

Creating your study plan for the CFRE Exam



There isn't a set number of hours to study for the CFRE Exam that will guarantee you a passing score. Everyone's background is different, which means how long everyone needs to study will be different.

On average, people who successfully pass the CFRE Exam have studied at least 40 hours. If you have been in fundraising for fewer than five years, you will likely need to study longer as the exam is written at the five-year practice level.

Following the steps below is not a guarantee of a passing score on the CFRE Exam.

Step 1: Determine what you need to study

- Print and review the [Test Content Outline](#).
- Underline any bullet points you are unfamiliar with, have not encountered yet in your career, or do not feel confident you could answer test questions about. Alternatively, you may prefer to test your knowledge with the [CFRE Practice Exam](#). US\$59.95 for 30 days unlimited access/\$99.95 for 90 days unlimited access. Note: The CFRE Practice Exam is not required to successfully prepare for the CFRE Exam.

Step 2: Determine the books you will use

We have identified the books on the [Resource Reading List](#) to be the best ones to help prepare you properly for the exam. Reading books not on this list as part of your preparation may not provide you with adequate information you need to pass.

- If you noticed the bullet points you underlined on the Test Content Outline are clustered into a few Knowledge Domains, visit the [Resource Reading List](#) to see the books that will help you best understand those areas.
- If the bullet points you underlined are fairly evenly distributed across the six Key Knowledge Domains, you may find it more helpful to read generalist books from the [Resource Reading List](#) that address multiple Key Knowledge Domains.

Many libraries and local foundation centers stock these books or will order them upon request. You may also want to ask your employer to purchase them and start a small staff lending library. If you know a CFRE, you may want to check if they have any books they used to study that they would be happy to lend you.

Step 3: Create your study plan

□ Decide if you will use an 8- or 16-week study plan. You may wish to use a shorter or longer timeframe depending upon work and personal commitments.

Plan to take written notes as you study (do not rely solely on highlighting passages) to fully absorb the content. Make flashcards to break down complex pieces of information as well as to help you recall newly-learned best practices.

REMEMBER: The CFRE Exam tests how well you know best practices and can navigate real-world scenarios. It is *not* about rote memorization of facts.

Below is an 8-week study plan. This may easily be modified into a 16-week study plan by taking two weeks to cover each area outlined below.

□ **Week 1:**

Thoroughly read the [Glossary](#) so you are familiar with the language of the exam.

Study the Current and Prospective Donor Research Knowledge Domain.

□ **Week 2:**

Study the Securing the Gift Knowledge Domain.

□ **Week 3:**

Study the Relationship Building Knowledge Domain.

□ **Week 4:**

Study the Volunteer involvement Knowledge Domain.

□ **Week 5:**

Study the Leadership and Management Knowledge Domain.

□ **Week 6:**

Study the Ethics, Accountability, and Professionalism Domain.

□ **Week 7:**

Re-read all of your notes. Test yourself with the flashcards you have made. Re-print the Test Content Outline and underline any areas with which you still feel unfamiliar. Plan to re-read book passages to address these gaps in knowledge during this week.

□ **Week 8:**

Review any areas you have had the least professional experience with and test yourself again with the flashcards.

□ **The day before the exam**

Many people take off from work the day before the exam to review notes. This is *not* the time to cram. The benefit of taking the day off is that you won't run the risk of working late the night before your exam and/or feel drained from a hectic day at work.

Review the Glossary as well as your notes and flashcards one last time. Get a full night's rest and think positive thoughts. With all of the studying you've done, you should feel confident and prepared.

Exam Knowledge Domains	Number	Percentage of exam
Current and Prospective Donor Research	28 Items	14%
Securing the Gift	46 Items	23%
Relationship Building	52 Items	26%
Volunteer Involvement	16 Items	8%
Leadership and Management	38 Items	19%
Ethics, Accountability, and Professionalism	20 Items	10%

Study tips

- Don't study at home if easily distracted there.
- Many CFREs tell us they studied on their lunch break in their office.
- Using flashcards? Have your friends, family, children, or roommates quiz you.
- If you have children, study while they're doing homework.
- Set yourself a goal each week for how many pages you will read (be sure to stick to it!).
- Find a [study group](#) or [start your own](#).
- Watch [The CFRE Exam: Setting yourself up for success video](#) (approx. 60 minutes)
- Leave your phone in another room while studying.