As of 1 Oct 2026

DEPARTMENT OF WAR
CONTRACTING PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATION EXAM
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1) What is the passing score?

Candidates (examinees) for the exam must obtain a score of 70% or higher to pass the Contracting Certification Exam, CON 3990V.

2) How do candidates typically perform on the exam?

In FY26, exam scores averaged 74.8%, with 79% passing on their first attempt.

3) How many questions are on the exam?

There are 150 multiple choice questions, each randomly pulled from a robust database ensuring each exam delivered is different from the next. The Warfighting Acquisition University (WarU)) employs a common industry practice of periodically reviewing exam item performance to determine whether adjustments are needed for any elements of the exam.

4) Is the CON 3990V Certification Exam open or closed book?

The CON 3990V Contracting Certification Exam is completely closed book. Examinees will not be able to use or reference any subject material during the exam, to include but not limited to notes, books, computers, personal devices, etc.

Passing the Contracting Certification Exam demonstrates "Initial Readiness" to operate in the contracting functional area. The closed book nature of the exam is used to evaluate a candidate's comprehensive understanding and retention of the subject matter. This approach ensures that exam candidates have absorbed the essential knowledge to execute fundamental tasks and can apply this knowledge independently, without the need for external resources.

5) Where can a candidate take the exam?

The exam is delivered by Pearson Professional Assessments, a commercial test service provider under contract with the Department of War (DoW).

Candidates may choose one of two ways to take the exam, either virtually on a personal computer using OnVUE--a Pearson proprietary software client application, or in person at a Pearson Professional test center. The following link provides information for both options: https://home.pearsonvue.com/Test-takers/Resources.aspx

If a candidate decides to take the exam using the OnVUE application, they will have to download a software add-on. Additionally, exam candidates will have to conduct a mandatory

system check prior to taking the exam. Please check the link below for system requirements and to run a system check for the OnVUE application: OnVue Application

6) Are there any advantages to taking the exam in person (at a Pearson Professional Assessments test center) vs. virtually (OnVUE)?

Although the exam is the same regardless of delivery method, historical data reflects an apparent advantage to taking the exam in person vs. virtually. Statistically speaking, the passing rate is ~4% higher for tests taken at a test center.

There are several factors that may contribute to the delta in the rates, i.e., IT/connectivity issues, increased test anxiety in the virtual environment, early termination due to examinee test environment compromise, etc. As such, it is recommended that examinees take exams at a physical Pearson test center and only choose the OnVUE virtual option by exception.

7) How much time is allotted to take the exam?

Candidates will have 3 hours to take the exam. This exam duration encompasses all "seat time" at the Pearson test center, and includes the exam introduction, tutorial, 150-question exam, breaks, and any pre-submission review.

8) How many times can the exam be taken?

DoW allows up to three exam attempts within a 12-month period, beginning on the date of the first exam attempt, with a minimum of 30 days between attempts. Agencies may establish local policy for exam attempts within the certification grace period, including extensions obtained through waivers.

If a student fails the exam three times, a fourth attempt can be authorized within a 12-month period beginning one year after the date of the first failed attempt. DACMs/DATM may approve additional attempts on a case-by-case basis.

Cancellation requests must be made at least 48 hours prior to an appointment in accordance with the reschedule/cancellation policy. Canceling an exam appointment without rescheduling will count as one of the three attempts allowed. However, if the candidate reschedules the exam within the allotted timeframe, the number of allowed exam attempts remain unaffected.

NOTE: Cancellation must happen internally in the agency's registration system (e.g., DATMS), as well as within the Pearson system for the cancellation to take effect. If a candidate with a valid appointment fails to show for the exam or cancels an appointment outside of the cancellation policy, the government is charged a seat fee by Pearson.

9) What material is covered in the exam, what is being tested?

Candidates will need to demonstrate a foundational understanding of the Contracting Common Technical Competencies (and related job tasks) found in the DoW Contracting Competency Model, which is accessible at the following link: CONCompetencies.pdf

The questions in the exam, and more importantly, the correct answers, are derived from the policy and guidance in the RFO-updated, Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) and the Defense Federal Acquisition Regulation Supplement (DFARS) as it relates to the competencies and job tasks in the DoW Contracting Competency Model.

Additionally, candidates should be familiar with the titles of the following FAR Parts: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 19, 31, 33, 42, 44, 46, and 49.

10) How many questions are on the exam for each of the competencies in the DoW Contracting Competency Model?

The table below depicts the distribution of questions in the exam per competency:

Life Cycle Phase		Domain	Competency	# of Qs on Exam
1	Guiding Principles	1.1 Skills and Roles	—	6
		1.2 Contract Principles	—	18
		1.3 Standards of Conduct	—	6
		1.5 Situational Assessment	—	3
		1.6 Team Dynamics	—	3
		1.7 Communication and Documentation	—	6
2	Pre-Award	2.1 Develop Solicitation	2.1.1 Plan Solicitation	12
			2.1.2 Request Offer	12
		2.2 Develop Offer	2.2.1 Plan Sales	3
			2.2.2 Prepare Offer	3
3	Award	3.1 Form Contract	3.1.1 Price or Cost Analysis	10
			3.1.2 Plan Negotiation	10
			3.1.3 Select Source	10
			3.1.4 Manage Disagreements	10
4	Post-Award	4.1 Perform Contract	4.1.1 Administer Contract	10
			4.1.2 Ensure Quality	10
			4.1.3 Manage Subcontracts	4
			4.1.4 Manage Changes	10
		4.2 Close Contract	4.2.1 Close Out Contract	4
			Total	150

11) Is there any TDY or travel required to take the exam?

It is anticipated that all candidates will be able to take the CON 3990V Exam at a Pearson test center within commuting distance from their home of record. In the event there is not a Pearson test center available within commuting distance, and if testing virtually is not a viable option, then the candidate must ensure travel authorization is received prior to scheduling their exam. More information regarding travel may be found in the WarU Student Policy

Handbook link on the following webpage: Student Policies & Information (waru.edu)

12) Is there anything a candidate can do to increase chances of success on the exam?
All exam candidates are highly encouraged to take CON 3910, Online Contracting Certification Exam Prep. CON 3910 is an online, self-paced course. This course was developed to help examinees achieve success on the exam. This self-paced course is available immediately upon registration. Taking CON 3910 has proven to be very effective in preparing candidates to be successful on the exam.

Additionally, candidates may also take CON 3900V, the Virtual Instructor-Led (VILT) Contracting Certification Exam Prep Course. Under the guidance of a live instructor, CON 3900V helps to reinforce a learner's studies and experience to date through a series of learner-led exercises and activities. As of 01 October 2023, any candidate wishing to take CON 3900V must have completed CON 3910 as a prerequisite prior to taking CON 3900V.

CON 3900V is prioritized for those candidates who were unsuccessful on their first exam attempt. However, any candidate who desires a live instructor-led experience to adequately prepare for the exam may register. Due to high demand, candidates who have not already attempted the exam may be waitlisted for prioritization purposes.

Information for both prep exam courses can be found in the WarU iCatalog.

CON 3910 (Self-Paced) - https://icatalog.waru.edu/CourseDetail/12833
CON 3900V (VILT) - https://icatalog.waru.edu/CourseDetail/12539

In addition to taking a prep course for the certification exam, candidates are encouraged to take advantage of instructor office hours, ask questions, and proactively participate in the certification courses. Furthermore, learning the FAR part numbers and titles mentioned in FAQ number 9 has proven to be highly effective in helping students in the exam. The game, "A FAR Better View" can assist you in memorizing the FAR part numbers and titles covered on the exam. Finally, read FAR part 15 thoroughly. Many questions on the exam stem from this FAR part.

13) If I pass the CON 3990V exam, can I avoid taking the CON 1100/V through 1400V certification courses?

No. Completion or fulfillment of the certification courses, CON 1100/V, 1200V, 1300V, and 1400V, are required for certification. CON 3990V is a separate and distinct contracting certification requirement from the four courses.

14) If a candidate does not pass the exam, do they have to retake any training?

After each unsuccessful exam attempt, the candidate and their Agency* will be notified of the results. The Agency will determine any required remedial actions to include retaking training, mandatory time between subsequent attempts, and Agency "counseling."

If a candidate's first attempt at the exam is unsuccessful, the DoW Components require that candidate take CON 3900V before attempting the exam again. If that candidate has already

taken CON 3900V, they need not retake it to fulfill this requirement. Note that CON 3910 is a required prerequisite for CON 3900V.

After the third unsuccessful attempt to take the exam in a 12-month period, candidates must review their exam performance feedback and the CON 3910 and CON 3900V materials obtained from the course. All remedial steps the candidate took should be validated and endorsed by their Agency before they are permitted to attempt the exam again.

*The term "Agency" includes the candidate's supervisor and the applicable Acquisition Training Office (ATO) lead for the Army, Navy, Air Force, and 4th Estate. The "Agency" is notified via the Training Application System/ATRRS (the official database of record for the Army, Air Force, Navy, and Fourth Estate). In addition, upon an unsuccessful attempt, WarU sends an attrition letter to the candidate and their supervisor.

The requirements are reiterated below for illustration purposes:

Unsuccessful attempt #	Take CON 3910 & CON 3900V	Review exam performance feedback
1	Required (if both not taken previously)	Recommended
2	Recommended	Recommended
3	Recommended	Recommended

15) What happens when an employee (exam candidate) exhausts all their options? Is there a potential an employee could be removed from their acquisition workforce coded position if they do not pass the exam and have exceeded their certification grace period?

Yes. Achievement of the DoW Contracting Professional Certification is a condition of employment for contracting coded acquisition workforce positions. Employees unable to meet their conditions of employment may be subject to employment actions in accordance with Agency procedures and as defined in the position description.

16) Will a promotion be withheld if an employee (exam candidate) does not pass the exam and is still within their grace period?

Agencies will determine eligibility for promotion based on organization policies and position requirements. However, the Agency must consider the following:

a. Certification grace period (3 years) will not reset if employee is promoted into a role within the contracting functional area.

b. If an employee leaves a contracting coded position and then returns, their grace period would reset.

c. Any waiver for certification grace period must be submitted in accordance with DoDI 5000.66 policy for an employee to maintain position compliance if they fall outside of the prescribed grace period.

17) Will I get credit for taking the certification exam if I transfer to a non-DoW agency?

There is reciprocity between DoW contracting organizations and other federal, non-DoW contracting organizations. Employees should reach out to their gaining non-DoW agency career manager or other relevant points of contact for further guidance.

18) Who pays for the exam?

The exams are paid for by WarU. Agencies and exam candidates are not involved directly in paying for the exam.