

ARE YOU READY TO TAKE THE CERTIFIED PARALEGAL EXAM?

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In 2017, NALA announced that there would be substantial changes to the format of its Certified Paralegal (CP) examination.ⁱ Beginning in 2018, the test will be administered in two parts, a Knowledge Exam consisting of multiple choice questions and a Skills Exam consisting of a written assignment. Candidates will be required to pass the Knowledge Exam before they are eligible to sit for the Skills Exam portion. The new system of on-demand testing will remove deadlines to apply for the examination. Candidates will be able to apply when they are eligible. Once NALA approves an application for the Certified Paralegal examination, candidates will have 365 days from the approval date to sit for the Knowledge Exam. If the candidate does not take the Knowledge Exam within 365 days of the initial approval date, NALA will return the application to the candidate. The examination fee is nonrefundable.

Since the announcement of this new format, prospective applicants have expressed a great deal of concern about how to prepare for and study for the exam and the availability of study materials. In addition to the tried and true methods and study materials, NALA rolled out a new practice exam platform. CP Prep Courses that were presented live at the 2017 NALA Conference this past July are available as on-demand webinars. Applicants may also join the NALA –CP Exam Review Online Study Group on Facebook.ⁱⁱ This is a great platform where CP/ACP's and candidates share tips and tricks for studying and study materials.

Besides the change to the on-demand, two-part exam format, the new Exam will feature some new subjects. Previously the exam was broken down into five sections with four substantive law sections:ⁱⁱⁱ

1. Communications
2. Ethics
3. Legal Research
4. Judgment & Analytical Ability (which contained an essay)
5. Substantive Law
 - » American Legal system
 - » Civil Litigation
 - » Contracts
 - » Business Organizations

The **Knowledge Exam** will consist of multiple choice questions covering the topic areas of:

- United States Legal System
- Civil Litigation
- Contracts
- Corporate/Commercial Law
- Criminal Law and Procedure
- Estate Planning and Probate
- Real Estate and Property
- Torts
- Professional and Ethical Responsibility

The **Skills Exam** will consist of a written assignment administered during four testing windows each year: February, April, July, and October.

One thing that has worked for most successful examinees, those that are now CP's, is that they studied and practiced. They took the practice exams over and over, under timed and non-timed circumstances. When they could not answer or understand a question they researched it and discussed it with other candidates, CPs, and attorneys. NALA has worked with experts in the field, attorneys, educators, and leaders in the paralegal profession to put together an extensive bank of practice questions.

Reading through, getting to know, outlining, and studying the primary source of law for many of these subjects is also important. Candidates should be familiar with the layout and specific rules from the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, the Uniform Commercial Code, NALA's Code of Ethics, and the American Bar Associations Model Rules of Professional Conduct. Some paralegals recommend textbooks or *Law in a Nutshell* series books helpful to study for some of the substantive sections with which they are less than familiar. Strunk & White's, *The Elements of Style*, and the *Harvard Bluebook: A System of Citation* are also great resources for candidates.

In addition, there are several other sources that many applicants have found to be helpful. Many of NALA's affiliated associations put together study courses or review groups several times a year. YouTube also offers several »

resources that candidates have found invaluable: *Writing a Legal Memorandum for the CP:CLA with Leanne the Lawyer* is mentioned time and again as having been invaluable in preparing for writing the essay on the exam (currently the Judgment & Analytical Section which will become the Skills Exam).^{iv}

I recommend, for those that like flash cards, there is quite a bit of benefit in preparing your own and keeping them handy and studying whenever the opportunity arises. An internet search of Flashcards + NALA CP exam will provide flashcard options.

In short, studying for and taking the CP Exam can seem daunting, especially for those that will be in the first wave sitting for the 2018 Knowledge Exam. You may feel that you are in uncharted territory, but as with those that have been taking the exam since its inception in 1976, the best advice and path towards success is studying and **practice, practice, practice!**



ⁱ <https://www.nala.org/sites/default/files/files/users/NALA%202017%20Exam%20Announcement.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/457104991164031/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.nala.org/sites/default/files/files/users/CP%20Program%20Effective%20through%20September%202017.pdf>

^{iv} <https://youtu.be/UcfQ2g3w3iY>



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