

2018 PHR and SPHR Exam Content Outline FAQs

When do the changes take effect?

The new exam content outlines take effect on August 1, 2018. Exams scheduled on or after that day will be based on the structure and percentage weightings of the new, separate exam content outlines.

Why are the currently combined PHR and SPHR exam content outlines going to be separated in the future?

The findings of the 2017 practice analysis study for the PHR and SPHR exams revealed that although there are some common elements to the HR professional and senior HR professional roles, there are now enough differences in HR practice at these two levels to warrant separating the exam content outlines. The previously combined **PHR/SPHR outline** had notations such as “SPHR only” or “PHR only” which made it somewhat difficult to understand the differences between the two exams. The new outlines are very clear in describing professional-level versus senior professional-level HR practice in the U.S.

I only want to take one exam. Which one should I take?

That depends on you, your HR experience and what you are looking to achieve by earning your PHR or SPHR certification. Please refer to the eligibility criteria as well as the new PHR and SPHR exam content outlines at www.hrci.org/eco to see how your unique combination of HR experience, knowledge, education and/or training align with the content of each exam. Both are practice-based so it is assumed you will select the exam that most closely aligns with your experience.

What should I do if I want to earn a PHR or SPHR certification in 2018?

Compare your HR experience to the combined PHR/SPHR exam content outline as well as the separate outlines taking effect August 1, 2018. If you want to try to earn a PHR or SPHR before the changes take effect, be sure to apply for and schedule your exam well before August 1st to allow for any last-minute emergencies that may result in a need to change your testing date. If you are eager to earn the new PHR or SPHR, apply for and schedule your exam for August 1st or later.

What does this change mean for those who earned a PHR and an SPHR under the combined PHR/SPHR exam content outline?

Prior to August 1, 2018, anyone who had earned a PHR and an SPHR could use only the SPHR credential because the exams shared a combined exam content outline. However, as of August 1, 2018:

- Someone who holds a PHR in good standing prior to August 1, 2018 who earns the SPHR on or after August 1, 2018 can use both credentials; and
- Someone who earns both the PHR and SPHR on or after August 1, 2018 can use both credentials

HRCI monitors inappropriate credential use in accordance with our policies.

What happens if I am registered for one of these exams before August 1st and I need to reschedule?

If you are able to reschedule to take the exam by July 31, 2018 then you will take an exam based on the combined PHR/SPHR exam content outline. If you can't reschedule until August 1st or later you will be required to take an exam based on the new PHR or SPHR exam content outline. Since test centers host candidates taking a variety of different types of exams, you should allow sufficient time to reschedule in July or make a firm commitment to testing on your scheduled exam date. There can be NO exceptions.

I have Second Chance Insurance. Can I still use it to retest if I do not pass?

Yes. Second Chance Insurance gives you the ability to take the same exam again after a 90-days waiting period. However, depending on when you choose to test the first time, your 90-days re-testing period may coincide with the change from the current PHR and SPHR exams on 7/31/18 to the new PHR and SPHR exams on 8/1/18.

You can try to avoid this by taking your exam the first time in April so you will still have 90-days to retest before 8/1/18. Otherwise, you should review and compare the old and new exam content outlines so you are prepared for the changes that will occur on August 1st. What happens if I fail the PHR or SPHR exam and the 90-days retake waiting period causes me to have to retest after August 1st?

Your next exam will be based on the new exam content outline. Therefore, you should use the 90-days waiting period to evaluate how your experience compares to the new outline and, if necessary, pursue additional preparation to feel confident for your next testing appointment.

What kinds of items will be included on the new PHR and SPHR exams?

HRCI exams include a variety of item types but are mostly multiple choice. Learn more about how HRCI exams are structured here: <https://www.hrci.org/how-to-get-certified/preparation-overview/how-the-exams-are-structured>

Additional Questions About the PHR

How will the PHR exam content outline change?

You can review the new PHR outline here: https://www.hrci.org/docs/default-source/web-files/2018-phr-exam-content-outline.pdf?sfvrsn=13c44f61_14. Instead of six (6) sections, the new PHR will have five (5) sections with the section names and percentage weightings shown below. As you can see, there is greater emphasis on the PHR's role in business management and a much greater emphasis on employee and labor relations (which now includes responsibilities previously identified under the separate risk management section). Risk management remains an important focus for HR professionals despite the movement of these responsibilities under the employee and labor relations heading. Some of these changes reflect the differentiation of the role of the HR professional from the senior HR professional. Others reflect changes in HR practice including terminology.

Current Content Outline	%	NEW Content Outline	%
Business Management and Strategy	11%	Business Management	20%
Workforce Planning and Employment	24%	Talent Planning and Acquisition	16%
Human Resource Development	18%	Learning and Development	10%
Compensation and Benefits	19%	Total Rewards	15%
Employee and Labor Relations	20%	Employee and Labor Relations	39%
Risk Management	8%		

Why is the percentage weighting for the PHR section on Employee and Labor Relations so large when unions are less common today than they used to be?

Employee relations is a major part of the HR professional's role. In the U.S., this role also requires knowledge of federal labor laws like the NLRA that affect both union and nonunion workplaces. This section of the PHR exam content outline also deals with the overall employee experience including safety.

I implement HR strategies at my organization. Does that mean I should take the SPHR instead?

The decision of which exam to take is an individual one but is best made by considering the framework of each exam as defined in the exam content outline.

Additional Questions About the SPHR

How will the SPHR exam content outline change?

You can review the new SPHR outline here: https://www.hrci.org/docs/default-source/web-files/2018-sphr-exam-content-outline.pdf?sfvrsn=7fc44f61_12. Instead of six (6) sections, the new SPHR will have five (5) sections with the section names and percentage weightings shown below. As you can see there is much greater emphasis on the senior HR professional's role in leadership and strategy and more emphasis on employee relations and engagement which now includes a focus on strategies for safety and security as well as employee performance, labor strategies and diversity and inclusion. Risk management remains a very important focus for senior HR professionals despite the movement of these responsibilities under the employee relations and engagement heading. I have 20 years of HR experience. Shouldn't that be enough for me to be able to pass the SPHR exam?

Current Content Outline	%	NEW Content Outline	%
Business Management and Strategy	30%	Leadership and Strategy	40%
Workforce Planning and Employment	17%	Talent Planning and Acquisition	16%
Human Resource Development	19%	Learning and Development	12%
Compensation and Benefits	13%	Total Rewards	12%
Employee and Labor Relations	14%	Employee and Labor Relations	20%
Risk Management	7%		

I have 20 years of HR experience. Shouldn't that be enough for me to be able to pass the SPHR exam?

That depends on the nature of your HR experience during those 20 years. If you have been involved in developing and evaluating strategies across all areas of HR practice you may be prepared to take the SPHR. Review both the PHR and SPHR exam content outlines to see how your experience compares.

Recertification Questions

I don't want to lose my PHR or SPHR certification. How can I be sure that doesn't happen?

Recertification is a requirement for maintaining your PHR or SPHR certification. Learn everything you need to know about recertification by reading the Recertification Handbook and accessing other resources here: <https://www.hrci.org/recertification/what-is-recertification/recertification-resources>

Now that the SPHR no longer has a section called "Business" does that mean I no longer need to earn business credits to recertify?

No. SPHRs and SPHRIs are required to earn 15 business credits to demonstrate continuing competence in a functional area that has been increasing in importance for the HR profession over many years.

With the increase in the PHR Business Management section from 11% to 20% does this mean I need to start earning business credits to recertify?

No. SPHRs and SPHRIs are required to earn business credits to recertify.

What does the SPHR Exam Content Outline update mean to my current cycle of SPHR recertification?

Your recertification cycle and requirements will not change because of the new exam content outline. For more about recertification visit the [Recertification Resources page](#).

What if I decide to recertify by testing?

It would change your recertification cycle. Those who earned an SPHR many years ago may wish to put their current HR experience "to the test" by voluntarily choosing to recertify by testing rather than by accumulating 60 recertification credits. For some, this may be a more efficient way to recertify. This also provides the opportunity to experience the new SPHR and see how the experience needed to earn this credential has changed over time.

Additional Questions About Exam Content Outline and Exam Form Updates

How is an exam content outline updated?

Exam content outlines are updated based on the results of a formal practice analysis study facilitated by a professional trained in this process. Each practice analysis study involves several phases such as preliminary research about HR practices, a workshop with a diverse task force of HR practitioners and a validation survey.

Why do exam content outline changes occur every few years instead of annually?

The timing of a practice analysis study is directly related to the frequency of substantive changes in practice in that field. HRCI follows industry standards with regard to the timing of practice analysis studies and exam content outline updates which may range from between three to seven years depending on the industry or profession. Exam items and exam forms are updated more frequently so candidates are always tested on up-to-date HR practices.

How often do exam forms change?

For security reasons, the specific timing of exam form updates is confidential. Exam items change periodically and are always aligned to the exam content outline.

Other Questions

How do the PHR and SPHR exams compare to other HR generalist certification exams available in the U.S.?

The PHR and SPHR exams are designed to meet the highest certification industry standards and are subject to annual review and monitoring by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA), an independent accrediting body which measures all aspects of a certification program based on 24 different standards. In addition, the PHR and SPHR have more than 40 years of name recognition and are asked for by employers by name more than any other HR certification developed in the U.S. These programs are developed by HRCI with the direct involvement of hundreds of HR practitioners.

What should I do if I practice HR outside the U.S.?

Although many HR professionals around the world have earned the PHR or SPHR, HRCI now has a global suite of HR certifications – including the PHRi™ and SPHRi™ – available for those seeking to demonstrate HR expertise and credibility regardless of where they practice.

What is the value of earning a PHR or SPHR certification from HRCI?

Research commissioned by HRCI has found that there is a direct monetary value to earning a PHR or SPHR when compared to non-certified peers. Those with a PHR reportedly earned more than \$4,000 more than non-certified peers while those with an SPHR reportedly earned more than \$19,000 more than non-certified peers. See: https://www.hrci.org/docs/default-source/press-releases/hrcivocstudy.pdf?sfvrsn=45eb1cf2_0 for more on this study. Other research finds that increasing professional credibility, gaining greater confidence and challenging oneself are considered valuable outcomes of earning a PHR or SPHR certification.

What is the benefit to organizations of hiring PHR or SPHR certified HR professionals?

HR is a complex and ever evolving profession. In addition to being able to master foundational and generally accepted HR practices, HR professionals must also be able to understand and apply their expertise based on the unique laws, regulations and practices of their employer's geographic region, industry and company size. In order to compete, fulfill their mission and/or serve stakeholders, every organization must be able to maximize the contributions of each employee through effective people management practices. When HR professionals earn their PHR or SPHR, they are choosing to have their knowledge and experience measured against a standard that has been developed objectively and independently by the HR profession.