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How Best to Prepare for the CompTIA RFID+ Exam

Those seeking CompTIA RFID+ certification have many choices available to them when it comes to training and education. They can pursue semester-long programs, offered by some universities and community colleges. They can attend four-day courses, taught by the top names in the commercial RFID

training space, RFID4U and OTA Training. They can sign up for two-day courses, sometimes referred to as “boot camps,” instructed by college staff, as well as by RFID experts or vendors in conjunction with universities or commercial providers. Or they can study on their own, attending no classes, but reading RFID manuals, taking CD-based practice examinations and utilizing the recently introduced interactive Web-based instruction. So which is best, and which should you choose?

Semester-long programs, available through universities and community colleges, are still in their infancy, and are as varied as the colleges offering them. Many programs are sponsored by industry, such as those provided by the University of Arkansas’ RFID Research Center. RFID programs are traditionally part of engineering or information technology departments, and do not lead to an RFID degree, but rather to a minor or area of concentration.



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While CompTIA’s RFID+ preparatory courses are normally part of a university’s curriculum, college courses tend to follow hot industry segments, such as supply chain, pharmaceutical and transportation. The main advantages in a semester-long program are the ties to industry, the reduced pace, the effects of cumulative learning over an extended period of time and the on-site RFID labs. The disadvantages are time and cost. College pricing is currently all over the map, and most existing professionals would have difficulty allocating a semester’s worth of time to complete such a program.

Commercial four-day courses are, in theory, the most comprehensive (outside of semester-long programs) available today. They are also the most expensive for short-term preparation, coming in at around \$4,000—not including travel, lodging and some meals. The advantage to this type of program is the slower pace and detailed instruction afforded for each of the nine domains covered on the CompTIA RFID+ examination. Additionally, most providers of these commercial courses assisted in the exam's development, and maintain close relationships with vendors and professionals in the RFID industry.

Assuming your goal, upon attaining certification, is to pursue RFID-related employment, commercial providers may offer the greatest network of available opportunities. Each provider has a large database of certified professionals, making it a logical resource for RFID organizations looking to augment their staff. The main disadvantage is cost. For \$4,000, you could purchase 40 RFID training manuals to prepare yourself for the exam—as opposed to attending a four-day course—and you would certainly learn enough to pass the exam.

Two-day courses, or boot camps, are offered by just about every segment in the RFID industry. Commercial providers, college instructors and RFID vendors—working in conjunction with college instructors and commercial providers—offer fast-paced CompTIA RFID+ preparation. Such courses tend to be taught over a weekend, or coupled with trade shows, vendor demonstrations or other major events.

While the pace of this training is greatly accelerated, boot camps often cover the same information (nine exam domains) as those offered in four-day training. The advantages to this type of instruction are convenience, time and cost. If you happen to be attending a trade show and can also take part in a boot camp, you will obviously save time, but you may also enjoy a training discount, by coupling it with other events at the show. The disadvantages are that the speed of the material

may be too quick for many individuals to effectively learn, and there may not be sufficient time or resources for a hands-on exploration of tags, interrogators, antennas and middleware. Furthermore, if your training is too vendor-specific, the proprietary knowledge you would acquire may not be beneficial to your exam preparation.

Self-study assumes you would not attend any RFID+ certified courses, and that you would prepare yourself for the examination utilizing a CompTIA "Quality Seal Approved" (QSA) training manual. Manuals with a QSA rating have been reviewed by CompTIA, and are generally thought to provide the tools necessary to learn the exam's nine domain objectives. In addition to learning about RFID through your training manual, you would test your knowledge utilizing CD-based practice exams (sometimes included with your manual) or by accessing online tests through such groups as MeasureUp.

You can also utilize Web-based training by purchasing different modules covering various areas of the examination. The single greatest advantage to self-study is cost. For less than \$500, including the price of the exam (\$258), but not including the expense of Web-based training (which varies), you can prepare for the RFID+ exam at your own pace, which offers a great advantage to those with time constraints.

The disadvantage is, in effect, all of the missed benefits afforded by the other programs. By preparing yourself, you lose out on all of the potential industry contacts, as well as on the in-depth understanding traditionally afforded through quality question-and-answer sessions. Most importantly, you miss out on the hands-on experience created by testing tags, antennas and readers in an RFID lab. Although you can visit YouTube and other sites to see tags in action, nothing can surpass an actual hands-on experience in developing an understanding of the physics behind RFID technology.

So which program is best for you, and which should you choose?

One way to help answer this question is to honestly consider whether you are a tech person by choice, or by nature. People who are “tech by nature” tend to have “math brains” and learn difficult concepts more quickly. People who are “tech by choice,” on the other hand, tend to require a greater amount of instruction and a tactile (hands-on) example. The time requirements and costs involved in CompTIA RFID+ preparation cannot be ignored; their differences are too varied, and their impact on your life and wallet are too great.

Prepare yourself first by reviewing all of the different programs available to you. Find out which colleges offer programs in your particular area, and determine the experience of companies that provide commercial training programs. Compare, prepare and pass the exam!

Marc Cantor is the founder of RFIDStudent.com, a vendor-neutral resource devoted to helping individuals to become CompTIA RFID+ certified.



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