

CPC Cheat Sheet 2026

The night-before summary, built like the exam.

100 Questions	4h Time limit	70% Passing score
\$425 Exam fee	AAPC Governing body	

CPC Exam — At a Glance

- 100 multiple-choice questions
- 4 hours (240 minutes) total testing time
- Passing score: 70%
- Exam fee: \$425 (1 attempt)

Pacing Math (must-remember)

- $240 \text{ min} \div 100 \text{ questions} = \sim 2.4 \text{ minutes per question}$ — your hard budget.
- Do a time check at Q25 (~60 min used), Q50 (~120 min), Q75 (~180 min).
- To pass you need 70 of 100 correct. You can miss up to 30 and still pass.
- Never leave blanks — there is no penalty math that beats a guess; a blank is a guaranteed miss.

Core Code Sets (know cold)

- CPT® — procedures/services. Category I (5-digit), Category II (performance, -F), Category III (emerging tech, -T).
- ICD-10-CM — diagnoses. Code to highest specificity; confirm laterality, episode, and combination codes.
- HCPCS Level II — supplies, drugs, DME, non-physician services (letter + 4 digits).

Modifier Quick Rules

- -25 significant, separately identifiable E/M on same day as a procedure.
- -59 distinct procedural service (use only when no more specific X{EPSU} modifier fits).
- -26 professional component; -TC technical component.
- -50 bilateral procedure; -51 multiple procedures; -76/-77 repeat by same/other physician.
- -RT / -LT right/left; -GA/-GY/-GZ ABN/liability (HCPCS).

Coding Workflow (apply to every case)

1. Read the full operative/office note before coding.
2. Diagnosis first (ICD-10-CM): Alphabetic Index -> verify in Tabular List -> apply all instructional notes (Includes, Excludes1/Excludes2, Code First, Use Additional).
3. Procedure (CPT): find the correct code family, read all section guidelines and parenthetical notes.
4. Append modifiers; confirm medical necessity links Dx <-> procedure.

Excludes Notes (frequent trap)

- Excludes1 = "NOT coded here" — the two conditions can never be reported together.
- Excludes2 = "not included here" — the condition is separate; both may be coded together if documented.

Test-Day Strategy

- Tab and index your code books — the exam is open-book; speed of lookup wins.
- Eliminate obviously wrong options first, then verify the remaining answer in the book.
- Answer easy questions first; flag and return to time-sinks.
- Guess (never blank) any question you can't finish before time runs out.

Official sources

- AAPC — CPC Certification Exam: <https://www.aapc.com/certifications/cpc>
- AAPC — What code books do I need for my AAPC certification exam? (AAPC Support): <https://www.aapc.com/support/books-for-exams/what-code-books-do-i-need-for-my-aapc-certification-exam>
- AAPC — Continuing Education Unit (CEU) Policy (AAPC): <https://www.aapc.com/medical-coding-education/help/>

Free practice questions for this exam: www.everyexamprep.com/exams/aapc-cpc/practice-test