

Frequently Asked Questions about the FE Exam

Disclaimer: The responses/opinions below are based on the experiences of Dr. Chris Pascual. Please refer to the California Board for Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors (http://www.pels.ca.gov/applicants/eit_lsitapp.shtml) for the most current information.

General Information and Application Questions

1. What is the Fundamentals of Engineering (FE) Exam?

This is an 8-hour exam that reviews basic math and engineering knowledge. After you pass the FE exam, you are certified as an Engineer-in-Training (EIT). This certification is the first step required under California law towards becoming licensed as a professional engineer.

2. Why should I take the exam?

Many mechanical engineering jobs do not require you to be a licensed professional engineer. However, small companies particularly in the construction industry do require you to have a license. Also, if you wish to start your own company or pursue consulting, a license is needed. Since you are best prepared for the FE exam while a student, there is no harm in taking the exam while a student (except financial cost of the exam). At some later date, if you need to get your license, you have already completed this first hurdle.

3. Should I take the exam as a student or wait until I am a practicing engineer?

You will never be as prepared for the exam as when you are a student. The exam tests your basic knowledge on a large number of subjects. Once you start working, you will forget much of the information in many of these subjects; therefore, you would need to study more if you take the exam after you graduate.

4. When should I take the exam?

I recommend taking the exam as close to graduation as possible because you will have been exposed to more topics by that time. For example, engineering economics is not covered for mechanical engineering students until ME 440 which is taken in your last year.

5. When am I eligible to take the exam?

Applicants must have completed three years of course work in a Board-approved engineering curriculum (any curriculum approved by the Engineering Accreditation Commission [EAC] of the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology [ABET]). The mechanical engineering program is ABET accredited at Cal Poly (all Cal

Poly engineering programs are accredited except for Biomedical and General engineering).

6. How do I apply for the exam?

You must complete two registrations for the exam. You need to submit your application and fee to the California Board for Professional Engineers. The exam itself is administered by NCEES. You need to register with them as well to select your afternoon exam and exam location.

7. Does the application have to be received by the deadline?

No. The application must be post marked by the application deadline.

8. Can the application fee be waived?

No. The current fee is \$100 and there is no aid available to offset the cost.

9. When is the FE Exam offered?

The FE exam is given in April and October of each year. Refer to the Board website for a current examination schedule: http://www.pels.ca.gov/applicants/exam_schedule.shtml

Studying for the Exam

10. Are there review sessions offered?

There are review sessions offered. The most economical are the ones offered by Chi Epsilon (<http://ceenve3.civeng.calpoly.edu/xe/eit.htm>). These review sessions sell out therefore I recommend buying your ticket as soon as they are available. Please check the Chi Epsilon website for more information.

11. Should I take the review sessions?

That is your decision. Most students have found them useful. Remember the review sessions are just that, “review”. You will not learn the subject material at these sessions. They will only refresh your memory.

12. How much should I study?

The more the better; but it is a large time commitment. By taking the exam as a student, most of the material is relatively fresh in your mind. I find that many students just attend the review sessions for their studying. Your goal should be to answer all the easy questions in every subject and the more in-depth questions in your particular major. See the exam specifications at http://www.ncees.org/Exams/FE_exam.php for a list of subjects covered on the FE exam.

13. Should I take the general or mechanical exam?

The vast majority of the mechanical engineering students take the general exam in the afternoon instead of the mechanical exam. The general exam covers more non-ME topics but at a more basic level. Overall, I feel that the general exam is easier. With that comment, the pass rate on the mechanical exam is the same (or higher) than the general exam. Please review http://www.ncees.org/Exams/FE_exam.php for the exam specifications for each exam.

14. Can I get a FE Reference Manual to study from?

All mechanical engineering students will be given a free copy of the FE Reference Manual in senior project class (ME 428). If you are registered for senior project class and do not have a copy, ask your instructor. For other engineering students, you can download a pdf version of the Reference Manual from: http://www.ncees.org/Exams/Exam-day_policies.php

Exam Day Questions

15. How do I select Cal Poly as the test location?

When you register with NCEES, you will select your afternoon exam and your test location. This is where you can choose Cal Poly as the test location.

16. What calculator are you allowed to use?

Please visit <http://www.pels.ca.gov/applicants/calculator.shtml> and http://www.ncees.org/Exams/Exam-day_policies/Calculator_policy.php or read the examinee instructions carefully. Your calculator will be checked for compliance at the exam site.

17. What if I am missing my admission ticket?

Go to the NCEES website and print out another one. Please visit the following website about additional exam day questions: http://www.ncees.org/Exams/Exam-day_policies.php.

18. How important is the Examinee Instructions?

Please review these instructions carefully. The instructions give detailed descriptions about what you can and cannot bring to the exam. You think the TSA is strict! Just wait and see!

19. What if I have a question or problem not discussed here? Where can I get answers?

Call the NCEES. They will be administering the exam.