

28 WAYS TO FIND TIME TO STUDY

FOR CPCU AND IIA COURSES

By

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What do most busy CPCU/IIA students gripe about?

I mean, besides the dryness of the texts.

The answer: not having enough time to read and study the material. Insurance students are time-pressed. In college, we thought we were busy, but most of us only had to focus on our coursework. Now that we are working professionals, it's tough to juggle myriad demands.

Full-time careers take up a huge chunk of time. The pace of the insurance business is accelerating daily. Downsizing is the norm. Employers increasingly are telling workers to "do more with less." Staffs are leaner. Budgets are eyed with microscopic scrutiny. Spans of supervisory control seem to widen as companies strive to be a "flatter organization" with fewer levels of bureaucracy. All of this often makes for a longer work day, which in turn makes it more challenging to find time to study.

Technological tools such as e-mail, voice mail, modems and FAX help us stay in touch with work even when we're out of the office. This often causes work to encroach on personal time. Indeed, the boundary between personal time and work time has become blurred. This also leads to less time for discretionary activities.

Many CPCU/IIUA students have families. We're grownups now! The demands of a spouse or children deserve a high priority. Evening commitments for PTA, Scouts, the homeowners association, church groups or soccer practice makes study time scarce.

Further, many insurance professionals – especially those in large metropolitan areas – face length daily commutes. This can be an hour or more each way. This extends the work day at both ends – morning and evening. It crimps the amount of time available to pursue discretionary activities such as CPCU/IIA study.

After factoring in work, family, sleeping, commuting, hobbies and downtime spent relaxing, little time remains – or so it seems – to crack open that CPCU textbook on Commercial Property Insurance. No wonder that insurance students often feel time-pressed, as though there are never enough hours in the day.

There aren't!

To help solve that problem, here are XX timely, time-tested techniques that will help you on your path to gaining that valued designation:

1. Get up earlier. Yes, I can hear you groaning. If you get up 30 minutes earlier, though, that gives you an extra two and a half extra hours per week of reading and study time. This admittedly works better for larks than for owls. Many people will find that doing this gives them study time during their most alert and productive hours of the day. At the start of the day, others may be sleeping, the phones aren't ringing and – in general – the world is a quieter place. This atmosphere is more conducive to reading and studying before your desk is surrounded at work and you are hammered with 1,001 distractions.

Also, by studying at the start of the day

- you feel good because you've already "done your time" and don't

have to dread hitting the books later

- after a tough day at work, you might be tempted to slough off studying
- you're mentally fresher

In a study comparing the habits of morning exercisers versus evening exercisers, researchers found that those people who work out in the mornings were more likely to sustain a long-term fitness habit than those who deferred their workouts till the end of the day. Apply this idea to the habit of CPCU/IIA study as well.

2. Get into Work Earlier Student Eric Blomfelt says, "I studied for the ARM and CPCU classes by coming into the office a half-hour early every day. There was no one around and it was quiet. Plus, my employer thought I was working more than anyone else since I came in early!"

3. Study and read "after work." Not all of us are morning people, though. For some, the "get up earlier advice" just doesn't seem feasible. Another tactic to squeeze in study and reading is to tack on extra time at the end of your work day. Before you leave the office, close your door and do your assigned reading. If you do not have a private office (or a door), sneak into an unused conference room or a remote unoccupied workstation removed from the office's hustle and bustle. Here, you are less likely to be distracted by piles of work, phone calls or visitor interruptions. Sequester yourself like this a little bit each day.

4. Grab any "scrap" of free time you can get your hands on. Even if you have a demanding job, you can probably fit in some study and reading during your lunch hours or coffee breaks. If you are logging time gossiping at the water cooler or rehashing the results

of last night's game on TV, consider re-arranging your time priorities. You may find that much of what you spend at-office time on really has very little to do with work: socializing, schmoozing and kibitzing. There's nothing inherently wrong with this, but ask yourself whether it's moving you toward your long-term goal of attaining a valuable goal.

5. Use commuting time. If you car pool or take a train into work, take your study materials along and read, or make notes. Business travel offers a wonderful opportunity. View commuting time as a gift. Accept traffic jams and the fact that you can't do anything about them, except to put the extra time to your study and use.

Gordon Field (CPCU Class of '82) says: "When I worked on my CPCU and ARP designations, I rode the bus to work four days a week and managed to read about fifteen pages each morning. At sixty pages per week, plus some weekend time, I managed to do two courses a semester for several years. In the afternoon, I usually dozed off while trying to read, so I learned that wasn't a good time for me to try to study."

Dave Morgan says, "I found that working away from home was good as I had next to nothing else to do in the evening!"

"Also, getting the exams over with before you get into the realms of real responsibility in your career has to be the solution. I'm about half-way through the UK equivalent, and my job takes about 25 hours a day, so I'll be lucky to pass any more of the bloody things!"

Chris Holden says . . . "I studied for my insurance exams by distance learning – reading textbooks during my 1 ½ hour train journey every day. I found I was able to read the texts several times, and then as things got clearer I would make notes on the text and use these as my revision aid."

Kenneth Fox states. "Make a cassette tape and play it in the car on the way to work and back. I travel over 50,000 business miles a year in the car, which gives me a lot of spare listening time."

Dave Morgan says, "I'll see if I can put the 90 minutes I spend in the car (at least) each day to good use between now and test time!"

Traveling by plane gives you hours of interruption-free study time. When you check into your hotel room, curl up with a good insurance book! Along with your suit bag and toiletry kit, make sure your insurance text is on your packing list.

Nancy Germond, an insurance consultant from the Phoenix area, says that, "The self study programs with tapes are very effective, if you don't just tun them on and then zone out. Listening while driving to and from work, appointments, before dozing off at night (guaranteed to help you sleep!), is very helpful. Also, I found that either using self-study flash cards or making them myself was absolutely the best tip. I kept them in my purse and whenever I had 'down time,' I'd take them out and review the terms!"

6. Use waiting time. Be prepared for stretches of time when you will be waiting on others: sitting in line waiting for your car to be inspected, in the dentist's waiting room, etc. You may even feel less frustrated by delays when you know you can put them to good use.

7. Shut off distractions. Only you know what distracts you. Once you know, be ruthless about eliminating it. Lock the door. Pull the shades, or swipe the batteries from your kid's boom box.

One mother/student with two little boys made a deal with her kids at night. She would set a timer for one hour and explain that Mommy was studying during that time and was not to be disturbed. Cloistered behind a closed door for an hour, she studied her CPCU

books. When the timer bell went off, the kids would burst into the room, knowing that study time was over. Indeed it was, but one hour of study per day is a healthy preparation for exam-day success.

8. Enlist your family's help. Busy CPCU/IIA students have been known to turn spouses into informal study coaches. Even if your family members are preoccupied with other activities and interests, they can help you tremendously by respecting your need for study time.

Ask a spouse to call out questions to you from the Course Guide. Have them drill you in key terms using flash cards. Bribe them by promising to take them with you when you go to the annual CPCU Convention. If you need to study rather than fix dinner, have the kids order a pizza or bring home some carry-out on your way home from the office.

9. Integrate With “Family Time” One CPCU student reports,
“I was the happy recipient of twin boys almost exactly half-way through my CPCU 4 class. Initially, I fell several weeks behind on my reading. I keep up on the current chapters by reading whenever the kids are nursing between 10:00 PM and 6:00 AM. Invariably, I get two – usually three chances to study for 30-60 minutes, seven days a week.”

“Works great. My wife thinks I’m crazy. As a last resort, I figure I can read the text to the babies and make them fall sleep!”

10. Plan your study time. Remember the old time management maxim, "Plan your work, then work your plan"? It did not achieve the exalted status of cliché for nothing. The good news for CPCU/IIA students is that your study plan need not be elaborate.

For example, look at each individual chapter of your insurance course. Divide the readings up into manageable, bite-size bits. The *Study Guide*, available free from the Institutes, contains a sample daily study schedule. Divide and conquer.

Map out a study schedule and timetable. Calculate the number of days or weeks till the exam. Divide this by the number of individual assignments in the course (12 for IIA; 15 for CPCU). Or, divide it by the number of pages to be read. This gives you an idea of how to pace yourself, and how much reading per day or per week you need to stay on target. Whatever form or format you use is less critical than having an overall plan of attack before you embark on the voyage.

11. Make an Appointment With Yourself James Brittle, ARM worked his way through the CPCU and ALCM designations. His tactic:

I try to arrive at work about 30 minutes early, close my door, hold calls and read/work on assignments. Scheduling study time as if you were taking a class is another way. With two kids under age seven, most of my studying is still done after 10 PM. It is hard, but worth it.”

12. Prioritize, Get Family Support and See Continuing Ed as Just another Part of Your Job Gene Weigel, ARM says, “I tried to cover all the material, even if I didn’t completely grasp it all. I consider continuing education a part of my job, and I was able to do some studying at work by rearranging my priorities – basically putting off the low priority projects for a while (and almost everything during the week of the exam). I’m a family man, so I let them know that I needed a few hours on weekends, and that we would all benefit in the long run.”

13. "Just do it," Daily. Adopt the Nike slogan. For example, answer one Course Guide discussion question each day. Read for thirty minutes each day. Schedule it for the same time each day, so that it becomes a habit. Psychologists believe it takes about thirty days to build a new habit. Apply this principle to IIA/CPCU study. Soon, study becomes an ingrained habit, and you won't need iron will power to motivate yourself. Make it a daily ritual. Try to study at the same time, and have a regular study area. When it's a habit, you feel guilty when you're NOT doing it.

14. Read out of sequence. There is no law which says you must read in the exact order set forth in the text or Course Guide. However, if later text material builds on concepts laid down earlier, this can be a problem. If, however, you have a solid grounding in a particular area of insurance covered by a course, you can possibly save that for last and plunge into the more unfamiliar readings.

15. Set a daily page quota. Determine to read a certain number of pages per day. If you read ten pages per day, you will likely be "ahead" of a chapter-a-week schedule presumed by most classes. Whether you aim for fifteen pages a day or five, the important thing is: Establish a reasonable reading quota and stick to it.

16. Become a study "flasher." Prepare your own flash cards based on the questions and vocabulary terms in the Course Guides. Four-by-six-inch index cards are handy for this. After reading a section of text, review it and the Course Guide and prepare flash cards based on that section. Pretty soon, you will have a handy and portable information bank from which to draw once the study phase ends and the review/exam preparation phase begins. Flash cards become your own form of "software" which don't

even require a computer purchase. Success in exam preparation may very well be "in the cards."

17. Use home-made study tapes or CD's. Consider composing your own study tapes on cassette or CD. For a fraction of what it costs to buy commercially-available tapes, you can make your own. Dictate flash card information onto blank audio-cassettes. If you have a car tape player or a Walkman-type machine, you can study and review while commuting to and from work, driving to appointments or while jogging.

18. Negotiate study time with your company. Not all companies will do this, but it does not hurt to ask.

19. Form a study group. Scout out other people who might be studying the same material, whether they are taking a class or self-studying. Organize or join a study group. Quiz each other. Discuss the readings. Clarify questions, answers. A support group such as this can help you stay motivated through the exam preparation process.

20. Use Mornings and Weekends Thomas McCloskey CPCU says, "Doing CPCU studies – or any other studies – requires a commitment to the long-haul aspects of the project. I took every Saturday morning from 7:30 AM to about 11:00 AM and did a chapter of CPCU. This was my normal starting time for work, and I just extended it to a five and a half day week.

"I went to my wife's office to study. It was closed – no phones, no kids, no 'Honey-Do' projects – just Saturday and CPCU."

"As an aside, nothing I have ever done has made me as much money as those Saturday mornings."

21. Brace for a Serious Commitment Don Donaldson is a former CPCU 6 instructor in the Dallas-Fort Worth, TX area. He cautions, “The national numbers on pass/fail (especially for first-timers) is conclusive evidence of the difficulty most people have with CPCU material. The fact that local instructors have little input into the exams, the complex text material and the sheer volume of the material required to master for each examination should encourage every potential CPCU student to have a serious mind and commitment prior to initiating the process. CPCU is not for everyone.”

22. Burn Midnight Oil Richard Jarry, Risk Management Officer with the City of Baltimore says: “I had to make time to study. With a wife and two children, I didn’t think it was fair to take time from them to do the reading and assignments. So, I ‘d wait until 11:00 PM (everyone was asleep) and start reading, researching and writing. The house was quiet. I could grab a snack or soda, curl up with one of my least favorite books and get my work done without distraction. It’s amazing how quiet the house is that late at night; you can really focus on the assignment. The routine evolved to Friday and Saturday nights from 11:00 PM to about 2:00 AM. I was able to get all my work done, sleep a little late the next morning and keep up with my life.”

23. Customize Your Own Recipe for CPCU Success No one size fits all. You may need to experiment with a number of different techniques before devising your own solution for finding study time. Kenneth Fox, ARM recommends, “Like Nike says, ‘Just do it.’ Schedule an hour a day. My method:

1. Read the chapter
2. Read the work book

3. Read the chapter and highlight or underline key terms and then answer questions in the Course Guide.
4. Make 3” x 5” flash cards of key questions. Keep the cards with you and review during lunch or during any “down time.”
5. Go on to the next chapter

P.S., I’m married, have one five-year old and work two jobs.

Walden Shelton Jr. CPCU says, “Here’s what I did: read a chapter, then answered the questions, all in the same week for 15 weeks. A little each day. Make sure there is plenty of time for everything else, like a life. Lunch time works good. Then, a quick review of the Course Outline and test time.”

24. Study while working out Sharon King of the Carlson Companies, Inc. says: “The best time for me to read the text was during my daily workout. I would ride the stationary bike three days a week for about an hour and read the text. It certainly keeps you from falling asleep during some of the drier chapters. While this works, it limits your workout to stationary biking.”

She adds that if you had audio-cassette tapes, you could vary your workout/study combo by putting on the headphones and running, stair-climbing or rowing, or doing whatever your workout mood dictates.

25. Enlist Family Support Michael McCracken CPCU says, “A prospective CPCU student should discuss the matter with his/her family. You need to let them know about your study/class schedule and why it’s important and that you may need to make some tough choices about allocation of your time. I am fortunate to be married to a very

understanding woman; she was very supportive of my efforts to obtain the CPCU designation and I couldn't have done it without her.”

26. Enroll in a Class. Tobey Gelder, ARM says, “My own ARM studies were complicated by a 140-mile drive each way and four kids to help study. I found that studying about six hours per week was required. This was accomplished by getting up at 5:00 AM. Also, I found that it was best to avoid operating motor vehicles or other power equipment for at least two hours after reading the textbooks!”

“The class time was invaluable! Not so much for the material itself, but for the experience and comments of the other people there. These people had a wealth of experience and knowledge which was exciting to hear about. My recommendation: Do the classes and use the study guides as pointers to the current aspects of the material.”

27. Factor in CPCU in Lifestyle Choices Ken Brownlee, former Corporate Risk Manager for Crawford & Company says, “Rule number one: Do it BEFORE you have kids!”

“Rule two: Don't commute 25 miles each way in heavy traffic. Instead, get a home within a mile of the office and use the time you'd otherwise be spending commuting to study.”

Dale Adams advises, “Get married after you complete the exams.”

28. Find Your Own Recipe Everett Randall of the Insurance Institute of America says, “When to find time to study? Lunch, lunch, lunch! If I ride an exercise bike during lunch, I read on the bike rather than watch TV or listen to the radio. I have not yet mastered highlighting while running on a treadmill, but I am working on it. I also do some reading and typing of notes at night when the kids (and, unfortunately) my wife

have gone to sleep. You can't do the latter too many nights and be fair to your family. I begin my study immediately after finishing my previous exam”

Chuck Marshall, CPCU, Group Manager Risk, BHP Petroleum, Melbourne says, “Although I started studying in 1967, I would still be undesignated (1972) on the ‘chapter a week’ method. Each of the five Sections then had three to five texts and each weekly assignment was more than one chapter. If you tried to do at least one section per year you would have to spend at least five hours a week reading/studying. We had a great CPCU chapter in Tulsa that provided instructors and sometimes professionally taught, once-weekly, night-classes at the nearby college. I believe they had one of the highest pass ratios in the US.”

Underlining and highlighting important points in the text and points likely (from past exams) to be on the exams is a great help while reviewing. Writing out summaries of the highlighted points helped burn them into my feeble brain. I still have all my textbooks and some updated editions that are still consulted. My employer allowed a few days off for "total immersion" (during which time the family visited granny.) to review just before the exams.

“Like any study when you have a full time job and a young family, it is tough and there is sacrifice. I had eight years industry experience and some courses in college before starting to study for CPCU. I have never found a way to fit in even one more hour into the 24-hour scheme. I doubt if there is any one best way for everyone. I usually studied late in the evening after I had done the other work I had brought home.”