

CAPM Certification Prep Course

Portfolio Case Study

Role: Freelance Instructional Designer

Client: University Lifetime Learning program

Platform: Brightspace, fully asynchronous

The project

I designed and developed a fully asynchronous exam preparation course for the Certified Associate in Project Management credential, built for a university Lifetime Learning program. The course delivers the 23 contact hours PMI requires candidates to complete before sitting for the exam, running across nine modules and 44 lessons in Brightspace. What started as a graduate practicum became a project I stayed with well past the practicum's end, because I wanted to see the full build through rather than hand off a half-finished framework.

Who it was for

The learners are adults returning to college, most of them with no project management background. Many are balancing coursework with full-time jobs and family. That reality shaped nearly every decision I made. They don't have long, uninterrupted stretches to study; they can't ask a question in the hallway after class, and they're motivated by something concrete: passing an exam that changes what jobs they qualify for.

Adults also bring a lot of experience, even when they don't think they do. Someone who has coordinated a hospital unit's staffing or planned a wedding has already lived through scope creep and stakeholder conflict without having the vocabulary for it. My job was to connect terminology to things they already understood rather than treating them as blank slates.

The design challenge

Certification prep has a built-in tension. The exam rewards recognition of a specific way of thinking, so the content has to be precise and aligned to the published exam outline. At the same time, precise often turns into dense, and dense loses beginners fast in an asynchronous environment where nobody is there to notice they've checked out.

A second challenge was sequencing. Most CAPM prep courses are organized by exam domain, which covers everything but asks learners to absorb concepts before the groundwork for them exists. Project management concepts reference each other constantly, so you can't meaningfully discuss risk response strategies before someone understands what a constraint is, and you can't teach Agile as a contrast to predictive planning if you haven't covered predictive planning yet. The exam content outline tells you what has to be covered without telling you the order a beginner needs it in, so the sequencing work happened separately from the coverage mapping and then had to be reconciled against it.

How I approached it

I worked within ADDIE, with Knowles' principles of adult learning guiding the instructional choices. Analysis started with the certification body's published exam content outline, which I mapped domain by domain so every lesson traced back to a weighted exam objective. That mapping became the backbone of the whole course and kept me from adding content that was interesting but not testable.

For the design phase, I built a full course blueprint and alignment matrix before writing a single page, which let me catch sequencing problems on paper instead of halfway through development. Development happened lesson by lesson, with notes pages, interactive activities, knowledge checks, and quizzes built as a set rather than bolted on afterward.

Revisions ran through shared Google Docs so that the client could comment directly on updated content, and I could work from her feedback in place rather than tracking changes across email threads. That kept the review cycle moving without version confusion, since the current draft and the conversation about it lived in the same file.

Decisions I'd point to

- **Structured around foundational understanding, not exam domains.** The course builds in the order a beginner needs rather than following the four exam domains. Foundational vocabulary comes first, methodology comparisons come later, and exam strategy comes last, once learners have something to strategize about. At the same time, every lesson still maps to the tasks and enablers in the exam content outline.
- **Short lessons with a visible finish line.** Lessons were chunked so a working adult could complete one in a single sitting. Each one includes a stated time estimate and

clear objectives, so learners can decide whether they have time for it before they start.

- **Retrieval practice at every level.** Rather than saving assessment for the end, every lesson closes with a knowledge check, every module with a quiz, and the course with full-length practice exams. The goal was to make forgetting visible early, while there's still time to fix it.
- **Accessibility built in, not retrofitted.** Every page was built to WCAG 2.1 Level AA, with contrast ratios, heading structure, and alternative text checked as the content was written rather than corrected afterward. Graphics were generated with text contrast verified at the pixel level against their actual backgrounds, holding to the 4.5:1 minimum for body text and 3:1 for meaning-bearing graphical elements. Every instructional image includes alternative text that conveys the information the graphic conveys rather than describing its appearance, and decorative elements are marked so screen readers skip past them.

Where the project stands

The course is in final review with the client and is being advertised to prospective learners, with interest already coming in ahead of the first offering. Completion and pass-rate data will follow once the first cohort moves through it.

Tools used

Brightspace, Creator+, H5P, Microsoft Word, and SVG-based graphic generation for instructional diagrams.