


DIY Exam Conditions



Stepping into an unfamiliar exam room can be jarring, and this feeling could potentially affect your performance on the exam. Practicing writing under exam conditions, even if it's in your own home, will help you prepare for the big day.

Write as many case responses as possible under exam conditions. The more familiar you are with these conditions, the less daunting the exams will feel.

We realize that everyone's living situation is different, so consider the following as guidelines rather than rules. Implement as many as possible for your own benefit.



What are Exam Conditions?

The conditions under which you will write an exam will be very strict. In an exam, you will have very little control over your surroundings, including the level of background noise and the (dis)comfort of the chair; you will likely be assigned a seat, and anything you bring in with you (e.g. snacks, medication, writing utensils) will need to meet specific criteria. Expect the room to be big, with many other people writing, sniffing, and shifting in their chairs. In a typical exam setting, CPA Canada will supply laptops for the exams, and even the keyboard may feel different than the one you use at home.

With so many factors out of your control, it's important that you're ready to face whatever is in that exam room and that you are somewhat flexible in your routine. However, practicing working within the expected nature of the exam will allow you to feel some comfort and familiarity when it comes to writing the real thing.

You will need to make sure you are aware of the time limit for your exam or case and the regulations for the exam; you can learn more about these on CPA Canada's website.

What You Need to Create Exam Conditions at Home

Space

Ensure you have a chair and enough space to spread out your case materials and laptop. Try to sit upright at a desk or table rather than on your couch or bed. Unfortunately, the chair in the exam room may not be all that comfortable—try using a dining chair rather than your comfortable desk chair when writing at home.

If applicable, close the door to remind others not to disturb you until you are done.

If you can, have someone else care for your kids and pets while you are writing.

Remove all distractions, including phones. Do not listen to music, as this is not allowed in the exam. Note that you likely won't find complete silence in the exam room, so some background noise may give you a more real-life experience.

Time

Each case has a time limit. Before you start, identify this so you can clear your schedule for the allocated time.

Set a timer for the allocated time. Ideally, use a timer other than your phone. If you don't have a timer, you could use your microwave or an alarm clock. If your phone is the only option, put it in "do not disturb" mode so it doesn't create any distractions.

When possible, try to start writing at the time the exam itself would start. For example, for a 9:00 am exam, you may wish to set up your space the night before, and complete your morning routine before writing (e.g. shower, eat breakfast, care for others in your household); this way you can start writing at the exam start time without any interruptions.

Supplies

Make sure you have a copy of the printed case. Do not look at any of the materials before you start writing.

Ensure you have pencils, highlighters, and erasers nearby. Limit yourself to using supplies approved by CPA Canada.

How to Create Exam Conditions at Home

Before you write

1. Remind yourself of your strategies for planning and time management before you decide to tackle your case response.
Note: It may take some time to determine what strategies work best for you. Try out a different approach each time you write, and stick with the strategies that work well for you. Employer Relations has blog posts on both time management and planning to help you.
2. Clear your space, and set up your laptop, case, and materials.
3. Remind those around you that you are not to be disturbed for the duration of the case writing.
4. Remove all distractions, including music and your phone, if possible.
5. Confirm the case timing.

While you write

1. Start your timer and write! Similar to a real exam, don't pause the timer if you have to take a break (for example, to go to the bathroom).
2. Avoid any distractions.
3. When your time is up, stop writing and save your work.

When you're done

Consider the following to help you plan for your next writing in mock exam conditions. This can tie into your debrief process, which Employer Relations recommends doing for every case.

- What distractions were present?
How can I reduce this for next time?
- How was my workspace?
What can I do to make it more exam-like?
- How did I feel after writing? *Was it harder or easier than I thought it would be? What can I practice for next time?*
- How was my planning and time management strategy?
What can I adjust?

If you are writing a case response as part of a module assignment, submit it for feedback. How did you perform, compared to those times when you did not write under exam conditions? Which parts did you do well? Where do you feel you need to improve? Again, this will largely tie into your debrief process. For tips on debriefing, check out the Employer Relations blog.

In the future, try writing in different locations because the exam room will be unfamiliar to you. You can try a vacant boardroom at your office or a quiet floor of a local library. You can even use different rooms in your home or write at your study buddy's house.





Checklist

- Are you **alone**?
- Is it **quiet**?
- Do you **have everything you need** to write your response?
- Do you have a **timer**?

Helpful Links

Employer Relations Blog Posts
dailydividends.cpaalberta.ca

CPA Canada
cpacanada.ca (search “exam regulations”)

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