

# 3 Keys to a High-Performing Exam Prep Program for Professional Learners



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Let's begin with a cautionary tale for certification program leaders from an unexpected place: a New Hampshire newsroom roughly 30 years ago.

Through the 70s, 80s, and 90s, The Reidale Tribune was the hottest newspaper in Reidale County, New Hampshire—on par with the New York Times, Boston Globe, and New York Post. Then, something changed.

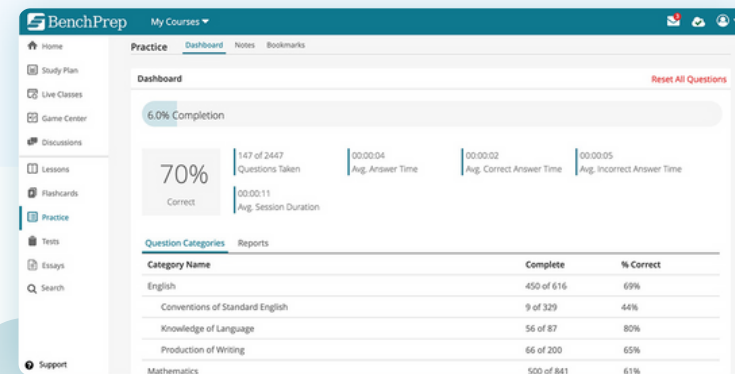
The internet age drove readers online, and the Tribune lost readers to virtual outlets. As a paper company stuck in a digital world, owner Sarah Haskin knew she had to change her business model. She had to reskill and upskill her reporters to write for the virtual space.

Sarah gathered every learning module, lecture, and training program she'd ever implemented and reworked them for online journalism, creating a virtual masterclass for her writers to follow. But something was wrong. While engagement levels were high at first, they crashed a few weeks into the course. Only 25% of Sarah's writers graduated, and the rest fled to work for the competition. The reviews weren't flattering either.

There are three key aspects to building an engaging learning program—personalized study plans, practice exams, and actionable data—and had the Reidale Tribune understood these key aspects, it could have been the most-read online news outlet in Reidale County, New Hampshire when the internet boom exploded.

These three keys are also crucial to crafting exam prep programs that actually work—programs that focus on engaging learners with personalized courses and study plans to meet their needs.

Let's put **personalized study plans, practice exams,** and **actionable data** under a microscope to see how they're critical to building an effective, high-performing certification exam prep program.



## KEY 1

# Personalize Your Study Plans

Understanding your target audience is key to running any successful business. As such, to build a successful exam prep program, you need to first understand your learners. Learner expectations have evolved over the decades, as teaching techniques and new technology have reshaped the way people learn.

According to Deloitte, **70%** of full-time employees do most of their work remotely. What good are your training and exam prep modules if they're tethered to a particular place and schedule? Ensure your learners can leverage online resources from the comfort of their home.

Source: [5 Things You Need To Know About the Modern Learner](#)



To meet modern learners where they are, you must remember the following:

- **They are easily distracted.** There are so many distractions bombarding their daily lives that dedicating uninterrupted time to online learning modules is a luxury many can't afford.
- **They expect instant gratification.** Today's learners are accustomed to the on-demand, just-in-time world. Exam prep and certification training programs are no different. The best programs are the ones that learners can access on their own time.
- **They are ready and eager to learn.** Learners are willing to reskill and upskill to keep pace with technology, and they expect your training and exam prep programs to do the same.
- **They long for social learning.** Learners will tap each other's information banks to gain deeper insight into their industry and profession. In fact, [those who participate in discussions are more engaged](#) with their learning program than those who don't.
- **They work remotely part-time or full-time.** Most of the workforce is now used to working remotely, and they also want to study from wherever they are as they prepare for their certification or entrance exams.

For example, Andrew is an aspiring attorney preparing for his California Bar Examination, one of the most complex bar exams in the country. Andrew also works a full-time job waiting tables at a local bistro. He has a loving relationship to maintain and a dedicated group of friends he meets with every weekend. Andrew lives a busy life, and while he's willing to make sacrifices to study for the bar, he shouldn't have to throw everything away just to pass.

With a personalized exam prep program, Andrew can leverage his free time to study for his upcoming exam. Instead of thumbing through dense books—perhaps skipping over the material he knows (or thinks he knows)—Andrew uses microlearning modules from the comfort of his mobile device to absorb information in bite-sized pieces.

On your end, you get to see where learners like Andrew spend most of their time. User data tracks which of your modules are most engaging and which need some work.

You can take any number of personalized approaches to enhance your exam prep program. However, some strategies, like one-to-one tutoring, lose steam at scale. These programs get more expensive as you expand, requiring more trainers and more costly overhead.

Instead, personalized exam prep allows learners to create study schedules that work on their time. They'll set their exams date and determine how much they'll need to study to pass.

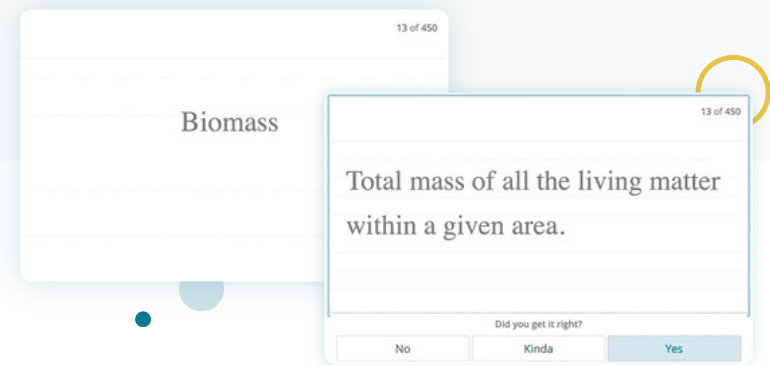


## CUSTOMER CASE STUDY

Find out how [CompTIA](#) partnered with BenchPrep to create a modern, personalized learning experience to improve engagement and outcomes.

Adaptive study plans recognize a learner's strengths and weaknesses and adjust the plan accordingly. Follow these steps to build more personalized study plans:

- **Organize.** Gather and organize your content by topic, competency, or learning objective. Then, tag any related content and make it accessible from the main subject.
- **Pre-exam.** Give learners a pre-exam to measure their strengths and weaknesses before diving into the course.
- **Focus on weaknesses, reinforce strengths.** Design a study plan based on learners' pre-exam data. Include content and practice questions related to their weaknesses, while remembering to bolster their strengths.
- **Measure learner confidence.** Selecting the correct answer doesn't always mean they're 'right.' Learners must understand *why* it's the correct answer if the information has any chance of sinking in.
- **Provide on-the-spot feedback.** In-the-moment or on-the-spot feedback helps learners identify and understand their blind spots.
- **Mix it up.** Leverage different mediums to deliver information. Flash cards, practice questions, podcasts, videos, lectures, games, and infographics are just a few examples.



# How to Personalize Your Study Plan

Personalization is essential to building an exam prep program that works with your learners' lifestyles and needs, but how do you build an individualized program that also works at scale?

Use these tips to help strategize.

## Put Yourself In Your Learners' Shoes

As mentioned, understanding your learners is the first step in crafting an exam prep program that works for them.

Consider the following questions, and narrow your strategy from there:

- **Who's taking your course? What type of professional/ learner are they?**
- **How much time do they need? How much time do they actually have?**
- **Would they benefit more from long-form online lectures, bite-sized learning modules, or a combination of both that they can use on the go?**
- **What sort of activities will increase engagement? Games? Flashcards? Discussion forums?**
- **Would they prefer periodic practice questions and exams, or a question bank they can repeat?**

*Flexibility* is essential when it comes to exam prep program training material. Your program can't facilitate your learners' diverse needs if it leans on a one-size-fits-all approach. Instead, ensure that learner experiences follow a flexible framework based on **discovery**, **learning**, and **feedback**.



### The Discovery Phase

Use pre-exams to determine where your learners are and which areas they need to improve. From here, your exam prep program works with learners to determine how much time they must dedicate to one area. You'll also establish the mediums through which you'll convey the information.



### The Learning Phase

Leverage those learning mediums to focus on the weak points established by discovery. The end goal is to pass the inevitable exam. How learners get there should be entirely up to them.



### The Feedback Phase

Provide constant feedback to reinforce learner confidence during the learning phase. Late feedback is no good. Explain why practice questions are right or wrong instead of just saying they're right or wrong. Redirecting to the source material is an excellent way to provide in-lesson feedback.

## Tell Them How Much Time To Spend Studying

Professionals are strapped for time, so you must determine how many hours they'll need to allocate to prepare for an upcoming exam. With this frame in mind, you can build a study plan that maximizes learners' available hours. Now learners have a realistic expectation of how much effort they'll need to put forth to prepare adequately.

Learners come from different backgrounds and have varying levels of prior knowledge. Some have years of industry experience, whereas others are brand new. Some learners work full-time jobs, while others have more free time to dedicate to study. Instead of being ready in 6–10 weeks, full-time workers might need 12–16 weeks to prepare.

On the other hand, those with more open or flexible schedules have more time to study. Learners with extra time on their hands can take more practice exams and complete more modules, thus shortening their exam prep time frame.

That said, different licenses, exams, and certifications come with vastly different time frames. For example, certifications in IT can range anywhere from three months to a full year to complete.

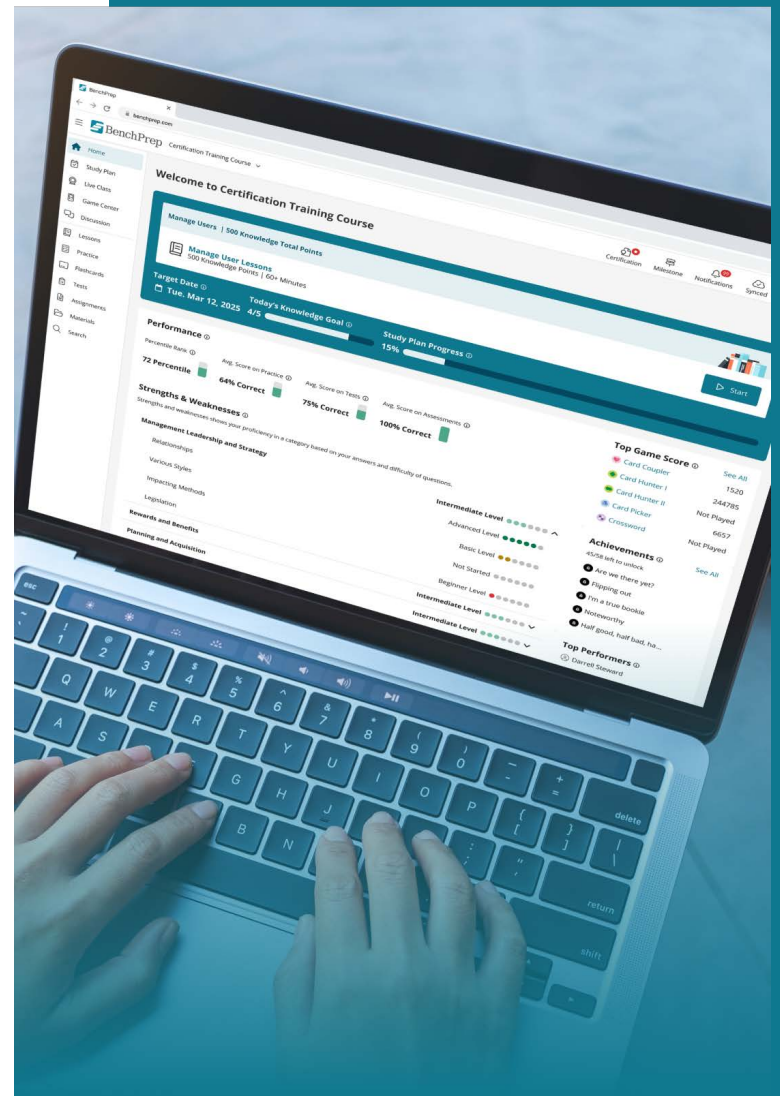
Real estate is another industry that requires hours upon hours of study, review, practice, and exam-taking. But while IT requirements change depending on the field, real estate regulations vary depending on where you practice.

Therefore, you'll need to expand your exam prep program to accommodate the credit hour requirements of different states.

### DID YOU KNOW?

BenchPrep's adaptive eLearning engine generates personalized study plans based on a variety of different data points, creating the most efficient learning experience possible.

Source: [Adaptive eLearning: Sorting Content for Personalized Learning Pathways](#)



## KEY 2

# Provide Practice Exams

Imagine if you handed someone a textbook titled *How To Play Baseball* and then sent them off to start a game. They'd be pretty lost, wouldn't they? You can say the same for exam prep and the importance of practice sessions before the big game, or before their high-stakes exam.



Practice exams lead to more positive outcomes while reducing learner stress and anxiety. They must get as close to the exam experience as possible to build confidence. When the practice exam doesn't mirror the actual exam, it can't help learners prepare. We've established that learners don't have much time and they certainly don't have time to waste.

Ideally, practice exams will leverage various **question types** to show learners what to expect on exam day. They may also include timers and other x-factors to consider. Finally, practice exams are an excellent source of real-time feedback to increase the chances of **remediation**.

Too many certification programs fall flat in this area. They provide plenty of learning opportunities but don't put those lessons to the exam. When you focus too much on learning, the practice stage falls to the wayside. Still, learners know the importance of practice—and will seek it elsewhere. Don't miss this massive revenue opportunity: ensure your exam prep lessons are backed up by plenty of practice opportunities.

Your learners will benefit from practice sessions in the following areas:



### Knowledge Assessment

Practice exams help determine how much information a learner absorbed before moving forward. For example, you might intersperse mini-quizzes at the end of a section or module to review key points before advancing from sections. Then use a practice-exam at the end of the course as a graded assessment. Learners can quickly determine which slides, videos, PDFs, or articles they must review to increase their scores.



### Motivation

Practice exams are a great way to motivate learners and keep them moving through the course. Leverage section pre-exams to determine what they already know. The pre-exam should cover key talking points during the course, giving learners an idea of what they're about to learn. Even if they don't perform well on the pre-exam, learners will be eager to retake the exam once they've learned the material.



### Learner Engagement

If motivation is the why for learners, then engagement is the what. Quizzes encourage learners to interact with content by making them think critically about the material covered. It turns them into active participants, rather than passive listeners.



## Best Practices for Practice Exams

Practice exams are essential to creating effective and engaging exam prep programs. What role does a learning management system (LMS) play in delivering practice exams and immediate feedback?

### Practice Exams vs. Practice Experiences: Decide Which is Right For Your Learners

Understanding the difference between practice exams and experiences is imperative to crafting effective exam prep courses.

Practice exams mimic the exam atmosphere by [asking a mixed bag of questions](#) learners are likely to find on the exam. These questions range across several styles, including multiple-choice, short answers, and essays. You should also time the practice assessment, to remind your learners of the ticking clock.

Practice exams also help learners build mental stamina. Most of us start strong when beginning a new task. The longer it takes, the weaker we get. The same is true for exam-taking. You might burn through the first hour but then drag through the last leg. The more practice exams your learners take, the better they'll gauge their mental endurance.

On the other hand, practice experiences let learners practice at their own pace. They can select from a bank of questions and get real-time feedback after each response. Practice experiences take the pressure off the learner, allowing them to focus on weak points for as long as they desire.

Ultimately, both are crucial to learning and retaining information. Learners will need the timed practice exam to get a feel for how long they'll have on exam day. Meanwhile, they can practice individual questions from the bank until they feel confident enough to take the timed exam.

### Provide Immediate Feedback

Feedback is perhaps the most crucial part of your exam prep program—and goes far beyond calculating a score at the end of a practice exam.

Immediate feedback dives into learners' strengths and weaknesses, explaining why they got a question wrong, rather than just marking it as wrong. It also shows them where to find the correct information within the source material. Then they can head back to the question bank and focus on those highlighted areas to build their subject mastery.

By definition, immediate feedback provides on-demand context for every given answer. When a learner inputs an answer, real-time feedback reinforces knowledge by explaining mistakes or affirming correct answers.



Incorrect. Here's why...



Correct! Here's why...

Consistent feedback improves learner performance and increases engagement. The more feedback learners receive, the deeper insight they will have into their progression. They'll be able to make better decisions, improve performance, and find more success as they move through the course.

This feedback goes hand-in-hand with engagement. The more you recognize learners for their positive performance, the more engaged they'll be. Simply marking answers right or wrong doesn't tell them everything they need to know. "Why?" is perhaps the most important question.

Four out of five modern learners prefer on-the-spot feedback and see it as crucial to their growth and understanding for mastering a subject.

Source: [Everything You Need To Know About The Millennials in the Workplace infographic](#)

## Provide Comprehensive Remediation

While practice exams and other characteristic features of an exam help create familiarity with the exam itself, **remediation tools** offer learners a deeper understanding of the skills being tested and thus require learning.

If a learner gets a practice question wrong, the best practice is to guide the learner back to a relevant lesson and to provide additional information and context around a particular topic. Effective remediation tools ultimately save learners time from having to go back and search through an entire course for the right answer, while also helping them identify where their strengths and weaknesses lie to better manage their study time.

## Provide a Variety of Practice Exams to Facilitate Confidence-Based Learning

Simply put, the more practice exams a learner takes, the better prepared they are. For more effective results, vary the types of assessments to prevent students from simply memorizing the correct answers.

Remember, learners need to understand *what* they're learning, as these lessons will have real-world implications after the exam. The more roads they find to a correct answer, the more confident they'll be in that answer. So how can you implement confidence-based learning strategies in your exam prep program?

Begin by adding a confidence metric to your multiple-choice quizzes. Learners will mark their answers and then rate how confident they are in that answer, on whatever scale deemed best.

The screenshot shows a quiz question about semicolons. The title is "Semicolons". Below it, it says "A semicolon is used:" followed by a bulleted list: "to join closely related independent clauses when a coordinate conjunction is not used", "with conjunctive adverbs to join main clauses", "to separate items in a series that contains commas", and "to separate coordinate clauses when they are joined by transitional words or phrases". It also states "A semicolon is not used to join two dependent clauses (sentence fragments)." Under "Good Semicolons", it says "Use a semicolon to join two complete and closely related sentences" and "Each sentence has to be able to stand on its own, and the two sentences should pertain to the same subject or be otherwise related." Three example sentences are provided: "My mother has been knitting all her life; I don't think she'll ever stop.", "I was constantly reminded to stay strong by my sister; her encouragement and love helped me through some tough years.", and "Taavetti starts a new job today; she is very excited." A fourth sentence is partially visible: "I don't understand the directions; my teacher must explain them to me." On the right side, there is a "Rate Your Confidence" section with three buttons: "High" (green), "Medium" (grey), and "Low" (grey). Below these is a blue "Continue »" button. Further down, it shows "Category: Conventions of Standard English" and "Related Questions: Practice Questions Taken related to this topic".

Adding this scale overcomes the limitations of multiple-choice exams. Instead of allocating resources to examine essays or give face-to-face assessments, you can see how well your learners understand the material with a simple multiple-choice quiz.



## KEY 3

# Leverage Your Data to Grow

As more learners move through your course, your online exam prep program needs to change, improve, and update. But how will you know which aspects to change, versus those that are already working?



Data enables organizations to identify patterns and behaviors about their learners. Learners will provide actionable insight every time they engage in the course. Then, you can take that data and modify the course at a moment's notice. These regular updates prevent high churn rates and provide significant advantages over your competition. So, where should you start your data journey?

Begin by looking for specific patterns as learners move through the program.

Here are three actionable learner patterns and how you can leverage them:

- 1** You notice that learners start very strong in the study plan—or the curated path through the course content—but then drop off towards the end. This trend would suggest that your study plan is too long and does not hold their attention long enough to complete. To solve this problem, consider utilizing [microlearning strategies](#), such as shortening the study plan. Learners should be able to complete sections in 20 minutes or less.
- 2** You notice the more practice questions a learner completes, the better they seem to perform on the practice exam. Clearly, your practice questions are helpful and effective for those who use them.  
  
Now that you know you don't have to change anything, you can focus on motivating learners to use the available practice questions.
- 3** You notice over half of your learners marking low confidence in two or three of your lessons. Data surrounding the same sections shows that learners took more notes and placed more bookmarks.

These behaviors tell you that the content in these lessons needs to be reviewed. A few simple edits may do the trick, or perhaps you need to rewrite the content altogether. You can work towards a solution that will help boost your learners' confidence so they feel prepared come exam day.

## Take Action With the Data in Mind

Now that you've identified the areas that require change, it's time to take action. Take a look at your patterns and determine how to fix the issues you've uncovered.

You can remedy your study plan issue by shortening the tasks and weeding out any superfluous content. Remember, these plans must be short and to the point—extra content bogs down learners who are used to fast-paced information delivery.

Next, let's tackle the low-confidence thresholds. Determine if there are lessons or topics in the section that could benefit from more clarification. Then rework them to make things more digestible. Add additional content that you believe better explains the topic at hand. This may be an extra infographic, a few different articles, or a video explanation.

The data proved that your practice questions are working, so how can you improve them? A mock exam is an excellent tool for learners to gauge their progress. Poor performance might steer them towards your practice questions—and it doesn't hurt to nudge them in that direction anyway.



## Conclusion

Learning businesses can unlock the full potential of their exam prep programs when they leverage the three keys to high-performing courses: **personalization, practice, and data**.

Personalized exam prep doesn't mean crafting a new course for every learner. It means designing a system that feels unique to the learner—one they can engage with on their own time.

Learners want to feel like they're taking a course built for them; one they can do while sitting at home or on their mobile devices. They may even be able to squeeze a lesson in while on break at work!

But on-the-go lessons are only as good as the material provided. Neither you nor learners will know if they've absorbed the information until they take a practice-exam.

Based on a learner's performance and confidence threshold, they can see where they stand in the course and which sections may need review. After enough practice questions, the practice exam should be a piece of cake. And when the time comes to take the final exam, learners should feel more confident than ever.

Finally, data is the key to keeping your exam prep programs up to par. Detailed analytics show you where learners are thriving and struggling, allowing you to alter some aspects of your program to boost confidence and pass rates.

**Without data, your eLearning business is just fumbling around in the dark.**



# The BenchPrep Approach

BenchPrep's [adaptive eLearning engine](#) generates personalized study plans based on a variety of different data points, creating the most efficient learning experience possible.

By leveraging [practice exams](#) and [confidence-based learning](#), BenchPrep helps exam prep companies scale their operations without the expensive overhead. In fact, BenchPrep helps you monetize your exams questions and other practice material to craft valuable, profit-driving lessons you can quickly push to out to the marketplace.

BenchPrep's focus on confidence-based learning weeds out misinformed or doubtful learners by providing [real-time feedback on their correct answers](#). After all, a correct guess is still a correct answer. But by measuring learner confidence, BenchPrep identifies doubtful learners. Then, you can provide them with more training or performance support to boost their confidence—so they know the answer, and aren't hanging on luck.

[BenchPrep's Platform](#) makes this task more manageable for exam prep providers. The LMS platform provides learners with daily microlearning questions sent straight to their mobile devices. All you need to do is create the practice questions—engagement takes care of the rest.



# Additional Resources

We hope you find this eBook useful and encourage you to explore more great BenchPrep thinking and content on our [blog](#) or in the many case studies, guides, infographics, webinars, and videos you can find on our [Digital Learning Resources](#) hub.



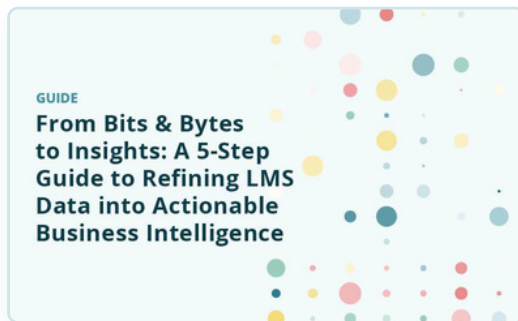
[3 Stages of Creating a Continuous Learning Journey for Your Candidates' Long-Term Success](#)



[4 LMS Superpowers Every Association Needs](#)



[Reinventing Learning: Credentialing Organizations' Golden Opportunity to Help Candidates—and Their Business](#)



[From Bit & Bytes to Insights: a 5-Step Guide to Refining LMS Data into Actionable Intelligence](#)



[How to Reduce Dropout Rates for Your Certification Candidates](#)



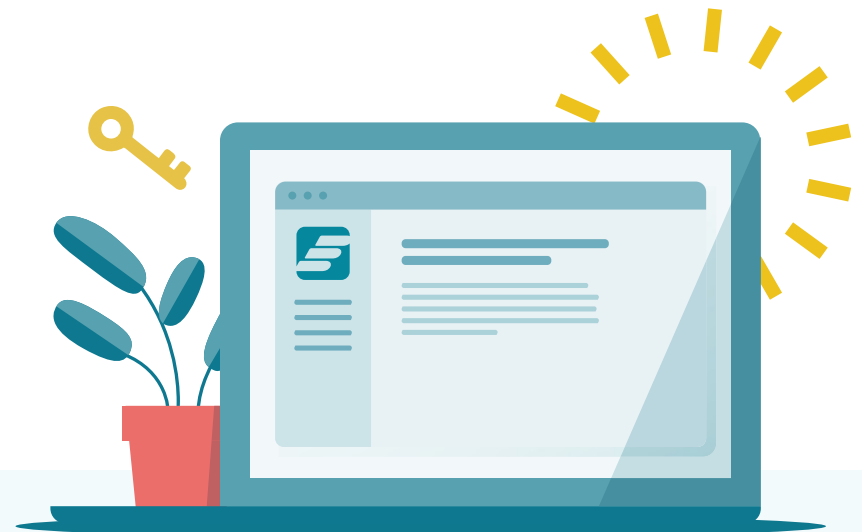
[CLO Secrets Revealed: 5 Learning Leaders Share Secrets to Transform Your Certification Program](#)

## About BenchPrep

BenchPrep is an award-winning learning management system (LMS) with a mission to transform traditional learning. Specializing in certification training, exam preparation and continuing education, we offer an interactive and personalized learning experience. We enable associations and credentialing bodies to grow their education programs and better support their learners throughout the lifelong learning journey.

BenchPrep is more than just a technology provider; we collaborate closely with organizations, helping to design and implement interactive online courses, and providing comprehensive project support alongside a versatile self-service admin portal for streamlined course management.

Many of the world's leading organizations trust BenchPrep to power their digital learning programs, including AAMC, AWS, CFA Institute, CompTIA, GMAC, HRCI, NCBE, PMI, and more. More than 11 million learners have used BenchPrep to attain academic and professional success. Visit [www.benchprep.com](http://www.benchprep.com) to learn more.



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