A (Not-So) Secret Strategy for Passing Certification Exams

With two certifications under his belt, Mark Valentino has a good understanding of what it takes to pass the exams for Esri Technical Certification.

Experience is the key, he believes. “There are details that only experience can give you,” he said. “If you just know that you push this button and pick these things to get a result—without knowing how complex the process is or what it takes to do that analysis—you will have trouble.”

Valentino is a GIS analyst at Freese and Nichols, Inc., a multidiscipline consulting firm in Texas. Valentino discovered GIS while in the US Army. His assignment required making a lot of presentations that used maps. However, the maps made by analysts were too precise for his purposes.

“So being a good employee, I said it was time to do them myself. I got a copy of ArcView GIS 3.0 and a crash course on how to put together a map.” He enjoyed his mapmaking projects so much that when ArcView 8 was released, Valentino explored more aspects of the software and “just kept going with it.” He was hooked.

He followed a similar path to technical certification, participating in the exam’s beta program. Valentino became one of the first Esri certified ArcGIS Desktop Professionals. He remembers how excited he felt in 2011 when he learned he had passed his first certification exam. He recently earned the Enterprise Administration Associate certification and is considering additional certifications.

In the three years since the launch of the Esri Technical Certification program, more than 3,800 certifications have been awarded. Technical recruiters and hiring managers have embraced certifications as a means to simplify the hiring process. Certifications help quickly identify qualified candidates for key technical positions. Many organizations cite improved customer service as a major benefit of supporting work force certifications. Esri partners recognize the advantage of employing Esri certified staff to win customers and differentiate themselves from competitors.

Although many organizations have just one GIS professional who is effectively a jack-of-all-trades, even the most accomplished jack will likely not come close to using all the tools available in ArcGIS. Given this reality and the exams’ broad scope, preparing for a certification exam can be a challenge.

To supplement his experience when preparing for exams, Valentino has taken Esri training courses, read Esri Press books, and used other free resources such as the ArcGIS Help documentation. His advice to other candidates preparing for an exam? “Start with the help files and get to know all aspects of the software and all extensions and possible uses. All the information is there.”

Learn more about Esri Technical Certification at esri.com/certification.