

10 Things That Worked For Me

Norman Dorf weekend or afternoon seminar – a no-nonsense, non-sentimental approach to the exams. He will let you know what the questions are asking, and what the markers are looking for in response.

Try to be relaxed and confident in approaching the exams – they are not incredibly difficult. Try not to over-analyze the questions and/or answers.

I would typically try to schedule the exams for a Monday or Tuesday morning, so my weekend studying would still be fresh in my mind.

Procrastination – don't do it! Because I waited so long (procrastinated) to start seriously taking the exams in 2004, summer arrived, but I still had to study. As a compromise with myself, I made a point of studying outside on the porch to try to get some summer sun (my positive reinforcement) but still dedicating myself to the required hours of study.

Take the exams seriously but not so seriously as to lose sleep, raise your blood pressure, or neglect family. Take a broader view - in the end, the exams are just one step on the road to developing into a strong and knowledgeable architect. Although it is necessary to pass, it does not matter if you pass with 90% or 55%

I tested in downtown Chicago on Clark Street – I found the staff there to be very friendly, helpful and accommodating. Since there are so many exams, after a while the men and women who work there became comforting and encouraging friends.

Study materials – I used ALS, Ballast, LEED, university materials, ARE forum online for specific questions on the graphics exams. I recommend studying for LEED too – it will broaden your base of knowledge, and you will be in the exam swing anyway – it's just one more to add onto the end.

Structures – everyone gets stressed over the 2 structures exams. Prepare very thoroughly; it will be to your benefit, not only for the exam but beyond. Remember, however, it is not university level engineering, which we all passed anyway. Get a thorough grasp of the basic concepts so you don't spend too much time answering the simple questions and have time to spend where you need to. I reviewed my notebooks from school and did the 2 ½ day course offered by UIUC Continuing Ed – Marc Mitalski, the instructor, was excellent, and I scheduled both exams for a week or two after this course.

Graphics exams – practice, practice, practice with the computer program, then practice some more. These exams tend to be more about your ability to manipulate the program than to test your architectural skills. Practice until you are severely bored and can knock of a site plan design or interior room layout in 10 minutes. One trick – do not “UNDO” – delete and reinsert instead, which is much faster.

Take in as much advice as you can, but in the end, make sure to study to your strengths. We have all successfully completed high school; many of us hold multiple university degrees – we should all know by now what our most effective way to study is – so just do that. For me, I would read in the evenings before the exam and be fully dedicated over the weekend before. That's what worked for me.

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