

APICS Exam Content versus Courseware

At times, APICS exam candidates perceive a difference in the exam content and what they learned during their courses. It is important to understand that courseware is a REVIEW course and not the entire educational component. A significant number of people who take a certification review course perceive they are getting certification education. In other words, take the course and pass the test.

Exam and course responsibilities are separate to maintain the integrity of the exam process. The exam committees define the contents of the *Exam Content Manual* (ECM), which defines the key areas to be tested in certification exams. The ECM defines the APICS body of knowledge that can be tested—every exam question is tied to the ECM every year. Each year, the exam committees also select the references that will be used for exam development, and those committees develop and maintain the exams. A separate courseware committee creates the courseware using the ECM and the recommended references.

The purpose of education is first, to convey knowledge, and second, to give the learner a chance to apply that knowledge. For that reason, exercises and quizzes associated with courses typically focus on testing the student’s understanding of the subject matter presented. Certification has a different purpose than education. Certification determines whether the candidate meets a minimum set of requirements related to the APICS body of knowledge as outlined in the ECM. Certification examinations test both the individual’s knowledge and his or her ability to apply that knowledge to specific situations. Certification exam items frequently require the candidate to select the best of the four choices based on the information given, and items may require him or her to make finer distinctions than the exercises or items presented in a course.

Course developers or instructors may believe that additional material needs to be taught or included in the glossary and flash cards to ensure understanding of the body of knowledge that can be tested. These experts also may decide that a concept or term is adequately covered by the definitions in the *APICS Dictionary* or the ECM Glossary. Therefore, they choose not to cover it in the course. These differences sometimes lead candidates to perceive a disconnect between the courseware and the exam, when in fact they are both covering the same body of knowledge.

The raw items (question and answer sets) for the APICS exams are written by volunteers who have earned the CPIM and/or CSCP designations. These volunteers must identify the specific entry in the ECM that is being tested and one or more of the references that supports the indicated correct answer. The items are reviewed and typically revised by exam committee members. APICS and an exam development contractor review the items for correctness of form, spelling, and grammar.

An item may be reviewed several times before it actually appears on an examination. Items initially appear on exams in what is referred to as “pretest” status. Pretest items are not scored on the



exam. Statistics are collected on pretest items. If there are inconsistencies with the statistics of a pretest item, it is returned to the committee for review and revision. When an appropriate number of candidates have seen the item and it has performed well, it is changed to operational status and can be selected for a test form in accordance with the distribution of items specified in the current ECM. The committee, then, reviews the test form one last time to ensure the test's overall integrity.

At any given time, there are multiple test forms in use. Because each form has a limited number of questions, it samples representative areas of the body of knowledge as defined by the ECM. While each test form is different, all areas tested are contained within the body of knowledge as defined by the ECM.

The following graphic (courtesy of Thomas R. Hoffman, CFPIM, CIRM) is a visual representation of the relationship between the APICS body of knowledge, certification scope, courseware, exam specification, and different examinations.

