



5 Reasons for Taking the CP Exam

by Joelle Taylor

Take a moment and ask yourself a very important career question, “Why have I not taken NALA’s Certified Paralegal exam?” NALA’s voluntary Certified Paralegal/Certified Legal Assistant exam is a nationally recognized exam that tests the skills and knowledge of paralegals through five sections for the federal system and laws including Communications, Ethics, Legal Research, Judgment & Analytical Ability, and Substantive Law. The Substantive Law section is further divided into five subsections. The examinee must take General Law and chooses four out of nine available legal subject. The available choices are Litigation, Criminal, Family, Estate Planning/Probate, Administrative, Bankruptcy, Contracts, Business Organization, and Real Estate. NALA reviews the test questions regularly and updates them to fit new laws.

Here are some discouraging and outdated reasons people have used to delay taking the test:

1. Inconvenient Testing Time
2. Limited Testing Sites
3. Cost
4. Specialized Practice Area
5. Extensive Study

Well, I have great news! As of September 2010, NALA has updated the test to help more paralegals take the exam and overcome some of the above excuses. This update includes changing the testing delivery from paper-pencil to computerized format and publishing the most recent edition of the CP Review Manual. This third edition was published in October 2010 to incorporate new laws and procedural updates from the last twelve years. These changes to the manual and to the test will facilitate easy test taking and limit many obstacles for the busy working person. The content of the test did not change, but NALA did remove the

questions on the Judgment & Analytical section, so only an essay remains that concentrates on the person’s writing skills.

CONVENIENT TESTING TIMES

In addition to the move to computers, NALA has opened the testing window from a two-day period, three times per year to an entire month occurring three sessions per year. The testing windows are now scheduled from January 1st–31st, May 1st–31st, and September 1st–30th. The examinee has two years to successfully complete the exam before NALA requires a new exam fee and application. This schedule gives more flexibility and control to the examinee and allows him or her to choose a manageable timetable to fit with personal and employment obligations. The former paper-pencil method crammed eight hours of testing plus travel, breaks, and lunch into two days and the examinee walked away as a temporary zombie drained of all emotions, desires, and thoughts until the brain could reboot. Now, the examinee can sit for each of the five test sections, at a time and location that is convenient to them, which can be a minimum three-day period, over four weeks, or over multiple testing windows giving time for family or community events. Spreading out the sections also will allow an individual to focus on a particular topic, take that test, have a few days rest, then repeat with the next subject until, voilà, the test is done and you can still function as a human being.

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MORE TESTING LOCATIONS

With the expanded testing windows, NALA requires the test be proctored at ACT Testing Centers or other approved sites. This change opens over 200 locations and allows paralegals in more remote areas or with low number of examinees to test without traveling out of state. However, not all ACT Testing Centers are easily accessible. Utah has locations in Sandy and Monticello. If the testing center is not in a convenient location, the individual can take the test in another state or there are options for other testing sites. Law firms and schools can apply to be testing sites with NALA for no cost. A few of the requirements to be a testing center include solid internet connection, available computers, and two proctors. All requirements are listed at www.nala.org. Persons interested in becoming a proctor have a separate application at no cost. Proctors can be attorneys, certified paralegals, HR managers, or paralegal program directors or teachers.

COST OF EXAM

With the computerized overhaul, cost to NALA for the test would be expected to increase, however NALA kept the exam fees the same. The total cost of taking the test may increase. The ACT Testing Centers and other approved sites are allowed to charge for each subject scheduled at its location. Here are some tips on how to lower your additional costs:

Buy Second-Hand

The published resources may be found online or at college bookstores at a discount. These resources include Virginia Koerselman Newman, *Certified Paralegal Exam Review Manual* (3rd Ed. 2010); *Certified Paralegal – Mock Examination and Study Guide* (4th Ed. 2005); and William Strunk, Jr. & E.B. White, *The Elements of Style* (4th Ed. 1999). Other materials can be useful and most can be found at a public library at no cost. The local paralegal associations may have information on anyone looking to sell his or her materials. In addition, if your employer has a law library, the materials may be available for your use.

Fees Waived for Military

NALA provides a waiver of the test fees under available G.I. Bills if you or your spouse is a member of the military. Details are provided at NALA's website, www.nala.org and included in the application form.

Request Employment or School Become a Testing Site

The approved testing sites may choose to charge each test taker or not charge. The sites also can choose to have the test available to certain groups or open to the public. So, if you are a student or a paralegal, talk to your supervisor about having your school or firm become a testing site. Each site needs two proctors who must apply to NALA for approval and also may choose to charge fees. Any choices the applicant makes are included at the submission of the application. The application process is easy and there is no cost to apply. The approved ACT Testing Centers include fees that cover both its site and the proctors.

Covered Fees

Although our nation is down in the finances, this test is an investment for you and your firm. Your employer may be willing to pay some of the cost of the exam or the resource materials. It does not hurt to ask.

EXPAND YOUR EXPERIENCE

You may think that it has been too long and your experience is too specialized. Well, here is your opportunity to refresh your skills and knowledge. This will show you and your attorney that you are an even greater asset to the practice. The various facets of law are interrelated such that a holistic view of the law will benefit you in your field of practice. Why not have this kind of an advantage that will promote your own success and the success of your employer?

Perhaps you do not have enough experience in a specific practice area. This test will provide you with a basic starting point and after you have successfully completed the Certified Paralegal exam, you can focus your attention on the Advanced Paralegal Certification in your desired specialty. NALA provides these additional exams and there are currently eleven possible subjects with one or two new subjects instated per year. That is another article for another time or you may check out NALA's website for more details.

STUDY OPTIONS

This test requires dedication, time, and extensive studying. However, you do not need to do it alone. There are local study groups, online study courses by NALA, and even college courses available. These options are additional costs after the materials

and the exam fees, but their benefits outweigh the costs. The study groups and college classes provide a disciplined time schedule and social support that is a great help. The online courses are precise and each area of focus coincides with one of the exam subjects. NALA now provides members with a yearly gift certificate that they can apply toward the cost of these online study courses.

Now consider why you *should* take the exam. Your reasons may be one or more of the following:

1. Increase Marketability
2. Credential Nationally Recognized
3. Higher Billing Rate
4. Accepted in Place of Bachelor's Degree
5. Personal Satisfaction

MARKETABILITY

The CP/CLA test requires examinees to demonstrate knowledge of general law and legal skills with basic information on specialized subjects. Completion of this exam shows your devotion to continuing legal education and progression and makes you a more desirable and effective legal staff member. The Certified Paralegal designation may open doors in the job market and provides more opportunities to change positions.

Nationally Recognized

Paralegals can use the CP or CLA credential throughout the United States without any further testing. Each region has a preferred title for the paralegal and if you need to re-locate, the

credential is interchangeable. You also may ask NALA to change the designation without having to re-test. After passing the exam, you must maintain the certification with fifty continuing legal education credits (CLE) every five years. CLEs are available through the Utah State Bar, online courses, college courses, and through local paralegal associations.

Higher Billing Rate

Money runs the world. The paralegal billing rate your attorney uses in fee applications may be increased to a higher market rate. *See Missouri v. Jenkins*, 491 U.S. 274, 287-89 (1989). This gives a little extra to your employer and makes you invaluable to the firm.

In Lieu of Bachelor's Degree

Programs that offer a bachelor's degree in paralegal studies are scarce in our state. The CP/CLA designation is widely accepted here and in other states in place of a four-year degree. It may open opportunities that were previously not available to you based on a lack of higher education.

INDIVIDUAL GRATIFICATION

What better way to love your career than to continue learning and becoming a better paralegal. This exam not only opens more doors, but is also a great accomplishment and adds prestige to your title.

Please take advantage of this wonderful opportunity to take the Certified Paralegal/Certified Legal Assistant exam and enhance your professional career.

The Paralegal of the Year Award

Presented by the Paralegal Division of the Utah State Bar and the Utah Paralegal Association, is the top award to recognize individuals who have shown excellence as a paralegal. This award recognizes this achievement. We invite you to submit nominations of those individuals who have met this standard. Please consider taking the time to recognize an outstanding paralegal. Nominating a paralegal is the perfect way to ensure that their hard work is recognized not only by their organization but by the legal community. This will be their opportunity to shine. Nomination forms and additional information are available by contacting Suzanne Potts at spotts@clarksondraper.com. The deadline for nominations is April 2012. The award will be presented at the Paralegal Day luncheon held in May 2012.