



Hannah Allsopp, CFRE, Shares Her CFRE Exam Studying Advice

On 1 May 2023, Hannah took and passed the CFRE Exam. After working in the philanthropy space for more than eight years, it was official! Hannah became one of 7,700 fundraising professionals in the world to hold the Certified Fund Raising Executive designation.

The CFRE credential sits alongside her Master of Communication to demonstrate she possesses a well-rounded knowledge base.

While working in her current role as Individual Giving Coordinator at Amnesty International Australia, she carved out study time and made her CFRE goals come to life. Below, she reveals how she formulated her successful study plan.

1) How long had you been in development when you decided to pursue your CFRE credential?

I learned about the CFRE credential early in my fundraising career. It's been in the back of my mind ever since. I'd been working in fundraising for just over seven years when I decided to start the application process.

2) What made you think the time was right to pursue your CFRE credential?

I realised I had a lot of education points that were expiring soon. That was the impetus I needed to finally get started. I was also at a time in my career where I wanted to really consolidate all of the expertise I had gathered over the years.

3) As a fundraising professional working in Australia, what value did you see in earning a globally-recognized credential?

The number of people in Australia with a CFRE credential is relatively small. I saw it as an opportunity to stand out among others in the fundraising profession. Tertiary education in fundraising is also rare in Australia.

I think the CFRE credential is a fantastic way to demonstrate commitment to best practice ethical fundraising and learn from the wealth of experience of fundraising professionals around the world.

4) How did you go about selecting your exam date?

As soon as my application was approved, I booked a date in the next test window (which was a couple of months away). I wanted to have a clear date to work towards so I could plan out my study.

I'd suggest looking at your workload and deadlines. In retrospect, I probably shouldn't have sat the exam in May considering I look after our Tax Appeal!

5) When did you start studying and roughly how many hours did you study?

I started studying in earnest about three months before my exam date. The [Fundraising Institute Australia \(FIA\) study group](#), which is free for members, was invaluable to my preparation.

I studied around 50 to 60 hours in total. I was very fortunate that my organisation offered me a few hours of study leave each week in the lead up to the exam, which helped a lot.

6) Which books or study resources did you use? Which were most useful and why?

I used “Achieving Excellence in Fundraising” and the [CFRE Exam Compass Study Guide](#). You absolutely do not need to read every textbook on the [Resource Reading List](#).

I also purchased access to the [Practice Exam](#), which I found helpful. The test questions are unlike other multiple choice exams I’ve done. It was useful to get to know how they would be structured and the kind of language used.

7) What did your study process look like?

In the [FIA study group](#), we covered one Knowledge Domain each week. I roughly structured my own study the same way.

As I read each chapter of “Achieving Excellence in Fundraising,” I made notes on the blank pages of the CFRE Exam Compass Study Guide so that I had everything in one place to revise in the last few weeks before the exam.

Sometimes, I found it hard to concentrate on reading for hours at a time (especially after a long day at work). I would break things up by doing a handful of practice questions. I tried to study regularly in short bursts rather than dedicating entire days.

8) Did you get any study/exam advice from current CFREs? If so, what did they recommend?

One helpful piece of advice was around answering the questions that you’re unsure about.

Don’t forget that you don’t need to get every single question right to pass the exam. You can usually eliminate two answers that you know are incorrect. Then you have a 50/50 chance of getting it right. As a direct marketer, statistics always give me more confidence!

9) What are your top 3 study tips?

- Find what works for you and don’t be afraid to change your study plan after a few weeks if it’s not working.
- Have a few different ways to study. If you don’t feel like reading one day, do some practice questions or use flashcards.
- [Join the FIA study group](#). It was incredibly helpful.

10) Did you have any anxiety about the CFRE Exam? If so, how did you manage it?

I think it's normal to have anxiety about exams. I started studying early so that no matter what happened on exam day, I knew I had given it my best shot.

11) Walk us through your experience at the test center. Did anything surprise you or was it as you expected?

I wasn't allowed to take anything into the exam room, including water. It's quite a long, exhausting exam. I took the full 10-minute break offered at the midway point and used it to eat a sandwich and drink as much water as I could. I was doing the longest exam of anyone at the test centre. A lot of people came and went while I was there.

12) What was your approach to answering the exam questions?

There's plenty of time [candidates are given four hours to complete the exam]. I read the questions and answer options quite carefully. Sometimes one word can make all the difference.

The test allows you to flag questions you're unsure about so that you can come back to them at the end (of each half). As I flagged questions, I still answered with my first instinct. I didn't change many when I came back to them at the end.

13) When you found out you passed the exam, who was the first person you told?

I called my husband straight away, and then sent a message to my manager who had been incredibly supportive of my CFRE journey. I think they were both very proud (and glad all the studying was finally over!).