# Passing the CISSP® Exam

Claude L. Williams, CISSP here! So, you want to be a CISSP. Well, let me share what I believe to be a good approach to passing the CISSP certification examination. I have borrowed content below from an article that I believe has a study plan that would work for most candidates. The article was written by Sujith Prasad and published via LinkedIn. I have made major changes to the article's content to include my own experience as a trainer and practitioner of CISSP concepts, and to match the most recent version of the Common Body of Knowledge (CBK), yet kept much of the author's outlined plan intact. Should you wish to read the original article, you can access it via LinkedIn at https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/20140626153605-63176935-preparing-and-passing-the-cissp-exam.

The main intent of this document is to give some insight to CISSP candidates on how to prepare for the exam. This is purely based on [the author's] experience, and I am almost sure that if you follow all these, you should be able to crack the exam. My study plan was very similar to the one outlined below, the only difference is that I went off track two times and I had to restart my studies.

The most important criteria to pass this exam is the "Will to Succeed". Passing this exam must be top priority. Eliminate distractions and immerse yourself in study. This will be a long journey, so being mentally ready and staying focused is very important. Passing the exam is not a joke as you must put in a lot of effort. Say "goodbye" to all outside-of-work activities until you pass the exam. Let your friends and family know that you won't be available for a few weeks. If you are a family person, gain support from your family as this is critical. If you have kids, prepare them by letting them know what you have committed yourself to. It is not my intent to scare you, although it should, it is just that you should know what type of journey you are embarking on. In other words, pursue this certification only if you are really serious about it.

The amount of time required to prepare for this exam varies depending on the expertise you have and the time you can devote for preparation. For some, it can take anywhere between 6 to 9 months to be ready for the exam, yet others 6 to 9 weeks. Because I had a solid background in Network and IT Security, it took me 2 weeks to prepare and successfully pass; but I also have good study habits and love to learn. For this article, I will focus on a seven (7) week plan which includes a five-day bootcamp offered by many fine training centers.   Let's get to it!

Folks often ask me what the best book is to study from, and right now, there's only one on the market that I think covers the most recent CBK thoroughly, the "Official (ISC)² Guide to the CISSP® CBK®" (referred to herein as the "textbook"). So, using that book as the primary text and the "CISSP Exam Prep Questions, Answers & Explanations: 1000+ CISSP Practice Questions with Detailed Solutions" (referred to herein as the "Q&A book"), I will outline our plan of attack.
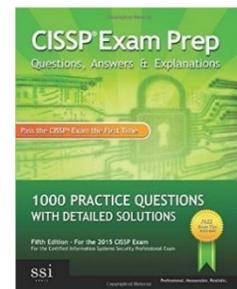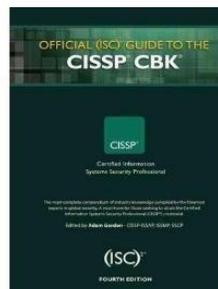
Week 1

(1st)   The CISSP Candidate Information Bulletin (CIB)

First, download and read the CISSP Candidate Information Bulletin (CIB). *This document can be found on your company's account portal.* It will detail the requirements to become certified and general examination information regarding the computer based test. The CIB will provide an overview of each of the eight (8) domains with key areas of knowledge that need to be mastered. Moreover, the CIB describes how the examination will be scored and what types of questions will be presented. In addition to the straightforward A, B, C, or D multiple choices questions, there are two (2) new types of questions as of 2014 called "Innovative Drag & Drop" and "Hotspot" questions (see an example at https://www.isc2.org/innovative-cissp-questions/default.aspx).

(2nd) Baseline Knowledge Assessment

Since attempting to answer questions is one of the best indicators of your familiarity of the subject matter, begin with a short assessment of your knowledge of the CBK before you begin your in-depth studies. For this article, there are two types of questions that will be referenced: exam prep and comprehension. Exam prep questions are most indicative of the certification exam experience, and are found in the Q&A book; while comprehension questions are simpler questions that test your understanding of concepts and topics previously covered, and are found in the textbook.

With that understanding, turn to page 6 of the Q&A book and complete the CISSP Mock Exam (Baseline) Practice Questions. Observe the time allowed and the passing score to really, and honestly, assess yourself. Any questions you didn't complete in the given 60 minutes should be marked as wrong, just like on the real exam. Don't be frustrated if you fail, and don't be too excited if you passed, as this is merely a baseline test. Regardless of your score, using the answer key, immediately review the answers you guessed at whether right or wrong.

(3rd)   Textbook Domain (P)Review Questions

Now, let's spend some time with the textbook. Turn to Domain #1 – Security & Risk Management. Proceed to the end of the domain content *(page #175)* where you will find the review (comprehension) questions, and attempt to answer them. Mark your answers on a separate sheet of paper as you will take this review quiz again. The idea here is to get a sense of what (ISC)[2] wants you to learn from this domain as you read. Check your answers with the back of the book and tally your score. By the way, they don't give you explanations for comprehension questions.

(4th)   Textbook Study of Domain Content

Now, read the domain content paying close attention to information that would have helped, or was otherwise referenced, in the end of domain review quiz. Don't forget to also read the domain summary as sometimes the author hides little nuggets of exam-success-gold in there. This is a management level examination. Therefore, don't study like a techie looking for great depth of understanding, study like a manager where you are looking for enough information to see the big picture of security.

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While you are reading, create a datasheet (cheat sheet) and/ or flashcards for any topics and concepts that you have difficulty remembering. Also, keep a (need-more-understanding) journal of topics and concepts that you don't feel you have a good grasp on. Note, for the CISSP exam, you won't need a great depth of knowledge in a topic or concept, rather a broad knowledge of topics and concepts and how they interrelate. So, don't get bogged down in trying to understand every aspect of, say, risk analysis or data classification.

(5th) Textbook Domain Review Questions (Again)

When you complete studying the domain content, immediately attempt to answer the review (comprehension) questions again. This time you should do better with these questions having read and studied the domain content. Any questions you are still struggling with, research in the domain content and be sure that you have it down on your datasheet and/ or flashcards. In addition, for topics and concepts you placed in your need-more-understanding journal use the Internet for research and a different perspective that may help you better understand, and be ready to engage your instructor for clarification during the bootcamp week. If you are still having trouble with a topic or concept, get active on some of the CISSP study groups on LinkedIn or other social networks. Remember, you are not looking for a complete understanding of how something works, but more of how the subject matter works within the realm of the CBK and security in general.

(6th) Q&A Test Prep Questions

Next, review your notes and/ or flashcards, then back to the Q&A book. Proceed to the Domain Area Test for Domain *#1 – Security & Risk Management* and attempt to answer the questions within the time allowed and at the stated passing score. Any questions where you had difficulty deriving the answer, you will need to list on your need-more-understanding journal and be prepared to discuss with your instructor during the bootcamp week. Record you score and move on to the next domain.

(7th) Textbook Domain (P)Review Questions

You are ready to tackle the second domain: Domain 2 – Asset Security. Good news, it's a short domain of content; bad news, it can be a bit of a yawn in comparison to other domains with the focus on policies, frameworks, and standards.

You should begin the same way you did with the previous domain, with the review (comprehension) questions. Proceed to the end of the domain content *(page #245)* where you will find the review (comprehension) questions, and attempt to answer them. Mark your answers on a separate sheet of paper as you will take this review quiz again. The idea here is to get a sense of what (ISC)[2] wants you to learn from this domain as you read. Check your answers with the back of the book and tally your score.

(8th) Textbook Study of Domain Content

As before, read the domain content paying close attention to information that would have helped, or was otherwise referenced, in the end of domain review quiz. Don't forget to also read the domain summary as sometimes the author hides little nuggets of exam-success-gold in there.

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While you are reading, update your datasheet and/ or flashcard set for any topics and concepts that you have difficulty remembering. Also, update your need-more-understanding journal as needed.

(9th) Textbook Domain Review Questions (Again)

When you complete studying the domain content, immediately attempt to answer the review (comprehension) questions again. This time you should do better with these questions having read and studied the domain content. Any questions you are still struggling with, research in the domain content and be sure that you have it down on your datasheet and/ or flashcards. In addition, for topics and concepts you placed in your need-more-understanding journal use the Internet for research and a different perspective that may help you better understand, and be ready to engage your instructor for clarification during the bootcamp week. If you are still having trouble with a topic or concept, get active on some of the CISSP study groups on LinkedIn or other social networks. Remember, you are not looking for a complete understanding of how something works, but more of how the subject matter works within the realm of the CBK and security in general.

(10th) Q&A Test Prep Questions

Next, review your notes and/ or flashcards, then back to the Q&A book. Proceed to the Domain Area Test for Domain *#2 – Asset Security* and attempt to answer the questions within the time allowed and at the stated passing score. Any questions where you had difficulty deriving the answer, you will need to list on your need-more-understanding journal and be prepared to discuss with your instructor during the bootcamp week. Record you score and move on to the next domain.

(11th) Textbook Domain (P)Review Questions

You are ready to tackle the third and final domain for Week 1: Domain 6 – Security Assessment & Testing. Great news, this is the smallest domain of content, and the content is easy to digest. This is why it is included in Week #1.

You should begin the same way you did with the other previous domains, with the review (comprehension) questions. Proceed to the end of the domain content *(page #781)* where you will find the review (comprehension) questions, and attempt to answer them. Mark your answers on a separate sheet of paper as you will take this review quiz again. The idea here is to get a sense of what (ISC)[2] wants you to learn from this domain as you read. Check your answers with the back of the book and tally your score.

(12th) Textbook Study of Domain Content

As before, read the domain content paying close attention to information that would have helped, or was otherwise referenced, in the end of domain review quiz. Don't forget to also read the domain summary as sometimes the author hides little nuggets of exam-success-gold in there.

While you are reading, update your datasheet and/ or flashcard set for any topics and concepts that you have difficulty remembering. Also, update your need-more-understanding journal as needed.

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(13th) Textbook Domain Review Questions (Again)

When you complete studying the domain content, immediately attempt to answer the review (comprehension) questions again. This time you should do better with these questions having read and studied the domain content. Any questions you are still struggling with, research in the domain content and be sure that you have it down on your datasheet and/ or flashcards. In addition, for topics and concepts you placed in your need-more-understanding journal use the Internet for research and a different perspective that may help you better understand, and be ready to engage your instructor for clarification during the bootcamp week. If you are still having trouble with a topic or concept, get active on some of the CISSP study groups on LinkedIn or other social networks. Remember, you are not looking for a complete understanding of how something works, but more of how the subject matter works within the realm of the CBK and security in general.

(14th)   Q&A Test Prep Questions

Next, review your notes and/ or flashcards, then back to the Q&A book. Proceed to the Domain Area Test for Domain *#6 – Security Assessment & Testing* and attempt to answer the questions within the time allowed and at the stated passing score. Any questions where you had difficulty deriving the answer, you will need to list on your need-more-understanding journal and be prepared to discuss with your instructor during the bootcamp week. Record you score and take a day off.

Week 2

(1st)   Textbook Domain (P)Review Questions

As we move into week 2, you should attack the third domain: Domain 3 – Security Engineering. This is the largest domain in the textbook and probably the most challenging because it covers a wide assortment of topics and concepts to include cryptography and physical (environmental) security.

You should begin the same way you did with the domains from last week, with the review (comprehension) questions. Proceed to the end of the domain content *(page #443)* where you will find the review (comprehension) questions, and attempt to answer them. Mark your answers on a separate sheet of paper as you will take this review quiz again. The idea here is to get a sense of what (ISC)[2] wants you to learn from this domain as you read. Check your answers with the back of the book and tally your score.

(2nd)   Textbook Study of Domain Content

As before, read the domain content paying close attention to information that would have helped, or was otherwise referenced, in the end of domain review quiz. Don't forget to also read the domain summary.

While you are reading, update your datasheet and/ or flashcard set for any topics and concepts that you have difficulty remembering. Also, update your need-more-understanding journal as needed.

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(3rd)   Textbook Domain Review Questions (Again)

When you complete studying the domain content, immediately attempt to answer the review (comprehension) questions again. This time you should do better with these questions having read and studied the domain content. Any questions you are still struggling with, research in the domain content and be sure that you have it down on your datasheet and/ or flashcards. In addition, for topics and concepts you placed in your need-more-understanding journal use the Internet for research and a different perspective that may help you better understand, and be ready to engage your instructor for clarification during the bootcamp week. If you are still having trouble with a topic or concept, get active on some of the CISSP study groups on LinkedIn or other social networks. Remember, you are not looking for a complete understanding of how something works, but more of how the subject matter works within the realm of the CBK and security in general.

(4th)   Q&A Test Prep Questions

Next, review your notes and/ or flashcards, then back to the Q&A book. Proceed to the Domain Area Test for Domain *#3 – Security Engineering* and attempt to answer the questions within the time allowed and at the stated passing score. Any questions where you had difficulty deriving the answer, you will need to list on your need-more-understanding journal and be prepared to discuss with your instructor during the bootcamp week. Record you score and move on to the next domain.

(5th)   Textbook Domain (P)Review Questions

You are ready to tackle the second largest domain: Domain 4 – Communications & Network Security. Although one of the largest domains, it has traditionally been the domain which is represented the least on the certification exam by question volume.

You should begin the same way you did previously, with the review (comprehension) questions. Proceed to the end of the domain content *(page #629)* where you will find the review (comprehension) questions, and attempt to answer them. Mark your answers on a separate sheet of paper as you will take this review quiz again. The idea here is to get a sense of what (ISC)[2] wants you to learn from this domain as you read. Check your answers with the back of the book and tally your score.

(6th)   Textbook Study of Domain Content

As before, read the domain content paying close attention to information that would have helped, or was otherwise referenced, in the end of domain review quiz. Don't forget to also read the domain summary as sometimes the author hides little nuggets of exam-success-gold in there.

While you are reading, update your datasheet and/ or flashcard set for any topics and concepts that you have difficulty remembering. Also, update your need-more-understanding journal as needed.

(7th)   Textbook Domain Review Questions (Again)

When you complete studying the domain content, immediately attempt to answer the review (comprehension) questions again. This time you should do better with these questions having read and studied the domain content. Any questions you are still struggling with, research in the domain content

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and be sure that you have it down on your datasheet and/ or flashcards. In addition, for topics and concepts you placed in your need-more-understanding journal use the Internet for research and a different perspective that may help you better understand, and be ready to engage your instructor for clarification during the bootcamp week. If you are still having trouble with a topic or concept, get active on some of the CISSP study groups on LinkedIn or other social networks. Remember, you are not looking for a complete understanding of how something works, but more of how the subject matter works within the realm of the CBK and security in general.

(8th)   Q&A Test Prep Questions

Next, review your notes and/ or flashcards, then back to the Q&A book. Proceed to the Domain Area Test for Domain *#4 – Communications & Network Security* and attempt to answer the questions within the time allowed and at the stated passing score. Any questions where you had difficulty deriving the answer, you will need to list on your need-more-understanding journal and be prepared to discuss with your instructor during the bootcamp week. Record you score and take a day off.

Week 3

(1st)   Textbook Domain (P)Review Questions

As we move into week 3, you are probably worn out and a little worried. Don't be; it's natural. Remember, the bootcamp week is "a coming." Nevertheless, keep cranking away with the fifth domain: Domain 5 – Identity and Access Management. This is a very technical domain, so if you are a techie, live it up.

Begin the same way you did with the domains from last week, with the review (comprehension) questions. Proceed to the end of the domain content *(page #733)* where you will find the review (comprehension) questions, and attempt to answer them. Mark your answers on a separate sheet of paper as you will take this review quiz again. The idea here is to get a sense of what (ISC)[2] wants you to learn from this domain as you read. Check your answers with the back of the book and tally your **score.**

(2nd) Textbook Study of Domain Content

As before, read the domain content paying close attention to information that would have helped, or was otherwise referenced, in the end of domain review quiz. Don't forget to also read the domain summary.

While you are reading, update your datasheet and/ or flashcard set for any topics and concepts that you have difficulty remembering. Also, update your need-more-understanding journal as needed.

(3rd)   Textbook Domain Review Questions (Again)

When you complete studying the domain content, immediately attempt to answer the review (comprehension) questions again. This time you should do better with these questions having read and studied the domain content. Any questions you are still struggling with, research in the domain content and be sure that you have it down on your datasheet and/ or flashcards. In addition, for topics and concepts you placed in your need-more-understanding journal use the Internet for research and a

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different perspective that may help you better understand, and be ready to engage your instructor for clarification during the bootcamp week. If you are still having trouble with a topic or concept, get active on some of the CISSP study groups on LinkedIn or other social networks. Remember, you are not looking for a complete understanding of how something works, but more of how the subject matter works within the realm of the CBK and security in general.

(4th)   Q&A Test Prep Questions

Next, review your notes and/ or flashcards, then back to the Q&A book. Proceed to the Domain Area Test for Domain #5 – *Identity and Access Management* and attempt to answer the questions within the time allowed and at the stated passing score. Any questions where you had difficulty deriving the answer, you will need to list on your need-more-understanding journal and be prepared to discuss with your instructor during the bootcamp week. Record you score and move on to the next domain.

(5th)   Textbook Domain (P)Review Questions

The next domain, Domain 7 – Security Operations, is comprehensive in that it contains elements from other domains.

Study this domain as you did the previous ones, with the review (comprehension) questions. Proceed to the end of the domain content *(page #629)* where you will find the review (comprehension) questions, and attempt to answer them. Mark your answers on a separate sheet of paper as you will take this review quiz again. The idea here is to get a sense of what (ISC)[2] wants you to learn from this domain as you read. Check your answers with the back of the book and tally your score.

(6th)   Textbook Study of Domain Content

Read the domain content paying close attention to information that would have helped, or was otherwise referenced, in the end of domain review quiz. Don't forget to also read the domain summary as sometimes the author hides little nuggets of exam-success-gold in there.

While you are reading, update your datasheet and/ or flashcard set for any topics and concepts that you have difficulty remembering. Also, update your need-more-understanding journal as needed.

(7th)   Textbook Domain Review Questions (Again)

When you complete studying the domain content, immediately attempt to answer the review (comprehension) questions again. This time you should do better with these questions having read and studied the domain content. Any questions you are still struggling with, research in the domain content and be sure that you have it down on your datasheet and/ or flashcards. In addition, for topics and concepts you placed in your need-more-understanding journal use the Internet for research and a different perspective that may help you better understand, and be ready to engage your instructor for clarification during the bootcamp week. If you are still having trouble with a topic or concept, get active on some of the CISSP study groups on LinkedIn or other social networks. Remember, you are not looking for a complete understanding of how something works, but more of how the subject matter works within the realm of the CBK and security in general.

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(8th) Q&A Test Prep Questions

Next, review your notes and/ or flashcards, then back to the Q&A book. Proceed to the Domain Area Test for Domain #7 – *Security Operations* and attempt to answer the questions within the time allowed and at the stated passing score. Any questions where you had difficulty deriving the answer, you will need to list on your need-more-understanding journal and be prepared to discuss with your instructor during the bootcamp week. Record you score and move on to the final domain.

(9th) Textbook Domain (P)Review Questions

The final domain, Domain 8 – Security in the Software Development Life Cycle, is probably one of the most uncomfortable for most students because most of the terms and concepts are foreign to IT security professionals. Much of the preparation work for this domain requires sheer memorization.

Study this domain as you did the other seven (7) domains, with the review (comprehension) questions. Proceed to the end of the domain content *(page #1065)* where you will find the review (comprehension) questions, and attempt to answer them. Mark your answers on a separate sheet of paper as you will take this review quiz again. The idea here is to get a sense of what (ISC)[2] wants you to learn from this domain as you read. Check your answers with the back of the book and tally your score.

(10th) Textbook Study of Domain Content

Read the domain content paying close attention to information that would have helped, or was otherwise referenced, in the end of domain review quiz. Don't forget to also read the domain summary as sometimes the author hides little nuggets of exam-success-gold in there.

While you are reading, update your datasheet and/ or flashcard set for any topics and concepts that you have difficulty remembering. Also, update your need-more-understanding journal as needed.

(11th) Textbook Domain Review Questions (Again)

When you complete studying the domain content, immediately attempt to answer the review (comprehension) questions again. This time you should do better with these questions having read and studied the domain content. Any questions you are still struggling with, research in the domain content and be sure that you have it down on your datasheet and/ or flashcards. In addition, for topics and concepts you placed in your need-more-understanding journal use the Internet for research and a different perspective that may help you better understand, and be ready to engage your instructor for clarification during the bootcamp week. If you are still having trouble with a topic or concept, get active on some of the CISSP study groups on LinkedIn or other social networks. Remember, you are not looking for a complete understanding of how something works, but more of how the subject matter works within the realm of the CBK and security in general.

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(12th) Q&A Test Prep Questions

Next, review your notes and/ or flashcards, then back to the Q&A book. Proceed to the Domain Area Test for Domain *#8* – Security in the Software Development Life Cycle, and attempt to answer the questions within the time allowed and at the stated passing score. Any questions where you had difficulty deriving the answer, you will need to list on your need-more-understanding journal and be prepared to discuss with your instructor during the bootcamp week. Record you score take a day off.

Week 4

The Bootcamp Week.

You should attend an exam prep (a.k.a. bootcamp) with a proven training center. Follow their study plan for the week. Be sure to engage your instructor with your need-more-understanding journal during the week.

Week 5

Begin your review after a weekend of downtime from study. Turn to page 6 of the Q&A book and retake the CISSP Mock Exam (Baseline) Practice Questions. Observe the time allowed and compare your score to the first time you attempted the exam. This time you should have done better than when you first attempted the exam at the beginning of your preparation journey. Using the answer key, immediately review the answers you guessed at whether right or wrong.

Continue this process with a mock exam 1 through 5 for the next 5 days, one per day. Use your notes and the textbook to reinforce understanding of wrong answers.

Week 6 and Week 7

Repeat the approach of week 5 by exercising your knowledge with mock exam 6 through 11 at a rate of one per day for week 6 and mock exams 12 through 17 at a rate one per day.

Week 8

The only thing left to do is pass the exam! Take the exam on a Monday after you had an opportunity to rest and refresh.

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