

C H A P T E R 8

Starting to Study: When is the Right Time?

Where are you in your journey? Have you completed your 3,000 hours? Have you sent your documentation to the Board of Behavioral Science and has it been accepted?

In my fantasy, I would finish my 3,000 hours and take the test the next day or next week. I didn't want to waste time. I was worried about wasting time. I wasn't even thinking, "When I'm prepared, then I'll take the exam."

Here's what I know now: You must be well prepared to sit for the exams. Do not cling to an artificial time table. When you begin your study phase, eliminate all distractions. The study process is between you and what you know. Nothing else should be considered. I want you to create a successful testing phase for yourself, where you pass both exams and do so without the difficulty I encountered. I want you to find peace in the next six months or more and not be in a rush because of a self-imposed deadline. I want you to believe that this is not just another hurdle, like getting some more hours or something to get through so you can be licensed... it's bigger than that.

Please take this process seriously. It's so important and extremely challenging.

Begin right now by honoring the next phase of your internship, your testing experience, and give it the respect it deserves. I did not. It is not something you can do halfway if you want to succeed. You have what it takes right this moment. But you must honor where you are going.

Don't minimize this because it is huge. Honoring and respecting this phase does not mean you make it so big and daunting you will buckle under the pressure. Expect pressure, but layout a six-month to one-year plan so you can maintain some relaxation during the process. Maybe you are a quick studier and you are shaking your head at spending so much time. You may not need this long, but most of us do.

After finishing the first exam, my mind needed a break. I spent three to four months in that first phase. I took the test and rested for a month — not long enough as it turned out! And then I went right back to studying. Having been through it, my advice is to take more time off between tests.

Clear your head. Spend time unwinding. You won't forget what you've learned. It's in there. Give your brain the rest it deserves. Give yourself the break you deserve. Slow down. You only want to take these tests once. Remember: Rushing them can backfire and waiting six months to retake an exam because you were in a hurry is just not worth it.

Should I buy a study program?

Absolutely. I am not a professional test taker nor a professional student. I prefer being handed my material, learning it and then taking the exam. There are many programs available to help you pass the tests.

Do yourself a service and explore them all to find the one that fits your brain. Each program comes with study materials — practice tests, CDs, even flashcards. Thousands of people have been successful with these programs. Each system is right for someone. Determine which one will be right for you. Ask your fellow interns

and make your own decision. I had the experience of using three programs. Each offered the information in a slightly different format. Find what fits you.

What to expect while studying

Expect to doubt yourself. Maybe your graduate school experience came easily for you. Maybe you passed your exams and were good at remembering the material. These tests are different. There is so much material that it is impossible to relate your study and test-taking success to this process. I spent time reading a chapter in a workbook, and taking the chapter exam that followed. I thought I was remembering the material, only I wasn't. I'd forget key elements when I took those summary tests. Expect this to happen and know there is probably nothing wrong with your brain.

I was hard on myself, and unforgiving, too. I became disappointed and wondered if I had the ability to remember. Here's what I know now: *Our brains need repetition to absorb all this material.* It's unfair to think you will study one piece and memorize that piece and then continue with the next part and repeat.

This will not happen. You will not memorize this material the way you were able to for your graduate school tests. This may seem frustrating, as if your brain is not working with you. That's not the case. The brain requires repetition, once, twice, and more. The brain needs to absorb the information in many different ways. Maybe you can listen to a tape. Maybe you will make flashcards. You will find what works for you. I had to. And I did. I started by creating an environment for my studying.

At first, I thought I could study anywhere. So I parked myself in the living room, relaxing on the couch. This lasted a couple of times before I began to feel antsy. Then I decided I needed to be at my desk. This worked until I began to feel claustrophobic. I realized I needed more space around me, so I moved to the den table. I spread out my books, got a footrest and planted myself in this spot for the next few months. That worked.

In the beginning stages, I made grand plans to study for six hours at a time. I thought I could... I couldn't. I eventually listened to my body and held study sessions as long as I could pay attention. Sometimes this was an hour. Sometimes it was an hour and a half; sometimes less. I started letting my mind decide instead of a grand plan. That worked better.

I made flash cards of everything I didn't know. I used bright green cards. Thinking they would help, I wrote and wrote flash cards — believing the actual writing was helping, too. After writing dozens, I stopped because I didn't like looking at them.

This did not work.

I started writing in a notebook: definitions, important phrases, summaries. This worked. I filled up more than one notebook with information and was able to study from them. That's how I studied for the first exam. Some people study with others. I didn't. Discover what works for you and make it happen.

How to know when you are ready

How well are you doing on the practice exams? Are you scoring in the passing percentile? The Board of Behavioral Sciences (BBS) and your program will provide information on what is needed to pass. This varies, so make sure you have current information.