

ARE EXAM TIPS AND STUDY TECHNIQUES

(These tips and techniques have been prepared by NOMA member Paul Kyegombe to help NOMA candidates take and pass the ARE. Paul used these techniques successfully in 2003, taking and passing all nine divisions in three weeks. If you have a question or comment, feel free to email Paul at pkwegombe@archtector.com.)

1. TIME is the most important factor determining your success, both during preparation and in the exam room.
Did you know that you could know all the answers but still fail the exam if it takes you too long to remember? Time management is particularly critical during the graphic tests.
2. AIM HIGH. NCARB has never published the official pass mark; so don't assume it is 50% or 40%. Go for 80% or even 100%.
3. The ARE exams are computerized and are more of a quiz than a traditional exam in college. Questions come fast at you and it almost feels like a firing squad.
4. Take the exam SERIOUSLY. Prepare thoroughly and take time off work before exam day to focus solely on the exam. Make sure you clear your mind of office projects and deadlines.
5. Know what to do on exam day. Get to bed early the day before so that your brain is fresh and alert in the morning. Don't stay up studying all night before the exam. Have a nutritious breakfast, do a little exercise, pray and listen to motivational music. Don't drink a lot of fluids so that you won't have to go to the bathroom during the exam. Get to the test center early, preferably an hour before.
6. Learn how to answer questions that involve combinations of various options. Look out for questions that require elimination of an option. For example, the following are correct EXCEPT.
7. For the graphic exams, it is more important to know how to use the computer program than how to solve the problems. In other words, more than 50% of your success lies upon knowing how to use the ARE computer program.
8. In addition to studying reference books, take practice questions under exam conditions. Time yourself, switch off the TV, radio and cell phone. Mark yourself and keep a record of your scores to monitor your progress. Take all the graphic exams under exam conditions as well.

9. Develop a specific method with detailed steps for solving the graphic questions. This is most crucial for the Design vignette. Practice this method and follow it step by step.
10. Did you know that some of the graphic vignettes have only one possible solution? Identify those vignettes and be aware of this fact when you take them.
11. The Design vignette is not an architectural design contest.
12. Amazingly, the graphic vignettes are very similar to the NCARB test examples.
13. Yes, there are some calculations in the structural exams. Fortunately, there aren't detailed engineering calculations, but rather simple computations to test your understanding of structural principles.
14. Contrary to the published NCARB pass rates, the lateral forces exam isn't the easiest. But the MEP is one of the toughest, true to the published pass rates.
15. A unique feature of the MEP exam is that it contains several diagrams and photos depicting the application of engineering systems.
16. The Pre-Design exam covers a very wide scope of knowledge including design, zoning, law, history, politics and music just to name a few.
17. Know all the AIA document names and numbers. Study the major provisions of the Architect- Owner agreement and the Owner- Contractor agreement and how they relate to each other.
18. Know the Masterspec division numbers and their names. Masterspec was recently overhauled, and the current system is Masterspec 2004. Some division names changed, for example Windows and Doors is now Openings.