



## Legal Gobbledygook

You have my permission to post, email, print, and share this guide with anyone. However, please do not make any changes to this document, claim it as your own, or try to charge for usage. That wouldn't be cool. However, it *would* be awesome if you printed and/or sent this to every HR professional that you know. There are hundreds of people that take the PHR exam every year, and they could all benefit from this guide in some way. If you know someone who is making the leap, then please share this study guide with them.

You could also steer them to the **UpstartHR** site, because it's just the right thing to do. Plus, there are some great free resources for everyone that benefit everyone.

# **Preface**

## ***What?***

The following articles were written over a twelve week study period in my solo preparation for the PHR exam. I took the exam in late January 2009, and I started studying at the beginning of November 2008. Some of the information may be a bit dated and the verbiage somewhat amateurish, and I considered removing it in this revision. However, I think it holds value, because it preserves my thoughts as they were instead of replacing them with words influenced by my current state of mind. Keep in mind that these were written before I started writing seriously, and my wording will probably reflect that. Also remember that they were written 7 days apart from each other, and some of the information could be redundant from week to week.

## ***Why?***

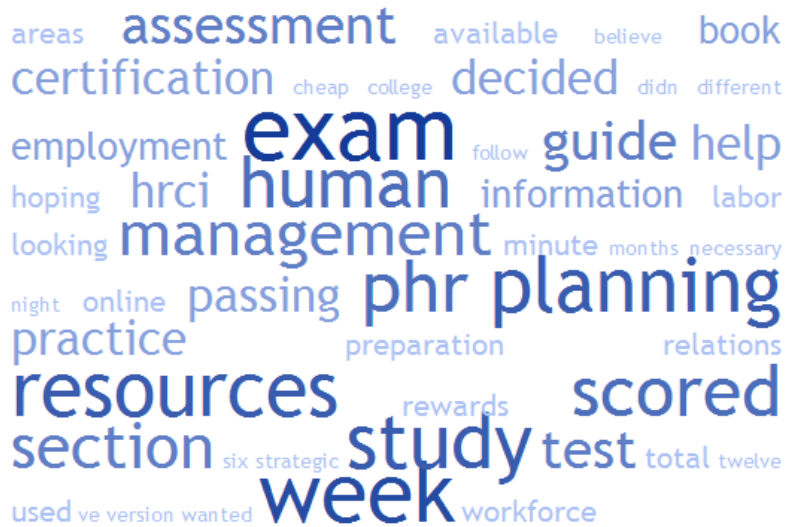
While there are many great study resources available, I couldn't find a good one detailing the whole process of signing up, preparing for, and taking the exam. That's one of the reasons I ended up writing these articles. The second reason I wrote them was to motivate myself.

## ***How?***

Trying to stay laser-focused for three whole months is tougher than most people would expect. I encourage you to know your study habits and your motivation before taking the plunge. Don't lose focus of the reason that pushed you into signing up for the exam. When you're grinding out those endless hours of study and flipping flashcards until your eyes ache, just remember that it's all worth it in the end. And speaking of endings, you can find out how I did on my exam by skipping to the end, but you wouldn't really do that, right?

## Week 1

### Preparation, Planning, and First Assessment



This is intended to be a guide for those in the reading audience that are contemplating taking the Professional in Human Resources Certification Exam. I am currently preparing to take the PHR exam in twelve weeks. I have been using many different resources to help me along the way, and I plan to write an article for each week detailing what I have studied, the resources used, concerns about the test, etc. I am doing this, because I have not been able to find very much information on this subject in the places I have searched online. There are a few specialized (and sometimes very costly) resources to be used as study aids, but I want to give my perspective of the steps involved in preparing for the exam.

First, here is a little information about the PHR exam. This exam is given by the **Human Resources Certification Institute**. A passing score on the exam signifies the applicant has a firm grasp of essential human resources concepts. The timed, computer-based test is 225 questions long and is taken at a testing center. HRCI says that the ideal candidate will have two years of HR experience, but I basically have zero experience in the HR field. I decided to take the PHR exam to help me when I decide to apply for a new job. I graduated six months ago with a bachelor's in Human Resources Management, so I'm hoping that most of what I learned is still fresh on my mind. I've always liked a challenge; I'm just hoping I didn't bite off more than I can chew.

I am skipping over the tedious registration procedure for now. There is more than enough information about this on the HRCI website. I can come back to this at a later date if necessary.

I've always had trouble with procrastination. I spent many long nights in college finishing papers that were due within hours of their submissions. However, I have been looking at all of the information available on this exam, and there is no way that I can wait until the last minute and cram for it. I have to prepare a plan and follow it in order to have a remote chance of success.

## Preparation

I researched available study methods and programs online, but the cheap ones still are several hundred dollars. I decided to go with a self-paced study with any resources I could get cheaply.

I kept one of my textbooks from my human resources management class in college, and after some digging, I dusted it off and had my first study resource. The book is **“Human Resource Management”** by Gary Dessler.

I checked around online until I found a study guide that looked promising. It is called the **“PHR/SPHR: Professional in Human Resources Certification Study Guide”** by Anne Bogardus. It was pretty cheap, and I needed a resource solely dedicated to the PHR exam, so I purchased it.

One day, out of the blue, I remembered that I had purchased a used book called the **“HRCI Certification Guide.”** I believe it was an old version, which worked okay, but there were some slight differences in the current exam makeup and the one depicted in the book. This book, while helpful, isn't really much of a study resource. However, as you will see in a minute, it did come in handy for me in regard to planning.

## Planning

After looking over the specifications for the test, I decided that a long-term study plan would be my best option for passing the PHR exam. In the **HRCI Certification Guide**, there is a small section about how to study for the test. They lay out a schedule/plan for if you have 8, 10, or 12 weeks to study. Because I was a little more than 12 weeks away when I decided to go for it, I went with the 12 week plan. My modified version is listed below.

Week One 11/2-11/8

Preparation, planning, and first assessment

Week Two 11/9-11/15

Strategic Management

Week Three 11/16-11/22

Workforce Planning and Employment (Part 1)

Week Four 11/23-11/29

Workforce Planning and Employment (Part 2)

Week Five 11/30-12/6

Human Resource Development

Week Six 12/7-12/16

Total Rewards (Part 1)

Week Seven 12/14-12/20

Total Rewards (Part 1)

Week Eight 12/21-12/27

Labor Relations (Part 1)

Week Nine 12/28-1/3

Labor Relations (Part 1)

Week Ten 1/4-1/10

Risk Management

Week Eleven 1/11-1/17

Practice, second assessment, and refocus on any necessary topics

Week Twelve 1/18-1/24

Go over every available practice question at my disposal. Take PHR exam. Pass. Rejoice.

### **First Assessment**

That's when I decided to take a step that was a little bolder (i.e. more expensive). I signed up for the **assessment exam that HRCI offers** (\$70.00 for two practice exams). I sat down one night, settled in, and took the first practice exam. I wanted to establish a baseline for my knowledge, and I also wanted to know which areas I needed the most work in. Well, after a grueling hour or two, I came up with a 66% composite score. My score was slightly below passing, but I'm confident that I can bring up my scores by the time the test rolls around in three months. I plan to take the second practice assessment at least ten days before the PHR, so that I can make any last minute adjustments to my study schedule. My separate scores for the functional areas didn't help me to know where to focus my studies, because I scored about the same in each area.

Strategic Management makes up 12% of the exam. I scored a 67% on this section.

Workforce Planning and Employment makes up 26% of the exam. I scored 74% on this section.

Human Resources Development makes up 17% of the exam. I scored 77% on this section.

Total Rewards makes up 16% of the exam. I scored 58% on this section.

Employee and Labor Relations makes up 22% of the exam. I scored 50% on this section.

Risk Management makes up 7% of the exam. I scored 67% on this section.

I am very excited about studying for the PHR exam. I believe that passing it will help me to prove to a prospective employer that I am a self-starter and a valuable resource. I also hope the content of this guide helps anyone that decides to follow this route as well.

## Week 2

### Strategic Management



Well, my first real week of studying (and my second week overall) has gone by, and I feel pretty good. I had my **PHR Study Guide** and my **HRM textbook**, and I got through all of the pages I had scheduled with time to spare in the week.

#### A New Resource

I have been looking around to see what others say online about how to prepare for the exam, and I found **this human resources certification blog** on the topic. The writer is an industry expert who also sells SPHR/PHR exam study materials. Her blog has quite a few good tips for preparing for the exam, including a few posts where a close friend of hers actually took the exam and gave her own **personal PHR recap** of her study habits and the exam questions. It was interesting (and quite helpful) reading.

#### Just the Facts, Ma'am

This week I studied Strategic Management. Strategic Management makes up about 12% of the total PHR exam weight. In the HRCI practice test, I scored a 67% on this section.

According to the **PHR Study Guide**, the Strategic Management section tests the HR professional's knowledge of:



- 1) Mission, vision, values, business goals, objectives, plans, and processes of the organization.
- 2) Legislative and regulatory processes.
- 3) Strategic planning process and implementation.
- 4) Management functions, including planning, organizing, directing, and controlling.
- 5) Techniques to promote creativity and innovation.
- 6) Corporate governance procedures and compliance.

\*The above list is also found in the **HRCI Certification Handbook, which is available as a free PDF file from the HRCI website.**

**Fun Fact:** The PHR is a 4-hour timed exam with 225 questions.

The above list is a general overview. In the study guide, I delved deeper into some topics. I already knew a good bit about organizational functions (Production, Marketing, Research & Development, Accounting, etc.), but it was a nice refresher to see some of this information again in my studies. Strategic planning was an area that I didn't know much about, so I made sure to study those sections especially well. The processes of a strategic management plan include pre-planning, environmental scanning, strategy formulation, strategy implementation, and strategy evaluation. As a part of the environmental scanning portion, I was sure to get acquainted with the ins and outs of SWOT analyses, PEST analyses, and Porter's Five Forces Model.

After the strategic part of the chapter, the study guide went into management principles, which I had already covered very well in my **human resources management textbook**. Also, the managerial ethics portion was very informative. Business ethics is a generally interesting topic, and I always enjoy getting to "put on my thinking cap" when trying to determine my solution to an ethical dilemma.

I also used my HRM textbook as a supplement to the study guide this week. Because the textbook is not written expressly for those taking one of the HR certification exams, I had to jump around in the book a bit to be sure I covered all of the material. I read several chapters. The topics it covered included strategic management, ethics, and HR's role in the corporate setting.

### **A Warm Glow**

I was happy that I remembered a good bit of what I had seen in the text before. I hope that this means that I will be able to retain the information that I am studying better than I thought I would.

After studying the section on Strategic Management all week, I took the short practice exam in the PHR Study Guide and scored fairly well. I'd like to think that I'm getting the hang of

the types of questions I'll see, but I am not sure. The multiple choice questions seem to have four good answers, and choosing "the best" one is often difficult. I need to brush up on my test-taking skills!

While this week was relatively easy, the next few weeks will be a bit tougher. The Workforce Planning and Employment section counts for more than one-fourth of the whole test, so I will be taking two full weeks of study to be sure that I fully cover this portion of the subject matter.

## Week 3

### Workforce Planning and Employment (part 1 of 2)



Because Workforce Planning and Employment is a large portion of the exam, I will be studying the topic over a two week period to hopefully soak it in a little better.

#### A New Resource

There are so many rules and regulations regarding employment laws in human resources, and remembering all of them is one of the hardest things about the PHR exam. I found a good resource this week that hopefully will help me with remembering all of the **laws related to human resources management**. They even had a bunch of **practice questions grouped by PHR category** (compensation/benefits, labor relations, safety, etc.).

#### Just the Facts, Ma'am

This week I studied Workforce Planning and Employment. Workforce P&E makes up about 26% (more than 1/4!) of the total PHR exam weight. In the Human Resources Certification Institute (HRCI) practice test, I scored a 74% on this section.

According to the **PHR Study Guide**, the Workforce Planning and Employment section tests the HR professional's knowledge of:

- 1) Federal/state/local employment laws and regulations for workforce planning and employment (Title VII, ADA, ADEA, EEOC, UGESP, WARN, Internal Revenue Code, IRCA, etc.)
- 2) Quantitative analyses required to assess past/future staffing effectiveness (cost-benefit analysis, cost per hire, selection ratios, adverse impact, etc.)
- 3) Recruitment sources (internal/external, Internet, agencies, referrals, etc.)
- 4) Staffing alternatives (temporary/contract, outsourcing, job sharing, part time, etc.)
- 5) Reliability and validity of tests, tools, and selection methods
- 6) Interviewing techniques (behavioral, situational, panel, etc.)
- 7) Impact of total rewards on recruitment
- 8) Terminations, downsizing, restructuring, and outplacement practices
- 9) Negotiation skills and techniques

### **My Take on the Material**

First off, my head was spinning trying to remember all of the different HR laws. I think it will get better with repetition, but it is pretty hard to remember which laws affect which portion of a human resource professional's job. A good bit of the problem is that I am not a human resource professional yet! I am one in spirit, but I have not had the requisite experience to classify myself as a "real" human resources pro.

One of the things I learned about was interviewing and selection procedures. Also, the time line depicting a person's employment history was neat to compare to my own employment status/history. That is because I've always been interested in the process detailing how a person goes from an applicant to a full-time employee to a former employee. I don't know where my fascination comes from, but I'm willing to bet that it's one thing that got me interested in HR in the first place!

Also, I spoke with my own supervisor about her take on interviews, because she is involved in them every so often. I quizzed her on the things she looks for in an interviewee, and I was able to get a short list of tips for a prospective employee. It was a lot of fun "interviewing" her about that, and I think she enjoyed it as well.

I finished up my study guide chapter pretty much, so I will be starting on my **textbook** for part two of my Workforce Planning and Employment studies. This human resources stuff is tough, but I really am enjoying it.

### **Looking Forward**

As I was on vacation last weekend, I was constantly veering back and forth between elation at being out of my routine and dread of the human resources study time I was missing. Workforce Planning and Employment (Part 2 of 2), here I come!

## Week 4

### Workforce Planning and Employment (part 2 of 2)



I am proud to say that I worked much harder in the past week on my studying to make up for my slacking on Part 1 the week before. I was able to get in all of the pages that I needed to cover the topic of workforce planning and employment fully. I feel much more confident than I did last week at this time, that's for sure. This is week four of my twelve week PHR Certification Exam preparation series.

#### A New Resource

As you may know, I have been looking constantly for resources to help me study for the Professional in Human Resources (PHR) Certification Exam. The PHR exam covers many topics, and no single study resource can prepare a test-taker completely; however, with the proper utilization of other study aids and supplements, a candidate can be better prepared than otherwise. It is with this philosophy that I search weekly for new places to get information. This week I have been enjoying my research at **HR.BLR**.

This website has some great ways for HR professionals to learn. There is a forum for asking questions of qualified human resource professionals. There is also a large library of articles on just about every conceivable HR topic. I have been receiving the daily and weekly emails from HR.BLR, and I have been learning a lot about current trends in human resource management, best practices in HR, and other valuable subject areas. This site is definitely worth a look if you're interested in beginning or furthering a career in HR.

## Just the Facts, Ma'am

I usually include a lot of information in this section of my PHR study guide every week, but it's mainly a recap of last week, so I'll stick to the high points.

This week I studied Workforce Planning and Employment (Part 2 of 2). Workforce P&E makes up about 26% of the total PHR exam weight. In the HRCI practice test, I scored a 74% on this section.

To see the focal points of this section, check last week's article (Workforce Planning and Employment-Part 1 of 2).

## My Take on the Material

I spent the week reading from my old college **human resources management textbook**, since I used my study guide for last week. I read the following chapters: Equal Opportunity and the Law, Personnel Planning and Recruiting, Employee Testing and Selection, and Interviewing Candidates. It took me all the way through Sunday afternoon (with a bit of skimming the chapters!) to finish, but at least I did!

I have a special interest in interviewing, and I think that might be the way I go if/when I ever get a job in the human resources field. For a long time, interviewing different HR professionals about their jobs has been an interest for me, and I really enjoy getting to listen to and analyze the responses. I've heard many successful people say, "If you want to be good at something, listen to someone who's already been there and done it well."

Next week I will tell about some of the PHR- and SPHR-certified people that I have had the opportunity to converse with recently. These people are a valuable resource, and I never let a chance go by without telling them how useful they are to me.

## 33% Less Crazy (or 66% More?)

Well, I'm roughly 1/3 of the way through my PHR exam prep, and I am feeling much more confident than I was originally (I was questioning my own sanity at the beginning!). I'm hoping that this confidence will continue. I took a special class on labor and management relations in college, so I am hoping that I can perform reasonably well when I get to that portion of my studies. Labor relations is another of the large portions of the PHR exam.

However, next I will be studying Human Resource Development. The topic covers training and developing employees. I'm also interested in the training aspect of HR, so I may end up really enjoying this part of my PHR studies, too!

## Week 5

### Human Resource Development



#### A New Resource

This week, I had the pleasure of "meeting" a lady online named Tish. She runs The Kat House blog, and her newest post was about how she passed the SPHR exam (a big congrats to her!). I emailed her, and she was amazingly helpful. She assured me that taking the PHR exam was not a bad idea for a new graduate. She even sent me the notes that she took while studying for her own exam! As a human resources professional that has already passed the PHR and SPHR exams, she is the kind of resource that I strive to make use of, and I am thrilled that she agreed to help me as I progress toward my own PHR certification exam.

I urge anyone that is currently in HR to find someone that has been in the field already and ask them to give you any advice they can. Spend time studying any information that you get from one of these human resource professionals. While it may take me years to learn the ins-and-outs of the profession, finding and utilizing an experienced mentor that has already "been there, done that" is a way to grow in knowledge by leaps and bounds.



## Just the Facts, Ma'am

This week I studied Human Resource Development. HR Development makes up about 17% of the total PHR exam weight. In the Human Resources Certification Institute (HRCI) practice test, I scored a 77% on this section.

According to the PHR study guide, the HR Development section of the certification exam tests the HR professional's knowledge of:

- 1) Applicable federal/state/local laws and regulations
- 2) Organizational Development theories/applications
- 3) Training-program development, methods, techniques, etc.
- 4) Performance appraisal methods
- 5) Performance management methods
- 6) Assessing a training program's effectiveness
- 7) Mentoring and coaching

## My Take on the Material

I used both the study guide and the **human resources management textbook** this week, and I think I actually enjoyed reading the study guide even more than the HRM textbook. I usually enjoy reading the text, but this time there seemed to be a lot of unnecessary and unrelated information included.

I particularly enjoyed reading about performance appraisals. My current job is the first of all my jobs where I've ever encountered a performance appraisal, and I enjoy the experience immensely. At my company, we utilize a sort of "appraisal interview," where the employee is given a short document to fill out detailing his or her career goals for the future, the ways to perform better at the job functions, etc. This document is then taken to the appraisal with the supervisor, so that both of them can go over the training, development, and career goals together. It is a very open and personal process.

In my previous jobs, I did not have to worry about a performance appraisal, but then again, I never really was given any goals or feedback on my job performance. I believe that all companies, small and large, should utilize some sort of performance appraisal. Even if the program is used for nothing else than to have a legal defense against wrongful firing lawsuits, it could still be worth the expense.

HR training and development is looked at as a wasteful expenditure for some companies, but they often don't realize the positive impact that training can have. Human resource managers should work diligently to provide management with solid advice on HR matters, so that businesses will take full advantage of the human resources available at their disposal.



## A Realization... Or Just a Study-Induced Headache?

In my ongoing studies for the PHR, I have come across several different topics that I have seen in a different light than ever before. Today I was looking over the last of the training and development material, and I was thinking to myself of the jobs that I have had in the past. I would love to go back into those workplaces and fix the problems that I knew existed back then, but I have never known how to rectify the problems until now. All that was needed was an understanding and grasp of the HR body of knowledge from my PHR studies to open my eyes to the ways that some businesses are shooting themselves in the foot with bad or nonexistent policies.

For the next two weeks, I plan to study Total Rewards. There is a quite a bit of material in this section, and I scored a 58% on the HRCI PHR practice exam, so I will be taking an extra week to be sure that I cover this topic well.



the field. I look forward to becoming a functioning member of the HR community and passing the PHR certification exam.

### **Just the Facts, Ma'am**

This week I studied Total Rewards. Total Rewards makes up about 16% of the total PHR exam weight. In the Human Resources Certification Institute (HRCI) PHR practice test, I scored a 58% on this section.

According to the **PHR study guide**, the Total Rewards section of the PHR exam tests the human resources professional's knowledge of:

- 1) Applicable federal, state, and local laws, including FLSA, ERISA, COBRA, HIPAA, FMLA, FICA, etc.
- 2) Total Rewards strategies involving compensation, benefits, wellness, rewards, bonuses, recognition, employee assistance, etc.
- 3) Job evaluation methods
- 4) Job pricing and pay structures
- 5) External labor markets and other factors uncovered during the process of environmental scanning
- 6) Merit, incentive, variable and other pay programs
- 7) Benefits programs, such as health, retirement, wellness, EAP, paid leave, etc.

**Did You Know?** According to the Human Resources Certification Institute, the pass rates for the 2008 PHR exam were the lowest ever, with only 60% of test-takers actually passing.

### **My Take on the Material**

I have always had an interest in the money and benefits side of the employment equation. (Most of us do, because our paychecks are involved!) However, being interested in the topic is a world apart from actually having to administer a total rewards plan in the workplace. There are laws covering almost every imaginable portion of a benefits package, and just thinking about all of them makes my head spin.

When I was taking human resources classes in college, I learned about legislation that was relevant to total rewards like the Davis-Bacon Act (requires a minimum wage for federal construction workers), ERISA (requires employers to hold a portion of retirement savings in a trust separate from operating funds), and so much more. However, the human resources study guide showed me not only what the laws mean, but why the laws were enacted.

For example, the PHR study guide says that ERISA was legislated to protect workers from losing their pensions in case their employer went out of business. That unfortunate problem was brought to light when the employees of the Studebaker Company lost their entire retirement savings back in the 1960's. To prevent employees from losing their pensions like that again, the new law was created. It now helps employees to keep their pensions even if they lose their jobs.

Being able to see the origins of a piece of legislation also helps with remembering its purpose. It's easier to recall a memory that is associated with an actual event instead of an abstract thought. Because human resources deals with many types of legislation, I will have to make those connections often.

### **The Upcoming Time Crunch**

A lack of time is getting to be an issue, so I think that instead of reading all of the relevant chapters from my human resources management textbook, I will probably skim the chapters, catch the high points, and leave the rest of the time for the PHR Study Guide. I have several practice tests for each chapter to catch up on. It is easier to take a 10 minute practice test than it is to sit and study for an hour, and I think I am getting more out of the practice exams.

Now that I am halfway through my human resources certification exam studies, I am starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel. I can beat this thing; I've just got to keep slogging through! I'll be back next time with week 7 of the PHR study guide with Total Rewards (pt. 2 of 2).



the human resources profession, and they have now combined forces to change the face of HR for the future. It is definitely worth a look!

### **Just the Facts, Ma'am**

Last week I went over this information, but it won't hurt to give it again as a reminder. This week I studied Total Rewards. TR makes up about 16% of the total PHR exam weight. In the HRCI practice test, I scored a 58% on this section.

### **My Take on the Material**

As I said before, I didn't really study the Total Rewards side of human resources (benefits, compensation, salaries, wages, etc.) much this week. I worked to catch up on some of the computer-based practice exams that came with my copy of the SPHR & PHR Study Guide. I am now almost completely caught up on the practice exams, and it feels good to be on target to complete my PHR study sessions by the exam date. I have heard it often, and I repeat it often, but the PHR- and SPHR-certified human resources professionals that I speak with almost always say that practicing the questions is one of the best ways to study.

I have noticed that as I have been taking more and more time to study PHR test questions, I have been able to see some of the little nuances in the questions that I would have otherwise missed. Also, the questions that ask things like "What is the most likely...? What is the best method for...? Which of the following is not...?" are easier to handle when you get into a thorough examination of the questions and possible answers. My scores started rising when I started paying attention to the minute details involved.

### **Hey! I Knew Something!**

I'm sure that all of you have learned something new at one time or another (heck, you're reading, right?). The experience of using that new knowledge, skill, or ability to your benefit is a great feeling. Last week I was speaking with someone about something going on in her career, and I was able to give some friendly advice based on what I have learned during my PHR study sessions. It really felt great to be able to use my study efforts to help someone in need! I have never been as confident in my human resources knowledge as I am now.

Next week starts my leap into the thrilling PHR exam topic of Labor Relations. Labor Relations makes up more than a fifth of the total PHR exam score, so I will be breaking it into two weeks to get my brain fully wrapped around the topic.



area of the human resource professional's body of knowledge. After I finish with my PHR studies, I would like to check back and purchase some of the books here to supplement my overall knowledge of human resources concepts.

### **Just the Facts, Ma'am**

This week I studied Employee and Labor Relations. Employee and Labor Relations makes up about 22% of the total PHR exam weight. In the Human Resources Certification Institute (HRCI) PHR practice test, I scored 50% on this section.

According to the **PHR study guide**, the Total Rewards section of the PHR exam tests the human resources professional's knowledge of:

- 1) Applicable federal, state and local laws affecting employment in union and nonunion environments, such as antidiscrimination laws, sexual harassment, labor relations, and privacy (for example, WARN Act, Title VII, NLRA)
- 2) Techniques for facilitating positive employee relations (for example, employee surveys, focus groups, dispute resolution, labor/management cooperative strategies and programs)
- 3) Employee involvement strategies (for example, employee management committees, self-directed work teams, staff meetings)
- 4) Individual employment rights issues and practices (for example, employment at will, negligent hiring, defamation, or employees' rights to bargain collectively)
- 5) Unfair labor practices (for example, employee communication strategies and management training)
- 6) The collective bargaining process, strategies, concepts, and human resources' role

### **My Take on the Material**

At this point in my PHR study sessions, it looks like I have abandoned my **human resources management textbook** in favor of the more comprehensive and subject-relevant PHR Study Guide. I was afraid that I would be focusing too much on information that wasn't useful in my study sessions for the professional in human resources certification exam, because the human resources management textbook was not written solely for the purpose of preparing the reader for the PHR exam.

As I said before, I really enjoyed reading the Employee and Labor Relations section of the PHR study material. That is somewhat surprising, because the topic can be as dull as watching paint dry (and after a few days of painting, I finally know just how bad that really is). However, in my formal human resources education, I took a class called Labor Management Relations that I enjoyed very much.

My professor had spent time in management working in human resources as a barrier to union organization in the company. He was an expert in the area of employee and labor relations management. After retiring from the private sector and joining the public sector as



an educator, he joined the National Education Association (a union organization). He laughed about the issue, because he had become a part of something that he had worked tirelessly to prevent earlier in his life.

When I had to study the topic of unions in college, I came to my own conclusions about their necessity and effects on business in our country. At first, they were necessary to correct imbalances in power due to overbearing management and bad business policy. However, over time, they have grown more and more powerful, and they now are squeezing the life from the companies they are supposed to be working with (Big Three, anyone?). While they were once a necessary component of the business world, they are now outdated. Something else to keep in mind: unionization is now higher in the government sector than in any other. After several years of working side-by-side with government employees, I know that they don't need another reason to slack off at work!

### **Do That "HR Thing"**

I'm really enjoying this study of human resources (and I hope I continue to after the PHR exam goes by)! I have had more than two dozen people email me for information, tips, or suggestions about studying for the PHR exam, and I was more than happy to answer each one of them personally. If anyone else has something they would like to ask about the PHR exam or human resources in general, please feel free to send me **an email**. I am rapidly learning more about the entire PHR study process, and I know more about HR and HRM now than I ever have.

Next week I wrap up this little section with Employee and Labor Relations Part 2 of 2.



## A New Resource

HR.com is the outside learning resource for this week. I checked around this site for a while, and the thing that stuck with me the most was the wiki. The human resources wiki allows site users to create and modify the definitions of HR terms. This wiki has the potential to become a very valuable tool for human resources professionals. The site also has job search links, surveys, free human resources management forms, related blog links, and a social networking tool. If you are a human resources professional, then it is definitely worth a look.

## Just the Facts, Ma'am

This week I studied Employee and Labor Relations. Employee and Labor Relations makes up about 22% of the total PHR exam weight. In the HRCI practice test, I scored a 50% on this section.

Last week I went over the knowledge requirements for the Employee and Labor Relations section in detail. Please refer back to that if necessary.

## My Take on the Material

I finished the book chapter, and it left me with some interesting conclusions. This week, I refreshed my memory of the types of dispute resolution, and I think it is a topic that everyone should be versed in. Many companies are now requiring employees to sign a mandatory alternative dispute resolution (ADR) agreement. This agreement basically states that the involved parties must take employer/employee disputes through an agreed-upon channel in order to resolve the problem. Two of the main methods of ADR include mediation and arbitration.

*Mediation* involves an impartial third party (mediator) that tries to facilitate a resolution to the problem. Mediation is informal, non-binding, and non-adversarial. A good mediation process will bring both parties to a mutually agreeable conclusion.

*Arbitration* involves a neutral person (arbitrator) that considers facts and arguments and renders a decision. Although arbitration is less formal than a court trial, the final decisions in an arbitration case will be binding to all involved parties.

Companies should look into forming their own ADR policies. Anything that a company can do legally to cut down on court costs is an avenue that should be explored. These cost-effective ADR methods are attractive to both parties in an employee/employer dispute. Human resources professionals are an important link in the ADR method of problem-solving in the workplace.

## Looking Forward

As the time has progressed, I have become more confident in my ability. However, I had a shock the other night. I found some practice flashcards, and I went through a couple dozen of the cards, and I didn't get more than half of them correct! I don't know if it is because the questions were more fact-based than the practice questions (situation-based) that I have been using, but it gave me pause, because I didn't know the answers. I have been feeling more confident, as I already stated, but this little incident gave me another boost in urgency to make sure that I am studying all of the necessary materials!

Next week is my last "focused" study week. I will be studying Risk Management (7% of total PHR exam, scored 67% on practice exam). After that, I will be taking the second PHR assessment exam to gauge my progress and narrow my study focus for the final PHR exam preparation.



## Just the Facts, Ma'am

This week I studied Employee and Labor Relations. Employee and Labor Relations makes up about 7% of the total PHR exam weight. In the HRCI practice test, I scored a 67% on this section.

According to the **PHR study guide**, the Risk Management section tests the human resources professional's knowledge of:

1. Federal, state, and local workplace laws regarding health/safety/security/privacy (OSHA, ADA, HIPAA, etc.)
2. Occupational injury and illness prevention and compensation programs
3. Workplace safety/security risks (theft, sabotage, espionage, etc.)
4. Emergency action and disaster recovery plans

## My Take on the Material

The reading this week was fairly dry, because it mostly revolved around the founding of OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) and how it currently regulates workplace safety. Because Risk Management only makes up approximately 7% of the entire PHR exam, the chapter was very short, so thankfully I didn't have to spend a lot of time on this topic.

**My Thoughts:** Studying for the PHR exam might be the hardest thing I've ever done.

The most interesting portion of the PHR study material involved the case *Automobile Workers v. Johnson Controls, Inc.* The basic summary of the case is that the company manufactures batteries with a high lead content. Lead has been shown to be a hazard for pregnant mothers and their children, so Johnson Controls decided to move the pregnant women to other, lead-free places in the company. They sued Johnson Controls for discriminatory practices and won the case. The bottom line: companies cannot remove a pregnant woman from a hazardous position simply because they want to. The company can provide information to the woman, but the final decision to move is left up to the employee. I put together a research paper as an undergraduate student on the topic of **pregnancy discrimination in the workplace**.

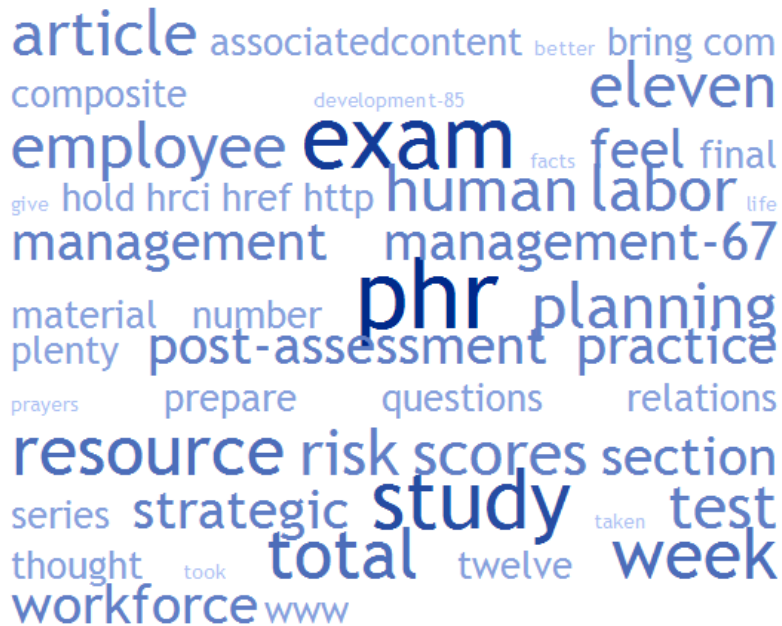
## Looking Forward

With the final "structured" week of PHR study behind me, I am now trying to decide exactly what would be the best way to study in the coming weeks. I now have less than two weeks until the PHR exam drops on me, and I don't know if I should feel excited or terrified (at the moment, I have a little bit of both). I have been going over the pass/fail numbers from the PHR, and according to the Human Resources Certification Institute, approximately 40% of PHR takers failed from 2005 to 2008. That should put a little hitch in anyone's step!

I plan to take the final exam I purchased from the Human Resources Certification Institute in the coming week, so that for the final seven days I can study the specific topics that I feel were missed most often. I have several hundred practice questions (excluding the HRCI practice exam) for my perusal, so I shall be sure to take full advantage of them.

## Week 11

### Study Summary, PHR Post-Assessment, and Planning



Welcome to week number eleven of my twelve week PHR study series. After much preparation and practice, I finally took the second PHR exam practice assessment that I purchased from the Human Resources Certification Institute (HRCI) a while back. While I scored better than my initial test, I still felt like it wasn't high enough to feel "safe" about the exam. I will give the scores for each section later in this article. I am skipping the "A New Resource" section this week, because I did not use any outside study materials.

#### Just the Facts, Ma'am

Strategic Management makes up 12% of the PHR exam.  
Workforce Planning and Employment makes up 26% of the PHR exam.  
Human Resources Development makes up 17% of the PHR exam.  
Total Rewards makes up 16% of the PHR exam.  
Employee and Labor Relations makes up 22% of the PHR exam.  
Risk Management makes up 7% of the PHR exam.

Listed below are my scores for my HRCI pre-assessment and post-assessment. Note the changes in scores from the first PHR practice exam to the second one.



### Pre-test

Total Composite Score-66%  
Strategic Management-67%  
Workforce Planning and Employment-74%  
Human Resource Development-77%  
Total Rewards-58%  
Employee and Labor Relations-50%  
Risk Management-67%

### Post-test

Total Composite Score-78%  
Strategic Management-78%  
Workforce Planning and Employment-79%  
Human Resource Development-85%  
Total Rewards-67%  
Employee and Labor Relations-81%  
Risk Management-67%

### **My Take on the Material**

Now that I've finished my PHR study guide and taken the post-assessment, I have to decide where my final efforts must be focused. For instance, should I focus on bringing up my low scores in areas like risk management, which only hold a small amount of test questions? Or should I try to bring up the high-percentage test questions like those in the employee and labor relations section (which I already have a good score in)? Also, will the law of diminishing returns affect my studying?

One thing that I thought was interesting was that I increased my total score on average by one percentage point per week of studying (plus twelve percent for eleven weeks of study). If that trend holds true, my score could be in the nineties if I had a few more months to study!

### **Looking Forward**

Well, what's left besides the PHR exam? I have worked hard for eleven weeks, now, and I won't know how to feel once it's all said and done. If there's anyone else out there that can, send some prayers, thoughts, and love my way, because come eleven in the morning this Saturday, I'm going to need plenty!

For the rest of the week, I will hit whatever I don't feel comfortable about (still plenty of that), get my testing center directions and my "Authorization to Test" (ATT) letter together, and prepare for the biggest exam of my life. Wish me luck!

## Week 12

### The PHR Exam



It's over. I'm finished. And I couldn't be more pleased with the outcome! I am still waiting on my "official" scores, but when the little preliminary "pass" report came up on the screen after the exam, I just sat back in awe.

#### A New Resource

Me! After getting so much help from other PHR and SPHR exam-takers, I have decided to do whatever I can to help others to prepare for and pass the exam. I have already been getting questions from others that are preparing to take or sign up for the exam, and I am more than happy to provide any assistance that I can for them. If anyone in the reading audience would like some advice, just leave me a comment or send me an **email**.

#### Just the Facts, Ma'am

After all of the hours of studying (~75), the practice questions answered (~700), and the pages read (~1000), I finally completed the task that has dominated my waking life for the past several months. I felt like many of the questions required some critical thinking, and I marked approximately fifty questions to re-check on the first pass, because they were worded in a tricky way. I estimate that 95% of the exam material was found in my various study sources, and the other 5% was technical information that would have taken a good bit of studying to memorize (visas, immigration, etc.).

The pass rate for the PHR exam has dropped from 67% in 2005 to 60% in 2008. In the same time frame, the SPHR exam pass rate has fallen from 58% to 54%. This was one of the facts that really bothered me as I prepared.

### **My Take on the Material**

I think the PHR exam was tough, but doable. I have read many comments in recent weeks. Most of them say one of two things.

A) *The exam was hard, but I passed, because I studied a lot.*

B) *The exam was nothing like my study materials. I studied a lot, but I failed.*

This leads me to think that too many people rely on a single source of study information. I know that I used several different kinds of study materials, including a **human resources management textbook**, a **PHR and SPHR Study Guide**, multiple sources of practice exam questions, and various online sites with relevant information. I know that branching out into other sources forced my mind out of the "groove" it was in while studying just from the book or just on the practice questions. I was forced to think more strategically, and it really helped me during the exam to be able to say, "If I was an HR manager, what would I do?"

### **Looking Forward**

After the exam, I just felt sort of listless, because all of my extra time and energy has been focused on the PHR exam for several months. In the past few days, I have started re-working my resume and looking for jobs in the human resources field. Beyond those two things, and the added help I hope to provide to the soon-to-be-certified human resources community, I don't have any immediate plans.

I have used the knowledge and discipline gained from studying for the PHR to begin writing career and employment articles for publication on other sites, and I plan to continue doing that in the future. Thank you all for joining me on this wild ride, and I hope you'll stick around to read more of my work in the future!

## Resources

The neat cover image was created at [www.wordle.net](http://www.wordle.net).  
The chapter tag clouds were created at [www.tagcrowd.com](http://www.tagcrowd.com).  
I really look up to Chris at [www.renegadehr.net](http://www.renegadehr.net), so check him out.  
The UpstartHR logo was developed by my talented and wonderful wife.



**About the author:** Ben is a writer, entrepreneur, and certified HR professional whose goal is to make the lives of HR practitioners easier and more manageable by providing resources to educate, enlighten, and entertain. You can learn more about him and his work at the **UpstartHR** site or contact him via email at UpstartHR AT gmail DOT com.