

THE TRUTH
ABOUT GETTING PROMOTED

BY

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Getting promoted through the Weighted Airman Promotions System (WAPS) requires a combination of effective study habits and effective test taking skills. However, the foundation for your success lies within in you...you must decide early in your career that you want to get promoted and commit yourself to a routine that maximizes your opportunity to score well on both the SKT and PDG. This process begins by answering a few questions and following these basic guidelines:

How soon do I begin studying?

I recommend that you begin studying no earlier than **4 months prior** to your test date. This will allow you to thoroughly cover all of your required materials in a timely but methodical manner without cramming. Four months is plenty of time to study for a couple of 100 question tests. Extending your studies beyond 4 months will drag this process out and likely cause you to lose focus at the end (the time that your focus needs to be sharpest). The key is to commit yourself to studying and limit all other distractions. Focus primarily on studying during this time and not taking college classes, playing intramural sports, or volunteering after hours at the Salvation Army. **Very Important:** let your spouse/family know that for the next 4 months you will be spending a lot of time at the library and in your home office preparing for promotion testing.

Where do I study?

Try to limit your study time to a few places like the **library, a conference room** in your work center or a **quiet room in your home** (preferably one without a television). The key is to limit your focus to the material that you are studying and eliminate all other distractions. I have found that the library is the best place to study due to its mandatory quiet hours and lack of other distractions like televisions, radios, etc.... You can always find an empty table in one of the quiet rooms there.

I try not to study at work but if I absolutely have to, I never study in my office or at my desk and of course, I never study during duty hours. I either come in 90 minutes prior to my normal report time (allow 30 minutes for coffee/breakfast) or I stay after work when everyone else has gone home. I usually find a small conference room or area with just a table and study for 1 hour before going home. I really try not to study at my house! There are just way too many distractions and even if I can find a quiet room or office, it's usually where my computer, radio or TV is located and the temptation is just too great! The only time I study at home, is early in the morning before everyone else wakes up and I always do it at the kitchen table. (This would be impossible during the day)

What time of day should I study?

Optimal times during the weekday are 0530-0630 in the morning, 1200-1300 during lunch and 1700-1800 after work. The key is to try to study at the same time every single day during the 4 month period. It would be great if you could hit at least 2 of them every day but realize that other priorities, family, job, fatigue will cause you to miss a session every now and then.

Optimal time on the weekends would be 0830-0930 both Saturday and Sunday morning. Yes, that means you have to get up early on your weekends but remember, it's for a worthy cause and it's only for 4 months. Never deviate from these prescribed times! If you get a wild hair and decide to study on Saturday night when you would normally be partying or watching "Barnyard" with your son...forget about it! Stick to the prescribed study times and enjoy the rest of your time.

How long should my study sessions last?

Study sessions should never last more than **1-hour!** That means if you make all 3 sessions (morning, lunch time and after work) you will study for a max of 3 hours per day for 120 days. That's plenty of time to prepare yourself for that 100%!

I recommend you study for 30 minutes, take a quick break (walk around, drink a coke, refill your coffee, stretch, etc...) and then study for 30 more minutes and call it a session. This method is much more effective than sitting down for 3-4 hours at a time hopelessly reading through material while you're thinking about your plans for the weekend. **No more than 1 hour!**

How do I study?

Here's where "the rubber meets the road"! How well you score will be a direct reflection of how much time and effort you put into studying!

Step 1 Set your testing performance goal (What do you want to score on the test?)

This will determine how much time and effort you put into studying. This is the easiest step in the process and I will actually help you with this one: **YOU'RE GOAL WHEN TAKING ANY TEST SHOULD BE TO SCORE 100%!!!!** Anything less than that will cause you to sell yourself short and not optimize your chance to get that next stripe.

I used to be an advocate of the popular "promotion calculator" where you punched in all of your weighted factors into an excel program and it gave you an estimate of what you needed to score to get promoted. This is not only a rough estimate based upon the previous year's cutoff score for your career field, but it only provides you with the score you would need to match the very last select from the previous year. It essentially sets you up to barely get your foot in the door. Besides, if you think you only need to score a 50 to get promoted, how much time and effort are you going to put into studying?

Forget about calculators and last year! Try your best to score a 100% and you will give yourself the best chance at promotion. At this point in the game, it's the only one (or two) of the weighted factors (TIS, TIG, decorations, PDG, SKT, and EPR's) that you can control. Who cares if you don't have a medal or if you've only been a SSgt for 2 years and have only been in the AF for 5 years? Who cares if you have a 4 EPR and didn't get the max 135 points in that

category? You can make up all those points by competing well on your promotion tests...so aim for the stars and study to score 100%!

Step 2 Inventory your study material and develop a schedule based upon 3 hours of study time per day for 4 months.

Here's a sample breakdown of a dental inventory:

1. PDG – 18 Chapters
 2. CDC Set 1 – 5 Volumes
 3. CDC Set 2 – 3 Volumes
 4. AFI 47-101 Managing AF Dental Services – 117 pages
- To properly read, highlight and take notes on 1 chapter in the PDG should take approximately 3-6 hours depending on the length of the chapter.
Total time required = 108 hours (18 chapters X 6 hours) or 36 days
 - To do the same for 1 volume of CDC's should take approximately 7 days or 21 hrs (You had 30 days to complete each volume in UGT but I doubt if you spent 3 hours a day on them!)
Total time required = 168 hours (8 volumes X 21 hours) or 56 days
 - A 117 page AFI should take approximately 3-4 days or 12 hours.

So let's put all of this together and develop our plan of action for the next 120 days:

Test Cycle begins: Feb 08

My study cycle begins: 1 Oct 08 (4 months prior to testing cycle)

Approach: I recommend using a combination of 2 days to study your PDG and 3 days to study your CDC's and AFI's. Your purpose for studying this information is to memorize as much information as you can for a short period of time. If you study your PDG for the 1st month and your CDCs for the next two – chances are you will do very well on your SKT and not so well on the PDG. This system also allows you to mix it up and break up the monotony that comes with studying.

Total Days available	120 (4 months)
Days required to prepare CDC's	-56
Days required to prepare PDG	-36
Days required to prepare AFI	-4
<u>Days left for final review</u>	<u>24</u>

Remember, try not to take more than 2 days on one chapter of the PDG or 7 days on one volume of your CDC's! This will optimize your time, allow you to stay on schedule and leave plenty of time for review.

Step 3 Begin Studying!

The most effective process for studying for promotion comes in 4 phases:

Phase 1 – Read/Highlight

Phase 2 – Annotate

Phase 3 – Review

Phase 4 - Validate

The key to effective studying as in anything else is preparation. You have to prepare your battlefield in order to properly neutralize your enemy (WAPS).

Let's look at the specifics of each phase:

Phase 1 – Read and Highlight

The process begins with you reading the information contained in your PDG, CDC's or AFI's and highlighting the information you think is testable. This should be done simultaneously; highlight important information as you read through each paragraph. This can be an extensive process, particularly for some of the longer chapters in the PDG! Don't be surprised if you finish with a chapter and almost every word is highlighted...this will depend on what you think is important and/or testable. It's better to have too much than too little!

This phase should be done 1 chapter at a time and should take no more than 2 days (6 hours) per chapter- remember you have to focus and commit yourself to studying. I recommend that you begin with a chapter that captures your interest as opposed to starting with chapter 1. The chapter on Dress and Appearance is always a good one to begin with; it will help you get into the flow of reading through all the material.

I also recommend that you remove the spine from your PDG (tear it apart) and place the individual chapters in a 3 ring binder. This allows you to isolate and focus on specific chapters and not be overwhelmed by the thought of having to read the entire book. Your CDC's are already broken out but feel free to separate longer volumes.

Remember...highlight until your heart is content!

Phase 2 – Annotate

Write down everything that you have highlighted! Sounds like a lot of work but trust me, this is the most important step in the process. Think about it, why do we write down our "to do" lists, or make notes to ourselves every day? It's because we tend to remember things that we actually take the time to write down more than those things that we simply read!

Purchase a small notebook (spiral bound or one of the little green books we use in the military). The key here is that you won't be writing things down word for word but in short bulleted notes. For example if you were studying this manual it would look something like this:

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Annotate

- read info in PDG/CDC/AFI and highlight at same time
- better to have too much than too little
- 1 chapter at a time
- Begin with Dress and Appearance

Again, the extent to which you highlight and annotate information depends on your interpretation of what's important and what may be testable.

I take annotation a step further by typing out the bullet notes that I write down in my notebooks. This step is not necessary in this process but it can help ingrain the information into your memory bank. Only type out your bullets if you have the time or if you can't read your own handwriting!

Phase 3 – Review

At the end of Phase 2 you should have a PDG, a set or two of CDC's and an AFI all highlighted from cover to cover. Additionally you should have 5-10 notebooks (depending on their size) of bulleted notes that directly correspond to what you have highlighted in each of these books.

Follow the same routine of CDC/AFI on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and PDG on Tuesday and Thursday. Remember, Saturday and Sunday are your flex days and should be used to tie up any loose ends from the week.

Follow these steps when reviewing:

1. Read through all of the material you have highlighted in your respective books
2. Read through your hand-written bulleted notes
3. Read through your typed bulleted notes

Repeat these steps as often as possible with every chapter/volume of your study material as often as you can. Remember to stick with your optimal study times.

This should be the extent of your studying the last 3-4 weeks of your allotted study time but may vary based upon your actual test date and how many breaks or lapses you had during your study period.

Phase 4 - Validate

Now, I'm sure you are wondering why I haven't mentioned electronic study materials like PDG Gold and Master Your CDC's. That's because these tools should only be used to validate this entire process. That means you should only take the online tests after or during the review phase of your studies. Using them any earlier than that is the equivalent of trying to validate how well you have neutralized the enemy before you've fired any shots or made any tactical maneuvers!

These tools can be effective but can set you up for failure if not used properly. Don't begin your studying process utilizing these tests or introduce them too early. Even if you get comfortable with these programs they only introduce you to a limited amount of information. Becoming comfortable with those targeted questions without understanding the concept in its entirety will surely cause you to miss out on key information during your studies.

Validate your CDC's by taking the End-of-Volume exercises. Again, wait until you have properly prepared and reviewed all of the materials to begin testing yourself.

This process can be very demanding and requires a lot of focus and commitment to sticking with the strenuous schedule. However, you will find yourself well prepared and extremely confident on test day and very pleased with your score and the promotion results!

Key Points to remember:

1. Begin studying approximately 4 months (120 days) prior to testing
2. Study at the library, in a conference room at work, or a quiet room at home
3. Study every day (3 times per day during the week and once on Saturday and Sunday)
4. Study for 30 minutes, take a break and finish with 30 more minutes (never go past 1 hour!)
5. Optimal study times are 0530-0630, 1200-1300, and 1700-1800
6. Set your performance testing goal at 100%
7. Inventory your study material and develop a schedule/plan of action
8. Spend 2 days a week on PDG and 3 days on CDC/AFI (use weekend's as flex time)
9. Limit your extracurricular activities during your study period
10. Read and highlight information you think is testable from your study materials
11. Write down everything you highlighted (short bullet statements)
12. Use the last month to review everything you highlighted and wrote down
13. Validate your effectiveness with PDG Gold or other computer based studying programs
14. Be committed!

Effective Test Taking

So now that you've prepared yourself to take these tests, what should you do now?

Here are just a few test taking tips that with further cement your success and maximize your potential to earn that next stripe.

Pay close attention to these things...I would hate to see you spend 4 months preparing and then allow your nerves or some other distraction ruin your chances at promotion.

How should I spend the day prior to my test date?

Take the day off prior to promotion testing (take the week off if possible). Continue your normal study routine but spend about half of the day prior reviewing and half relaxing.

Be sure to get a good night's sleep – mental or physical fatigue will cause a lapse in concentration; especially when you get near the end of the test.

What should I do the morning of my test?

Wake up extra early! If you normally get up at 0500, set your alarm for 0400 this day. Leave yourself room to manage any emergencies or unexpected situations (traffic, flat tire, kids, left your ID card at home, etc...) There will be enough stress to deal with already so make sure you have plenty of time to manage any last minute issues.

Eat a small breakfast. Testing can be a very strenuous process that requires a great amount of energy and focus. A light breakfast (fruit, yogurt, pastry, or cereal) will make sure you have the right amount of energy to make it through the test. Don't go to Bojangles or the Biscuit Kitchen and eat a giant breakfast with biscuits and gravy and pancakes – this will sit on your stomach, make you tired and possibly cause you some stomach problems! Keep it light!

How early should I arrive at the testing sight?

Since you woke up an hour early and if there are no last minute issues, you should arrive at the testing site at least 30-45 minutes before your scheduled test time. Use the extra time to sit in your car, do last minute reviews or meditate. Clear your mind of all distractions and focus solely on the task at hand. Be confident in yourself! If you have followed the regimen described above you should be well prepared so avoid negative talk and feelings of uncertainty. You can do it!

What if I'm nervous?

It's natural to be nervous before any significant event you partake in. The best way to combat nervousness is preparation. Again, if you have prepared yourself you can easily overcome the nervous feeling you get prior to testing. Proper breathing is the key to keeping yourself calm. Also, clear your mind once you get in the testing room; there's a significant amount of time

between the time you arrive there and the time you are allowed to begin taking your test (admin time mostly filled with instructions from the test proctor). During this time you should be thinking about absolutely nothing! Not what you did yesterday, what you are going to do when you leave, are things okay at work, am I going to fail, did I study hard enough, etc... None of this matters at this point in the game so don't fill your brain with idle thoughts that only serve as distracters. Listen to the instructions and prepare yourself to knock this test out!

Now that I have my test what should I do?

The very first thing you should do before you open your test booklet is take 3 deep breaths. Don't be pressured by everyone around you opening their books and aimlessly flipping back and forth from page to page. The 3 deep breaths will help you to relax and focus on the task at hand. You'll be amazed and how well this works.

Prior to looking at the first question, take your scratch paper and jot down any ideas, charts, steps or rules that you think you will need to answer specific questions. This is perfectly legal because only you will see the scratch paper and the proctor will take it from you at the end of the test. Most people don't use this seemingly unimportant tool to their advantage. Again, don't worry if your neighbor has already flipped to page 4 by this time (he probably started studying way before you too)...you have plenty of time to take this test and you are well prepared!

Pretend that you are in a bubble and no one is in the room except yourself. Don't let people's idle pencil knocking against the desk, leg shaking, clearing their throat or sighs of uncertainty distract you from your mission. Stay Focused!!!

How should I approach the questions?

One question at a time! Of course you can only answer one question at a time but here are a few tips to maximize your focus and ultimate outcome:

Mentally break the test into 10 sections of 10 questions (answer sheet partially does this for you with 5 columns of 20 rows of answer bubbles).

Answer 1 question at a time and pretend that you are taking 10 mini-tests – this will allow you to narrow your focus and improve your concentration.

Take a deep breath after each question before you move on to the next one. This is an important step and helps you clear your mind of all the information you processed to answer the previous question before moving on. Too often, we try to answer a question about disciplinary standards after we just spent 2 minutes racking our brain about how many F-16's are in Air Combat Command. This is particularly important if you are not sure that you answered the previous question correctly – either way you have to let it go for now and move on to the next one.

If you come to a question that you are unsure of, spend no more than 3-4 minutes trying to figure it out before you skip it or take an educated guess at it. Either way you have to move on...don't spend 15 minutes trying to figure out one question.

If you decide to skip a question, place a small mark beside it in your test booklet (you can't make stray marks on your answer sheet) and write the number down on your scratch paper. It's imperative that you remember to go back and answer these questions even more important that you skip the same spaces on your answer key! Don't worry if you have to skip 2-3 questions in a row just don't let them slow you down and kill your confidence.

How do I select the best answer?

First and foremost, read the question in its entirety and ensure you understand exactly what the question is asking.

Secondly, read each answer in its entirety. Don't just pick what you think is the best answer; justify why you believe it to be correct. This process is sometimes done by justifying why certain answers are incorrect, eliminating them and giving yourself a 50/50 chance at success. For example I was once faced with this question on a promotion test:

“Who is the Roadrunner's arch nemesis who chased him all around the desert?”

- a. Bugs Bunny
- b. Winnie the Pooh
- c. Scooby Doo
- d. Wile E. Coyote

Now I must have skipped this section during my 4 month study period so I had no idea what the correct answer was. However, I did know that:

- Bugs Bunny was on Looney Toons just like Road Runner so it could be him
- Winnie the Pooh was never on Looney Toons and is way to slow to chase Road Runner (eliminate this answer)
- Scooby Doo had his own show and rarely chased anyone because he was always running himself (eliminate this answer)
- Wile E. Coyote – not quite sure who that is but I recall a scrawny wolf-looking guy always using ACME products so it could be him

I effectively eliminated 2 answers and gave myself a fighting chance even though I wasn't sure of the correct answer. I then conducted further analysis with these two choices:

- Bugs Bunny, after all was a rabbit and rabbits don't eat birds!
 - I wasn't quite sure what or who Wile E. Coyote was but the last name (Coyote) had me thinking that he was at least a carnivore (meat eater)
 - I was still unsure but based upon my analysis and my best guess I selected
- d. Wile E. Coyote

I later found out that this was the correct answer and was probably the one question that catapulted me to promotion to MSgt!!

Okay...let's be serious for a minute! Although this is obviously not a real test question, pay attention to the process that I used to give myself the best opportunity to select the correct answer. The key is not to haplessly guess...if you have followed the regimen we discussed earlier...you may not know all the answers but you will at least be in the ballpark on every question.

What should I do after I've answered all the questions?

First, go back to any questions you might have skipped and go through the steps above. Make sure you answer all the questions...guessing can actually help you if you get lucky but leaving it blank will surely hurt you!

Next, do a quick but thorough review of your entire exam. Read each question and identify the answer you selected. Then look at your answer key and ensure that you filled in the correct corresponding bubble. Don't retake the test...your first choice is usually correct!
Should I change any answers?

I'm not all against changing answers but just realize the potential to change an answer from right to wrong is just as great as the potential to change one from wrong to right. Only change an answer if you have since received some divine revelation (or remembered a key point later in the test) and can justify the change using the Road Runner method.

Again, if you have prepared well...the necessity to change answers will be minimized because you will be confident in your knowledge of the related subjects.

So now what?

Once your test is over you should do one thing...**RELAX!** It's been four long months of studying and you deserve a break. There's no need to worry about what you scored, if you'll get promoted or if you'll be the number one non-select who missed TSgt by .01 points!

You have done your part by dedicating yourself to 3 hours of studying a day for the last four months and maintaining your focus all the way through the last test question. There's nothing else you can do at this point. Go join your intramural softball team, take a college class and volunteer at the Salvation Army...the test results will be out in a couple of months and you can plan your promotion party.

You can spend the next couple of days searching through your PDG and CDC's for the questions that were on the test and pulling your nose hairs out because you're not sure if you answered them correctly or not...but what's the point? Your analysis of how many you got right will likely be grossly inaccurate and it really doesn't matter for next year because you **will** get promoted and won't test again for the next 2-3 years. Relax and enjoy life again!

Your ability to get promoted is in your own hands so you must commit yourself to some methodical study regimen that will prepare you for WAPS testing. Hopefully this system will work for you. Congratulations and good luck!

“Success always comes when preparation meets opportunity”

Henry Hartman