

The Evolution of SHRM Certification:

Part I—Changes to Documents and Exams

SHRM certification is designed to reflect the HR competencies that are most relevant in today's world. The documents and exams that make up the program were created with input from tens of thousands of HR professionals across the globe, who contributed their expertise to defining the practice of HR—what HR professionals need to *know*; what they need to know how to *do*; and how to use their competencies, knowledge and applied skills to *perform* proficiently on the job.

These certification documents and exams are continually enhanced and revised. To accomplish this, SHRM conducts a practice analysis every few years—a thorough, systematic research study of the profession—to ensure that the SHRM certification program remains current with trends in HR and events throughout the world of work (especially important in tumultuous times).

This two-part article discusses the results of SHRM's most recent practice analyses and the changes made based on the results of these research efforts. The changes will go into effect in May 2022.

Part I, below, discusses the updates and revisions to the SHRM Body of Applied Skills and Knowledge (SHRM BASK), formerly titled the SHRM Body of Competency and Knowledge (SHRM BoCK). It also describes the simplified eligibility requirements for candidates seeking to take the certification exams.

Next month, Part II will discuss the modifications made to the length and timing of the exams themselves.

Practice Analyses and Research Projects

SHRM undertook an extensive review and study of the practice of HR worldwide to understand how the profession is evolving and to inform the future of certification.

SHRM conducted two practice analyses to revise the SHRM BoCK/SHRM BASK, one in 2015-2016 and the second in 2019-2021, with the participation of HR professionals and other subject matter experts representing the global HR community. The practice analysis process includes focus groups, surveys and iterative revisions based on feedback. A validation study was deployed to confirm and further refine the contents of the revised document, and responses were collected from more than 8,000 HR professionals around the world.

Simultaneously, SHRM conducted multiple integrated research projects to determine how to modify the certification exams, focusing on three aspects: 1) the number of questions asked on each exam, 2) the amount of time required to complete an exam and 3) eligibility requirements for candidates seeking to take an exam.

The resulting modifications to the SHRM BASK and the SHRM certification exams are good examples of evidence-based decision-making. Input from real-world practitioners has helped modernize the SHRM certification program, bringing it into alignment with a current definition of HR practice globally.

The revised SHRM BASK more clearly defines and describes the behavioral and technical knowledge required for HR professionals to meet the current and future needs of employers. This additional clarity and guidance will facilitate HR professionals' career development and advancement.

The revised SHRM-CP and SHRM-SCP exams retain their reliability, validity and score-decision accuracy, while enabling candidates to complete the exam within the allotted time without rushing. (Details in next month's article.)

Research also indicated a need to simplify and clarify the exam eligibility requirements. Thanks to feedback from candidates for SHRM certification, this information is now presented in a less confusing way.

Updated SHRM Body of Applied Skills and Knowledge

General highlights of the updated SHRM BASK include:

- Revised and expanded definitions of the behavioral competencies and the functional areas of the *HR Expertise* technical competency.
- Revised and expanded descriptions of the subcompetencies, proficiency indicators and key concepts, reorganized to flow more logically, with more examples to aid in interpretation and implementation.

The most significant specific content change is the addition of a new behavioral competency in the Leadership Cluster, *Diversity, Equity & Inclusion* (DE&I). (*Diversity & Inclusion* was an HR functional area in the earlier SHRM BoCK.) This change occurred as a result of world events over the past two years. Global social justice and the impact of the pandemic influenced the practice analysis in terms of underscoring the need for DE&I to become a more important component of certification—something HR professionals *do* every day, rather than something HR professionals simply *know*.

The SHRM BASK now consists of nine behavioral competencies in three competency clusters and 14 HR functional areas in three knowledge domains.

The most significant design change is the transition of the SHRM BASK from a printed booklet to an online, interactive resource. This new format allows HR professionals to access and use it anywhere. It is also easier to navigate.

Additional content modifications and enhancements that better reflect the evolution of the HR profession:

- New names for two behavioral competencies, *Global Mindset* (formerly *Global & Cultural Effectiveness*) and *Analytical Aptitude* (formerly *Critical Evaluation*).
- New names for two functional areas, *HR Strategy* (formerly *HR Strategic Planning*) and *Managing a Global Workforce* (formerly *HR in the Global Context*).
- Updates to the *Employee & Labor Relations* functional area, to remove content related to collective bargaining agreements and similar issues.
- More precisely defined terms in the glossary appendix.

- An expanded resources appendix with live links. Exam developers refer to many of these sources when writing test items. The links will also ease the process of adding valuable information to your personal library.

A virtual tour of the updated, interactive SHRM BASK is now available [online](#). Click on the different areas of the document to see what's new and what's different.

Clarifications to Exam Eligibility Requirements

SHRM research also indicated a need to clarify the eligibility requirements for candidates seeking to take the certification exams. In response to helpful feedback, the information is now presented in a simplified, less confusing way. The statements of exam purpose and intended audience are combined *with* the experience requirements.

The more clearly communicated eligibility requirements are available [online](#), in time for applicants for the upcoming May-July 2022 exam window.

If you are an applicant, your first and most important decision is to determine which level of certification exam—SHRM-CP or SHRM-SCP—is the right one for you based on the type of work you do, *then* to check your eligibility. Use this [tool](#) for help in choosing the correct exam. Simply answer the questions, refer to the eligibility requirements to confirm that you meet them, then apply [online](#).

PART TWO

SHRM certification is designed to reflect the HR competencies that are most relevant in today's world. The documents and exams that make up the program are continually enhanced and revised. To accomplish this, SHRM conducts a practice analysis every few years—a thorough, systematic research study of the profession—to ensure that SHRM certification remains current with trends in HR and events throughout the world of work.

This two-part article discusses the results of SHRM's most recent practice analyses and the changes based on these research efforts that will go into effect in May 2022.

Last month, [Part I](#) discussed updates to the [SHRM Body of Applied Skills and Knowledge](#) (SHRM BASK) and to eligibility requirements for candidates seeking to take the SHRM-CP and SHRM-SCP exams. Part II, below, discusses the research that drove modifications to the length and timing of the exams themselves.

Need for Adjustments to Exam Length and Timing

Feedback from people who took the SHRM certification exams showed a need for two kinds of adjustments: to the length of the exam (i.e., number of questions asked) and to the time limit (i.e., number of minutes allotted to answer the questions and finish the exam).

In the exam development field, the term used for the number of questions that have to be answered correctly for a test-taker to pass the exam is the "standard" or "cut score." Test-takers who do not meet the standard or cut score fail the exam. "Speededness" is the term used to describe the extent to which the time limit for an exam alters a test-taker's performance by needing to rush to finish.

In response to examinees' feedback, SHRM set out to determine whether and how to make and optimize adjustments to exam length and speededness. Once any adjustments were made, we would determine how the exams would be affected in terms of their reliability, validity, pass rates and scoring accuracy.

The goal was to preserve the reliability and validity of each SHRM certification exam, while giving most examinees sufficient opportunity to answer all the questions within the allotted time and without rushing to finish.

External research studies were conducted on exam length, speededness, accuracy of scoring and pass rates.

Number of Scored Questions

SHRM's current certification exams have 130 scored questions. Of current test-takers, 80 percent finish the exams with time remaining.

According to the research studies on length and speededness, reducing the number of scored questions to 110 would cause virtually no change in exam reliability or validity. In addition, the percentage of test-takers who finish with time remaining would increase to 90 percent.

Reducing the number of scored questions would also cause no change in the accuracy of scoring and pass rates, according to the research study covering these factors. The exams would continue to be scored accurately. Calculations also showed that with fewer questions, pass rates for both exams would likely go up, with the greatest increase projected for the SHRM-SCP.

Unscored Field-Test Questions

Effective with the May 2022 testing window, there will be 134 questions on each SHRM certification exam. Of these items, 110 questions will be scored and 24 questions will be unscored or "field-tested." The field-testing process, by which we regularly add and remove exam questions, helps us keep the SHRM-CP and SHRM-SCP exams fair and up-to-date.

Before new questions are officially added to an exam, they are tried out "in the field." Several field-test items are mixed into the exams during each window, but the test-takers' answers to these questions will not "count" toward their final scores. Because examinees don't know which questions are which—scored or unscored—it is crucial to answer all of them.

After the testing window closes, we analyze the performance of the field-test items. Following several review cycles, the items that meet our performance standards become operational as scored questions on subsequent exams.

Of the 134 questions that will be on the next SHRM certification exam, 110 questions will be used to calculate the examinee's score. The 24 field-test items won't be part of that calculation. In the long run, however, those items will play an important part in SHRM's ongoing development of future exams.

Amount of Time to Take the Exam

Effective May 2022, the total testing time for each SHRM certification exam is three hours and 40 minutes, divided into two equal sections of 110 minutes. Our research showed that 90 percent of test-takers will finish both sections within the time allotted, and likely with time remaining in each section.

The original time limit for the exams was four hours, but the new shorter time is optimal according to the speededness study (see above).

Examinees must complete the first section of the exam and clear any flagged or unanswered questions before proceeding to the second section. Each section must be completed independently; examinees cannot move from one to the other. The clock runs continuously during each section, including while a test-taker might take an unscheduled 15-minute break.

Therefore, SHRM recommends that examinees who complete the first section of their exam with any time remaining should take their unscheduled break before moving on to the second section.

Two Types of Exam Questions

The SHRM-CP and SHRM-SCP exams are based on the information described in the [SHRM BASK](#), which consists of nine behavioral competencies and one technical competency, *HR Expertise*, which is divided into 14 HR functional areas.

Both certification exams feature two types of questions: 1) knowledge items, which assess candidates' knowledge and application of knowledge; and 2) situational judgment items, which assess candidates' problem-solving, behavior and decision-making skills.

The scored questions as well as the unscored field-test questions on the exams include both knowledge items and situational judgment items.

HR-specific knowledge items (KIs) cover the 14 functional areas of the SHRM BASK's technical competency. Foundational knowledge items (FKIs) cover the nine behavioral competencies. Each knowledge item has one correct answer, and candidates will receive credit for selecting it.

Situational judgment items (SJIs) present realistic work-related scenarios, followed by four possible strategies or courses of action to resolve or address the issues raised. All four options *may* be effective, but candidates will receive credit only for selecting the answer that describes the *best* or *most effective* strategy or course of action (as determined by a panel of experienced HR professionals).

In sum, half the questions on each SHRM certification exam cover the HR functional areas (50 percent KIs) and half the questions cover the behavioral competencies (10 percent FKIs plus 40 percent SJIs).