

# Program manager: study guide

Business, consulting, management, and operations · suite apt-278-program-manager · generated 2026-09-15T15:24:29.777Z

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Answer keys and scoring logic stay server-side and are never included in any download or export.

## How to use this guide

This file contains the whole study outline for this suite: every skill it draws on, the full lesson for each of those skills, worked examples, practice tips, a glossary, and where each piece of material comes from. Nothing here is a summary of a page you still have to visit.

1. Read the skills section end to end once, without timing yourself.
2. Work the guided practice mode for the suite, using the practice tips as a checklist.
3. Move to the mini-test only when guided practice feels unhurried.
4. Sit the full simulation last, once, in the conditions you expect on the day.

Practice attempts are stored on the device you used, never on an account. Exporting a result is the only way anything leaves that device.

## Practice modes and durations

*Practice modes for Program manager*

| Mode            | Duration   | What it is for                             |
|-----------------|------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Guided practice | 15 minutes | Untimed, with feedback after every item.   |
| Mini-test       | 18 minutes | A short timed set for checking pace.       |
| Full simulation | 45 minutes | Full length and full time, in one sitting. |

- Start guided practice:  
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/practice/new?bank=apt-278-program-manager&mode=guided>
- Start mini-test:  
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/practice/new?bank=apt-278-program-manager&mode=mini>
- Start full simulation:  
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/practice/new?bank=apt-278-program-manager&mode=full>

## Skills covered, in full

This suite draws on 5 skill constructs. Each one below carries its complete lesson.

### Management and supervisory judgment

Prioritization, delegation, fairness, coaching, accountability, and team decisions.

Practise management decisions that balance people, fairness, delivery, and accountability. The method emphasizes private fact-finding, clear expectations, appropriate delegation, and documented follow-up.

What you should be able to do after this lesson:

1. Diagnose a performance or conduct issue before choosing coaching, support, delegation, or escalation.
2. Delegate work with a clear outcome, authority boundary, resources, checkpoint, and owner.
3. Apply comparable standards consistently while accounting for relevant individual circumstances.

### Worked examples and pitfalls

Worked scenario: repeated missed handoffs: A team member has missed two handoffs, but the cause is not known. Meet privately, describe the observed gap and impact, ask for relevant facts, agree a specific next standard and support, then set a review point. Public blame assumes motive and damages fairness; silently moving all work away avoids the accountability problem rather than managing it.

Delegation check: Before delegating, state the result needed, deadline, decision rights, constraints, available help, and when progress will be reviewed. Delegation transfers ownership of a task, not the manager's responsibility to provide context and monitor risk.

### How to practise this skill

- Look for options that address both the immediate delivery need and the underlying people issue.
- Reject false choices between empathy and standards; a good response can provide support and define accountability.
- Use formal escalation when risk, repeated behaviour, or policy requires it, not as the automatic first move.

### Glossary

Delegation: Assigning a defined outcome and suitable authority to another person while retaining oversight.

Accountability: Clear ownership for an agreed result, including review of actions and consequences.

Procedural fairness: Using a consistent process, hearing relevant facts, and avoiding conclusions before evidence is checked.

### Study this next

- Management: <https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/search?q=Management>
- Delegation: <https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/search?q=Delegation>
- Leadership: <https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/search?q=Leadership>
- Management and supervisory judgment lesson on Novus Learn:  
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/skills/management-judgement/lesson>

### Where this material comes from

- Novus Learn original management, leadership, and in-tray suite scenarios and published construct mapping.

- Novus educational framework: clarify facts, set expectations, support proportionately, document, and review.

Educational preparation only. Novus Learn does not administer official exams and does not guarantee scores or hiring outcomes.

## Planning and scheduling exercises

Resources, dependencies, deadlines, constraints, and contingency planning.

Learn to build a feasible schedule from dependencies, resource limits, deadlines, and uncertainty. A strong plan makes the critical sequence visible and includes triggers for replanning.

What you should be able to do after this lesson:

1. Convert a task list into durations, predecessors, resource needs, milestones, and constraints.
2. Identify the chain of dependent tasks most likely to control the finish date.
3. Add proportionate buffers, checkpoints, and contingencies without hiding an impossible deadline.

## Worked examples and pitfalls

Worked scenario: a four-hour shutdown: Inspection takes 30 minutes before either repair can start. Two repairs take 90 and 120 minutes, but both need the same technician; testing takes 45 minutes after both finish. The minimum sequence is  $30 + 90 + 120 + 45 = 285$  minutes, longer than the shutdown. The correct response is to surface the conflict and change scope, staffing, or window, not to place overlapping bars on a chart and call the plan feasible.

Dependency and contingency check: Draw arrows between tasks, then mark scarce resources and approval gates. For the highest-risk dependency, define an early warning and a response: for example, if a permit is not approved by noon, defer nonessential work and notify the owner rather than discovering the conflict at start time.

## How to practise this skill

- Check resource conflicts as well as task order; parallel work is impossible when both tasks need the same person or asset.
- Protect the completion milestone with visible review points, not an unexplained buffer at the end.
- When a constraint makes the plan impossible, state it early and propose the smallest viable change.

## Glossary

Dependency: A rule that one task or milestone must precede or enable another.

Critical path: The dependent task sequence that determines the earliest possible finish under the stated plan.

Slack: The time a task may move without delaying a dependent milestone or final completion.

## Study this next

- Scheduling: <https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/search?q=Scheduling>
- Critical path method: <https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/search?q=Critical%20path%20method>
- Resource allocation: <https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/search?q=Resource%20allocation>
- Planning and scheduling exercises lesson on Novus Learn:  
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/skills/planning-scheduling/lesson>

## Where this material comes from

- Novus Learn original scheduling, project-coordination, dispatch, and operations suite scenarios.
- Novus educational framework: tasks, durations, dependencies, resources, constraints, milestones, and contingencies.

Educational preparation only. Novus Learn does not administer official exams and does not guarantee scores or hiring outcomes.

## Case analysis

Synthesizing multiple documents and making a reasoned recommendation.

Build a recommendation from several documents without blurring facts, interpretations, and assumptions. The core method is to frame the decision, organize evidence, test alternatives, and state conditions or gaps.

What you should be able to do after this lesson:

1. Translate a broad case prompt into a decision question, criteria, constraints, and required output.
2. Create an evidence table that separates supported findings from inference and missing information.
3. Write a recommendation that compares alternatives, acknowledges trade-offs, and names the next validation step.

## Worked examples and pitfalls

Worked scenario: two service proposals: Proposal A is cheaper and can start now; Proposal B costs more but has stronger reliability evidence. The case does not provide peak-demand data. State the decision criteria first (cost, launch timing, reliability, and demand risk), then compare only supported facts. A defensible recommendation might select a limited A pilot with a reliability threshold and request peak-demand evidence before wider rollout, rather than claiming either proposal is universally best.

Evidence matrix: Use columns for claim, supporting document, strength, contradiction, and gap. When sources conflict, report the conflict and explain how it affects confidence. Repeating every document is summary; connecting evidence to the decision criteria is analysis.

## How to practise this skill

- Begin with the decision and criteria so interesting but irrelevant details do not take over.
- Use calibrated language: supported, suggests, uncertain, and conditional communicate different evidence strength.
- End with an owner, next step, and condition for revisiting the recommendation.

## Glossary

Finding: A conclusion directly supported by the evidence supplied in the case.

Inference: A reasoned interpretation that goes beyond a directly stated fact and therefore needs justification.

Decision criterion: A standard used to compare options, such as cost, safety, feasibility, equity, or timing.

## Study this next

- Case study: <https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/search?q=Case%20study>
- Evidence: <https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/search?q=Evidence>
- Recommendation: <https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/search?q=Recommendation>
- Case analysis lesson on Novus Learn:

## Where this material comes from

- Novus Learn original case-study, policy-analysis, investigation, and evidence suite scenarios.
- Novus educational framework: frame the decision, map evidence, compare alternatives, qualify confidence, and recommend.

Educational preparation only. Novus Learn does not administer official exams and does not guarantee scores or hiring outcomes.

## Situational judgment

Evaluating workplace responses against role-relevant principles.

Learn a repeatable way to compare workplace responses: establish the facts, identify duties and risks, respect role boundaries, then choose a proportionate first action. This is educational preparation, not an official scoring guide.

What you should be able to do after this lesson:

1. Separate facts stated in a scenario from assumptions that the scenario does not support.
2. Rank response options by immediate risk, policy or role obligations, proportionality, and follow-through.
3. Explain why a strong first action is better than passive, punitive, or unauthorized alternatives.

## Worked examples and pitfalls

Worked scenario: an unverified safety concern: A colleague reports a possible equipment fault while a deadline is approaching. First distinguish the known fact, the report, from the unverified cause. A strong response protects people and affected work, checks the concern through the right channel, tells the relevant lead, and records what was done. Ignoring the report underreacts; shutting down unrelated work or accusing someone before checking the facts overreacts.

Method: facts, duties, risks, response: Write four short notes before ranking options: what is known, who may be affected, which duty or boundary applies, and what safe next step is available now. Prefer an action that addresses the immediate issue and creates useful follow-through. Do not reward an option merely because it sounds decisive.

## How to practise this skill

- Answer the question asked: best first action, worst action, or complete response are different tasks.
- Check whether an option acts within the person's authority and escalates only as far as the risk requires.
- When two options look reasonable, prefer the one that gathers missing facts and communicates ownership.

## Glossary

Proportionality: Matching the urgency and scope of a response to the evidence, likely impact, and authority available.

Role boundary: The limit of what a person may decide or do without approval, specialist help, or escalation.

Follow-through: Confirming ownership, recording the decision, and checking that the issue was actually resolved.

## Study this next

- Situational judgement test:  
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/search?q=Situational%20judgement%20test>
- Workplace ethics: <https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/search?q=Workplace%20ethics>
- Decision-making: <https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/search?q=Decision-making>
- Situational judgment lesson on Novus Learn:  
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/skills/situational-judgement/lesson>

## Where this material comes from

- Novus Learn original situational-judgment suite scenarios and published construct mapping.
- Novus educational framework: facts, duties, risks, role boundaries, proportional action, and follow-through.

Educational preparation only. Novus Learn does not administer official exams and does not guarantee scores or hiring outcomes.

## Critical thinking

Evaluating evidence, assumptions, arguments, credibility, and alternative explanations.

Critical thinking assessments ask you to take an argument apart: what is being concluded, what it rests on, what evidence would settle it, and whether a proposed conclusion actually follows. Published critical-thinking batteries typically run five task types - inference, recognition of assumptions, deduction, interpretation, and evaluation of arguments - and they are deliberately built so that agreeing with a conclusion and judging the argument as strong come apart. The construct is heavily weighted in policy analysis, audit, legal, investigative and graduate selection, and it is the same skill that stops a plausible chart from turning into a bad decision. Practice stays on this device; there is no account and nothing is uploaded unless you export it.

What you should be able to do after this lesson:

1. State an argument's conclusion in your own words before evaluating it, and identify which sentences are premises and which are background.
2. Use the negation test to separate a required assumption from a statement that would merely strengthen the argument.
3. Distinguish validity from truth, and identify affirming the consequent as distinct from the valid modus tollens form.
4. Compute a posterior probability on a screening example and explain why the rate of true positives among all positives is far lower than intuition suggests.
5. Generate at least two alternative explanations - selection, reverse causation, a common third factor - for any claimed causal effect, and name the comparison that would rule them out.
6. Judge argument strength on relevance and directness rather than on agreement, including marking arguments you personally reject as strong.

## Worked examples and pitfalls

The negation test finds assumptions; nothing else does: Argument: 'The council should fit bin sensors across the district. In the trial depot they cut collection trips by a fifth.' Candidate assumption A: 'The trial depot's waste pattern is broadly representative of the rest of the district.' Negate it - suppose the trial depot is nothing like the rest of the district - and the argument collapses, because a result that does not transfer supports nothing about the district. So A is a required assumption. Candidate assumption B: 'Bin sensors are the cheapest available technology for this purpose.' Negate it - suppose they are the most expensive - and the argument still stands as given, since it argued from a reduction in trips, not from cost. B is not required; it

would strengthen a cost-based argument that was never made. Candidate C: 'Fewer collection trips reduce total operating cost.' Negate it and the recommendation loses its point, so C is required too, even though the argument never mentions cost. That last case is the one candidates miss, because the required assumption is what bridges the evidence to the recommendation, and bridging assumptions are by definition unstated. The failure mode across this whole item type is picking statements that support the conclusion instead of statements the argument cannot survive without.

Base rates: 90 percent accurate, 15 percent right: A production line runs an automated defect test. Defects occur in 1 percent of units. The test flags 90 percent of genuinely defective units, and wrongly flags 5 percent of good units. A unit has just been flagged - how likely is it to be defective? Work in whole units rather than probabilities. Take 10,000 units: 100 are defective and 9,900 are good. Of the 100 defective, the test flags 90. Of the 9,900 good, it wrongly flags 5 percent, which is 495. Total flags:  $90 + 495 = 585$ . Of those, 90 are genuine, so the answer is  $90 / 585 = 15.4$  percent. Better than the 1 percent base rate, and nowhere near the 90 percent that intuition offers. The error has a name - confusing the probability of a flag given a defect with the probability of a defect given a flag - and it has a practical consequence: the rework queue has to be sized for 585 units a batch, not 100, and 495 of the 585 units sitting in it are perfectly good. Whenever a test, screening rule or model accuracy figure appears in an item, ask how many of the negatives there are, because with a rare condition the false positives from a large clean population swamp the true positives from a small affected one.

Three alternative explanations, and the comparison that settles it: Claim: 'Employees who attended the optional resilience workshop took 30 percent fewer sick days last year, so the workshop works.' Alternative one, selection: attendance was optional, so the people who signed up may have been the healthier and more engaged to begin with, and would have taken fewer sick days regardless. Alternative two, reverse direction: employees who were frequently unwell were the least able to attend a full-day workshop, so illness determined attendance rather than the other way round. Alternative three, a common third factor: the workshop ran on Thursday afternoons at head office, so attendance largely tracks being an office-based rather than shift-based worker, and shift workers take more sick leave for reasons that have nothing to do with resilience training. What would settle it: randomly assigning the offer to half the workforce and comparing the two groups. Failing that, the cheapest useful check already exists in the payroll data - compare attendees' and non-attendees' sick days in the year before the workshop. If attendees were already 30 percent lower, selection is doing the entire job. The habit worth building is to name the comparison group before you accept any before-and-after number.

Deduction: affirming the consequent versus modus tollens: Rule: 'If an invoice is over 10,000 euro, it requires two signatures.' Argument A: 'This invoice has two signatures, therefore it is over 10,000 euro.' Invalid - this is affirming the consequent. The rule makes two signatures necessary for large invoices; it says nothing that prevents a cautious manager from double-signing a 400 euro invoice, so a two-signature invoice of any size is consistent with the rule. Argument B: 'This invoice has only one signature, therefore it is not over 10,000 euro.' Valid - this is modus tollens, denying the consequent to deny the antecedent, and it holds assuming the rule was followed. Argument C: 'This invoice is not over 10,000 euro, therefore it does not have two signatures.' Invalid again, denying the antecedent. Two further points that deduction items test directly. First, validity is about form alone: 'All banks close on Sundays; Riverton Mutual is a bank; therefore Riverton Mutual closes on Sundays' is perfectly valid even if the first premise is false, and a valid argument with a false premise can deliver a false conclusion. Second, in these items you must accept the premises as given even when you know them to be untrue, because the question is whether the conclusion follows, not whether it is true.

Interpretation: what a survey figure does and does not license: Data: all 1,200 employees of a firm were surveyed. 62 percent said they would accept a four-day week at 90 percent pay. Of those who said yes, 71 percent were under 35. Conclusion one: 'A majority of this firm's employees would accept the trade.' This follows - 62 percent of a complete census of the firm is a majority, and the conclusion is properly limited to

this firm. Conclusion two: 'A majority of the firm's under-35 employees would accept the trade.' This does not follow, and the arithmetic shows why. Sixty-two percent of 1,200 is 744 accepters, and 71 percent of 744 is about 528 accepters aged under 35. That is the composition of the accepters, not the acceptance rate within the under-35 group, and without knowing how many under-35s the firm employs the rate is undetermined: if there are 900, the rate is  $528 / 900 = 59$  percent; if there are 600, it is 88 percent; if there were 1,100 the rate would be below half. Conclusion three: 'The firm should move to a four-day week.' This does not follow either - a stated preference about pay says nothing about output, shift cover, customer hours or cost. Notice that conclusion two is the base-rate error from the screening example, wearing survey clothing.

Strong and weak arguments on the same question: Question: should the agency publish raw inspection scores for every site? Strong argument for: 'In the neighbouring authority, publication was followed by a measurable fall in repeat violations, which is the stated aim of the inspection regime.' It is directly about this decision, it addresses the regime's own objective, and it offers evidence - and if true it would change your view. Weak argument for: 'Yes, because transparency is always good.' Sweeping, unsupported, and it would apply identically to publishing anything at all, which is the tell. Strong argument against: 'Raw scores omit the severity weighting, so a site with one critical failure can rank above a site with six minor ones, and a member of the public cannot see the difference.' Specific, mechanistic, directly about the proposal, and it would change your view. Weak argument against: 'No, because businesses will object.' It may be true and it may matter politically, but it does not bear on whether publication achieves the regime's aim, and no evidence is offered. Two tests separate strong from weak: is the argument about the exact question asked, and would accepting it change the decision? Note that you can hold a firm personal view on publication and still be required to mark the argument on the other side as the strong one - that split is what the item type is measuring.

## How to practise this skill

- Negate every candidate assumption out loud. If the argument survives the negation, it was never an assumption, however supportive it sounds. This single habit converts the assumption item type from guesswork into a mechanical check.
- Write the conclusion in your own words before reading any option. Half of the wrong answers on inference and evaluation items are responses to a conclusion the argument never reached.
- Ask 'percentage of what?' on every percentage in the stimulus and reconstruct the denominator in whole units. Base-rate and composition errors both dissolve the moment you write out counts instead of rates.
- Deliberately practise marking arguments you disagree with as strong and arguments you agree with as weak. Assessments in this construct are built to catch agreement masquerading as evaluation, and the effect is largest on politically loaded stimuli.
- For any causal claim, write two alternatives - selection and a third factor - and name the comparison group that would rule them out, before you decide whether the evidence supports the claim.
- Log wrong answers by task type rather than by topic: inference, assumption, deduction, interpretation, evaluation. Candidates are rarely weak across all five, and the profile tells you where the next hour of practice belongs.

## Glossary

**Conclusion:** The claim an argument is trying to establish. It is not always last, is often signalled by therefore, so, or should, and locating it correctly determines every subsequent judgement about the argument.

**Assumption:** An unstated premise the argument requires in order to work. Identified by negation: negate it and a genuine assumption brings the argument down, while a merely helpful statement leaves it standing.

**Validity and soundness:** An argument is valid when the conclusion cannot be false while the premises are true, which is a property of form alone. It is sound when it is valid and the premises are actually true.

**Affirming the consequent:** The invalid pattern 'if P then Q; Q; therefore P'. It is the most common deductive

distractor because it differs from the valid modus tollens form by only the position of a negation.

Base rate: How common something is in the population before any test or evidence is applied. Ignoring it makes accurate-sounding tests appear far more informative than they are when the condition is rare.

Confounder: A third factor associated with both the supposed cause and the outcome, capable of producing the entire observed relationship on its own. Ruled out by randomisation or by an explicit comparison group.

Selection effect: A difference between groups created by how people entered them rather than by the treatment under study. Optional programmes and voluntary surveys are where it appears most often.

Falsifiability: The property of a claim that some observation could show it to be wrong. A claim compatible with every possible result carries no information, which is why 'what would change your mind?' is a diagnostic question.

## Study this next

- Critical thinking skill hub: <https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/skills/critical-thinking>
- Practise the critical thinking bank: <https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/cognitive-skills/critical-thinking>
- Verbal reasoning lesson: <https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/skills/verbal-reasoning/lesson>
- Government audit suite: <https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/tests/government-audit>
- Investigator and detective reasoning suite:  
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/tests/investigator-and-detective-reasoning>
- Critical thinking lesson on Novus Learn:  
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/skills/critical-thinking/lesson>

## Where this material comes from

- Worked items written for Novus Learn. The arguments, survey figures, defect-test numbers and evaluation options above are original and invented for this lesson; no published or copyrighted test item is reproduced.
- The five task types named in the summary - inference, assumption, deduction, interpretation, evaluation of arguments - describe a structure used publicly across several critical-thinking assessments; no affiliation with any publisher is claimed or implied.
- Terminology follows standard, widely published usage in introductory logic and research methods - validity, soundness, affirming the consequent, base rate, confounder, selection effect.
- Novus Learn aptitude construct registry (catalog seed) for the construct scope and the suite mapping shown in the related links.
- Public educational framing only - not affiliated with any official exam board, publisher or employer.

Educational preparation only. Novus Learn does not administer official exams and does not guarantee scores or hiring outcomes.

## Recommended preparation

- Practice management judgement:  
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/skills/management-judgement/lesson>
- Practice planning and scheduling:  
<https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/skills/planning-scheduling/lesson>
- Practice case analysis: <https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/skills/case-analysis/lesson>

## Answer keys, scoring and privacy

| Answer keys and scoring logic stay server-side and are never included in any download or export.

Formal suite answer keys and scoring logic stay on the server and are not part of any download, in any format. Downloadable keys exist only for the open, untimed practice material (the practice packs on the puzzles, cognitive-skills and reasoning practice lab pages), where the answers are already public teaching content.

Novus Learn needs no account. Your practice history lives in this browser's storage on this device, and is sent to a server only if you create an account and switch on backup. This file contains no attempt, session or result link, so it is safe to share.

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*Private practice result. Not an official exam certificate, employer decision, hiring signal, admissions decision, or guaranteed outcome. Scores stay on this device unless you export them.*

*Answer keys and scoring logic stay server-side and are never included in any download or export.*

*Source: <https://learn.novusstreamsolutions.com/aptitude/tests/program-manager/study-outline>*