

Chapter

1

Introduction



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“You are what you do, not what you say you’ll do.”

Carl Jung

Welcome to *The Big Book of HR Practice Questions*! Your decision to invest in your professional development speaks volumes about your commitment to excellence and your dedication to advancing in the field of human resources (HR).

As the opening quote suggests, the process of preparing to sit for a certification exam requires taking action. It is not enough to simply think about or say that you want to accomplish something. True mastery of any topic requires work, patience, consistency, and access to resources that support a successful outcome. This book is designed to be a functional practice question guide for exams offered by the Human Resource Certification Institute and the Society for Human Resource Management.

- **The Human Resource Certification Institute (HRCI):** The Human Resource Certification Institute (HRCI) is an organization that offers certifications for HR professionals, validating their expertise and competency in various HR domains. Through rigorous examination and ongoing professional development, HRCI aims to elevate standards in the HR industry and empower professionals to advance their careers. This book is mapped to HRCI’s exam content outlines for four exams:
 - **Professional in Human Resources (PHR):** The PHR certification caters to HR professionals who possess one to four years of experience in executing programs with a tactical/logistical focus, highlighting their operational duties within the organization’s HR department.
 - **Professional in Human Resources, international (PHRi):** The PHRi certification is tailored for HR practitioners situated in a single international setting (non U.S.-based company), affirming their professional-level proficiency, knowledge, and skills to advance their careers in HR. Through the PHRi, individuals showcase their expertise in universally recognized technical and operational HR principles within an international context.
 - **Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR):** The SPHR credential targets senior HR leaders in the United States with four years or more experience in strategizing rather than executing HR policies. SPHR professionals typically oversee HR department objectives and strategize and implement business plans and technology, all while comprehending the broader HR requirements of the organization.
 - **Senior Professional in Human Resources, international (SPHRi):** The SPHRi certification is tailored for HR leaders located outside of the United States,

acknowledging their senior-level competency in generally accepted HR principles encompassing strategy, policy development, and service delivery within a single international setting.

- **The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM):** The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) is a professional association dedicated to advancing the HR profession by providing resources, training, and networking opportunities to its members. Through advocacy, research, and education, SHRM strives to empower HR professionals worldwide to become strategic partners in their organizations' success. They have developed an exam Body of Applied Skills and Knowledge (BASK) for two exams that this practice guide is mapped to:
 - **SHRM Certified Professional (SHRM-CP):** An individual pursuing an SHRM-CP certification typically engages in HR or HR-related tasks or is aspiring toward a career in HR, with a focus on operational responsibilities. It's advisable for candidates to possess a basic understanding of HR concepts as they prepare for the certification.
 - **SHRM Senior Certified Professional (SHRM-SCP):** The SHRM-SCP certification is designed for individuals who have a minimum of three years of experience in executing strategic-level HR or HR-related responsibilities. Alternatively, it's also suitable for SHRM-CP holders who have maintained their certification for at least three years and are either currently working in or transitioning into strategic-level roles within the HR domain.

What sets this book apart is its practical approach. Each question is carefully crafted to mirror real-world scenarios and challenges encountered in a typical day in HR. Each question is also designed to get you familiar with how the questions are presented on the HRCI and SHRM exams. By engaging with the questions in this book, you'll not only test your understanding of key concepts but also hone your ability to critically think through situations, make informed decisions, and apply your work experience to find the correct answers.

Many athletes are familiar with the age-old adage, "Practice makes perfect." Yet, imagine a professional golfer heading to the driving range, swinging away for hours with the wrong form and the wrong club, and lacking the proper mindset. That practice might end up engraining the wrong techniques rather than properly refining the skills necessary for success.

This same principle applies to exam preparation! It's not just about practice; it's about perfect practice. To stack the odds in your favor, you need the right tools and resources for effective performance, and that's where this book comes in. It's designed to be an important resource in your preparation cache.

Success when facing a difficult exam requires planning and effort, not unlike when preparing for a marathon, embarking on a job search, or taking on new responsibilities at work. It will take perseverance and a commitment to yourself. The journey begins by understanding your own motivation.

Know Your Why

Mae Jemison was the first African American woman to travel in space, a physician, an engineer, and a passionate advocate for STEM education and exploration. From an early age, Dr. Jemison was captivated by the mysteries of the universe. This curiosity fueled her passion for science and drove her to pursue studies in chemical engineering and medicine. This led her to apply to NASA's astronaut program, despite facing barriers as a woman and African American. Jemison's personal "why" was rooted in a deep-seated desire to understand and explore the cosmos, propelling her to space aboard the Space Shuttle Endeavour in 1992. A true space pioneer and role model, Jemison's story reminds us that overcoming internal and external barriers to success requires a whole lot of guts, planning, and perseverance.

Why are you taking a professional certification exam? The answer to the question "why" serves decision-making, drives behaviors, and satisfies in a way experts call *intrinsic motivation*. Intrinsic motivation refers to the internal desire or drive to engage in an activity or pursue a goal solely for the enjoyment, satisfaction, or inherent interest it brings. This type of motivation often leads to higher levels of engagement, persistence, and creativity in tasks or goals pursued. Of course, there is nothing wrong with being motivated by external factors either; in fact, for some, the idea of recognition or monetary rewards is a key driver. When pursuing successful HR certification, it is useful to understand your own intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, such as the following:

- **Self-investment:** People often take professional certification exams to invest in themselves, aiming to boost their skills and knowledge for personal and professional development.
- **Pay increase:** Getting certified can help bump up your earnings by more than 25%. This is accomplished by showing employers and clients that you've got the expertise and competencies they're looking for, which can lead to better job opportunities and higher salaries.
- **Role-modeling:** When you become certified, you're not just doing it for yourself; you're also setting an example for others around you, inspiring them and encouraging them to keep pushing forward in their own careers.
- **Excellence:** Sitting down for a professional certification exam isn't just about passing a test; it's about showing your commitment to being the best in your field, demonstrating your dedication and staying on top of industry trends and standards.

This process is tough, and at times it might even be stressful. Knowing your why is your benchmark, the place that tethers you to the reasons you get up early to study, stay up late making flashcards, and watch MBA-level videos while on the treadmill. A quick mindset shift can help when those study days seem long. As Simon Sinek said, "Working hard for something we don't care about is called stress. Working hard for something we love is called passion."

The Exam Content

The profession of human resources has a framework from which university courses are taught, research is conducted, and best practices are formed. This framework is built around the human resource body of knowledge (HRBoK), and exam content often reflects these guidelines. While each exam has its own functional area categories, there are core knowledge and competency themes that are covered across all of the HRCI and SHRM exams. This book includes exam questions in the following HR domains:

- **U.S. Labor Laws (covered in Chapter 2):** Regulations governing employment practices and worker rights in the United States
- **Business Management and Strategy (covered in Chapter 3):** Developing and implementing plans to achieve organizational goals and maintain competitiveness
- **Talent Planning and Acquisition (covered in Chapter 4):** Strategically identifying, recruiting, and retaining skilled individuals to meet organizational needs
- **Learning and Development (covered in Chapter 5):** Cultivating employee skills and knowledge through training and educational programs
- **Total Rewards (covered in Chapter 6):** Comprehensive compensation and benefits packages designed to attract, motivate, and retain employees
- **Risk Management (covered in Chapter 7):** Identifying and mitigating potential threats to the organization's success, including legal, financial, and operational risks
- **Employee Engagement and Retention (covered in Chapter 8):** Fostering a positive work environment and implementing strategies to enhance employee satisfaction and loyalty
- **Employee and Labor Relations (covered in Chapter 9):** Managing interactions between employees and their employers, including negotiations, conflict resolution, and union relations
- **Ethical Practice and Corporate Social Responsibility (covered in Chapter 10):** Adhering to moral principles and implementing socially responsible practices to benefit society and stakeholders
- **Managing a Global Workforce (covered in Chapter 11):** Overseeing HR activities across international borders and diverse cultures
- **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (covered in Chapter 12):** Promoting fairness, respect, and opportunities for all individuals regardless of differences in background or identity
- **Workforce Analytics and Technology (covered in Chapter 13):** Leveraging data and technology to inform decision-making and optimize human resource processes
- **Human Resource Competencies (covered in Chapter 14):** Demonstrating proficiency in various HR functions, including communication, problem-solving, and strategic thinking
- **Leadership (covered in Chapter 15):** Guiding and inspiring individuals or teams toward shared goals and objectives
- **Organizational Design and Development (covered in Chapter 16):** Structuring and evolving the organization to enhance efficiency, effectiveness, and adaptability

Regardless of which exam you plan to sit for, it is recommended that you download the detailed exam content descriptions. You can find the PHR and PHRi (PHR/i) exam content outline here:

www.hrci.org/certifications/exam-preparation-resources/exam-content-outlines

The SPHR and SPHRi (SPHR/i) exam content outline can be found here:

www.hrci.org/certifications/exam-preparation-resources/exam-content-outlines

Finally, the SHRM Body of Applied Skills and Knowledge (BASK) can be found here:

www.shrm.org/credentials/certification/exam-preparation/bask

Types of Questions

To maintain their accredited status, exam administrators must maintain a controlled firewall between themselves and the item writers. This means the authors who write the exams do not have access to special content. They are building the items, options, and correct answers from their position as a subject-matter expert (SME) who has worked as an HR practitioner. Each question is submitted for review and refined until it reaches the beta phase. At this point, the question is placed on the exam as a “pre-test” item for validation before it becomes part of a candidate’s official score. For example, on the PHR exam, there are 25 items on each exam that are not part of the scaled score. You will not know which exam items these are.

All six exams share similarities in the types of questions you will encounter. There are questions designed to measure knowledge and questions designed for you to apply your situational judgment.

Knowledge Items Knowledge items are typically questions that assess your understanding of fundamental concepts, principles, and theories in human resources management. You are required to recall and apply your knowledge of HR practices, laws, regulations, and organizational policies. Knowledge items serve to evaluate your depth of understanding and proficiency in various HR domains, ensuring you possess the necessary foundational knowledge to excel in HR roles.

Situational Judgment Items Situational judgment items on exams present you with realistic scenarios or workplace dilemmas relevant to the subject matter being tested, such as management or professional ethics. You will be asked to evaluate the situations and then select the most appropriate course of action from a list of options provided. These items assess not only your knowledge of theoretical concepts but also your ability to apply that knowledge to real-world situations, providing a more holistic measure of your competence and decision-making skills.

The correct answer on the situational judgment items on the SHRM exam are crafted by vote. This means a question goes out to field practitioners who “vote” on the correct answer. In many HR situations, the answer is not necessarily rooted in facts or evidence but rather best practices that require discernment and critical thinking skills. This is also why on all

of the exams it can feel like there are many possible correct answers, and thus, it's important that you take the exam that is best supported by your practical experience. For candidates with less than five years of generalist experience, that would be HRCI's operational PHR/i or the SHRM-CP. For senior HR professionals, consider the more strategic SPHR/i or SHRM-SCP.

The tests will measure your knowledge and your ability to apply that knowledge in real-life situations. The following are the types of questions you will encounter:

- Multiple choice/multiple option
- Drag and drop
- Fill in the blank

Multiple Choice/Multiple Option

A multiple-choice or multiple-option exam item starts with a clear stem or statement that presents a problem or scenario. This is followed by several possible answer options. In a multiple-choice question, one of the answer options presented will be correct. In a multiple-option question, one or more of the answers options will be correct. The other options will likely sound plausible or will closely resemble the correct answer, but they are incorrect. The intent of the questions is to assess your understanding and ability to differentiate between the correct and incorrect options. The following is an example of a situational judgment multiple-choice question:

A manufacturing company recently relocated its corporate headquarters, resulting in changes to HR operations, including implementing a new quarterly performance management system. The department manager expresses concerns to the HR director about the increased workload and system efficiency. How should the HR director respond to the supervisor?

- A. Offer additional training sessions to help supervisors and employees adapt to the new performance management system.
- B. Ignore the concerns raised by the department manager and proceed with the implementation of the new system.
- C. Provide the department manager with additional resources or support to help alleviate the increased workload.
- D. Revert to the previous performance management system to address the concerns raised by the department manager.

Drag and Drop

A drag-and-drop question assesses your knowledge as well as your ability to organize information or concepts effectively, offering a more interactive and engaging assessment experience. It requires that you match a set of terms to their corresponding description. The following is an example of a drag-and-drop question:

Match the HR principle with its corresponding definition:

Principles	Definitions
1. Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO)	A. Ensuring fair treatment of all employees regardless of their race, gender, age, or other protected characteristics.
2. Diversity and Inclusion	B. Fostering a work environment that embraces and respects individual differences, perspectives, and backgrounds.
3. Performance Management	C. Establishing processes and systems to assess and improve employee performance, productivity, and development.

Fill in the Blank

A fill-in-the-blank question is a statement or sentence with one or more blanks strategically placed to test your understanding of specific concepts or terms. The blanks are placed in a manner that requires you to recall and accurately provide missing information or complete the statement correctly. This type of question evaluates your knowledge in a more targeted manner. Here is an example of a fill-in-the-blank exam item:

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was originally passed specifically to prohibit employment discrimination on five protected class characteristics including _____, _____, _____, _____, or _____.

- A. Age, disability, sexual orientation, marital status, or veteran status
- B. Race, color, religion, sex, or national origin
- C. Age, gender identity, compensation discrimination, educational background, or socioeconomic status
- D. Physical appearance, accent, genetic information, immigration status, or pregnancy status

Exam Preparation

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to studying. Some individuals learn best under pressure, so a shorter preparation window makes perfect sense. Others require a more planned out and predictable schedule, so 10–12 weeks makes more sense. The key is to understand how you learn and play to your strengths.

Regardless of your pace, it is recommended that you take as many practice assessments as possible. This not only helps you become familiar with question structure but also allows you to see where your greatest strengths and opportunities for improvement are. From this, you can plan to spend extra time in the more difficult areas and brush up in the areas where you are scoring the highest.

Exam Scoring

Speaking of scoring, the exams are not graded in the traditional academic way of A, B, C, D, or the dreaded F. Instead, they are scaled scores based on the degree of difficulty in the random question mix that you draw on exam day. Think of it this way: out of the thousands of exam items available in the master database, you will receive between 115–134 questions, depending on your exam. This means a few things:

- **Over-preparation is essential to success.** While we know what percentage of questions you will get in each of the content areas, we cannot know which domain topics you will be tested on. For example, the SHRM-CP exam will have 134 questions, and the HR expertise domain of the Workplace will account for 14% of the total. This means you will have only approximately 19 questions related to this functional area. Take a look at Table 1.1 for an example of this concept in action.
- **Foundational knowledge is also essential for success.** While the purpose of the exams is to measure competencies, the tests (and the real world) will require that you are able to draw from a bank of knowledge to make evidenced-based decisions, critically think through multifaceted problems, and align HR programs with business results. This will require memorization of facts, models, and theories.
- **The test is just a snapshot of time.** The exams have varying pass rates, ranging from 50% to 70%. Many people don’t pass the first time, and that is OK! The process of getting ready is just as important to your career because the knowledge you gain during the preparation process is invaluable. It is possible that the questions you get on exam day just won’t align with your experience or knowledge, but it does not mean that you aren’t a great HR professional. Review your results, refresh your memory in the areas your under-performed, and retest as soon as possible.

TABLE 1.1 SHRM-CP Exam Weights

SHRM-CP Exam: 134 Questions	Percentage of the Exam	Total Number of Questions
Leadership	17%	23
Interpersonal	16.5%	22
Business	16.5%	22
People	18%	24
Organization	18%	24
Workplace	14%	19

Studying Best Practices

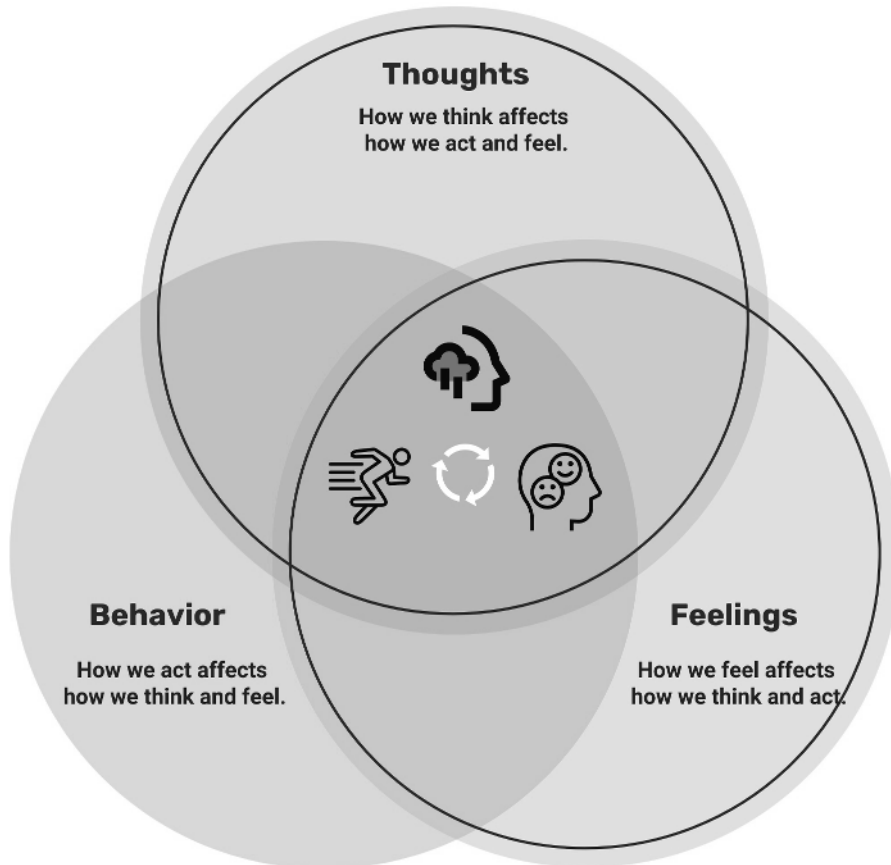
There are several other study best practices that can help prepare you for the big day:

- **Know your learning style:** Do you prefer to learn by seeing, hearing, or touching? Visual, auditory, and tactile learners all have a preferred way of taking in information, and aligning your preparation activities with your style will help to maximize retention. For visual learners, use colors and categorization methods to create presentations that sort and organize the information. For auditory learners, record yourself reading the material out loud, and subscribe to the various podcasts and YouTube channels that are listed at the end of each chapter in this book. Tactile learners, look for opportunities at your place of work to see the HR process in action and consider typing up your notes. Typing offers a tactile learning experience through physical engagement and muscle memory development. For all types, use a variety of study resources to enhance your understanding such as textbooks, online courses, academic journals, case studies, and reputable websites.
- **Finish this book:** Getting familiar with the question formatting is essential to establishing comfort with the exam style. Even if you are confident with your knowledge of a subject, use the practice questions to time yourself or simply to brush up.
- **Create study aids:** Create your own study aids, such as flashcards, summary notes, or mind maps, to condense and organize key information. These aids can be especially helpful for memorizing definitions, laws, or key concepts. The best way to learn something is to teach it, so consider teaching the material to someone else or discussing it with peers to deepen your understanding and retention of the material.
- **Stay organized and manage your time effectively:** Develop a study schedule that allocates sufficient time to cover all the necessary material before the exam. Break down your study sessions into manageable chunks and set specific goals for each session. Prioritize topics based on their exam weights and your understanding of them. Also, make sure to take regular breaks to avoid burnout.
- **Consider joining a study group:** Surround yourself with a group of likeminded individuals, and you are likely to feel supported as you get ready for the test. Joining a study group can provide valuable insights and perspectives from peers, facilitating a collaborative learning environment, and discussing concepts and practicing problem-solving together can enhance comprehension and retention of key materials.
- **Self-study:** Even if you are part of a network of like-minded individuals, it may be helpful for you to access micro-learning sessions for topics you are less familiar with. I have partnered with MindEdge to offer professional-level online content that is 100% self-paced and in alignment with the HR exams. Take a look at <https://catalog.mindedge.com/sandrareed>.

What You Think About Matters

In the 1960s, Aaron Beck and Albert Ellis introduced cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), now one of the most prevalent therapeutic approaches. It is primarily utilized in treating disorders such as anxiety and depression. For many people, test anxiety is an incredibly real presence in their life, and the CBT technique can be helpful to practice long before the day of the exam arrives. At the core of CBT is the idea that “what you think about, you bring about.” This is illustrated in the “Cognitive Triangle” presented in Figure 1.1.

FIGURE 1.1 The Cognitive Triangle



When studying for the exams, understanding and utilizing the Cognitive Triangle of thoughts, feelings, and actions can be instrumental in optimizing preparation and performance:

- **Thoughts:** Monitor and manage your thoughts about the exam. Instead of dwelling on fears of failure or inadequacy, cultivate positive and empowering beliefs about your abilities and preparation. Practice cognitive restructuring techniques to challenge and replace negative thoughts with more realistic and constructive ones. For example, instead of thinking “I’ll never be able to remember all this,” reframe it to “I’ve studied diligently and am well-prepared to tackle this exam.”
- **Feelings:** Recognize and regulate your emotions related to studying and taking exams. Anxiety and stress are common emotions during exam preparation, but they can be detrimental if left unchecked. Engage in stress-reducing activities, such as deep breathing exercises, mindfulness meditation, or physical exercise the morning of test day to manage anxiety and promote a calm and focused mindset.
- **Actions:** Align your study strategies and behaviors with your cognitive and emotional states. Break down your study material into manageable chunks and create a study schedule that reflects realistic goals and deadlines. Make sure the schedule is realistic! So many students allot “8 hours every Saturday for 12 weeks” and then are surprised, frustrated, and defeated when that proves to be unsustainable. Build in breaks and time off for special occasions. Finally, practice relaxation techniques before and during the exam to manage test anxiety and optimize performance.

Using This Book to Practice

This book is composed of 16 chapters with more than 1,000 practice test questions. Each of the chapters covers an HR domain with a variety of questions, including terminology, that can help you test your foundational knowledge, real-world scenarios, and HR best practices.



To access our interactive test bank and online learning environment, simply visit www.wiley.com/go/sybextestprep, register to receive your unique PIN, and instantly gain one year of FREE access after activation to the interactive test bank with two practice exams and hundreds of domain-by-domain questions. More than 1,000 questions total!, register to receive your unique PIN, and instantly gain one year of FREE access after activation to the interactive test bank with hundreds of domain-by-domain questions. To optimize your learning, the chapters in this book are laid out in a very specific way. Each chapter starts with an introduction that outlines the chapter’s objectives and scope. A case study follows to illustrate real-world applications or short scenarios related to the topic. After the case study comes the bulk of the chapter, the practice questions.

After the practice questions, you will find a section titled “Key Research” that is designed to enrich your knowledge on important topics and connect you with online, expert sources to deepen your understanding. This section is followed by simple “Terminology” questions to test your knowledge on important terms and concepts to aid comprehension. The “Conclusion” section summarizes key points and identifies the weighting of the chapter topic on the HRCI and SHRM exams. Pay special attention to the last section titled “Additional Resources.” These resources are designed for multiple learning styles by suggesting podcasts, YouTube channels, and more websites to invite further exploration and reflection, ensuring a cohesive and informative chapter experience.

Appendix A has the answers to the practice questions, along with an explanation for the correct and incorrect options. The exams count any unanswered question as “incorrect,” so you don’t want to leave any question blank. Appendix B contains the correct answers for key terminology, and Appendix C provides insights into the key research questions.

Conclusion

Building a career is a commitment requiring passion, focus, and intention to gain experience and education one step at a time. Setting yourself up for success requires that you have access to the right resources and that you “perfectly practice” for optimal performance on exam day and throughout your career.

Thinking about your “why” offers you a benchmark from which to return when the exam process feels overwhelming. Reminding yourself that many others have gone before you and have been successful can help sustain you when a concept feels particularly complex or you are questioning your own capabilities.

Understanding the exam dynamics around the content areas and question format serves as a reminder that you are not being tested on all things. There is a framework of expertise that defines the practice of human resources, and it is likely you are not starting from scratch—you are starting from experience. Trust your talent. This commitment to excellence in your career will pay off, even if it takes you a little longer than others. “Comparison is the thief of joy,” so meet yourself where you are and remember that a career is a journey, not a sprint. Best of luck as you get started on this next step!

