



Pretest Questions on API Examinations

API 510, 570, 653 and 1169 exams contain pretest questions. Pretest questions are newly-written or recently revised questions that must be vetted by the candidates before being approved and used for scoring. The API 510, 570, and 653 exams have 125 scored questions, plus 25 pretest questions, while the API 1169 exam has 100 scored questions, plus 15 pretest questions.

Using pretest items on an exam does not impact scoring or test taker performance since test takers are unable to identify which questions are scored and which are not. Exam grading is based on the number of correct responses. The minimum passing score is calculated based on the scored items, and each scored item is worth 1 point. API utilizes the statistical method of equating in order to maintain the same level of exam difficulty. The equating process takes into account that a specified amount of test questions are “pretest” and accordingly establishes passing grade for all exams. The pretest questions appear on all tests for all candidates, so each test taker receives the same fair experience.

Pretest FAQs

1. What is the purpose of using pretest questions?

Using pretest items is a standard practice in the certification industry. It helps determine whether the new questions are valid, reliable and fair to be used for scoring on future exams.

Pretesting allows API to improve the overall quality of the exam questions and reduce the number of challenges received after exam administrations. Candidates are able to challenge every item on the test. When reviewing the challenges we receive on pretest questions, we are able to determine whether those questions are misleading, unfair, or not well written. We are then able to improve the questions before they appear on subsequent exams.

2. Does the use of pretest questions impact how scoring works?

Pretest questions do not impact how scoring works. Exams are scored in terms of number of correct responses. The passing score depends on a level of difficulty of a given exam as compared to the benchmark, which is based on the number of scored items. The use of pretest items does not impact the overall exam or question difficulty in any way.

The equating process essentially adjusts the passing point of each examination to compensate for differences in the difficulty level of the different exam forms. Thus, the passing point always represents the minimum knowledge required and the absolute knowledge standard is held constant. The test results of candidates only reflect whether they have this minimum amount of knowledge.

3. Are exams marked on a curve?

Exams are not marked on a curve. Marking an examination on a curve is comparing the scores of one candidate to all the other candidates who took the examination and assigning grades, or passing status, according to a fixed percentage. This implies that whether an individual passes the examination or not may depend upon the ability level (or preparation) of all the other candidates who took the exam. This would not be fair for a credentialing examination.