

APL™

Exam Content Outline

Advanced Project Leader (APL)™





Advanced Project Leader (APL)[™] Exam Content Outline (ECO)

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	5
EXAM CONTENT OUTLINE	6
DOMAINS AND ASSOCIATED BEHAVIORS	7
DOMAIN I LEADERSHIP AND INFLUENCE—14%	8
DOMAIN II COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION—14%	9
DOMAIN III ENGAGEMENT—12%	10
DOMAIN IV STRATEGIC AND SYSTEMS THINKING—12%	10
DOMAIN V PROBLEM-SOLVING—12%	11
DOMAIN VI RISK AND UNCERTAINTY MANAGEMENT—14%	12
DOMAIN VII AGILITY AND RESPONSIVENESS—12%	13
DOMAIN VIII CULTURAL AND ECOSYSTEM INTELLIGENCE —10%	13
ADVANCED PROJECT LEADER (APL) ^{™™} CERTIFICATION ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS	14
ADVANCED PROJECT LEADER (APL) [™]	16
EXAM INFORMATION	16
ADVANCED PROJECT LEADER (APL) [™]	17
EXAM QUESTION TYPES	17
TAKING THE ADVANCED PROJECT LEADER (APL) [™] EXAM	18
RETAKEING THE ADVANCED PROJECT LEADER (APL) [™] EXAM	18



CONTINUING CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS (CCR) PROGRAM	19
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	19
REFERENCE MATERIALS	20

INTRODUCTION

Project Management Institute (PMI) offers a globally recognized professional certification for project professionals who manage high-stakes and complex projects, known as the Advanced Project Leader (APL)[™]. PMI exam development processes stand apart from other certification programs. PMI aligns its processes with the certification industry's best practices such as those found in the [Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing](#). The certification development process followed to develop the Advanced Project Leader (APL)[™] is also accredited against the internationally recognized ISO 9001 standard.¹

A key development requirement for a fair and reliable certification exam is an analysis of the job being assessed and a market assessment of standards and industry practices. Given that the Advanced Project Leader (APL)[™] is a global certification, PMI conducted a job competency analysis (JCA), which included a criterion-referenced approach to assessing candidates. Because the Advanced Project Leader (APL)[™] exam focuses on certifying that successful candidates have the necessary proficiency in competencies required to successfully lead high-stakes projects, it was critical that PMI evaluate the professional practice expectations for associated competencies and behaviors. These competencies and behaviors were identified through a multiday JCA and then included in a global survey for validation. Validation helps ensure that each exam measures the most critical elements of high-stakes project management in terms of realistic work settings and ways of working identified as likely to lead to project success.

The Advanced Project Leader (APL)[™] exam is a vital part of earning this professional certification; thus, it is imperative that the exam accurately reflects the competencies and behaviors of project professionals managing high-stakes projects. All the questions on the exam have been written and extensively reviewed by subject matter experts (SMEs) who actively manage highly critical and complex projects in various industries across the globe. All exam questions are mapped to the *Advanced Project Leader (APL)[™] Exam Content Outline* to help ensure an appropriate number of questions are in place for a valid examination.

PMI retained ACT to develop the global advanced project management competency framework and exam content outline. ACT provides workforce solutions that include psychometric, curriculum development, test development, and credential management solutions to credentialing programs. PMI retained HumRRO to work with SMEs to develop and validate the exam questions in the exam. HumRRO provides assessment solutions focused on human capital management, education, credentialing, policy analysis, program evaluation, and training.

¹ Published jointly by the American Education Research Association (AERA), National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME), and American Psychological Association (APA).

EXAM CONTENT OUTLINE

The following table identifies the proportion of questions from each domain that will appear on the exam.

Domain	Percentage of Items on the Exam
I. Leadership and Influence	14%
II. Communication and Collaboration	14%
III. Engagement	12%
IV. Strategic and Systems Thinking	12%
V. Problem-Solving	12%
VI. Risk and Uncertainty Management	14%
VII. Agility and Responsiveness	12%
VIII. Cultural and Ecosystem Intelligence	10%
Total	100%

Important note: The Advanced Project Leader (APL)[™] exam is assessing competency proficiency. Unlike task-based exams, the focus of the assessment is to identify behaviors associated with successful management of high-stakes projects. Question answer options are designed to differentiate between proficiency levels for each domain. Our scoring model is periodically reviewed by scoring experts to help ensure valid assessment of knowledge and skills. For more information, please review the exam reporting section of the [PMI® Certification Handbook](#).

DOMAINS AND ASSOCIATED BEHAVIORS

This document provides details about the structure for the Advanced Project Leader (APL)[™] Exam Content Outline (ECO), including domains and associated behaviors as defined by the JCA.

- **Domain:** Competencies identified as necessary for professionals leading high-stakes and complex projects
- **Areas:** Areas of work behavior related to a specific competency
- **Behavior Exemplars:** Examples of behaviors exhibited by professionals leading high-stakes, complex projects in a specific area at the competency proficiency level necessary to lead those projects to success.

Each Advanced Project Leader (APL)[™] exam will include questions that address behaviors for each competency domain, and PMI will adhere to the percentage of coverage at the domain level as outlined on the previous page.

DOMAIN I LEADERSHIP AND INFLUENCE—14%	
The ability to inspire, align, and mobilize individuals and teams across diverse, dynamic, and high-stakes environments. This includes executive presence; leading large-scale, cross-functional teams; influencing without authority; fostering ethical and inclusive cultures; bridging cultural, hierarchical, and seniority barriers; and leading change.	
Area 1	Collaborative Leadership Behavior Exemplar: Leads large cross-functional teams across multiple regions and organizations; aligns interdependent workstreams; adapts leadership style to diverse teams; supports integration in complex project environments
Area 2	Ethical Leadership Behavior Exemplar: Models ethical leadership and inclusivity across diverse stakeholder groups; builds cohesiveness in stakeholders with conflicting values systems
Area 3	Empowerment and Delegation Behavior Exemplar: Develops high-performing teams; empowers teams and fosters cross-functional collaboration; develops effective leadership structures.
Area 4	Influence and Persuasion Behavior Exemplar: Influences cross-functional leaders and external partners to align with project goals; adapts messaging to diverse audiences
Area 5	Change Leadership Behavior Exemplar: Leads change management across teams by fostering engagement, securing buy-in; addresses resistance in diverse, distributed environments; navigates change fatigue while sustaining team momentum and energy.
Area 6	Inspiring Confidence Behavior Exemplar: Builds confidence in the project leader and the team in challenging circumstances; inspires engagement with culturally and functionally diverse stakeholders without having formal authority

DOMAIN II COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION—14%

The ability to communicate with clarity, agility, and empathy to foster collaboration and alignment across diverse teams and stakeholders in complex, high-pressure environments.

Area 1	Communication Agility Behavior Exemplar: Shapes and reinforces project communications across distributed teams and stakeholder groups; ensures clarity, focus, and alignment in dynamic and rapidly evolving environments.
Area 2	Interpersonal Facilitation Behavior Exemplar: Resolves dynamic, multiparty conflicts across functions and/or organizations; facilitates alignment and consensus among diverse stakeholders.
Area 3	Building Collaborative Stakeholder Environment Behavior Exemplar: Fosters collaboration culture among diverse and geographically distributed stakeholders with often conflicting interests; enables diverse and geographically distributed stakeholders to collaborate effectively and efficiently.

DOMAIN III ENGAGEMENT—12%	
The ability to build, sustain, and align stakeholder relationships across diverse and dynamic environments. This includes trust building, stakeholder alignment, and relationship management across organizational, cultural, and regional boundaries.	
Area 1	Stakeholder Engagement and Alignment Behavior Exemplar: Engages multiple stakeholders across functions and/or regions; aligns and realigns diverse or competing interests in project goals through proactive collaboration; proactively communicates with executive-level stakeholders across functions and organizations regarding project-critical information
Area 2	Relationship Management Behavior Exemplar: Manages complex stakeholder networks; resolves tensions and fosters long-term partnerships across internal and external organizational boundaries
Area 3	Trust Building Behavior Exemplar: Strengthens and deepens team and stakeholder group trust in volatile, uncertain environments; models integrity and responsiveness in high-pressure situations

DOMAIN IV STRATEGIC AND SYSTEMS THINKING—12%	
The ability to understand and influence the broader organizational, systemic, and strategic context of a project. This includes aligning project outcomes with enterprise strategy, navigating interdependencies, and applying systems thinking to manage complexity in high-stakes environments.	
Area 1	Strategic Alignment Behavior Exemplar: Continuously aligns project outcomes with evolving strategic priorities; influences organizational priorities in the areas critical for project success
Area 2	Systems Thinking Behavior Exemplar: Applies and/or promotes application of systems thinking to manage complexity; anticipates cascading impacts and proactively designs for resilience
Area 3	Organizational Navigation Behavior Exemplar: Navigates formal and informal structures and decision-making processes within or across multiple organizations; influences decisions across functions and levels; builds effective networks and leadership coalitions

DOMAIN V PROBLEM-SOLVING—12%

The ability to analyze complex problems, generate innovative solutions, and make sound decisions under pressure. This includes critical thinking, judgment, decision-making in situations of uncertainty and ambiguity, including crises.

Area 1	Critical Thinking Behavior Exemplar: Balances multiple, conflicting sources of, or limited, information; leverages information technologies to collect and process information; invites stakeholder insights and data
Area 2	Decision-Making Behavior Exemplar: Leads resolution of systemic, high-impact issues in uncertain or dynamic conditions using advanced decision frameworks; engages multiple, diverse, and competing stakeholders in time-sensitive decision-making; integrates technology to enhance decision-making and performance
Area 3	Innovation Culture Behavior Exemplar: Leads innovation efforts within the project; pilots and scales novel approaches to address complexity; proactively identifies unmet needs, areas of inefficiencies, and potential for improvement.
Area 4	Crisis Management Behavior Exemplar: Leads cross-team response, reallocating resources to stabilize delivery; communicates transparently with stakeholders under pressure; drives recovery actions and incorporates lessons learned; ensures institutional learning is captured and shared

DOMAIN VI RISK AND UNCERTAINTY MANAGEMENT—14%

The ability to anticipate, assess, and respond to risks and uncertainties in complex project environments. This includes scenario planning and ambiguity navigation to pivot in the face of dynamic and unpredictable conditions.

Area 1	Risk and Scenario Planning Behavior Exemplar: Champions risk-driven decision-making; facilitates and enables scenario-based risk planning across multiple stakeholder groups; defines and implements risk escalation strategies; accepts calculated risks
Area 2	Navigating Ambiguity Behavior Exemplar: Leads teams through ambiguous situations and builds their own capacity to do so; reframes complex problems and guides adaptive planning cycles

DOMAIN VII AGILITY AND RESPONSIVENESS—12%

The ability to respond rapidly and effectively to changing conditions, priorities, and constraints. This includes adaptive prioritization, responsive planning, flexible delivery, and emotional intelligence in dynamic and uncertain environments.

Area 1	Adaptive Prioritization Behavior Exemplar: Leads reprioritization efforts in response to shifting demands; balances competing priorities across workstreams and organizational units; works with partners and suppliers to prioritize project work
Area 2	Responsive Planning Behavior Exemplar: Designs and leads dynamic planning; aligns planning cadence with environmental volatility and strategic shifts; integrates real-time delivery feedback and adapts accordingly
Area 3	Flexibility in Delivery Behavior Exemplar: Drives flexible delivery strategies effectively across teams without disrupting delivery; promotes usage of emerging technologies or ways of working
Area 4	Emotional Intelligence Behavior Exemplar: Models self and social awareness, empathy, and resilience; manages team emotional stability; helps teams navigate stress and uncertainty to maintain performance; adapts own style in recognition of changing situations

DOMAIN VIII CULTURAL AND ECOSYSTEM INTELLIGENCE —10%

The ability to collaborate effectively across diverse cultural and organizational contexts while navigating external ecosystem factors such as sustainability, regulation, and societal impact.

Area 1	Intercultural Collaboration Behavior Exemplar: Leads multicultural teams; integrates diverse perspectives into decision-making; aligns culturally diverse stakeholders to shared goals
Area 2	Ecosystem Intelligence Behavior Exemplar: Integrates ecosystem factors—such as regulatory requirements and sustainability targets—into project planning and delivery; balances conflicting requirements arising from different legal systems and cultural norms; anticipates external influences and adjusts accordingly; promotes practices that align project outcomes with long-term environmental and social value

ADVANCED PROJECT LEADER (APL)[™] CERTIFICATION ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

The Advanced Project Leader (APL)[™] recognizes project professionals who consistently deliver successful project outcomes in high-stakes environments. Eligibility reflects mastery of advanced practice and alignment with the PMI Definition of Complexity and Advanced Project Management Professional Capability Framework.

1. Foundational certification (required)

You must hold an active Project Management Professional (PMP)[®], Program Management Professional (PgMP)[®], or Portfolio Management Professional (PfMP)[®] certification and be in good standing.

2. Pathway to eligibility (enterprise pathway only)

Eligibility to sit for the Advanced Project Leader (APL)[™] exam is limited to candidates who have successfully completed an Advanced Project Leader (APL)[™] evaluation program at a PMI-Accredited Partner Organization.

- Successful completion of a PMI-Accredited Program inherently satisfies the PMI competency and experience requirements for the Advanced Project Leader (APL)[™].
- No additional application narrative, panel review, or experience audit is required beyond standard identity and exam registration steps.

3. Confirmation of competencies and experience

Accredited programs confirm that candidates have demonstrated advanced performance leading complex, high-stakes projects or programs across the PMI components of complexity:

- Structural complexity: Many differentiated components with tight interdependencies; changes in one area can cascade. Requires robust planning, integration, and clear documentation.
- Dynamic complexity: Conditions evolve over time; uncertainty, ambiguity, and emergent behaviors demand continuous sensemaking and adaptive planning.
- Human and sociopolitical complexity: Diverse stakeholders, cultures, and power dynamics; team maturity and geography; requires strong engagement, leadership, and clear

communication.

- Environmental complexity: External forces (market, regulatory, economic, cultural, supply chain, geopolitical, or natural events) that necessitate agile, risk-aware responses.
- Technological complexity: Rapid technology change (e.g., artificial intelligence [AI]), enterprise architecture, data governance, and cybersecurity; balancing improved efficiency with change disruption.
- Organizational complexity: Governance structures, decision rights, and strategy shifts across one or multiple organizations; favors lean governance with empowered, proximate decision-making.

Note: In the current release cycle, no individual pathway is offered. When available in a future release, details will be added to this section.

ADVANCED PROJECT LEADER (APL)[™]

EXAM INFORMATION

The Advanced Project Leader (APL)[™] exam is comprised of 60 questions, including multiple-choice items, multiple-choice situational judgement test (SJT) items and case study items. Of the 60 questions, 10 are considered pretest questions. Pretest questions do not affect the score and are used in exams as an effective and legitimate way to test the validity of future exam questions. Unsourced questions are randomly placed throughout the exam.

Number of Scored Questions	Number of Pretest (Unscored) Questions	Total Exam Questions
50	10	60

Allotted Exam Time
120 Minutes

The allotted time to complete the center-based exam is 120 minutes. It may take you less than the allotted time to complete the exam.

The exam will first display all SJT questions followed by all case study questions.

The exam is preceded by a tutorial and followed by a survey, both of which are optional and take 5 to 15 minutes to complete. The time used to complete the tutorial and survey is not included in the exam time of 120 minutes (2 hours).

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EXAM QUESTION TYPES

Technical Knowledge: The candidate will be presented with multiple-choice questions that will demonstrate their understanding of foundational concepts from the Navigating Complexity Practice Guide, including sources/types of complexity (e.g., organizational, structural, dynamic, environmental), how complexity emerges in projects and systems, and key related models/tools (e.g., cognition/decision-making approaches and leverage points).

Multiple-Choice Situational Judgement Tests (SJTs): A situation will be described followed by a multiple-choice question. The candidate will be presented with four answer options and must select the optimal decision. Only the information provided should be used to determine the optimal decision for that specific situation. **Candidates should assume that they have the authority to make any of the decisions presented as answer options.**

Case Study: The candidate is presented with a detailed scenario or situation on the left side of a split screen (graphic below shows how the split screen will be displayed). After reviewing the case, the candidate will answer a series of questions based on all the information provided. All questions related to the same case will be presented together.

A project manager is working for a company that is launching a new smart home device designed to improve energy efficiency. The product aims to help consumers reduce their energy consumption by automatically adjusting heating, cooling, and lighting based on occupancy and time of day. The project manager has been given a budget of \$500,000 and a timeline of six months to complete the project. The project team consists of engineers, marketers, and sales professionals. A recent market analysis shows a growing demand for eco-friendly products, but competition is fierce with several established brands already in the market. Additionally, the company has set a goal to achieve a 10% market share within the first year of launch.

The engineering team has identified several technical challenges, including ensuring compatibility with existing smart home systems and maintaining user privacy and data security. The marketing team is tasked with creating a compelling campaign that highlights the unique features of the product while addressing consumer concerns about privacy. The sales team is focused on establishing partnerships with retailers and online platforms to maximize distribution channels.

Based on the scenario, what are the key challenges the project manager might face in launching this product, and how should they be prioritized?

- ☐ A. Focus solely on marketing
- ☐ B. Overemphasize technical features
- ☐ C. Delay privacy measures
- ☐ D. Technical compatibility



TAKING THE ADVANCED PROJECT LEADER (APL)[™] EXAM

The Advanced Project Leader (APL)[™] exam is available to take in person at a test center using a computer or it can be taken online with a proctor. Please be sure to review the exam day instructions and check-in procedures as outlined in the [PMI® Certification Handbook](#).

For in-person test center and availability, please make sure to review test centers near you by visiting: <https://www.pearsonvue.com/us/en/pmi.html>.

Online proctored exams will require system tests and an extensive check-in process. Please allow for time prior to the exam to help ensure you complete these processes. For testing online via OnVue online proctored, please make sure you review, and complete necessary system checks by visiting: <https://www.pearsonvue.com/us/en/pmi.html>.

RETAKING THE ADVANCED PROJECT LEADER (APL)[™] EXAM

If you do not pass your first exam attempt, we encourage you to continue studying and retake the exam. You may take the exam up to three times within your 1-year eligibility period. After three attempts, you must wait 1 year from the date of the last exam before you reapply for the certification. This policy is designed to uphold exam security and reduce overexposure of exam questions to individual candidates. However, during this year you are welcome to apply for any other PMI certification.

If your 1-year eligibility period expires without you passing the exam, even if you have not taken it three times, you must reapply for the certification. This policy is designed to uphold eligibility and help ensure all experience included in a candidate's application aligns to the 10-year limit. However, in such a case, you will not be subject to a waiting period.

CONTINUING CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS (CCR) PROGRAM

Once you have successfully earned your Advanced Project Leader (APL)[™], maintain your certification by completing and submitting 60 professional development units (PDUs) every 3 years and paying the certification renewal fee.

For details on the CCR program and instructions on how to earn and track PDUs in CCR, please review the *Continuing Certification Requirements (CCR) Handbook* by visiting <https://www.pmi.org/certifications/certification-resources/maintain>

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REFERENCE MATERIALS

Please be sure to review the Advanced Project Leader (APL)[™] exam preparation materials.

PMI does not endorse specific review courses resources, references, or other materials for certification preparation. The references listed are not inclusive of all resources that may be utilized and should not be interpreted as a guaranteed means of passing the exam.

The Advanced Project Leader (APL)[™] exam is not written according to any single text or singularly supported by any specific reference.