

Association Executives of North Carolina

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## 9 Tips For Passing The CAE Exam

Pete Zimek, CAE

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## 9 Tips For Passing The CAE Exam

By: Pete Zimek, CAE

The CAE exam will likely be the hardest test you take in your professional life. The path to this certification is full of people who have postponed, quit, failed, and tried again. It's also one of self-examination, deep learning, and transformation.

Like Kennedy said of going to the Moon in the 1960s, we do these things not because they are easy but because they are hard. We choose to sit for the CAE exam, not for the resume line and the lapel pin but to fundamentally rock the way we lead our organizations.

If you're anything like me, you're likely excited, nervous, optimistic, pessimistic, and generally all over the place with your thoughts as you prepare. Looking back on my experience, these nine tips helped to ensure that my study time was as impactful as possible. Hopefully, some will be helpful to you as well.

### 1. Get A Commitment From Your People.

Talk to your family, your roommate, your partner, your employees, your boss, and your team. Anyone who relies on you daily needs to understand the commitment you are making. This will take time away from work and home life. Proactive communication will help to ensure that your personal relationships don't suffer throughout the process.

### 2. Relearn how to learn.

It is likely you haven't studied at this level in a long time. Your learning style has possibly changed. Are you visual or auditory? Do you perform better studying in a group, or would you be more effective working alone?

### 3. Get a "Do It Later" notebook.

Throughout your study, you'll find your brain running wild with lots of ideas that you want to implement at your organization. Sue Radwan, the editor of the "Professional Practices in Association Management" textbook and instructor for MSAE's CAE prep courses will tell you that these ideas can very quickly distract you from the mission at hand. She's right.

If you just can't let the ideas go, write them down in a "Do it later" notebook. This doesn't have to be paper. Apple notes, OneNote, and Evernote are all great options. After the exam, you'll have more free time than you'll know what to do with. Bust out your notebook then and get to work.

### 4. Multitask to reinforce concepts.

Much of the CAE content is available in audible or video form. When you are driving, working out, doing the dishes, or anything else where you might normally be listening to the radio or a podcast, listen to CAE prep. Listen and then listen again. When you think you've listened to the same video too many times, then listen once more. As adults, we might not have a lot of "free" time, but we certainly have lots of opportunities to multi-task.

### **5. Turn your flashcards into your own personal podcast.**

As noted above, it's much easier for most of us to find time to listen to content than to sit down for a traditional study session. Consider recording yourself reading your flashcards or other notes. This will allow you to study your own notes on the go.

### **6. If reading puts you to sleep, try a multi-media approach.**

No matter how much coffee I drink, I fall asleep 3 pages into any book I pick up. The CAE textbooks were no exception. To counter this, I found that listening to the text while reading it kept me wide awake, engaged, and moving along at a good pace.

When I couldn't find Audible versions of the CAE texts, I discovered that I could have my phone or iPad read the text. The computer voice isn't the best, but I got past it pretty quickly. To try this out, you'll need to purchase a digital copy of the book. Then use the accessibility settings on your kindle/iPad/iPhone to have it read to you.

### **7. Digital highlighting makes review easy.**

If you do purchase digital versions of the textbooks, you'll be able to highlight important sections just as you would with a paper copy and a highlighter. The Kindle app will aggregate your notes into a central location. Instead of flipping through every page or trying to rely on old-school dog ears, you can simply go to the "my notebook" section to read only the text that you chose to select.

### **8. Use a persona to help step outside of your day-to-day.**

For many of us, it can be challenging to imagine ourselves as the chief staff executive of a large organization with a seemingly unlimited budget as the CAE exam often calls on us to do. Indeed, students who take the exam based on their current role or association often struggle to succeed. Consider making up a fictitious chief staff executive for the make-believe ABC association. As you're studying, think about how this persona might handle the abstract concepts presented.

### **9. Don't stress out on exam day.**

On exam day, expect the unexpected. Something will go wrong. It could be a power outage, your Internet connection, or the lawn guy showing up just as your exam begins. Regardless of the curveball that heads your way, do not let yourself get stressed. You have prepared for this moment for months. Relax and focus on the exam.

*About the Author: Pete Zimek is the founder and CEO of [Novi AMS](#). During one association's strategic planning session in 2015, Pete was "voluntold" to build a different type of AMS - one that truly integrates with QuickBooks and one that works the way associations work. Today, Novi AMS serves over 250 associations and is the highest rated association management software on [ReviewMyAMS.com](#).*

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