

# Chinmay's CISA Prep Strategy

An effective guide to ace your CISA exam in first attempt!



To have the results very few have, you must do the things very few do.

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## Introduction

Welcome to my guide on designing your own strategy to ace the CISA exam! I'm Chinmay Kulkarni, a computer engineering graduate with a master's degree in Cybersecurity. I've successfully passed five certifications on my first try and I'm here to share my proven strategy with you.

I come from a strong academic background, having earned my Bachelor of Technology in computer engineering from University of Pune in India, and now pursuing a master's degree in Cybersecurity at Northeastern University with a focus on Risk Management and Information Assurance. My professional experience as an IT Audit Analyst Co-op at [Fidelity Investments](#) gave me valuable hands-on experience in evaluating business processes, testing controls, and identifying risks in the asset management sector. My goal was to ensure that Fidelity's Technology heavy applications were secure and to identify and mitigate any risks.

[I audited 4 platforms in 6 months across 11 IT General controls and discovered a level 2 Critical Audit Issue!](#)

Are you ready to take your career in information systems auditing to the next level? I have done it and I'm here to guide you through the process of achieving the ISACA's Certified Information Systems Auditor (CISA) certification exam on your first attempt. I have successfully passed the CISA exam on my first try, and I want to share my proven strategy with you.

In addition to my CISA certification, I am also a certified lead implementer in ISO 27701 Privacy Information Management System (PIMS) and a certified ISO 27001 Lead auditor for ISMS. These certifications have given me the knowledge and experience to support organizations in effectively planning, implementing, managing data privacy programs, monitoring, and maintaining compliance with privacy regulations such as EU GDPR.

With my unique blend of academic and professional expertise, I'm confident that I can help you achieve your goal of acing the CISA exam on your first attempt.

So, join me on this journey, and let's make it happen together!

[Unlocking the potential of IT auditing, one byte at a time.](#)

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## What this guide is NOT about?

I understand the significance of this exam for both your professional and personal development. It is important to note that the Certified Information Systems Auditor (CISA) exam is not a simple task. I strongly advise proper planning before attempting the exam.

“Passing the exam” should not be the only reason why you are taking this exam.

After receiving numerous requests from professionals preparing for the CISA exam, I decided to compile all the resources that I used during my own preparation. I strongly advise you **NOT** to simply follow my approach, but rather use this guide to design your own personalized strategy. The CISA exam is taken by a diverse range of professionals, from entry-level to those with over 10 years of experience. Thus, every individual's knowledge and expertise will differ and their perspective when taking the exam will also vary. It is important to keep this in mind and tailor your approach accordingly.

This guide will **NOT** provide you with a quick fix or shortcut to passing the exam in a short period of time. My goal is not, and never will be, simply passing the exam. Instead, my focus is on truly understanding the concepts and using certification exams to validate my knowledge. However, this guide will certainly assist you in understanding how I broke down and approached the exam topics based on my own specific requirements and time constraints, which may be useful for you as you prepare for the CISA exam.

Before I delve into sharing my strategy, it is important to note that I utilized various resources from the internet while preparing for the CISA exam. The resources that I will be sharing are not necessarily original to me, but rather the ones that I found helpful during my own preparation. However, the strategy that I am going to share is unique to me and was designed based on my understanding of the topics, time constraints, and personal motivation. Though it may not be a perfect fit for you, there are certainly elements that you can adapt to design your own personalized strategy.

If you have any remaining questions regarding this guide or if you require assistance in planning, preparing, and designing your own timetable or schedule, please do not hesitate to reach out to me on LinkedIn. I am happy to help you in any way that I can.

Let's begin!

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## What is the first step that I should take?

Booking your exam date is a crucial step in your journey to pass the CISA examination. Many professionals who have already cleared the exam will advise you to schedule your exam date first. This is sound advice; however, it is important to note that it is not just about scheduling the exam date but also knowing how to properly schedule it.

Currently, you may feel confident that you can study and take the exam within the next four months. However, as time goes on, the task of dedicating time from your busy schedule to study the extensive syllabus may seem daunting. This is where the importance of proper planning comes into play. Just like scheduling my exam date before beginning my preparation, I also make sure to choose the right date that works best for my schedule and personal circumstances.

## And how I do that?

The solution is straightforward: create a day-by-day schedule for your CISA examination. This schedule should include everything from the specific topic you will be studying each day to the number of minutes you will spend on each topic. For example, if you are only able to dedicate 30 minutes per day to preparing for the exam, you can plan your schedule accordingly. By mapping out a day-by-day schedule based on the amount of time you can commit, you can effectively cover all the topics listed in the syllabus, which I will be sharing in this guide. This schedule will help you to stay on track and achieve your goal of passing the CISA exam with confidence. And once you cover all the topics listed in the syllabus, (which I will be sharing in a few moments), you then get a date!

**Tip** - I strongly advise you to always schedule your exam 10 days after your planned syllabus completion date. These 10 days will act as a safety cushion, allowing you to address any unforeseen issues or lack of time to study specific topics. This approach has proven successful for me in all of the five certifications that I have completed thus far, and I highly recommend you implement this strategy for the CISA exam to increase your chances of success.

And of course, you don't have to worry about listing down all the topics. I have already done that for you in the next couple of sections of this study guide.

There are 3 only things that you need to focus on.

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## What are the 3 things that I should focus on while planning my schedule?

Motivation. Expertise. Time.

### How do I know my motivation?

As previously mentioned, the primary motivation for taking the CISA exam should not be simply to pass the exam. The Certified Information Systems Auditor is a widely recognized certification that validates your knowledge of effective planning of audit engagements. This certification is not only a valuable addition to your professional qualifications, but it also provides the opportunity to learn about risk-based auditing. If your sole motivation for taking the exam is to simply add the certification to your resume, then I would suggest this guide may not be the best fit for you. I have never attempted a certification exam solely to showcase it on LinkedIn, for me, it serves as a validation of my knowledge on that specific topic. I always make sure that I truly understand what I am learning. This guide is designed for those who not only want to pass the exam but also want to gain the knowledge and skills that come with it.

It's important to note that individuals have their own reasons for taking the CISA exam. Some may be genuinely interested in learning about risk-based auditing, while others may need the certification for a promotion or to validate their years of experience in IT auditing. However, if you are only taking this exam because someone else is pressuring you to do so, this guide may not be the best fit for you. The guide is designed for those who are motivated to learn, grow, and succeed in the CISA exam, not for those who are doing it because they feel forced to do so.

Just ask yourself - [Why am I taking this exam?](#)

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## Why do I need to understand my level of expertise?

As previously mentioned, the CISA exam is taken by individuals with a wide range of experiences in the field of auditing. Some may be early in their careers, while others may be seeking to validate their years of experience and knowledge of IT auditing. That is why it's crucial to be aware of your understanding of the topic.

You may be wondering why it's important to understand your level of expertise if you're willing to study and take the examination? Understanding your level of expertise is crucial in determining the most vital factor in planning your preparation strategy - Time.

**Time management is a fundamental aspect of planning.** In my case, as I am early in my career when it comes to auditing, it was important for me to dedicate more time to understand and grasp the level of questions and syllabus of the CISA exam. This helped me to plan my study schedule effectively.

For instance, it took me more time to grasp the audit planning model, as I had no prior experience in leading and planning an audit. However, if you have experience in leading audits, you may find it easy to quickly cover the topics and answer more advanced questions. This is why it's important to be aware of your level of knowledge about the domains of the exam.

Now that you have a clear understanding of your motivation for taking the exam and your level of expertise, the next step is to focus on the final and most crucial aspect of any planning strategy: time management.

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## Can I pass the exam if I study for “X” hours every day?

The last and the important aspect to consider is the time factor. It is crucial to understand how much time you can dedicate to preparing for the exam daily. Personally, I prefer to study every day instead of just on weekends, as it helps me to quickly grasp and retain the information. However, it's important to consider your personal circumstances and calculate the amount of time you can dedicate to studying each week.

Once you have a clear understanding of the time you can commit every day, you can then move on to developing your exam preparation strategy. Remember, don't take advice from someone who tells you that you can pass the exam by studying “x” number of hours, as [it might have worked for them, but it doesn't necessarily mean it will work for you.](#)

Every individual is unique and has their own capabilities. I dedicated 2 hours every day to prepare for the exam, but this schedule may not work for you. Instead of setting a final goal of passing the exam in five months, the first step is to understand the number of minutes you can dedicate every single day. To achieve this, you must understand your daily routine and make sure that the time you dedicate for preparation is focused and effective.

With a clear understanding of your motivation, level of expertise, and amount of time you can dedicate, it's time to explore the various resources that I used during my own exam preparation and recommend for you to use.



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## Which resources should I refer?

My preparation strategy focuses on 4 types of key resources that will help you in passing the exam in first attempt.

**Instructor-led training:** Instructor-led training is optional, but I highly recommend it for individuals who may not have extensive experience in performing IT audits. This training from an accredited CISA trainer will help you to comprehend the five domains of the examination, including topics that you may not have encountered in your professional experience. Certain concepts can be difficult to understand by simply reading the CISA review manual, and an experienced instructor can provide valuable guidance and aid in understanding these topics in an effective manner.

**Official ISACA's CISA Review Manual:** The CISA Review Manual, 27th Edition is a comprehensive reference guide, created to assist you in preparing for the CISA exam and to help understand the roles and responsibilities of an information systems (IS) auditor. This guide is extremely detailed and covers all the topics necessary for someone entering the field of information systems audit. The language used in this review manual is technical and highly detailed, which may be challenging for those without prior IT audit experience to understand, which is why I strongly recommend using a study guide in conjunction with the official review manual.

Link to [CISA Review Manual, 27th Edition](#)

**A Study Guide:** As I previously mentioned, it's beneficial to use a study guide for those seeking to acquire practical skills in auditing control and security. Not only will this aid in passing the exam, but the use of simpler language will aid in understanding the CISA topics. I highly recommend Hemang Doshi's CISA - Certified Information Systems Auditor Study Guide. I am not endorsing this book specifically, but I genuinely appreciate the efforts the author has made to simplify the difficult language of the CISA review manual. There are other study guides available in the market, but since I am sharing my own personal strategy that helped me pass the exam on the first attempt, I highly advise considering this guide.

Link to [Hemang Doshi's CISA - Certified Information Systems Auditor Study Guide](#)

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## How can I test my understanding?

**Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs) Practice Sets:** It is important to not only understand and learn the material, but also to put that knowledge into practice. One way to do this is by attempting multiple choice questions to test your understanding. I highly recommend two resources that I personally used during my own preparation. Keep in mind that when taking the exam, you must adopt the ISACA's way of thinking. There may be times when your professional experience differs from what is outlined in the CISA review manual, but it is important to understand and think like ISACA does if you want to pass the exam. That's why it's crucial to test your understanding and apply what you have learned.

The CISA Questions, Answers & Explanations Manual, 12th Edition is an excellent resource created by ISACA specifically for CISA exam takers. Each domain includes over 150 multiple choice questions that will prepare you for the exam. While the exact questions may not be repeated on the exam, the nature of the questions will be like those found in this book. In addition to this book, I also practiced multiple choice questions for each domain on Hemang Doshi's website. I highly recommend his resources for CISA exam preparation. Later in this guide, I will share the recommended order in which to solve these questions, as it is the approach, I personally found most effective for understanding the level of questions on the exam.

**Most Important** - Don't let the fear of getting multiple-choice questions wrong hold you back from acing your exam. Trust me, even I struggled with a 65% accuracy rate when I first tackled these questions. But, as you work through the exam, remember that the questions are designed to challenge and make you think. So, if you don't score as well as you'd like on your first go, **don't lose hope**. Instead, take it as an opportunity to dive deeper into the material and solidify your understanding by reviewing the questions and explanations multiple times.

I know it can be discouraging to not score as well as you'd hoped, but I urge you not to give up. I'm confident that with persistence and determination, you'll be able to ace your exam on the first attempt. So, stay motivated and keep pushing forward!

Link to [ISACA's CISA Questions, Answers & Explanations Manual, 12th Edition](#)

Link to [Hemang Doshi's Website](#)

Alright, now that you understand the resources and strategies I recommend, it's time to look at my actual exam preparation schedule. This is the most exciting part of this guide, as I will show you the day-by-day plan, I used to prepare for the CISA exam.

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## How should I plan my day-to-day strategy?

How much hours can you dedicate every day?			CISA Domain 1 Information System Auditing Process		
A	B	C	D	E	F
1 hr./day	2 hrs./day	3 hrs./day	Topic	Resource	Avg. Time (minutes)
Day 1	Day 1	Day 1	1.0 Introduction	CISA Review Manual	15
			1.1 IS Audit Standards, Guidelines & Codes of Ethics	CISA Review Manual	15
			1.2 Business Processes	CISA Review Manual	30
Day 2	Day 2	Day 1	1.2 Business Processes	CISA Review Manual	30
Day 3			1.2 Business Processes	CISA Review Manual	30
Day 4			1.2 Business Processes	CISA Review Manual	30
Day 5	Day 3	Day 2	1.3 Types of Controls	CISA Review Manual	30
			1.3 Types of Controls	CISA Review Manual	30
Day 6	Day 4	Day 3	1.4 Risk Based Audit Planning	CISA Review Manual	30
Day 7			1.4 Risk Based Audit Planning	CISA Review Manual	30
Day 8			1.5 Types of Audits & Assessments	CISA Review Manual	30
Day 9	Day 5	Day 4	1.6 Audit Project Management	CISA Review Manual	30
Day 10			1.6 Audit Project Management	CISA Review Manual	30
Day 11			1.7 Sampling Methodology	CISA Review Manual	30
Day 12	Day 6	Day 5	1.8 Audit Evidence Collection Techniques	CISA Review Manual	30
Day 13			1.9 Data Analytics	CISA Review Manual	30
Day 14			1.10 Reporting & Communication Techniques	CISA Review Manual	30
Day 15	Day 7	Day 6	1.11 Quality Assurance & improvement of audit process	CISA Review Manual	30
Day 16			Audit Planning	Hemang Doshi CISA	60
Day 17			Business Processes applications & Controls	Hemang Doshi CISA	60
Day 18	Day 8	Day 5	Types of Controls	Hemang Doshi CISA	60
Day 19			Risk-based Audit Planning	Hemang Doshi CISA	60
	Day 9	Day 6	Audit Project Management	Hemang Doshi CISA	60
			Sampling Methodology	Hemang Doshi CISA	60
	Adjust	Adjust	Audit Evidence Collection Technique	Hemang Doshi CISA	60
			Data Analytics	Hemang Doshi CISA	60
			Reporting & Communication Technique	Hemang Doshi CISA	60
			Control Self-Assessment	Hemang Doshi CISA	60

Total Time in Minutes for Understanding Domain 1 1110 Minutes

Total Time in Hours for Understanding Domain 1 18.5 Hours

No. of hours you can commit everyday Enter your value → 1 Hours/day

No. of Days you will need to understand Domain 1 19 Days

The table above illustrates my plan for domain one. The only input required is the number of hours you are willing to commit to studying each day. Column F shows the average amount of time needed

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to read and understand each topic, which may vary depending on an individual's reading speed and comprehension abilities. You can adjust these numbers to fit your own needs, but I recommend using a copy of the CISA review manual and taking a rough estimate of the time required to complete each topic. While it may be tedious, proper planning is crucial for success in this examination. So, take the time to plan your schedule and you will be well on your way to passing the CISA exam.

As an illustration, I have provided three variations for completing Domain 1. In the above plan, I have assumed that you are able to commit one hour every day to studying and preparing for the exam. Depending on the number of hours dedicated to studying, in this case one hour, Column F calculates the number of days required to complete Domain 1 - 19 days. With the appropriate time and effort, you can achieve your goal of mastering Domain 1 and passing the CISA exam. Remember, consistent effort over a period leads to success. So, commit yourself to a schedule, stay focused and work diligently towards your goal.

This is the approach you should take when creating a schedule for all five domains. I have not included all the tables in this study guide, but I have created a separate excel sheet that you can download and use to experiment with different numbers. By using this method, you can customize your schedule to fit your specific needs and ensure that you allocate the right amount of time to each domain. Remember, proper planning is essential for success. By taking the time to create a comprehensive schedule, you'll be well on your way to passing the CISA exam.

By following the steps outlined above, you will be able to determine an ideal date for completing all the topics. However, it's important to keep in mind that unforeseen circumstances can arise, which is why it's a good idea to have a buffer of at least 10 days. Once you have your final date, schedule your exam for 10 days after that date. This will give you extra time to review and ensure that you are fully prepared for the exam. Remember, the key to success is being well-prepared and having a solid plan in place. So, take the time to create a schedule, and don't be afraid to include a buffer for unexpected events. By doing so, you'll be well on your way to passing the CISA exam. So, what's next?

Download the excel sheet, play around with the numbers, and create a schedule that works best for you.

Link to Excel Sheet - [Build your own CISA Prep Strategy](#)

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## Uncovering my 5-step strategy for passing the CISA exam

When it comes to understanding and studying for the CISA exam, the approach I followed was as follows: First, I created a schedule and set a deadline for myself by booking the exam date. Once my schedule was in place, I followed these five steps for each domain:

1. Complete the study plan for each domain according to the schedule.
2. After finishing the study plan, move on to solving the section and domain quizzes from Hemang Doshi's website for that specific domain.
3. Repeat steps 1 & 2 for all five domains.
4. Once you have completed all five domains, go back, and review the notes you took while studying.
5. Use The CISA Questions, Answers & Explanations Manual, 12th Edition to practice solving domain-specific multiple-choice questions.

By following these steps, you will have a comprehensive and structured approach to studying for the CISA exam. By finishing the study plan, solving quizzes, reviewing notes, and practicing with MCQs, you will be well prepared for the exam and increase your chances of success. Remember, **consistent effort and a structured approach are key to passing the CISA exam**. So, stay focused, stay motivated and work diligently towards your goal. With the right mindset and approach, you will be able to achieve your objective of passing the CISA.

This process took me approximately 3 months to complete. After those three months, I felt confident enough to take the exam, but I wasn't certain about my chances of scoring well. So, what I did next was quite effective. I took a week's break and then returned to skimming through the CISA Review Manual and Hemang Doshi's book. Revising these topics took me around three to four weeks, depending on the time I dedicated to it. Once I finished revising, it had been almost a month since I solved any multiple-choice questions. So, the next step I took was to focus on solving multiple choice questions in a timely manner. This approach helped me to solidify my understanding and improve my chances of success on the CISA exam.

By focusing on a structured and consistent approach, taking breaks, revising, and practicing with MCQs, you will be able to pass CISA exam with flying colors. Remember, the key to success is having a clear plan, consistent effort, and a structured approach.

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While solving the multiple-choice questions, I started a timer to track the amount of time I spent on average for 25 questions. This helped me to understand my approach and identify where I was going wrong. By analyzing this time, I was able to identify areas that required improvement and adjust my study plan accordingly. This approach helped me to improve my efficiency and increase my chances of success on the CISA exam.

Understanding where you are going wrong is an essential quality of a true learner.

Whenever I encountered an incorrect answer while solving multiple choice questions, I would read the explanation provided by ISACA. This helped me to gain valuable insights from experienced auditors, who have written these books. Through this approach, I was able to pass the CISA exam on my first attempt and retain the knowledge I had acquired while preparing. One of the most crucial things to remember is the importance of consistency and focus. There may be times when certain topics may not seem relevant to your professional experience or job, but it's essential to remember that when taking the exam, you must think like an ISACA auditor and have a comprehensive understanding of all the topics because learning never goes to waste.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I truly appreciate it. I want to remind you that the strategy I shared is one that I personally designed for myself and may not be suitable for everyone. However, I can guarantee that if you follow the approach, I used to plan my journey, you will see better results.

I wish you all the best in your CISA exam and please do not hesitate to reach out to me on LinkedIn if you have any questions related to this strategy or the CISA exam.

*Chinmay Kulkarni*

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## Get in touch!

Suggestions? Or feedback? Hit me up!

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“You just have to be the best student to be the biggest talent to lead your field and make a rare air life.” ~ Robin Sharma