how long should it be? Well, about a week is ideal. A month is fine. But after a couple of months, you'll start to be at a disadvantage rather than having a benefit. After about two months, although you'll have had more time to revise and practise, your speed of recall of information from the course will start to diminish. If you need to start looking a lot of things up in the manual because you can't quite remember them, you're in for timing problems in the exam and are more likely to fail.

Getting your certificate(s)

If you pass the Foundation and go on in the same course event to take Practitioner and you pass that too, then you'll only get a single certificate, which is the Practitioner Certificate. You don't need a Foundation Certificate in that case, because everyone knows that if you hold the Practitioner qualification then you must also have passed Foundation.

If you do both exams in the same training event and pass the Foundation but fail the Practitioner, then you'll, predictably enough, get a Foundation Certificate. When you take the Practitioner again and hopefully pass this time, you'll get a Practitioner Certificate. If you leave a gap between the exams and don't do them at the same event, you'll end up with a Foundation Certificate when you pass the Foundation and then a Practitioner Certificate when you pass that exam – one certificate for each end of your bookshelf.

Understanding the Practitioner Exam

The Practitioner is to test your understanding of how to use PRINCE2 and whether you can apply it to a project, as explained in the previous section.

Practitioner exam

Two and a half hours.

Eight sections, each with ten questions. Unlike the Foundation, there are no 'experimental' questions in this exam, so all questions are live ones.

Each question is worth 1 mark, so the whole paper is 80 marks.

The pass mark is 55 per cent, so you need 44 marks to pass.

You don't have to pass each section, just achieve 55 per cent across the whole paper.

Questions are different styles of multiple choice, such as matching questions and sequence questions. I explain the styles in Chapter 2.

There's only one right answer to each question unless you're specifically asked to give more than one answer.

As with the Foundation exam, there are no levels of pass. The result is simply a pass or a fail.

Your training company may give you your result very quickly, or it will follow within about two weeks – after the paper has been marked centrally.

There are no deliberate trick questions and there's no intention to try to catch you out.

Understanding the structure of the Practitioner paper

Six of the eight sections in the exam are each based on one theme. The remaining two sections are each based on one set of process groups. The groups are Starting Up a Project with Initiating a Project, then Managing a Stage Boundary with Closing a Project and Directing a Project, then Controlling a Stage with Managing Product Delivery.

To check that you can apply the method to a project, the exam provides details of a particular project and then bases the questions on that project scenario. Don't worry that the project example will be some obscure branch of rocket science of which you have no knowledge. It will be about something you can understand easily enough. The example used in this book is about preparing a set of offices in a headquarters building for staff who are in a new business unit. Even if you're not a building expert, you can understand about the need for new phone lines, carpeting and furniture.

The Practitioner exam uses some strange terminology to describe the sections. Currently each of the eight sections is termed a question, and each question has ten bits, each of which is also referred to as a question. That's confusing to just about everyone other than PRINCE2 examiners! For clarity in this book, the eight major parts of the Practitioner paper are referred to as sections, and the ten component elements within each one, and which score a mark, are referred to as questions.

Referring to scenario information

The whole paper uses a single project scenario, and that scenario is in a physically separate part so you can have that section open alongside the question paper. The good news here is that you only have to get your head around one project and not several. There's some initial scenario information, typically taking up about two-thirds of a side. Then for some of the sections, but not all, there's additional information that relates just to that section. For example, it's common to have some additional information about a project risk to go with the 'risk'

section of the paper. In the exam, you need to take into account any extra information for the section you're working on, but also the overall scenario information for the project.

The additional information for a section is often about half a page. However, it may be longer, and a notable example is with Organization, where there can be as much as one and a half pages describing a range of people who may be involved in the project, and from whom you'll then be asked to select suitable people to fill project management team roles.

Keeping to time

Time management is absolutely critical. Let's say that again for emphasis. Time management is critical for success in the Practitioner exam.

Happily the Practitioner exam, like the Foundation, lends itself to clear time management by its very structure. There are 9 sections, each worth 12 marks, so you need to distribute your answer time evenly between the 9. You won't complete particular sections to the exact second, but you really can't afford to slip by very much.

In my company, Inspirandum, we inevitably get some people who fail the Practitioner. Because of the practical nature of our course, such failure is very rarely because of a problem with PRINCE2 knowledge. It's almost always down to exam technique, and within that by far the most common problem is timing out.

You'll find advice in Chapter 2 on how to structure your time in the Practitioner exam. It isn't as simple as dividing the two and a half hours by the eight sections, because there's project scenario information to read first. There's the main scenario, but then some sections will have extra project information. You'll need to allow time for reading the main scenario and then, for each section as you come to it, any additional scenario for that section. With a bit of contingency time – good risk management – that leaves you with about 15 minutes to answer each of the sections of 10 questions.

It's a bad mistake to 'steal' time from later sections if you're struggling with one or two questions within a section. Rather than let the timing slip, take a guess at the probable answers and move on. If you spend 15 minutes extra on questions that you're having trouble with early on in the exam, you may find you haven't got time to do the last section, where, in the same 15 minutes, you may have scored many more marks. That can, and sometimes does, make the difference between a pass and a fail.

Guarding your feelings

The Practitioner exam is pretty tough, so most people find it a bit nerve-wracking. Bear in mind that most people pass the exam, although that involves a lot of hard work and good preparation. Try to have a positive outlook, based on your preparation, and try not to let over-concern become an additional burden. If you suffer from exam nerves and this is likely to be a particular problem, have a look at the section later in this chapter, 'Managing Exam Nerves'.

Also be prepared for a feeling that you've failed after you've handed in your Practitioner paper. Relatively few people think that they've passed, although all hope it. In my company, we get a constant stream of inbound emails after we've sent out the results. People say some very nice things about our course and their confidence that they can now go out and use PRINCE2 well on their projects, but when reflecting on a successful exam outcome they often say 'I was really surprised, because I was sure I'd failed.'

Understanding the Re-registration exam

Your PRINCE2 Practitioner qualification lasts forever, but it's dated. You're only considered up to date if you regularly top up with a Re-registration exam. This must be done at intervals of between three and five years. If you do top up within this window, you need only take the Re-registration exam, which is shorter than the full Practitioner. If you leave it longer than five years, then to get up to date again you have to face a full Practitioner paper.

Preparing for the Re-registration exam

You don't necessarily have to attend a training course to go for the Re-registration exam. However, it's worth considering to get back up to exam speed, and especially if there has been a new edition of the PRINCE2 manual since you last did the exam. On a training course, you can be shown where the method has changed since the previous edition of the manual.

You must allow sufficient time for preparing for the Re-registration. As with the full Practitioner exam, that means both revision and practice with exam questions. If you haven't used all of the method for a while on projects, you'll probably be well aware of the need to prepare. But if you're using PRINCE2 regularly, you can be lulled into a false sense of security that you know what you're doing on projects so you don't need to revise too much. Remember that you need to be really fluent in the method to be successful. On a project, you can spend a few minutes reading something up in the manual if you need to. In the exam, you can't keep doing that, because you're under time pressure; you have to know it already and be able to recall the information quickly and accurately.



You need to put time aside to revise and practise for the Re-registration exam. Don't try to slot in a bit of revision in the evenings, after long days on a busy project, in the few days leading up to the exam. If possible, take two or three days out before the exam so you can really focus. That's likely to be much more time-efficient than doing a bit of revision, travelling to and from the exam, and taking the exam only to fail and have to do it all over again.

Re-registration exam

One hour.

Three sections, each with 10 questions. There are no 'experimental' questions in this exam, so all of the questions are live ones.

Each question is worth 1 mark, so the whole paper is 30 marks.

The pass mark is 55 per cent, so you need 17 marks to pass.

You don't have to pass each section, just achieve 55 per cent across the whole paper.

Questions are at Practitioner level. In fact, currently the practice is to build the paper using three of the nine

sections of the full Practitioner exam running on the same day. I explain the question styles in Chapter 2.

There's only one right answer to each question, unless you're specifically asked to give more than one answer.

There are no levels of pass. The result is simply a pass or a fail.

Your result may be given to you by your training company on the day, or will follow within about two weeks, after the paper has been marked centrally.

There are no deliberate trick questions and there's no intention to try and catch you out.

Practising with questions

Probably the most important part of your preparation for Re-registration is practice with the Practitioner-level questions. If you're up to speed on each of the question styles, you'll find the exam that much less daunting. Buying this book is a good start to getting up to speed with the question styles, but do also get the practice papers from the exam authority or the training company where you'll be taking the exam. That gives you even more opportunity to practise against the clock.

Don't be fooled that because you've been using PRINCE2 for some years on live projects, the exam will be that much easier for you. Sadly perhaps, the PRINCE2 exam is about passing the PRINCE2 exam, not running live projects with the method. Be warned that the exam authority did some checking a while ago and found that the pass rate for Re-registration was no higher than the pass rate for Practitioner. In other words, practical experience of applying the method doesn't seem to offer any advantage when it comes to the Practitioner exam.

Managing Exam Nerves

If you're nervous about exams, then you're in good company because a lot of people are in the same position. It may be that you just don't like exams (like me!) or are nervous because it's a long time since you last sat one. Here are some hints and tips for handling exam nerves. You won't find that everything helps you, but you may find some things that do.

If you have big problems with exam nerves, as opposed to 'butterflies in the stomach' that most people have, it can be useful to try and find out why. This can help to focus your thoughts on how best to handle the problem. For many, the problem is the fear of failure.

Handling exam nerves

Try the following to help you cope with exam nerves:

1. **Think briefly about the consequences of failure. Would it be that terrible?**
2. **Can you simply take the exam again if it all goes wrong?**
3. **Is it likely that you'll fail – how well do you know the method? If you think there's a likelihood of failure, use that energy to learn more; try not to waste it in worry.**
4. **Are your thoughts dominated by pictures of someone telling you that you've failed? If so, spend a bit of time visualising someone telling you that you've passed.**
5. **Visualise success, not failure. Develop a strong mental picture of you passing and having the certificate in your hand with your name on it. Attach other dimensions such as how you'll feel and what others will say. This can work to build confidence and help you to be positive.**
6. **If you tend to think of the exam as a test of your weakness, work on your thinking and try to approach the exam as a chance to prove that you know the method.**

Handling Special Requirements

To make the exams fair, time allowances are available to those with special difficulties, and sometimes other special provision is available, such as for those with eyesight difficulties.

Taking the exams in your second language

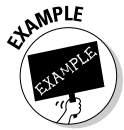
If you're taking the exam in English but you have a different first language, then ask your training provider for a PRINCE2 glossary in your first language. A lot of glossaries are now available, and there may well be one which translates English PRINCE2 terminology into your first language. You may find a glossary helpful while you're learning the method, not just in the exams.

Irrespective of whether you're taking in the exam in English, you can also ask to take in a dictionary to help with translation. In most cases you won't need the dictionary, because you'll already be familiar with the PRINCE2 terms from your course, but even so you might like one there as a comfort factor just in case something isn't clear or your mind goes blank.

Depending on your exact language abilities and where you're taking the exam, you may be allowed extra time. The allowance is for the extra time you'll spend in translating the English of the question to your first language in order to think it through, then working back into English to identify the answer.

It's hard in this book to set down the exact circumstances in which extra time will be allowed, since the rules and guidelines keep changing. If you're booked on a training course, the best advice is to contact your training provider well before the course and talk it through. If you're taking exams in a central exam location, then contact the exam organisation, APMG, again well before the time of the exam.

There's one final provision to consider. If the PRINCE2 exams are available in your first language, see whether you can take them in that instead.



I had a Project Manager from Holland on one of my courses a while ago. After taking the course and Foundation exam in English, he actually sat a Dutch exam paper for Practitioner. Everyone else on the course was jealous because, from his description afterwards, it sounded like the Dutch paper was more straightforward than the English one that day.

Taking the exams if you're dyslexic

In my company, Inspirandum, we find that about 5 per cent of people attending our PRINCE2 courses are dyslexic. So the first thing to say here is: don't worry, the whole exam process is well set up to meet your needs. Provision ranges from an extra time allowance to working in an adjacent room and having someone read the paper out to you. The extra time allowance is typically 30 minutes for the Practitioner and a smaller amount for Foundation.

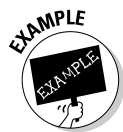
You need to provide evidence of your dyslexia. Acceptable forms of evidence include a medical statement, a report from an authorised dyslexia assessment or something like a university statement acknowledging your dyslexia in the context of university exams.

If you need someone to read out the questions to you, it's very important to get the arrangements in place early – such as booking an extra room – and to make sure that the reader is suitable. One delegate told me about two exams he sat on a different subject. The reader for the first one was fine and did a good job, but for the second, a different person was involved and read out the text in a flat, expressionless way. The lack of intonation made the meaning as difficult to grasp as if the candidate had read the text for himself.

Dealing with special physical needs

If you have other needs, then do ask – whether you have a permanent issue such as an eyesight limitation, or a temporary one such as a recent injury. As with dyslexia, you'll need some form of evidence to confirm that the need is genuine, so that unscrupulous people can't get extra time. Don't take it as a personal slight when you're asked for evidence. If your need is genuine, then you'll find the exam organisation is extremely understanding and helpful and will work with you, and your training provider if you go on a course, to give you as fair a chance as possible in the exams.

If you need extra-large print because of eyesight limitations, then provision includes preparing a double-size (A3) paper for you. If you have had an injury preventing use of your writing hand, it's possible for someone to sit with you to fill in the ovals on the answer sheet according to your instructions.



In one training course, I had a delegate with an ongoing medical condition which gave her severe pain. At regular intervals throughout the course she needed to stand and walk around a bit – which was fine. She also needed special provision for the exam: she said she would find it easier to stand throughout the exam. We arranged with the exam authority for a time allowance to offset the breaks she needed to walk around, and we got a high table from the bar in the hotel in which we were running the course so she could stand up to do the papers. Other course delegates were most understanding and weren't distracted by her quietly walking up and down at the back of the room from time to time. She passed with great marks and went on to run projects and programmes for a major UK children's charity.

Applying for special provision

If you're attending a training course, then in most cases your training provider won't have the discretion to decide on a time allowance or other special provision. Instead, the provider will need to get permission from the exam authority. The important thing in all instances is to talk to your training provider, or APMG in the case of central exams, in good time. Good time means at least four weeks before you're due to take the exam.

Where you need to supply medical evidence, you must allow time for that to be checked and, if it isn't quite suitable, for the exam authority to come back to you saying what it does need and for you to then have sufficient time to get it. Clearly, in the case of provision of double-size exam papers, these need to be prepared in advance – so again you need to be in communication early. You can't say on the morning of an exam that you need a large-print paper; it will be far too late.

Having a problem on the day

If you have a problem on the day of your exam, such as a severe headache or you feel ill, you must tell the exam invigilator before the start of the exam. You then have two choices: to call it a day and arrange to sit the exam when you're feeling better, or to go for it anyway. If you decide to go for it, the invigilator can note down on the exam form that you were unwell; if your result is borderline, your circumstances may just be taken into account.

The important thing to remember is that you must report any problem up front, before the exam has started. It's no good having a bad exam then deciding at the end that you didn't feel too well and asking for it to be reported then; it will be too late.