

Exam Writing and Grading FAQs



Item Writing FAQs

Q: What is involved in being a question writer?

A: Question writers complete a 1-2 hour training webinar and are then paired with a partner. Writers are assigned specific learning objectives for which they write questions. Volunteers may ask to be assigned to their preferred section of the syllabus or to be paired with a specific partner and part chairs will try to accommodate those requests. Partners review each other's questions prior to the virtual or in-person 1½ day writers' summit, during which questions are refined.



Q: How long does it take to write?

A: The time it takes will vary depending on your familiarity with the syllabus and your experience with question writing. Generally, a volunteer estimated that it takes about 25 hours to review the syllabus material, write questions and discuss questions with your writing partner, with the first year taking longer as you climb the learning curve. This would be in addition to virtual or in-person attendance at the 1½ day writers' summit.

Grading FAQs

Q: What is involved in being a grader?

A: Graders complete a 1-hour training webinar and are then paired with a grading partner. Graders are usually assigned one question to grade, though graders for Exams 6C and 6I grade multiple questions since there are fewer candidates. Volunteers may ask to be assigned to their preferred section of the syllabus or to be paired with a specific partner and part chairs will try to accommodate those requests. Question writers provide a model answer and partial grading rubric but graders are expected to review the relevant syllabus material prior to grading. After grading several papers and entering grades into the online grading portal, partners review scores to be sure they are being consistent.



Q: How long does it take to grade?

A: The time it takes will vary depending on your familiarity with the syllabus, your experience with grading and the difficulty of the question you are assigned. Grading is done online and volunteers spend an average of about 20 hours in the system, with the first year taking longer as you climb the learning curve. Additional time would be required to review the syllabus and discuss the grading rubric with your partner.

General FAQs

Q: Can I write or grade for just one exam sitting?

A: We ask that you make every effort to write or grade for 3 years to maintain quality and consistency. This is especially important for question writing since the quality of questions improve with experience.

Q: Can I get CE credits for writing and grading?

A: It would be up to the volunteer to determine how much CE credit would apply. If you are reading and discussing material that is outside your area of expertise, that should count as CE. The actual time you spend writing questions or grading would not count. The main criteria is whether you can justify that you learned something new.

Q: Is travel required or optional?

A: There was no travel in 2020 or 2021. We expect that travel will be optional going forward. For those who do not wish to travel, virtual attendance at writers' summits and grading sessions will still be required.

Q: If travel is involved, what is the reimbursement policy?

A: The CAS covers up to \$800 for airfare, the negotiated room rate of the selected hotel, and up to \$125 for incidental expenses (taxi, parking, etc.). International volunteers can request increased reimbursement for airfare.

Q: Do I have to write and grade?

A: No. We ask that you make every effort to continue in the role for which you joined, but you are welcome to do both.

Q: Can I switch exams?

A: It is helpful in terms of continuity if you stay with one exam for 3 years, but if you strongly prefer a different exam, we will try to accommodate you.



Q: Can I join an exam committee if I am an Associate?

A: Associates are welcome to serve on an exam for which they have credit if they have not taken an exam for the last 2 years and do not plan to take an exam for 3 years after serving on the exam committee.

Q: In addition to giving back to the actuarial profession, and opportunities for continuing education and professional network building, are there other benefits to volunteering?

A: Yes! A key benefit is the opportunity to develop leadership skills. While we generally ask our new writers and graders to commit to three years of service, you don't have to stop there. In addition to the more than 500 individual contributor positions we need to administer our exams and maintain our syllabus, there is a robust and well-organized volunteer leadership team of more than 40 vice-chairs, chairs, and general officer roles. So, if you're leadership-minded you could have an excellent opportunity to hone your management skills and have a strong influence on how the CAS Admissions process evolves and continues to stay current with modern actuarial practice and skills. You could advance through the ranks, taking on a specialized leadership role overseeing an exam part or broad functional area or important project! You could even become the chair of the full Syllabus & Exam Working Group.