

# CIMA success

The latest insight and advice for success with your CIMA exams



## Countdown to success

How to prepare for your  
November 2011 exams

## Ultimate exam skills

Essential skills you need to pass

## What turns distance learning into effective learning?

Finding the course that's right for you

# Countdown to success

Whether studying with a Quality Partner learning provider such as BPP or on your own at home, this essential exam schedule from BPP will set you on track for success in November. This is not a definitive guide to passing the CIMA exams but it will give you a structure for planning your studies and monitoring your progress.

**P**lanning your studies is key. You need to study the Post Exam Guides for that paper, access the past questions and answers (available via your MyCIMA account) and look out for relevant articles in FM and Velocity. Tutors at BPP have developed this eight-week "countdown" guide.

## 8 weeks to go

**What BPP students will be doing (face to face or online).**

Be halfway through the "taught phase". Working through condensed and focused course notes under the guidance of their tutor.

Getting to grips with key areas of the syllabus and how each topic is likely to be examined.

Submitting completed course exams to get feedback, check understanding and get an early gauge of how they are progressing.

Reviewing an online walk-through of all the course notes for any areas they want to revisit.

Raising any queries with their tutor and discussing issues online with fellow students.

### Practical steps to match BPP students

Must be sticking closely to your study plan.

Assuming you are working from a textbook, avoid the temptation to get bogged down in too much technical detail at this stage in your studies.

See if you can find other CIMA students, maybe at work or via CIMAsphere, who you can contact.

Use the progress tests or similar in your textbook, but try them without looking at your notes, plus ensure you note where you are going wrong and draw up a list of topics to revisit later.

Start a simple study log of "topics I understand" and "topics I need to come back to". This will help you to gain a sense of progress and ensure you remember to come back to certain areas in detail.

## 6 weeks to go

**What BPP students will be doing (face to face or online)**

Nearing completion in terms of syllabus coverage and getting ready for the all-important revision phase.

Already have been through some real past paper questions and started to get a feel for the specific exam skills needed for specific papers.

Still have some areas/topics where they're not happy, so will be reviewing these in preparation for moving into the revision phase.

Completed another course exam and sent it in for marking and feedback.

### Practical steps to match BPP students

Again, the key here will be sticking to your study plan and maintaining your motivation.

Remind yourself why you are in this and the benefits that will accrue when you



Photography: Hannah Edwards

complete your CIMA studies.

Self-study can be a real challenge and sticking to your plan will help you to maintain a sense of momentum.

It is vital that you are now reaching the point where you can move on to question practice without relying on your notes.

Ensure you've reviewed and updated your study log.

**'It is vital that you are now reaching the point where you can move on to question practice without relying on your notes'**

## 4 weeks to go

**What BPP students will be doing (face to face or online)**

Be well into the revision course.

Understanding key exam skills and techniques needed for specific paper.

Working through condensed recaps of key topics, but concentrating on analysing, breaking down, attempting and learning from past paper questions and getting lots of practice of specific skills (see Ultimate Exam Skills article).

Using online walk-throughs and debriefs to compare own attempts against recommended practice questions to supplement those covered by their tutor.

### Practical steps to match BPP students

Download all the past paper exams for your paper from [cimaglobal.com](http://cimaglobal.com) (but put one from last year to one

side for now).

Identify two to three questions on the same syllabus area and work through them. Although they often fall into the "prizewinner" category, the examiner's answers will give you a benchmark to compare to. PEGs give marking guides.

Use the Ultimate Exam Skills guide in this supplement to ensure you are practising the skills you need for your paper.

Ask a partner/friend/work colleague to read your answers. Even though they're probably not CIMA students, they should be able to follow what you are doing – if they can it's a great sign that you are on the right tracks in terms of exam technique.

## 2 weeks to go

**What BPP students will be doing (face to face or online)**

Reaching the point where you've practised several past paper questions on all key topics and are feeling comfortable in terms of key exam skills.

Attending a question day to attempt a brand new mock exam, and getting on-to-one feedback on knowledge and exam technique.

Identifying any remaining weak spots.

Confidence is building.

### Practical steps to match BPP students

Take the past paper you haven't looked at yet and attempt it in full, giving yourself the full 3hr 20mins reading time.

Do it in "exam conditions" as much as you can. You must not take a look at your notes for a helping hand – you can't do this in the exam and you need to get used to that feeling now.

Pay attention to how well you did in terms of managing your time and how well you presented your answers. Make a list of three key aspects you will improve on next time.

## 1 week to go

**What BPP students will be doing (face to face or online)**

Time for fine-tuning, based on personal feedback from the tutor.

Concentrating on specific past paper questions – doing some two or three times to ensure complete understanding.

Raising any last-minute queries with tutor.

### Practical steps to match BPP students

If your study log is up to date you can do a final review of this and also review your "lessons learned" from the mock exam you did last week.

Do some more question practice to address any specific weaknesses.

Keep an eye out for online Q&A sessions being provided by CIMA or any of the tuition providers.

## 1 day to go

**What BPP students will be doing (face to face or online)**

Relaxing (!) and getting a good night's sleep.

### Practical steps to match BPP students

Relax (!) after following the advice in this student supplement.

# Ultimate exam skills

Preparing for CIMA exams is not just about repeatedly reading through your syllabus notes and attempting a few past paper questions. On a BPP revision course the main focus is the development of the key exam skills specific to each paper and this is done through guided question practice

**T**

o help all CIMA students, here's a summary of BPP's key skills that often turn a marginal fail into a comfortable pass, along with practical tips on how

to practise them and a check list to work through in your run-up to the exam. Keep this page somewhere safe with your CIMA study notes and work through them as you prepare for your next exam sitting.

TITLE	DESCRIPTION	HOW TO PRACTISE	CHECKLIST
<b>Question planning and analysis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The CIMA examiners constantly report that students do better where it is clear they have planned their answers.</li> <li>For any question worth five or more marks you should be producing a quick plan of how you'll structure your answer to directly "hit" what's being asked for in the requirement, making appropriate use of any scenario in the question.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spend an hour just planning questions. This gets you to develop your "planning mindset".</li> <li>You could even do it on a paper you're not currently sitting, but from the same level – ie for a requirement with more than one part – how would you structure your answer?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Am I good at planning my answers? (if not, keep practising).</li> <li>Do my plans directly lead to my answers?</li> </ul>

TITLE	DESCRIPTION	HOW TO PRACTISE	CHECKLIST
<b>Know the basics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Although not a genuine "skill", you must understand the basics of all the key syllabus areas. They will all be in your exam somewhere.</li> <li>You don't have to be an expert on every technical aspect of the whole syllabus, but you do need to truly understand what the basic concepts mean and do.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For each key topic in the syllabus, check you can explain/discuss it in simple terms.</li> <li>For financial reporting and/or numerical questions practise writing out the proformas, column headings and workings headings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can I explain all the key topics/concepts in simple terms?</li> <li>Can I discuss them in terms of advs/disadv, when suitable, when not suitable, and think of real-life situations where they are applied (especially at management and strategic levels)?</li> <li>Can I lay out the standard proformas and financial statements without looking at my notes?</li> </ul>
<b>Use your 20 minutes reading time well</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using this well can make all the difference between passing or failing your exam. The critical thing here is knowing exactly how you will use your 20 minutes BEFORE the exam. You can answer some multiple choice questions, plan some of the longer questions or choose between optional ones.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Download a past paper you haven't seen before and practise using your 20 minutes before attempting it.</li> <li>Pick another one and try again, this time doing something different.</li> <li>Decide which bits work best for you and combine them.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have I decided BEFORE the exam how I will use my 20 minutes reading time?</li> <li>Have I practised it?</li> </ul>



Photography: Getty Images

TITLE	DESCRIPTION	HOW TO PRACTISE	CHECKLIST
<b>Effective presentation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A good plan is a great start – to maximise your marks you then need to write out your full answer in a "professional format" – remember that this is a professional qualification.</li> <li>This means using subheadings and leaving lots of white space in written questions.</li> <li>Numerical answers should follow standard proformas and workings should be clearly labelled.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Select some past paper questions.</li> <li>Practise doing a skeleton answer first – writing out your subheadings, or the main sections and headings, in a standard proforma.</li> <li>Then complete as best you can.</li> <li>Compare to examiner's answer – won't be as good but DOES IT LOOK SIMILAR?</li> <li>Can the marker see some structure to your answer?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are my answers pleasing to the eye?</li> <li>Do they have lots of white space?</li> <li>Are there some sub-headings and labels?</li> </ul>
<b>Time management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Get this sorted and the rest of your CIMA exams will suddenly become a lot easier.</li> <li>Simple rule here is one you should have had drilled into you by now "1 mark = 1.8 minutes"</li> <li>Time can do very strange things in CIMA exams – you have to find a way of keeping track of it.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set an alarm on your mobile phone to go off when you're allotted time for a practice question is up. Get used to how long this is. Immediately go on to another question.</li> <li>Write the finish time on your question paper as if it were the real exam – get used to checking the time frequently.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do I know how much I can write in nine minutes? In 18 minutes? In 45 minutes?</li> <li>Am I comfortable stopping midway through an answer and moving on to another question?</li> <li>Do I have a way (that works for me) to keep track of time in the exam?</li> </ul>

# Study CIMA with BPP how, when and where you want



BPP has a range of flexible learning options to choose from, all designed to fit around the way you prefer to study.

Our Online Classroom follows the same high standards and course structure as our face-to-face programmes. Expert tutors support you every step of the way, providing proactive guidance and motivation as well as giving you all the tips and techniques you need to pass your exams. All elements of your course are available from day one, so you can be as flexible as you like in how you pace your studies.

The Basics Online option gives you a simple, cost-effective way to access the material you'll need to pass your CIMA exams. Our Basics Plus option gives you the added benefit of online and offline support.

Visit [bpp.com/cima](http://bpp.com/cima) or call 0845 833 7275 to learn more and see how successful you can be with BPP.



## What turns distance learning into effective learning?

Compared to a few years ago there's now a wealth of distance learning packages on the market. If you are considering using this approach for your CIMA studies, it's important that you find a distance learning course that will be effective for you. We've put some questions to **Malcolm Bell**, BPP's Head of Distance Learning, on what students should look for in a distance-learning course

**Q: What are the key things to look for in a distance-learning course?**

**MB:** The two key aspects to consider are the level of proactive support you will be provided with (to get you through the inevitable periods of self-study blues!), and the flexibility you will have to study exactly when you want to.

**Q: Why is proactive support important?**

**MB:** We have statistics that suggest that up to 25 per cent of typical distance-learning students don't turn up to the exam that they are booked onto. This means they have paid the exam entry fee, but are not motivated or confident enough to attempt the exam. An effective distance-learning course should prevent this from happening.

**Q: What should students look for in terms of proactive support?**

**MB:** A key feature to check for in any distance-learning package is the level of support you are offered and, importantly, is this support reactive or proactive? With BPP's online classroom a group of students study together in a cohort under the guidance of their named cohort tutor. This tutor proactively sends them weekly emails providing guidance, motivation and focus, and monitors a cohort-specific forum to answer queries that may arise during the course. We specifically contact students who appear to have been "inactive" for a while to check that everything is OK.

**Q: Do you have any feedback from your students on this?**

**MB:** Lots! Here's some from a P2 student... "I was very impressed with the weekly emails from tutors, even if it was just to keep in touch. Advising on where they think you should be up to in the study notes was both helpful and a lot of the time reassuring. The forums / emails have really reinforced the study material. They help me not feel alone while studying and the feedback/questions from other students has, at times, helped me understand difficult points."

**Q: Don't all courses offer this level of support?**

**MB:** It's easy to say you've got "24/7 tutor support"

if that means a tutor is at the end of a generic email address that the student has to get around to using. As a tutor I've given my email address to thousands of students and very few have ever emailed me. It's the proactive bit that makes all the difference to maintaining motivation and focus.

**Q: What should students look for in terms of flexibility?**

**MB:** "Structured flexibility" is the key to effective distance learning. The training provider should give students the structure and guidance of what and how to study, but the ultimate flexibility of when should be left to the time-pressured student.

**Q: What does this mean in practical terms?**

**MB:** Students should check when they get access to all the course materials and online lectures. Even though studying towards CIMA exams should be at a good pace and as structured as possible, it's great if you can get ahead a bit by taking advantage of peaks in the study time you have available.

This is much easier if you get access to your materials up front rather than waiting for online lectures to happen before you can actually use them to help your studies.

**Q: Any student feedback on this?**

**MB:** Yes, here's some from an FI student... "I thought the tutorials were extremely good – the fact that they were split into small chunks meant that I could fit in a lot midweek, even if I had just a spare hour or so."

**Q: So finally, if you were to give one nugget of advice to students studying via distance learning what would it be?**

**MB:** A quote that I love sums up the fairly obvious when it comes to any professional exams and life in general: "The harder I work, the luckier I get!" It does come down to the effort the student puts in. As a tuition provider our job is to make sure the hard work is efficient and effective and, as discussed earlier, proactive tutor support and "access on demand" to quality materials is a major step to achieving this.

**'Even though studying towards CIMA exams should be at a good pace and as structured as possible, it's great if you can get ahead'**

# BPP for CIMA

## No one is better qualified to help you qualify

BPP trained 11 out of 13 of CIMA's worldwide prizewinners in the May 2011 exams.



BPP has a formula for helping students achieve **success** in their CIMA exams and here are some numbers to prove it:

- in May 2011, more than **75%** of our Taught and Revision students passed their exams first time
- **78%** passed P1, **80%** passed F2 and **82%** passed F3.

We help our students to be so successful by providing them with **exactly what they need to pass** and by ensuring they are **fully supported** from booking their course right up to sitting the exam (and beyond).

Visit [bpp.com/cima](http://bpp.com/cima) or call 0845 833 7275 to learn more and see how successful you can be with BPP.