



Navigating the CCNA 201-301 Exam: My Journey to Success

Having successfully passed the CCNA 200-301 exam on my initial try, I felt it was crucial to share my journey towards success to assist others in achieving a positive outcome, ideally on their first attempt as well. Admittedly, I grapple with test-taking. Adding to the challenge, the night preceding the exam, I couldn't sleep at all, leaving me mentally fatigued even before the exam started. And to make matters worse, I entered the test center with a prevailing sense of impending doom. However, I managed to reassure myself (yes, I'm a pro at self-talk) that if I were to fail the exam on my first attempt, it wasn't the end of the world; it was simply an opportunity to identify and improve upon my weaknesses while I psych myself up for round two.

After two hours of intense laser-like focus, and with the clock constantly in my sight, I wrapped up the exam with five minutes to spare. As I exited the testing room, a young lady handed me the examination report, complete with an unflattering photo of myself accompanied by the delightful verdict: 'PASS.' I left the testing center with a grin stretching from ear to ear, still amazed.

10 Essential Tips for Acing the CCNA Exam

I don't want to risk getting into any trouble by sharing specific details about the exam, but here's what I did and what I can safely recommend to others on the same journey. If you're aiming to ace the CCNA exam, here are some steps to follow:

1. **Understand the Exam Blueprint:** Familiarize yourself with the CCNA exam blueprint provided by Cisco. It outlines the topics covered in the exam, helping you focus your study efforts effectively. Note: The last date to take the CCNA v1.0 is August 19, 2024. You can access the blueprint here: <https://learningnetwork.cisco.com/s/ccna-exam-topics>

2. **Study Resources:** I used the official Cisco Cert Guide CCNA 200-301, Vol 1 & 2 by Wendell Odom. Additionally, websites like the Cisco Learning Network offer valuable official Cisco documentation. If you're taking the CCNA v1.1 after August 19, 2024, consider getting the newer books by Wendell Odom published this summer. Alternatively, you can use the older v1.0 books and supplement them with your own self-study materials, as the updates are minor. I have both the hardcover and e-books, which I utilize when traveling. <https://learningnetwork.cisco.com/s/>

3. **Tutorial Videos:** Enhancing your learning experience with additional study materials is highly recommended, and one valuable resource is the collection of instructional videos available on Udemy. One course that I particularly enjoy is the 'CCNA 200-301 Exam Complete Course with Jeremy's IT Lab.' This course covers all the topics outlined in the CCNA 200-301 exam blueprint, ensuring learners gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. Moreover, Jeremy McDowell's courses often incorporate hands-on labs and demonstrations, which effectively reinforce theoretical knowledge.

<https://www.udemy.com/course/complete-cisco-ccna-200-301-course/?couponCode=ACCAGE0923>

4. **Hands-on Practice:** Set up a lab environment using Cisco Packet Tracer or actual Cisco equipment if possible. Practice configuring routers, switches, and networks, as hands-on experience is crucial for understanding networking concepts. Packet Tracer is more than enough for the exam and is free, making it a viable option if you're on a budget. <https://www.netacad.com/courses/packet-tracer>

5. **Review Fundamentals:** Ensure you have a strong understanding of networking fundamentals, including TCP/IP, VLANs, STP, IPv4 addressing, routing protocols, OSPF, ACLs, and network security principles. These concepts form the foundation of the CCNA exam. If you struggle with understanding subnetting like I did, I highly recommend Todd Lammle's older book, "CCNA Routing and Switching Complete Study Guide, Second Edition. You can find a used copy of his book for under \$10 on Amazon. Todd's subnetting methods made it possible for me to learn how to subnet in my head—now that's *Krazy* with a 'K'! <https://www.amazon.com/Routing-Switching-Complete-Study-Guide/dp/1119288282>

6. **Time Management:** Develop a study schedule and allocate specific time slots for studying different topics. Manage your time effectively to cover all exam objectives before the exam date. Even if your schedule is tight, dedicating a small amount of time each day can have a significant impact. Despite working 50-60 hours a week, I made a commitment to study daily. Whether on the bus during my commute or during lunch breaks, I devoted a little time to studying, and it truly made a difference.
7. **Review and Reinforce:** Continuously review and reinforce your understanding of topics. Use flashcards, summaries, and revision techniques to solidify concepts. Anki flashcards are useful for improving memory retention and enabling spaced repetition learning. Alternatively, traditional paper and pen flashcards, while low-tech, are effective in achieving the same goal. <https://apps.ankiweb.net>
8. **Cover your butt:** If you're investing \$300 in the exam, consider upgrading to the CCNA Exam Safeguard Offer Plus. This comprehensive package not only provides a safety net in case you don't pass on the first attempt but also offers a second chance at success. Additionally, the bundle includes a review tool to assess your knowledge and skills, featuring 300 questions and 15 lab exercises. One caveat is that you'll have 90 days from the date of purchase to schedule and complete both of your Cisco certification exam attempts if necessary. That's the route I took, but make sure to purchase the bundle only when you're ready to take the test. <https://learningnetworkstore.cisco.com/cisco-study-bundles>
9. **Stay Updated:** Keep yourself updated with any changes or updates to the CCNA exam blueprint or syllabus. Cisco regularly updates its certification exams to reflect changes in networking technologies. <https://learningnetwork.cisco.com/s/ccna>
10. **Keeping Your Cool:** It's a familiar saying come exam day: stay calm and focused. Easier said than done, right? Instead of fixating on the outcome or potential mishaps, focus on the here and now; be in the moment! Take each question as it comes, reading carefully and answering to the best of your ability. Remember to manage your time effectively, avoiding getting bogged down by difficult questions.

By following these steps and maintaining a consistent study routine, you'll boost your chances of successfully passing the CCNA exam. Oh, and don't forget to get a good night's sleep before the exam 😊 Best of luck!

Did you find these tips helpful? Let me know!

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