



CFA[®] 2026/2027

A guide to your CFA[®] studies



Contents

Welcome	3
Getting help	3
The CFA challenge	4
How long will it take me to study?	7
Kaplan study methodology	8
Starting your studies – prepare and practice	10
Which subject to start with?	16
The most common reasons for failure	17

Welcome

First of all thank you for enrolling on a Kaplan course for the CFA® examinations. At Kaplan we believe that our role is to partner with you throughout your CFA studies. Whilst dedication will be required on your part, using our study materials and attending our lectures will optimise the use of your study time, making your studies far more effective.

Our learning methodology, guided by academic research, is detailed in this guide. Regardless of how you have studied in the past it is worth familiarising yourself with our approach as it is backed by academic research, ensuring your study time is used in the most productive way possible.

Knowing where to start your studies can feel a little daunting especially when the pile of text books arrive on your door step from the CFA Institute. This guide has been put together to give you an idea of where to start and how to use your time in the most effective manner.

Getting help

Our claim to be your partner in your CFA studies is not just a marketing line. But something our entire faculty passionately believes in. Our tutor faculty is available to help answer queries and help with technical issues from the moment you enrol until the day of the exam.

For any technical queries review the support section of the Schweser LMS Study Tools. For any administrative queries: Citybookings@Kaplan.co.uk

Good luck in your studies. With effort and application the CFA examinations are very passable exams.



The CFA® challenge

CFA® pass rates tell a story that the CFA® examination really is a high level examination, designed so only those that are meticulous and efficient with their studies have a chance of passing all three levels. CFA® global pass rates are normally between 40% and 45% for Levels 1 and 2, and between 50% and 55% for Level 3.

Level 1

Level 1 is a foundation level aiming to bring candidates from both relevant and non-relevant backgrounds up to a core level of knowledge. You will notice that the technicality and difficulty of the exam increases when you reach Levels 2 and 3.

At Level 1 the major challenge is not the technicality of the exam, but the sheer volume of material you will need to cover to be properly prepared. When we talk to unsuccessful candidates the most common reason for failure is not covering all the material quickly enough to leave enough time for question practice and revision. This appears to be the case at all three levels. Our study methodology is designed to ensure that your time is spent studying in the most time effective manner.

Level 2

At Level 2 you will notice three things compared to Level 1:

1. The material is without question technically more advanced than at Level 1 and as a result will take longer to master.
2. The style of the examination being item set rather than standalone multiple-choice questions is more difficult.
3. Each area of the curriculum has variable exam weightings.

There is no doubt that the material is a step up from Level 1 and will take longer to master. Virtually all of our CFA Program candidates comment on this fact.

The Level 1 exam consists of 180 standalone multiple choice questions, split between two 135-minute sessions. There is an optional break between sessions.

The CFA Level 2 exam consists of item set questions, comprised of vignettes with 88 accompanying multiple-choice questions and also split between two 135-minute sessions.

The nature of item sets means that not all material studied will appear in the examination. This is one of Level 2's big frustrations. You can put days of effort into a particular reading and then not see it in the actual exam.

Conversely if you skip a reading it could show up as an entire item set. This danger really means you cannot afford to skip any readings. Remember the CFA Institute do not release past Level 2 papers and as a result it is not possible to question spot or spot patterns between sittings of the examinations.

It's also worth pointing out that there is more fluidity to the curriculum weightings of each subject at Level 2. At Level 1 we had a fairly rigid set of weightings but this is not the case at Level 2. Most of the areas now have a range. This makes the Level 2 exam harder in terms of focusing how much time to spend studying each topic area.

One question we get asked a lot is whether an item set can contain multiple topic areas from the CFA curriculum. The simple answer is theoretically yes, however in practice items sets tend to focus on topic areas. So it is highly unlikely you would see an item set containing ethics, FRA, valuation elements and portfolio management questions. What is far more common is to see, for example, an equity valuation question that brings in elements

of financial reporting quality or a quants question where the regression model you are analyzing is deriving the cost of equity.

At Level 1 people tend to complain about the sheer volume of material covered. At Level 2 the curriculum is of similar size but when we add the increase in technicality and the harder exam style, you can see that the real challenge of the CFA Program starts now. The good news is that few people report Level 3 to be harder!

However, when we talk to unsuccessful candidates the most common reason for failure is very similar at all three Levels: not covering all the material and leaving enough time for question practice. Our study methodology is designed to ensure that your time is spent studying in the most time effective manner.

Level 3

You might well find the Level 3 curriculum “an easy read”, and it’s also somewhat shorter than the curricula for Levels 1 and 2, but you mustn’t be lulled into a false sense of security. While it may not have as many tricky technical areas as did the Level 2 (there’s no financial reporting material, for example!) it is, as an overall exam experience, equally challenging.

The Level 3 exam introduces specialized pathways. Candidates select one pathway from a choice of three; Portfolio Management, Private Wealth or Private Markets. The choice allows candidates to select a pathway that more directly relates to their sector and/or interests. The three pathways have a ‘common core’ curriculum (65-70%), supplemented by specialized content (30-35%) for each specific pathway. While many of the study sessions seem to deal with the same areas as the preceding two levels (e.g. fixed income, equity, alternatives) the focus shifts to their usage within the context of portfolio construction. For example a case study question might include a section asking you to evaluate the appropriateness of a particular alternative asset class to the client.

This means that – whereas at Levels 1 and 2 the material is tested in much the same way as it is presented in the material, and memorization alone can get you through – to answer questions at Level 3 you must learn each study session well enough to integrate your knowledge of it with that of the other study sessions, given that a single item set or essay question can incorporate concepts from several study sessions.

Success at Level 3 is as much about preparing for the style of questions (and coping on exam day) as it is about learning the material. Historical Level 3 pass rates attest to the fact that it is not easy – you will have to be as meticulous in your preparation as you were at the previous levels.

The exam consists of 11 item sets, similar in style to Level 2 and also 11 essay sets where answers need a typed response. Each item and essay set will be worth 12 marks and contain four parts or questions. The exam is spread across two 132-minute sessions consisting of either 5 item sets and 6 essay sets or 6 item sets and 5 essay sets.

How long will it take me to study?

The CFA Institute states that to be properly prepared takes 300 hours of study. This allocation represents the hours somebody unfamiliar with the subject matter would require to cover the material.

It is important to note that the number of hours required will vary candidate to candidate depending on ability and background.

The aim of Level 1 is to equip all students with the same fundamental knowledge and skills in finance to allow them to tackle the more advanced Levels 2 and 3. You may well have picked up some of this knowledge at university especially if you have studied economics, finance and accounting and so the 300 hours may not apply.

Virtually all successful candidates at Level 2 and 3 will study in the region of 300 hours regardless of their background and the hours they studied at Level 1.

A common study period for all three levels of CFA is approximately four to five months, e.g. commencing study in January for a May CFA exam. A candidate commencing their studies in January will need to study for approximately 15 hours per week up to the exam date to meet the 300 hour guideline.

In order to properly be prepared for the exam and perform to your maximum potential it is vital that you study effectively. We find many candidates fall back on study habits developed at university. It is important to note that these won't necessarily be efficient for the CFA program.



Kaplan study methodology

All students have their own approaches to study which work for them. As a result there is no one size fits all approach to studying for the CFA examinations. It is worth noting that just because a study approach has worked in the past for you it does not mean you are studying in the most effective manner. The volume of material you will need to master to perform in the CFA examinations means you must maximise the benefit you are getting from your studies at each stage of the process.

In our faculty, in the UK alone we have more than 30 years of experience in preparing candidates for the CFA Program and have developed an approach backed by the latest academic insights in learning sciences, which maximises the potential for success.

Academic research shows question practice is clearly the most effective preparation tool. Question practice is shown to aid technical understanding and retention far more effectively than any other method of study.

Prepare-Practice-Perform™

At Kaplan, we are dedicated to accelerating the learning trajectories of our candidates and helping them to succeed in their examinations. To accomplish these goals, we utilise learning science in the instructional design of our courses. Learning science is grounded in research that provides evidence on how people learn. At Kaplan, we translate research insights into practical implications for instructional design so that our candidates learn more effectively and efficiently.

Three key stages are required for learning- Prepare, Practice, Perform. All of these stages are aligned toward accomplishing specific objectives. The alignment allows candidates to build the knowledge and skills to transition from a novice requiring guidance to an expert who knows exactly what to do by the time you sit your examination.

Prepare

This first stage in the learning process provides candidates with information and examples related to the CFA Institute learning outcome statements (LOS). The information includes vocabulary, theory concepts, and principles related to the learning objectives. The examples provide sample problems that help candidates understand how the information is utilised within a specific context to accomplish understanding of the learning outcome statement. This will provide candidates with just what they need to be ready to dive in and practice.

For the majority of our candidates the biggest challenge of the CFA curriculum is not just the technical difficulty of the concepts but also the volume of material that needs to be mastered.

Our "Prepare" based courses and study products are designed to utilise your time in the most efficient manner to accelerate your technical understanding of the topic matter.

Prepare will involve reading the Schweser StudyNotes and attending video or live classes (depending on the study package you have selected).

Practice

The “Practice” stage of our framework is designed to ensure that you can apply your technical knowledge to answering questions. Studies have shown that reinforcing knowledge with question practice is a vital step in order to check a concept has been mastered and crucial for aiding recall and retention. At Kaplan we take pride in the fact that our packages contain more question practice than any other provider in the marketplace. The more questions you can undertake, the more familiar you will become with the topic material and the quicker you will become when answering questions. Some candidates feel that they are not ready to tackle questions early in their studies.

We are not expecting you to achieve a passing score the first time you tackle questions on a topic. You must view question practice as a learning tool. Taking time to learn from mistakes is part of the learning process. The more questions you attempt the stronger your performance will become. Put simply, the more question practice you can undertake the greater your chance of exam success.

Perform

The “Perform” stage of our materials is designed to revise your knowledge before the exam and to give you familiarity with the look and feel of the actual examination. Replication of exam standard formats and question types enables you to practice and develop your exam strategy. Practicing mock papers that replicate the final examination, will help fine tune and recall all of your studies leading up to this point and help you assess how prepared for the actual exam you are. A key part of this stage is using our products to identify where your strengths and weaknesses are and address them before the final examination.

Starting your studies – prepare and practice

Your study from commencement up to the final month will be focused on both Prepare and Practice stages. In the final month before the exam your attention will turn to Perform.

During this phase of your studies approximately 50% of your time should be spent on reading and attending video or live classes, and 50% on question practice.

The key to studying effectively is to reinforce what you learn with plenty of question practice. Academic research demonstrates that the Practice component of your studies is critical in your preparation.

The study process is straightforward: review OnDemand videos and/or attend live classes, supplement your notes using the Schweser StudyNotes and then immediately reinforce this knowledge by undertaking question practice.

Live Classes

Classes are designed to accelerate your mastery of the key technical content of the examinations. The focus is on breaking down the key and tricky areas of the curriculum to ensure your home studies are more effective. By helping your technical understanding in class, more of your time outside of the classroom can be spent on question practice – the key to passing the examination.

Classes will focus on developing your understanding of the key and more challenging topic areas. You should not expect the class to cover all learning outcome statements. Your tutor will focus on the essential LOS needed to develop an understanding of the topic area and also the LOS that in our experience cause the greatest difficulties for candidates.



Key features:

- Focus on understanding and knowledge
- Cover key & technically challenging LOS
- Worked examples of challenging calculations
- All examples unique to the material

You will receive class workbooks you can annotate and use for note taking. The aim is that these slide packs will reduce the need for you to rewrite the Schweser or CFA Institute materials in your own notes.

Many candidates claim that taking their own notes is vital to aid their retention of the material however the academic evidence shows that this is not true. Whilst it is more effective than simply reading it is not comparable to question practice in terms of benefits and will also, given the size of the syllabus, take up huge amounts of your study time. Candidates time and time again fall back towards note taking, as this was a key component of university study. It is vital that you do not fall in to this trap. Efficiency of study did not really matter at university when 100% of your time could be focused on academic pursuits. With the CFA program chances are you are trying to juggle study with work and home commitments, and as a result your study technique has to be efficient.

What you need

- Exam approved calculator
(we recommend the Texas Instruments BAI+ Professional)
- Writing instruments

Getting the best out of your time after class

After class review the Kaplan Schweser StudyNotes™ material and CFA Institute material, adding any additional notes to the classroom slide packs.

The aim is to cover the material quickly and build up one comprehensive set of notes based around the class workbooks. The aim now is to complete your technical review of the material and transition to the Practice stage of your preparation.

Simply reading material or even reading and underlining or highlighting has been shown to have very low effectiveness in terms of retention and recall. Interrogative reading has a greater utility. Interrogative reading is the process of reading material and then repeating back in your own words the key reasons, logic and steps.

Practice stage for the CFA® examinations

The most important and effective use of your time outside of the classroom is to practice questions. Put simply the more questions you do the easier the final exam will become. The practice of questions helps build up both your technical understanding but also is the most powerful technique to aid retention and recall of the material.

Step 1

Review the Schweser StudyNotes™. Use them to add notes to your classroom workbooks.

Step 2

Tackle the module test either in the hardcopy Schweser StudyNotes or online. These will quickly tell you if you have understood the topic area.

Step 3

Take the Topic Assessment (online and StudyNotes) for the topic area studied. These are designed to replicate the difficulty level of exam standard questions. A score of over 70% indicates you are ready to move to step 5. A score of less than 70% indicates there is more work to be done so move to step 4.

Step 4

Use the Online SchweserPro QBank to create tests that cover any weak areas you have. Tests can be built around particular topics or even individual modules. Take some time to familiarise yourself with this product, as it will be very useful in ironing out those problem areas.

Step 5

Once you feel comfortable with a topic move on to the next. You should aim to have covered all the study sessions before the start of the final month prior to the exam. In the final month you should be shifting your attention to the Perform stage of your preparation. This time will be needed to refresh material that you studied some months ago and to develop your exam technique.

Step 6

Once sufficient topics have been covered attempt the online Checkpoint exams (online). These have been designed to mimic the look, feel and standard of the real exam.

The Checkpoint exams should only be taken after completing module exams and topic assessments. Scores of less than 70% on the checkpoint exams indicate there is still work to be done on these areas. If you don't score above 70% don't despair but do note that more question practice will be needed on these areas before examination day.



The final weeks – focus on performing

As you move towards your final month your attention should be turning from Prepare and Practice to the Perform stage of our study approach. This final stage is all about getting ready for the actual examination, monitoring your performance, gaining familiarity with the style and format of the examination, developing an exam strategy and seeing improvement in your test results.

You therefore need to ensure that you have covered all the study sessions and end of chapter questions before this point to yield the best results.

Your focus at this stage of your studies should be almost exclusively question practice. You should only be re-reading material and watching OnDemand videos if question practice demonstrates you have a technical weakness on an area of study.

OnDemand Video or Live Revision Classes

Kaplan Revision Classes will focus on reviewing the topics and from this point on we will be focusing extensively on question practice to prepare you for the

exam. Your tutor will also spend time discussing exam technique and the experience of exam day itself. Remember all our tutors have been in your position and have succeeded in passing the exam.

The classes start each topic area with a review of the key learning points and then detailed review of the more challenging topics in class. The tutor will then set questions on the material just covered under timed conditions to give an idea of the pressure faced by candidates. You will then be given time to go over the answers with the more difficult ones being debriefed by the tutor.

What you need for classes:

- Exam approved calculator
(we recommend the Texas Instruments BAI+ Professional)
- Writing instruments

What will be used in classes:

- Mindmaps – containing summarised key points for each study session
- Revision Q&A bank.

The final month

You should be spending virtually all your time focusing on question practice at this stage. To be properly prepared you will need to:

1. Before taking the first Mock Exam ensure you have completed all Module, topic assessments and Checkpoint exams.
2. Attempt Mock Exams to time.
3. Download and attempt the CFA Institute mock included in your exam entry fees. It should also be noted that the CFA Institute mock is not written by the same authors as the real examination.
4. Design online tests specifically focusing on your weaker areas.
5. Review the CFA Institute material on ethics.
6. Reread the more wordy areas such as ethics, types of debt and equity instruments, corporate governance, alts etc a day or two before the exam to store the more forgettable points in your short term memory.



Using the Mock Exams

Using our Mock Exams is key to ensuring you will perform on the day of the examination. Our experience is that the Mock Exams provide a good indication to candidates' performance on test day. Your results can be entered online to see how you have performed relative to the cohort of candidates taking that mock.

The key at this point is to use these exams to identify how prepared for the final exam you currently are. Vital to this is to pinpoint your areas of weakness and address them. Fully worked solutions are provided to allow you to debrief after tackling a Mock Exam. All questions that you got wrong or guessed must be debriefed. When debriefing you should note whether the issue was application of your knowledge to the question, or a fundamental lack of understanding on the topic area. If you realise from these early exams that you have weaknesses on particular areas you should design custom tests using the online SchweserPro QBank. The next time you tackle a Mock Exam testing similar content you should be seeing an improvement.

As you start to work on Mock Exams it will be important to test your exam-taking strategy. You need to develop a strategy that will yield the most marks on the day of the exam. Exam taking strategy is covered in depth on our Revision Courses.

As you take further Mock Exams you are looking to see an uptrend in your scores. Keep returning to the online question bank every time you identify an area of weakness. We set a benchmark for our candidates of 70% by the final week. Whilst the passing score for your particular examination will vary by sitting we do know the CFA Institute have never failed anyone achieving above 70% at any of the three levels.

In addition to our Mock Exams do not forget that the CFA Institute provide mock exams included in your exam registration fee.



Which subject to start with?

We recommend studying subjects in curriculum order (starting with Quantitative Methods for Levels 1 and 2, Asset Allocation for Level 3), and then following the subsequent study sessions in LOS sequence (the order in the Schweser Online Activity Feed).

The most common reasons for failure

Speaking to both successful and unsuccessful candidates and incorporating the insights gained from learning science, we have compiled a list of the common pitfalls to avoid and therefore maximise your chances of success.

- 1. Spending study time re-writing the Schweser material.** This is a key pitfall to avoid but one that many candidates fall in to. The curriculum is too vast to take this approach, even if it has been the way you have studied in the past. Candidates attempting to build their own set of notes spend far too long on the Prepare stage of their studies at the expense of spending sufficient time on Practice and Perform. The approach we recommend is adding additional notes to your classroom slide packs to accelerate this process.
- 2. Failing to allocate sufficient time to the Practice stage.** The learning sciences demonstrate that question practice is without a doubt the most beneficial use of your time outside of the classroom. Academic studies indicate that the Practice stage is crucial for both developing your understanding but also aiding recall. Learning sciences indicate writing out notes yields far smaller benefits. We recommend that at least 50% of your time should be spent on question practice until the final month. In the final weeks this should increase to around 90%.
- 3. Leaving the serious study until the last couple of months.** You simply will not have the time to cover the material and spend sufficient time on the Practice and Perform stages of your studies. If you know the demands on your time from work and family life make studying difficult we strongly recommend you start your studies earlier to reduce the weekly study burden.
- 4. Believing that the 300 minimum hours won't apply to you.**
- 5. Not covering all the LOS.**
- 6. Failing to develop an exam technique.** You must ensure that your test taking strategy allows you to complete the exam in the prescribed time and yields the maximum marks. It is vital that you allocate a minimum of one month to the Perform stage of your studies. The more Mock Exams you can undertake the stronger your exam day performance is likely to be. Ensure that you give yourself the proper exam time allocation when attempting Mock Exams.
- 7. Failing to properly debrief Mock Exams.** Taking a Mock Exam is a good indication of how prepared you currently are for the exam but to gain the maximum benefits you must fully debrief incorrect answers and lucky guesses. Addressing your failings is a key step in improving performance going forward.

8. Over focusing on calculations.

Expect approximately 40% calculation based questions in the exam and 60% narrative. You are equally likely to be tested on what a calculation is doing or its strengths and weaknesses as you are on performing the calculation. This means rote learning a calculation without understanding the mechanics of what you are doing is a dangerous strategy. It also means the more narrative areas of the curriculum are as likely to be tested as the computational areas.

9. Not understanding the functionality of your calculator.

Whilst this seems a silly point, fully understanding the functionality of the BAI+ calculator can pay dividends on exam day. This will be addressed in classes and our Tuition phase classroom material contains a guide to maximize the BAI+ for the CFA examinations. A narrated tutorial is also available in the online library.

10. Studying too hard the day before the real exam.

It is important to ensure that you enter the exam room in peak mental condition. That means balancing study with rest is important in the final week before the examination. Mentally fatigued candidates throw away marks by misreading questions and making silly mistakes. If you have paced your studies correctly you shouldn't feel the need for panicked studying at the last minute. We typically suggest that the day before the exam is left for a light day of reading your notes rather than trying to grind out more practice examinations. It's important to note that given the size of the curriculum you will always feel that there are areas of the material that you could work on. Remember we are aiming to be in the passing 40% (approximately) of candidates rather than achieving a Zenlike knowledge of the furthest corners of the CFA curriculum.