

August's account is provided by Michele T. King, PMP, CSEP

I started studying in October and tested in December. My original study plan was to read the book over the course of three weeks, take practice exams for a week, and then test. Due to other life obligations (work, child, holidays, etc.) and being overly optimistic, my aggressive study timeline slipped to the right. I revised my plan, spreading the chapters out a little more, taking time in between to really study and understand the process diagrams. I tried to leverage my work experience by tying specific events to what I was reading, but this was not possible for every topic described in the book; the topics I didn't have experience with are the ones I struggled with the most. When I had completed the entire book (and the practice tests on each individual chapter), I spent some time trying reconstruct the process diagrams on paper. Doing this really helped me to understand the flow of the processes from one to the next, as well as their iterative nature. I followed this by taking a full two-hour practice exam, which made me realize that I needed to revisit some sections (and diagrams!!) in the book. I took more time out to thoroughly reread Chapters 5 and 9, as I found these to be crammed with the most information. Overall, I probably read the book about three times, highlighting (in my mind and in the book!) different areas the second and third times through each section.

On test day, I arrived at the test site at 7:30am and sat in my car reviewing the Reed CSEP Exam Success Sheet. I was scheduled to test at 8am. Someone from the test facility came out and tapped on my window and told me that registration was at 7:30am; it was now 7:40am. That caught me by surprise – likely a small but important detail that I overlooked when I got my test confirmation email. I entered the site and didn't have to wait much past 8am to start testing, but those 20 minutes of waiting can really mess with a person's head. I finally entered my testing station a bit nervous, but by question #3, I felt pretty confident that if the questions continued in their current manner, I might do okay. To compare it to the PMP (since some folks going for their CSEP also have their PMP), I thought the content was more difficult (and more technical), but the exam was not as intentionally confusing. Some of the questions were very straight forward – you either knew the answer, or you didn't. So this made the CSEP less mind-boggling overall than the PMP, even though going in I had convinced myself that it would be more difficult.

If I had to do it again, I would spread out my study plan to cover three months, spending a week (or less) on the small chapters and two to three weeks on the larger chapters. I would also sign up for any online practice exams available (as I did this time around). While they don't necessarily mimic questions on the exam, they do help one get into test-taking mode. I would also use the Reed Success Sheet because it's handy for quizzing yourself first thing in the morning, between work meetings, while on lunch breaks, and right before bed.