

Legal Stuff

You have my permission to post, email, print, and share this guide with anyone. However, please do not make any changes to this document, claim it as your own, or try to charge for usage. That wouldn't be cool. However, it *would* be awesome if you printed and/or sent this to every HR professional that you know. There are hundreds of people that take the HR certification exams every year, and they could all benefit from this guide in some way. If you know someone who is making the leap, then please share this study guide with them.

You could also steer them to the **UpstartHR** site, because it's just the right thing to do. Plus, there are some great free resources available that benefit everyone. To learn more about UpstartHR and the author, check out the last page in this eBook.

Preface

What?

The following articles were written over a twelve week study period in my solo preparation for the PHR exam. I took the exam in late January 2009, and I started studying at the beginning of November 2008. Some of the information may be a bit dated and the verbiage somewhat amateurish, and I considered removing it in the revisions. However, I think it holds value, because it preserves my thoughts as they were instead of replacing them with words influenced by my current state of mind. Keep in mind that these were written before I started writing seriously, and my wording will probably reflect that. Also remember that they were written 7 days apart from each other, and some of the information could be redundant from week to week.

Why?

While there are many great study resources available, I couldn't find a good one detailing the whole process of signing up, preparing for, and taking the exam. That's one of the reasons I ended up writing these articles. Now they are here for you to enjoy!

How?

Trying to stay laser-focused for three whole months is tougher than most people would expect. I encourage you to know your study habits and your motivation before taking the plunge. Don't lose focus of the reason that pushed you into signing up for the exam. When you're grinding out those endless hours of study and flipping flashcards until your eyes ache, just remember that it's all worth it in the end. And speaking of endings, you can find out how I did on my exam by skipping to the end, but you wouldn't really do that, right?

HRCP system, feel free to check out my synopsis on [UpstartHR](#). Now I'll step off the soapbox and get on to the good stuff!

In my own studies, (before I learned of the HRCP materials), I had to make do with what I could find. I used the **“PHR/SPHR: Professional in Human Resources Certification Study Guide”** by Anne Bogardus.

Planning

In the **HRCI Certification Guide**, there is a small section about how to study for the test. They lay out a schedule/plan for if you have 8, 10, or 12 weeks to study. I went with the 12 week plan. My modified version is listed below.

Week	Planned Activity
1	Preparation, planning, first assessment
2	Strategic Management
3	Workforce Planning and Employment (Part 1)
4	Workforce Planning and Employment (Part 2)
5	Human Resource Development
6	Total Rewards (Part 1)
7	Total Rewards (Part 2)
8	Labor Relations (Part 1)
9	Labor Relations (Part 2)
10	Risk Management
11	Practice, second assessment, and refocus
12	Redo every practice question. Take exam. Pass. Rejoice.

Tip: Your formal study plan can be as long as you wish. I recommend a range from a min of 8 to a max of 12 depending on your testing comfort level.

First Assessment

Now you're serious. You have laid out your plan and decided when the exam date will be and how you will arrive at that destination. Now it's time to take a bolder step and find out where you stand. If you purchased the **HRCP** materials mentioned above, then you can use the card that came with the books to sign into your account and

take the included 100 question practice exam. If you did not purchase them, they also offer a separate 100 question exam for around \$30.

Whatever you choose, it's time to find out what you know. Set aside an hour or two and take the first exam as soon as possible with as few distractions as you can manage. This is going to do two things for you.

1. *Establish a baseline*-It will tell you how much (or how little) you actually know. It will probably scare you to death. Don't worry too much.
2. *Identify your deficiencies*-The first assessment will also show you which subjects you are best/worst in. This will come in handy soon enough.

Just to stir up some nostalgia (for me) and provide a source of comparison (for you), here are my scores from my first assessment.

Module	Exam Weight	My Score
Strategic Management	12%	67%
Workforce Planning & Employment	26%	74%
Human Resources Development	17%	77%
Total Rewards	16%	58%
Employee and Labor Relations	22%	50%

Now that you've had a chance to laugh at my scores, it's time to get back to business. You have your plan. You have your own benchmark score. Now it's time to buckle down and study.

Week 2

Strategic Management



A New Resource

I have been looking around to see what others say online about how to prepare for the exam, and I found **this human resources certification blog** on the topic. The writer is an industry expert who also sells SPHR/PHR exam study materials. Her blog has quite a few good tips for preparing for the exam, including a few posts where a close friend of hers actually took the exam and gave her own **personal PHR recap** of her study habits and the exam questions. It was interesting (and quite helpful) reading.

Just the Facts, Ma'am

This week I studied Strategic Management. Strategic Management makes up about 12% of the total PHR exam weight. In the HRCI practice test, I scored a 67% on this section.

According to the **PHR Study Guide**, the Strategic Management section tests the HR professional's knowledge of:

- 1) Mission, vision, values, business goals, objectives, plans, and processes of the organization.
- 2) Legislative and regulatory processes.
- 3) Strategic planning process and implementation.

- 4) Management functions, including planning, organizing, directing, and controlling.
- 5) Techniques to promote creativity and innovation.
- 6) Corporate governance procedures and compliance.

*The above list is also found in the **HRCI Certification Handbook, which is available as a free PDF file from the HRCI website.**

(Not So) Fun Fact: The HR certification exam is a 4-hour timed exam with 225 questions.

My Take on the Material

The above list is a general overview. In the study guide, I delved deeper into some topics. I already knew a good bit about organizational functions (Production, Marketing, Research & Development, Accounting, etc.), but it was a nice refresher to see some of this information again in my studies. Strategic planning was an area that I didn't know much about, so I made sure to study those sections especially well. The processes of a strategic management plan include pre-planning, environmental scanning, strategy formulation, strategy implementation, and strategy evaluation. As a part of the environmental scanning portion, I was sure to get acquainted with the ins and outs of SWOT analyses, PEST analyses, and Porter's Five Forces Model.

Week 3

Workforce Planning and Employment (part 1 of 2)



Because Workforce Planning and Employment is a large portion of the exam (26%), I recommend splitting the topic to study over a two week period.

A New Resource

There are so many rules and regulations regarding employment laws in human resources, and remembering all of them is one of the hardest things about the PHR exam. I found a good resource this week that hopefully will help me with remembering all of the **laws related to human resources management**. They even had a bunch of **practice questions grouped by category** (compensation/benefits, labor relations, safety, etc.).

Just the Facts, Ma'am

This week I studied Workforce Planning and Employment. Workforce P&E makes up about 26% (more than 1/4!) of the total PHR exam weight. In the Human Resources Certification Institute (HRCI) practice test, I scored a 74% on this section.

According to the PHR Study Guide, the Workforce Planning and Employment section tests the HR professional's knowledge of:

- 1) Federal/state/local employment laws and regulations for workforce planning and employment (Title VII, ADA, ADEA, EEOC, UGESP, WARN, Internal Revenue Code, IRCA, etc.)
- 2) Quantitative analyses required to assess past/future staffing effectiveness (cost-benefit analysis, cost per hire, selection ratios, adverse impact, etc.)
- 3) Recruitment sources (internal/external, Internet, agencies, referrals, etc.)
- 4) Staffing alternatives (temporary/contract, outsourcing, job sharing, part time, etc.)
- 5) Reliability and validity of tests, tools, and selection methods
- 6) Interviewing techniques (behavioral, situational, panel, etc.)
- 7) Impact of total rewards on recruitment
- 8) Terminations, downsizing, restructuring, and outplacement practices
- 9) Negotiation skills and techniques

My Take on the Material

One of the things I learned about was interviewing and selection procedures. Also, the time line depicting a person's employment history was neat to compare to my own employment status/history. That is because I've always been interested in the process detailing how a person goes from an applicant to a full-time employee to a former employee. I don't know where my fascination comes from, but I'm willing to bet that it's one thing that got me interested in HR in the first place!

Week 5

Human Resource Development



A New Resource

This week, I had the pleasure of "meeting" a lady online named Tish. She runs The Kat House blog, and her newest post was about **how she passed the SPHR exam** (a big congrats to her!). I emailed her, and she was amazingly helpful. She assured me that taking the PHR exam was not a bad idea for a new graduate. She even sent me the notes that she took while studying for her own exam!

I urge anyone that is currently in HR to find someone that has been in the field already and ask them to give you any advice they can. Spend time studying any information that you get from one of these human resource professionals. While it may take me years to learn the ins-and-outs of the profession, finding and utilizing an experienced mentor that has already "been there, done that" is a way to grow in knowledge by leaps and bounds.

Just the Facts, Ma'am

This week I studied Human Resource Development. HR Development makes up about 17% of the total PHR exam weight. In the Human Resources Certification Institute (HRCI) practice test, I scored a 77% on this section.

According to the PHR study guide, the HR Development section of the certification exam tests the HR professional's knowledge of:

- 1) Applicable federal/state/local laws and regulations
- 2) Organizational Development theories/applications
- 3) Training-program development, methods, techniques, etc.
- 4) Performance appraisal methods
- 5) Performance management methods
- 6) Assessing a training program's effectiveness
- 7) Mentoring and coaching

My Take on the Material

I particularly enjoyed reading about performance appraisals. My current job is the first of all my jobs where I've ever encountered a performance appraisal, and I enjoy the experience immensely. At my company, we utilize a sort of "appraisal interview," where the employee is given a short document to fill out detailing his or her career goals for the future, the ways to perform better at the job functions, etc. This document is then taken to the appraisal with the supervisor, so that both of them can go over the training, development, and career goals together. It is a very open and personal process.

In my previous jobs, I did not have to worry about a performance appraisal, but then again, I never really was given any goals or feedback on my job performance. I believe that all companies, small and large, should utilize some sort of performance appraisal. Even if the program is used for nothing else than to have a legal defense against wrongful firing lawsuits, it could still be worth the expense.

- 1) Applicable federal, state, and local laws, including FLSA, ERISA, COBRA, HIPAA, FMLA, FICA, etc.
- 2) Total Rewards strategies involving compensation, benefits, wellness, rewards, bonuses, recognition, employee assistance, etc.
- 3) Job evaluation methods
- 4) Job pricing and pay structures
- 5) External labor markets and other factors uncovered during the process of environmental scanning
- 6) Merit, incentive, variable and other pay programs
- 7) Benefits programs, such as health, retirement, wellness, EAP, paid leave, etc.

Did You Know? According to the Human Resources Certification Institute, the pass rates for the 2008 PHR exam were the lowest ever, with only 60% of test-takers actually passing.

My Take on the Material

I have always had an interest in the money and benefits side of the employment equation. (Most of us do, because our paychecks are involved!) However, being interested in the topic is a world apart from actually having to administer a total rewards plan in the workplace. There are laws covering almost every imaginable portion of a benefits package, and just thinking about all of them makes my head spin.

For example, the PHR study guide says that ERISA was legislated to protect workers from losing their pensions in case their employer went out of business. That unfortunate problem was brought to light when the employees of the Studebaker Company lost their entire retirement savings back in the 1960's. To prevent employees from losing their pensions like that again, the new law was created. It now helps employees to keep their pensions even if they lose their jobs.

Being able to see the origins of a piece of legislation also helps with remembering its purpose. It's easier to recall a memory that is associated with an actual event instead of an abstract thought. Because human resources deals with many types of legislation, I will have to make those connections often.

Week 7

Total Rewards (Part 2 of 2)



A New Resource

Last week, I mentioned a new Website that I had found for human resources professionals (HR Guru). This week I have a similar site, but it is a little different. **HRM Today** was created as a social network for human resource professionals. The site was created by Lance Haun, Jenn Barnes, and Laurie Reuttimann. The two basic parts of HRM Today are the social networking site and the main page. The main page displays HR blogs submitted by contributors. It's definitely worth a look!

Just the Facts, Ma'am

Last week I went over this information, but it won't hurt to give it again as a reminder. This week I studied Total Rewards. TR makes up about 16% of the total PHR exam weight. In the HRCI practice test, I scored a 58% on this section.

My Take on the Material

I have noticed that as I have been taking more and more time to study test questions, I have been able to see some of the little nuances in the questions that I would have otherwise missed. Also, the questions that ask things like "What is the most likely...? What is the best method for...? Which of the following is not...?" are easier to handle when you get into a thorough examination of the questions and possible answers. My scores started rising when I started paying attention to the minute details involved.

According to the **PHR study guide**, the Total Rewards section of the PHR exam tests the human resources professional's knowledge of:

- 1) Applicable federal, state and local laws affecting employment in union and nonunion environments, such as antidiscrimination laws, sexual harassment, labor relations, and privacy (for example, WARN Act, Title VII, NLRA)
- 2) Techniques for facilitating positive employee relations (for example, employee surveys, focus groups, dispute resolution, labor/management cooperative strategies and programs)
- 3) Employee involvement strategies (for example, employee management committees, self-directed work teams, staff meetings)
- 4) Individual employment rights issues and practices (for example, employment at will, negligent hiring, defamation, or employees' rights to bargain collectively)
- 5) Unfair labor practices (for example, employee communication strategies and management training)
- 6) The collective bargaining process, strategies, concepts, and human resources' role

My Take on the Material

As I said before, I really enjoyed reading the Employee and Labor Relations section of the PHR study material. That is somewhat surprising, because the topic can be as dull as watching paint dry. However, in my formal human resources education, I took a class called "Labor Management Relations" that I enjoyed very much. My professor had spent time in management working in human resources as a barrier to union organization in the company. He was an expert in the area of employee and labor relations management. After retiring from the private sector and joining the public sector as an educator, he joined the National Education Association (a union organization). He often laughed about the irony of that!

Making a difference. One person at a time.

I have had more than two dozen people email me for information, tips, or suggestions about studying for the PHR exam, and I was more than happy to answer each one of them personally. If anyone else has something they would like to ask about the PHR exam or human resources in general, please feel free to send me **an email**.

I finished the book chapter, and it left me with some interesting conclusions. This week, I refreshed my memory of the types of dispute resolution, and I think it is a topic that everyone should be versed in. Many companies are now requiring employees to sign a mandatory alternative dispute resolution (ADR) agreement. This agreement basically states that the involved parties must take employer/employee disputes through an agreed-upon channel in order to resolve the problem. Two of the main methods of ADR include mediation and arbitration.

Mediation involves an impartial third party (mediator) that tries to facilitate a resolution to the problem. Mediation is informal, non-binding, and non-adversarial. A good mediation process will bring both parties to a mutually agreeable conclusion.

Arbitration involves a neutral person (arbitrator) that considers facts and arguments and renders a decision. Although arbitration is less formal than a court trial, the final decisions in an arbitration case will be binding to all involved parties.

1. Federal, state, and local workplace laws regarding health/safety/security/privacy (OSHA, ADA, HIPAA, etc.)
2. Occupational injury and illness prevention and compensation programs
3. Workplace safety/security risks (theft, sabotage, espionage, etc.)
4. Emergency action and disaster recovery plans

My Thoughts: WHAT ELSE???

My Take on the Material

The reading this week was fairly dry, because it mostly revolved around the founding of OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) and how it currently regulates workplace safety. Because Risk Management only makes up approximately 7% of the entire PHR exam, the chapter was very short, so thankfully I didn't have to spend a lot of time on this topic.

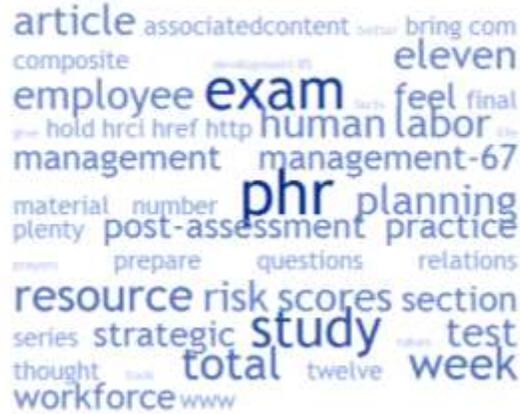
The most interesting portion of the PHR study material involved the case *Automobile Workers v. Johnson Controls, Inc.* The basic summary of the case is that the company manufactures batteries with a high lead content. Lead has been shown to be a hazard for pregnant mothers and their children, so Johnson Controls decided to move the pregnant women to other, lead-free places in the company. They sued Johnson Controls for discriminatory practices and won the case. The bottom line: companies cannot remove a pregnant woman from a hazardous position simply because they want to. The company can provide information to the woman, but the final decision to move is left up to the employee. I put together a research paper as an undergraduate student on the topic of **pregnancy discrimination in the workplace.**

Looking Forward

With the final "structured" week of PHR study behind me, I am now trying to decide exactly what would be the best way to study in the coming weeks. I now have less than two weeks until the PHR exam drops on me, and I don't know if I should feel excited or terrified (at the moment, I have a little bit of both). I have been going over the pass/fail numbers from the PHR, and according to the Human Resources Certification Institute, approximately 40% of PHR takers failed from 2005 to 2008. That should put a little hitch in anyone's step!

Week 11

Study Summary, PHR Post-Assessment, and Planning



Just the Facts, Ma'am

Strategic Management makes up 12% of the PHR exam.

Workforce Planning and Employment makes up 26% of the PHR exam.

Human Resources Development makes up 17% of the PHR exam.

Total Rewards makes up 16% of the PHR exam.

Employee and Labor Relations makes up 22% of the PHR exam.

Risk Management makes up 7% of the PHR exam.

Listed below are my scores for my HRCI pre-assessment and post-assessment. Note the changes in scores from the first PHR practice exam to the second one.

Pre-test

Total Composite Score-66%

Strategic Management-67%

Workforce Planning and Employment-74%

Human Resource Development-77%

Total Rewards-58%

Employee and Labor Relations-50%

Risk Management-67%

Post-test

Total Composite Score-78%

Strategic Management-78%

Workforce Planning and Employment-79%

Human Resource Development-85%

Total Rewards-67%

Employee and Labor Relations-81%

Risk Management-67%

My Take on the Material

Now that I've finished my PHR study guide and taken the post-assessment, I have to decide where my final efforts must be focused. For instance, should I focus on bringing up my low scores in areas like risk management, which only hold a small amount of test questions? Or should I try to bring up the high-percentage test questions like those in the employee and labor relations section (which I already have a good score in)? Also, will the law of diminishing returns affect my studying?

One thing that I thought was interesting was that I increased my total score on average by one percentage point per week of studying (plus twelve percent for eleven weeks of study). If that trend holds true, my score could be in the nineties if I had a few more months to study!

For the rest of the week, I will hit whatever I don't feel comfortable about (still plenty of that), get my testing center directions and my "Authorization to Test" (ATT) letter together, and prepare for the biggest exam of my life. Wish me luck!

(Not So) Fun Fact: The pass rate for the PHR exam has dropped from 67% in 2005 to 60% in 2008. In the same time frame, the SPHR exam pass rate has fallen from 58% to 54%. This was one of the facts that really bothered me as I prepared.

Week 12

The PHR Exam



Just the Facts, Ma'am

After all of the hours of studying (~75), the practice questions answered (~700), and the pages read (~1000), I finally completed the task that has dominated my waking life for the past several months. I felt like many of the questions required some critical thinking, and I marked approximately fifty questions to re-check on the first pass, because they were worded in a tricky way. I estimate that 95% of the exam material was found in my various study sources, and the other 5% was technical information that would have taken a lot more studying to memorize (visas, immigration, etc.).

My Take on the Material

I think the PHR exam was tough, but doable. I have read many comments in recent weeks. Most of them say one of two things.

A) *The exam was hard, but I passed, because I studied a lot.*

B) *The exam was nothing like my study materials. I studied a lot, but I failed.*

This leads me to think that too many people rely on a single source of study information. I know that branching out into other sources forced my mind out of the "groove" it was in while studying just from the book or just on the practice questions. I was forced to think more strategically, and it really helped me during the exam to be able to say, "If I was an HR manager, what would I do?"

I hope this guide has been helpful to you! If you know someone who is considering taking the leap, please forward this free guide on to them. You never know when a good deed will come back around to you!

Resources

The neat cover image was created at www.wordle.net.
The chapter tag clouds were created at www.tagcrowd.com.

The little UpstartHR logo at the bottom of each page was developed by my talented and wonderful wife, Melanie.



About the author: Ben is a writer, entrepreneur, and certified HR professional whose goal is to make the lives of HR practitioners easier and more manageable by providing resources to educate, enlighten, and entertain. You can learn more about him and his work at the [UpstartHR](http://UpstartHR.com) site or contact him via email at UpstartHR@gmail.com. And if you're active on Twitter, why not give him a shot? [@beneubanks](https://twitter.com/beneubanks)