

Five Steps to A+ Certification Success

For Exams 220-1001 Hardware & 220-1002 Software

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Page | 1

NOTE: This report is not aimed at teaching you the subject matter knowledge to pass the exam. This is a paper about exam structure, pass scores, question structure and type, as well as what you can expect from succeeding at the A+ exam.

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CONTENTS

- How the exam is made and why you should care.
- A+ Requires two exams.
- How many questions are there and how are they distributed?
- What is the passing score in plain English?
- The question types you will see on the exam.
- A brief note on exam time management

How the exam is made and why you should care

Industry representatives from the leading computer vendors set the Exam Objectives. This means that, based on, their day to day needs, they define which skills the exam should address. In this phase of the exam definition the industry representatives also decide what areas to prioritize over others. They do that by assigning different weights to the different Exam Objectives (more on this later). Once these areas of expertise have been established by the industry representatives the next step is to write exam questions within those areas of expertise. This is done by Subject Matter Experts – SMEs. These are experts in the various computer fields that know which questions will help find out if a candidate knows the topics covered by the Exam Objectives. There are a few more steps but I am not going to bore you with the details. Here's your take home from this though; the exam objectives are subject to interpretation. Why? Because when the exam objectives are handed over by the industry representatives the SMEs read in to these what *they* see. Now, most of the time it's what you and I would expect. However there will be cases where there is a difference of views. This means that you have to read the objectives very carefully and make sure you understand each of them. Don't interpret them too narrowly since the process does leave the SMEs with room for interpretation.

A+ Certification Requires two exam

To become A+ Certified you need to pass two exams: A+ Exam 220-1001 that is focused on hardware skills and knowledge and A+ Exam 220-1002 that focuses on various operating system issues. The A+ Certification, like all CompTIA exams, is organized around its list of Exam Objectives that are published on their website. These Exam Objectives consist of a handful of "Main Domains" (the high level topic definition) and under each of the Main Domains, "Sub-Objectives" that narrow down to the specifics of what you should know in preparation of the exam. Here are the main domains of both exams with their relative weights:

A+ Exam 220-1001 aka Core 1

| Domain | Percentage of Examination |
|--|---------------------------|
| 1.0 Mobile Devices | 14% |
| 2.0 Networking | 20% |
| 3.0 Hardware | 27% |
| 4.0 Virtualization and Cloud Computing | 12% |
| 5.0 Hardware and Network Troubleshooting | 27% |
| Total | 100% |

Click the links for free sample questions for Exams [A+ 220-1001](#) & [A+ 220-1002](#)

A+ Exam 220-1002 aka Core 2

| Domain | Percentage of Examination |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1.0 Operating Systems | 27% |
| 2.0 Security | 24% |
| 3.0 Software Troubleshooting | 26% |
| 4.0 Operational Procedures | 23% |
| | |
| Total | 100% |

These tables show the CompTIA Main Domains (exam objectives) and how much weight they each should have on the exam. Why do the relative weights matter? Because they give a good indication of how many questions each domain will present at your exam.

[Click here for more free resources for the A+ 220-1001 & 220-1002 Exams.](#)

How many questions are there and how are they distributed?

Each exam contains a maximum of 90 questions and you have an hour and a half to answer them so on average one question per minute. This is in line with certification best practices for multiple choice based tests but it will require you get organized and focused to not run out of time. Thankfully there are methods and tools available to you to make sure you don't get overwhelmed by the quantity of questions. For that see our article "Test Taking Strategies for IT Certification"

A+ Exam 220-1001 aka Core 1

| Domain | Approximate# of questions |
|--|---------------------------|
| 1.0 Mobile Devices | 13 |
| 2.0 Networking | 18 |
| 3.0 Hardware | 24 |
| 4.0 Virtualization and Cloud Computing | 11 |
| 5.0 Hardware and Network Troubleshooting | 24 |
| Total | 90 |

A+ Exam 220-1002 aka Core 2

| Domain | Percentage of Examination |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1.0 Operating Systems | 24 |
| 2.0 Security | 22 |
| 3.0 Software Troubleshooting | 23 |
| 4.0 Operational Procedures | 21 |
| | |
| Total | 90 |

In CompTIA's Exam Objectives document, it says:

***Note: The lists of examples provided in bulleted format below each objective are not exhaustive lists. Other examples of technologies, processes or tasks pertaining to each objective may also be included on the exam although not listed or covered in this objectives document.*

This is the kind of statement you want to take seriously. It will require you not only to master the terms on the various lists but what they can do and different ways they can do it. This can be tricky but should impact how you study for the exam.

What is the passing score in plain English?

The grading scale is a bit funky as you are evaluated on a scale from 100 to 900. The passing score on the CompTIA A+ 1001 exam is 675 and for the CompTIA 1002 exam it is 700. What this works out to in terms of percentages is about 72% for 1001 and about 75% for 1002. This means that with a total of 90 questions per exam you will need at least 65 correct answers on 1001 and no less than 68 on 1002. Because the objectives are so wide ranging and unless you have a lot of professional experience, it will take a fair amount of work to prepare for this exam. If you doubt this just take a look the A+ objectives as published by CompTIA, between the two exams you are looking at 51 pages mainly of lists of items you could get a question on...

The question types you will see on the exam

By and large the most common question type is the multiple choice type of questions. The basic four alternatives – three detractors and one correct choice is the most common question type on the exam. Typically these questions will include one correct answer, one detractor that is very similar to the correct answer and a different detractor that is still wrong and finally the nonsense detractor(s). The nonsense detractor is the one a candidate with no idea about the topic at hand could pick. In some of these you will be facing more than one alternative that you will feel is correct, in those situations you are expected to pick the "best" answer. By that CompTIA means the alternative that is the more direct and clearly related to the question as asked. Here is an example:

A customer wants games from their child's Windows 7 computer removed. Which of the following is the BEST way to accomplish this task?

- a) Control Panel > Game Controller > Select controller > click Remove
- b) Control Panel > Administrative Tools > Computer Management
- c) Control Panel > Add/Remove programs > Add/Remove Windows Components > select Accessories and Utilities > uncheck Games
- d) Programs menu > Right click Games > select Properties > select the Hidden check box

Answer c) "Control Panel > Add/Remove programs > Add/Remove Windows Components > select Accessories and Utilities > uncheck Games" is the best way to accomplish the task. The user wants the games removed and since we are expected to take the question literally it is the only choice that will actually remove the games. So from the top, a) game controllers will only impact the devices used for gaming, not the games themselves. b) Computer Management has no capabilities in this area. The last

choice is the most tempting in terms of practicality it will only *hide* the Games from the menus not remove them. A crafty child will still be able to find them since they haven't been removed.

When you are facing the four alternatives – three detractors and one correct choice, you will see that the clickable area is a radio button. When you see a question that has check boxes instead of radio buttons, that will be a multiple choice – multiple answer type question. With these questions you can expect that five alternatives will contain two correct answers and six alternatives will contain three correct answers.

In addition to the multiple choice questions you will see two more question formats: Scenario based and Performance based questions.

The scenario based questions are essentially multiple choice questions just with a longer question text. Instead of asking you (basic multiple choice):

Which of the following network devices allows for full-duplex communication?

- a) Hub
- b) Bridge
- c) Switch
- d) Firewall

...the scenario based question sets up a situation that you are expected to respond to by choosing one of the alternatives. Here is an example of that:

A technician just finished removing spyware from a computer and now they are not able to connect to any websites. Which of the following is the MOST likely cause?

- a) Automatic configuration
- b) Network card driver is damaged
- c) Proxy settings
- d) The Internet is not functioning

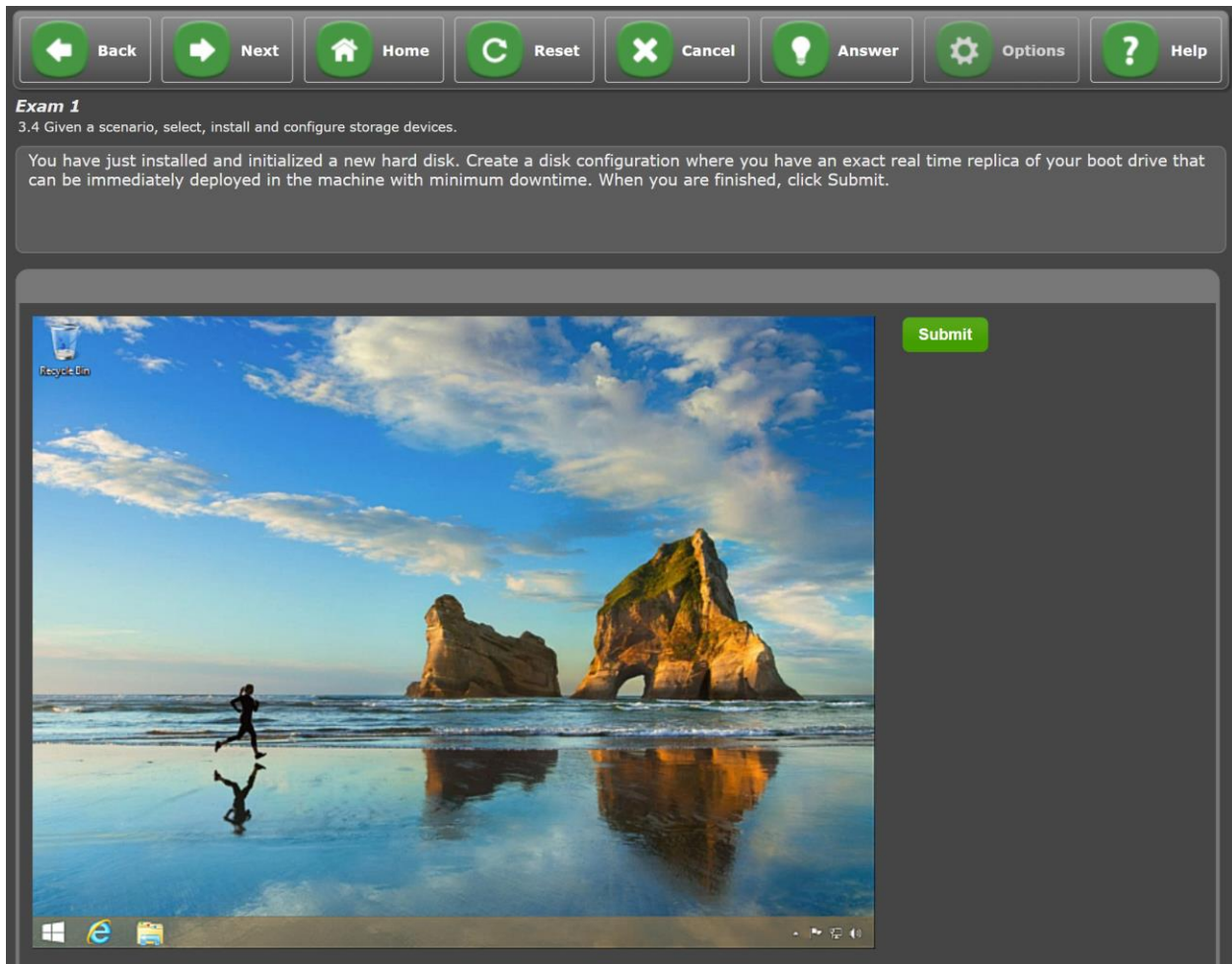
Because these are CompTIA exams the scenario is a “scenario of few words”... CompTIA is known for its short and terse questions. In addition to

So what is the answer? The most likely answer here would be c) Proxy Settings. Malware often reconfigures proxy settings, or in some cases initiates them, to enable their programs to operate optimally. Often this could go unnoticed by the user and the program will run indefinitely undetected. Proxy settings is the MOST likely answer because you are told in the question that “A technician just finished removing spyware”. Although in b) a damaged network card driver would cause inability to connect to the network it is not induced by malware removers and so does not qualify for the MOST likely cause. a) Automatic configuration will not disable internet connectivity by design as it is non-routable. Finally, d) if the Internet was not functioning in the workplace it's safe to assume yours would not be the only complaint!

IMPORTANT NOTE ON SCENARIO BASED QUESTIONS: There is definitely a bias towards more scenario-based questions in Exam 220-1002 (Software) than 220-1001 (Hardware). You get that from studying the CompTIA Exam Objectives documents. The exam objectives for Exam 220-1001 (Hardware) lists an

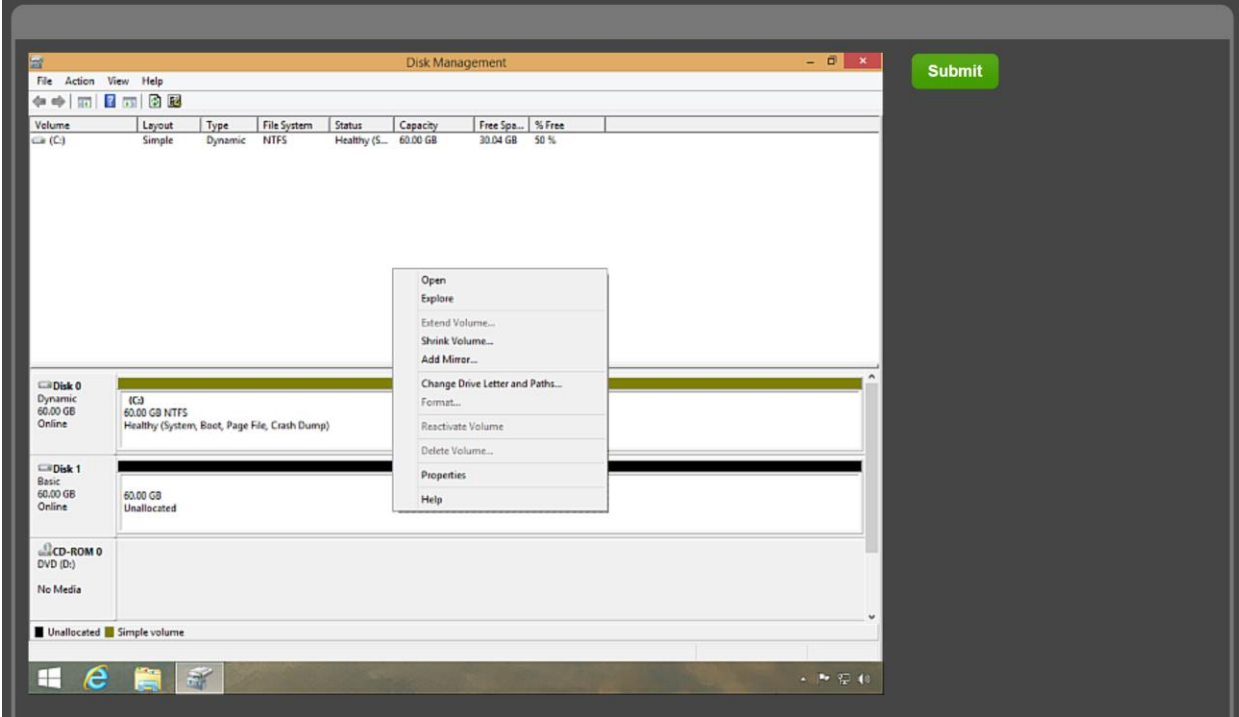
impressive 16 sub-objectives starting with “Given a scenario...” while for Exam 220-1002 you have a still considerable 11 objectives starting with “Given a scenario...”. To get the CompTIA Exam Objectives documents click here. [A+ Exam Objectives](#).

The performance based questions are exercise based. You complete a task in a Windows simulator or a command line interface simulator and you come to the correct answer through entering the right command or navigating correctly in the Windows menu. Below is an example from the CertBlaster for A+ 220-1001. It is of a performance based question that addresses disk management.






This question is testing your knowledge of disk management using a simulation of the Windows disk management console and the associated commands. For you to answer this question correctly you will need to perform the configuration of a Raid 1 mirrored image of the hard drive. This question addresses A+ 220-1001 Main Domain 3.0 “Hardware” Sub-domain 3.8 “Given a scenario, select, install, and configure a storage devices.” Below is another screenshot from the same question showing the hard drive you are to mirror in the Windows disk management console.

You have just installed and initialized a new hard disk. Create a disk configuration where you have an exact real time replica of your boot drive that can be immediately deployed in the machine with minimum downtime. When you are finished, click Submit.



Another performance based question type asks you to “configure” a system based on custom needs. Below is an example of what those questions look like at the exam. Here you are supposed to figure out, based on what the systems are to be used for, which components belong under which system. Those questions are supposed to satisfy the exam sub-objective 3.8: **“Given a scenario, select and configure appropriate components for a custom PC configuration to meet customer specifications or needs.”**

| | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|---|
| High-end video |  |  |  |
| Maximum RAM | Graphic design workstation | Thin Client | Gaming PC |
| Meets minimum requirements for OS | | | |
| Multicore processor | | | |
| Network connectivity | | | |
| Basic applications | | | |
| High definition sound card | | | |

There are other types such as list and re-order and drag and drop etc. but those are pretty self-explanatory (and all exist in CertBlaster).

A brief Note on Time Management

At the exam many question banks front-load the performance based questions. This means that you will see most if not all the performance based questions in the first ten or so questions on your exam (out of 90). The performance based questions are more time consuming as there can be 4 – 5 steps in one compare to a single click in a multiple choice question. This means you have to be smart about your time management as although more time consuming, the performance based questions do not give you more points. If you don't immediately know what the correct steps are for a performance based question then make sure to rapidly use the "Flag for Later" feature and move on to the multiple choice questions, make sure to answer those and then circle back to the performance based questions. This will offer you the chance to take your time on these at the end with a lot less stress knowing that you answered already the great majority of questions.

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