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ULTIMATE STUDY GUIDE

A COMPLETE GUIDE WITH A 16-WEEK AND 12-WEEK ROADMAP TO PASSING THE EXAC.

Designed by Architects for Future Architects.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE:

This guide is built for one purpose: to get you to exam day with the right material covered, the right number of repetitions logged, and enough rest left in the tank to perform.

How this guide is structured:

- **Part A — Strategy:** The ExAC, the study philosophy, why this section order, the two tracks, and the daily and weekly templates.
- **Part B — Toolkit:** Recommended tools, the chapter summary template, and self-assessment checkpoints. Read this before Week 1.
- **Part C — The schedule:** Week-by-week calendars for both tracks, with assignments, practice question targets, and review checkpoints.
- **Part D — Section briefs:** One brief per ExAC section in study order (1 → 4 → 3 → 2), with section-specific tactics included.
- **Part E — Final exam prep + exam-day playbook:** The last 1–2 weeks: mock exams, taper, the in-room playbook.

Two tracks are included. Pick the one that fits your life, not the one that sounds heroic:

- **16-week standard track** — ~15 to 17 hours per week. Designed for candidates working full time with family, commute, or other commitments. Built-in slack for missed days.
- **12-week compressed track** — ~22 to 25 hours per week. For candidates with a strong study habit from school, a flexible work schedule, or a closing exam window. Tight, no slack.

Both tracks cover the same content in the same order:

Section 1 → Section 4 → Section 3 → Section 2

Then a final integration and exam-practice phase.

How to use it week by week:

- Once you've read it through, treat the Schedule (Part C) as your weekly checklist. Each Monday, open to your current week, confirm the targets, plan your sessions on your calendar.
- When you start a new section, re-read the corresponding brief in Part D first. It tells you what to focus on and what gets tested hardest before you start reading source material.
- Run the Self-assessment checkpoints in the Toolkit at the end of each section. Honest scores. Mark wrong if you guessed and got lucky.
- Two weeks out from the exam: switch to the Exam-day playbook (Part E). Don't open anything else.

THE ExAC

The Examination for Architects in Canada (ExAC) is the mandatory licensing exam administered jointly by the provincial and territorial architectural associations. It is offered once per year, in November.

Each section maps to specific ExAC objectives. The objectives are the testable units, listed in Appendix 1 of the 2026 Preparation Guide. Every week in this schedule references the objectives it covers so you can audit your own progress.

The four sections:

- **Section 1 — Programming:** Site and Environmental Analysis · Coordinating Engineering Systems · Cost Management · Schematic Design · Design Development.
- **Section 2 — National Building Code of Canada (2020):** National Energy Code of Canada (2020).
- **Section 3 — Final Project:** Sustainable Design Literacy.
- **Section 4 — Bidding and Contract Negotiations:** Construction Phase – Office Functions · Construction Phase – Field Functions · Management of the Project & Business/Practice Management.

The five question formats (per the 2026 ExAC Preparation Guide):

- **Multiple choice** — choose the correct option from four.
- **Pairing / matching of components** — pair related items, like terms to definitions.
- **Ordering of elements** — put a set of steps or processes in the correct order.
- **Completion of sentences / fill in the blank** — complete a sentence or calculation result.
- **Short answers** — a few sentences or bullet points written in your own words. Higher-point items.

Format at a glance

- Four sections, written over two consecutive days.
- **Mostly closed reference materials:** You write from memory in Sections 1, 3, and 4 — no contracts, no handbooks in the room. The exception is Section 2 (Building Codes), where you may bring the NBC and NECB into the exam room. Tab and highlight your copies during prep — but no other notes can be added.
- **Pass mark is set by the ExAC committee:** Historically in the high 60s percentile of the candidate cohort. Plan to aim for 80%+ on practice exams to give yourself a margin.

Eligibility:

First-time candidates must meet three eligibility conditions before registering:

- **Academic certification** through the Canadian Architectural Certification Board (CACB) — verifying your degree meets the Canadian Education Standard for Architects.
- **Active enrolment** in the Internship in Architecture Program (IAP) with your provincial association.
- **At least 2,800 experience hours** recorded and approved (or submitted for approval) by the official experience submission deadline, typically late June of the exam year.

THE ExAC

Registration:

The 2026 registration window runs June 1 to July 10, 2026 (noon local time on the closing day). Each provincial association sets its own registration portal — confirm yours.

- First-time candidates must register for and write all four sections together.
- Retake candidates register only for the sections they need to rewrite.
- Choose your exam-day language at registration: English or French. Both versions test the same content.
- About three weeks before the exam, you'll receive an authorization letter confirming dates, times, and venue.

Exam date:

The exam is held on two consecutive days, simultaneously in all provinces and the Northwest Territories. Recent sittings have been in early November. Confirm the current year's exact dates with the ExAC.

Exam day:

- **Permitted items:** HB pencils, eraser, small sharpener, small ruler, non-programmable calculator, silent watch. For Section 2 only: tabbed copies of the NBC 2020 and NECB 2020 (manufacturer-printed pages only, no additional notes).
- **Prohibited items:** phones, smartwatches, electronic devices, programmable calculators, any notes or references for Sections 1, 3, 4.
- You'll sign a confidentiality agreement. Do not discuss exam content with anyone.

Results:

Results are released by mid-February for the November exam. Reported per section as a simple Pass or Fail; no numeric score breakdown is provided. Marking is rigorous — multiple-choice sheets are hand-scored, short-answer booklets are marked by trained architects with a third marker if the first two disagree:

- $300 flat fee, regardless of how many sections you ask to be reviewed. Refunded only if a fail is overturned to a pass.
- Review confirms or overturns the existing grade. No numeric feedback is provided.
- Errors are rare. Most reviews confirm the original result.

The three-attempt rule:

You have three consecutive attempts to pass all four sections. The rules are tight.

- After your first attempt, register for the next sitting and rewrite any failed sections.
- If you fail one or more sections on your second attempt, you're granted one final attempt at the next scheduled sitting.
- If you do not pass all four sections by the end of your third attempt, you'll have to rewrite all four sections at a future sitting — as a first-time candidate, with no carry-over.
- Skipping a sitting counts as a failed attempt. Don't skip. Register every year until you've passed all four.

STUDY STRATEGY: THE BEST TECHNIQUES

Most architecture interns reach the ExAC having spent years passive-reading textbooks. That's the lowest-yield method we have. The techniques below are the ones the cognitive-science literature consistently shows produce durable learning. Treat them as non-negotiable.

1. Active recall over re-reading:

Closing the book and trying to recall what you just read — from a blank page, out loud, or via flashcards — is roughly twice as effective as re-reading.

- **After each chapter, close the doc:** On a blank page, write everything you remember. Then reopen and find the gaps.
- **Use flashcards** for facts that need memorization: CCDC clause numbers, NBC table references, fire separation ratings, occupancy classifications.

2. Spaced repetition:

Information reviewed at expanding intervals is retained 5–10× better than information reviewed in bulk the night before. Aim for 15–20 minutes of card review every day, including rest days.

3. Practice testing:

Testing yourself is a learning event, not just a measurement. Doing 10 practice questions teaches you more than re-reading 10 pages.

- **Make it timed:** Build the habit of quickly identifying what a question is really asking, filtering out distractors, and committing to an answer.

4. Interleaving:

Mixing topics within a study session beats blocking one topic per session.

- After you've covered two sections, rotate 20–30% of your weekly practice questions back to the older section.

5. Elaboration:

Don't just memorize — connect. Why does this clause exist? What problem on a real site does it solve?

- When you read a CCDC clause, write one sentence on why it exists.
- When you read an NBC requirement, picture a building you know that's governed by it.

6. Sleep and taper:

Memory consolidation happens during sleep. No amount of cramming overrides this.

- **Minimum 7 hours sleep,** every night, for the full 12–16 weeks. Part of the protocol, not optional.
- Stop reviewing new material 48 hours before the exam.

TOOLKIT:

Tools, templates, and tracking systems you'll use every week. Read this section before you start Week 1, the tools take 30 minutes to set up and save dozens of hours over the next four months.

Recommended tools

- **Flashcards** — free, open-source spaced-repetition flashcard software: the single highest-yield tool you'll use. Build cards as you read.
- **Trace AI** — EXACTLI's AI study assistant: ask it to explain any clause or code provision, draft flashcards, and generate practice questions from whatever you're reading.
- **Quizzes** — EXACTLI's ExAC question bank: timed, section-tagged practice quizzes with instant scoring so you can see weak themes as you go.
- **Notion or paper notebook** — for chapter summary sheets: one page per chapter, hand-written if possible (handwriting helps encoding).
- **Timers** — 25–50 min focus block: Forest, Be Focused, or any kitchen timer.
- **Practice question bank** — sample questions from Appendix 2 of the ExAC 2026 Preparation Guide, plus any provincial association resources you can access.

Chapter summary sheet template:

After each chapter, fill out (one page max, handwritten):

- Chapter title and date studied.
- **Top 5 takeaways** — the things you'd tell a colleague over coffee.
- **3 facts to memorize** — specific numbers, dates, clauses, ratings.
- **1 diagram or matrix** — visual synthesis (classification tree, flow chart, comparison table).
- **Questions I still have** — to bring up with mentors or coworkers.
- **Cross-references** — "this links to Section X chapter Y."

Self-assessment checkpoints:

Track your scores at each checkpoint. The targets are calibrated to the historical pass rate — hitting these means you're tracking to pass. Honest scoring matters.

CHECKPOINT	TARGET	ACTION IF BELOW
End of Section 1 quiz	75%+	Re-do programming + site analysis exercises
End of Section 4 quiz	75%+	Re-read CCDC 2 + redo wrong Qs
End of Section 3 quiz	75%+	Re-read envelope assemblies + spec exercise
End of Section 2 quiz	75%+	Re-build NBC matrix from scratch
Mock Exam #1 (integration)	75%+ overall	Targeted drilling on weakest section
Mock Exam #2 (taper)	80%+ overall	Stay in flashcard-only mode
Final mock (week of exam)	85%+ overall	Trust the prep, rest, do not cram

THE STUDY SEQUENCE & TWO TRACKS

The two tracks at a glance:

	16-WEEK STANDARD	12-WEEK COMPRESSED
Weekly load	15–17 hours	22–25 hours
Daily weekday	2.5 hours	3.5–4 hours
Weekend day	4–5 hours	5–7 hours
Built-in rest	1 full day + 1 light day / week	1 full day / week
Best for	Working FT, family, normal life	Strong study background, flex schedule
Slack for missed days	Yes — ~10% buffer	No — must self-recover next day
Mock exams	3 full	2 full
Total estimated study hours	~240 hrs	~280 hrs

- **Pick 16-week if:** you work full time, have dependents at home, are out of school more than 2 years. The slack matters.
- **Pick 12-week if:** you have a study habit fresh from school, can protect 25 hours/week without disruption. The pace is sustainable but unforgiving.

DAILY & WEEKLY STRUCTURE:

Both tracks use the same building blocks: new content, active recall, practice. The 12-week compressed track packs longer blocks into each session.

16-WEEK WEEKDAY (~2.5 HRS)

Block 1 (60 min): New content. Read assignment. Underline key terms. No multitasking.

Break (10 min): Walk, water, no phone.

Block 2 (45 min): Active recall. Close source. Write what you remember. Find gaps. Make flashcards.

Block 3 (35 min): Practice. 10–15 questions. Mark wrong answers for tomorrow's flashcards.

12-WEEK WEEKDAY (~3.5–4 HRS)

Block 1 (90 min): New content. Higher reading volume.

Break (10 min): Same.

Block 2 (60 min): Active recall + 1-page synthesis of today's material.

Block 3 (60 min): Practice. 20–25 questions, including 5 from a prior section (interleaving).

16-WEEK WEEKEND (~4–5 HRS/DAY)

Morning (2 hrs): Deep block. Heaviest chapter of the week. Make a diagram or matrix.

Midday (1.5 hrs): Practice questions, full topic batch. 25–40 questions.

Late afternoon (1–1.5 hrs): Flashcard review across all sections covered so far.

12-WEEK WEEKEND (~5–7 HRS/DAY)

Morning (2.5 hrs): Deep block + diagram.

Midday (1.5–2 hrs): Mixed practice batch (current section + 1 prior section).

Late afternoon (1.5 hrs): Summary sheet writing. One page per chapter completed.

Evening (1–1.5 hrs): Flashcard review.

16-week track: one full rest day per week plus one light day (45–60 min flashcards only). 12-week track: one full rest day per week. No flashcards, no questions, no reading on the rest day. Your brain consolidates on rest days — you actually retain more by stepping away.

Integration week (second-to-last week):

- Cross-section interleaved practice. Mock Exam #1. Re-run flashcards across all sections.
- Targeted weak-area drilling based on mock exam results.
- Mock Exam #2 under timed conditions. Light review only.

Exam prep week (final week):

No new material. Final 48 hours: rest, logistics, sleep.

16-WEEK SCHEDULE

Standard track. Targeted weekly load: 15–17 hours. Section 1 → 4 → 3 → 2, then integration and exam prep.

Total study time: ~240 hours over 16 weeks. Daily flashcard review (15–20 min/day) is in addition and continuous from Week 1 Day 5 onward.

WK	PHASE	FOCUS & ASSIGNMENTS	QS	HRS
1	Sec 1	Programming + Site & Environmental Analysis (Themes 1 + 2). CHOP design-phase chapters + IAP programming requirements. Build site analysis checklist diagram. Begin daily flashcard review (Day 5+).	35	15
2	Sec 1	Coordinating Engineering Systems + Cost Management (Themes 3 + 4). CHOP design-coordination chapters + Studio Companion for system sizing. Class A–D estimating practice.	35	16
3	Sec 1	Schematic Design + Design Development (Themes 5 + 6). CHOP design-phase chapters. End-of-section quiz (full Section 1 batch).	35	15
4	Sec 4	Bidding & Contract Negotiations (Theme 9). CHOP Bidding chapter + Appendix A + CCDC 2 Articles A-1 to A-13.	35	15
5	Sec 4	Construction Phase – Office Functions (Theme 10). CHOP CA chapters + CCDC 2 GC 1–4. Master shop drawings, RFIs, change order workflow.	35	15
6	Sec 4	Construction Phase – Field Functions + Project & Business/Practice Management (Themes 11 + 12). CCDC 2 GC 5–9 + ethics scenarios. End-of-section quiz.	35	14
7	Sec 3	Final Project — Materials + Construction Principles (Themes 8.1 + 8.2). Ching's BCI + Studio Companion. Materials matrix exercise.	25	16
8	Sec 3	Final Project — Evaluate Assemblies and Details (Theme 8.3). Building envelope physics. Control-layer diagrams for 3 common wall assemblies.	25	16
9	Sec 3	Final Project — Components of Construction Documents + Specification writing (Themes 8.4 + 8.5). MasterFormat. RAIC Document 6 + 9 reading.	25	16
10	Sec 3	Final Project — Evaluate CDs (Theme 8.6) + Sustainable Design Literacy (Theme 13). LEED Core Concepts + Net Zero. End-of-section quiz.	25	15
11	Sec 2	NBC structure — the 12 Parts, Division A/B/C framework (Theme 7.1). NBC Parts cheat sheet. Begin tabbing your printed NBC.	25	17
12	Sec 2	Part 3 — Major Occupancies (Groups A–F), fire separations, fire resistance ratings (Themes 7.2 + 7.3). Occupancy classification matrix.	25	17
13	Sec 2	Exiting + Accessibility (Theme 7.4). Travel distances, dead-end corridors, NBC 3.8. NECB integration.	25	16
14	Sec 2	Part 9 small buildings, Parts 4–8 (skim), Part 11 (Existing Buildings). End-of-section quiz.	25	15
15	Integ.	Cross-section interleaved practice (50/50 mix all 4 sections). Re-run flashcards across the full deck. Mock Exam #1 (full, timed). Targeted weak-area drilling.	Full mock	17
16	Exam	TAPER WEEK. Mon–Wed: Mock Exam #2 (full, timed) + light review. Thu–Fri: flashcard-only review, no new material. Sat: rest, logistics. Sun: EXAM.	Full mock	10

12-WEEK COMPRESSED SCHEDULE

Compressed track. Targeted weekly load: 22–25 hours. Same content, same order, tighter pacing. No slack for missed days.

Total study time: ~280 hours over 12 weeks. Daily flashcard review (20 min/day) continuous from Week 1 Day 3 onward.

WK	PHASE	FOCUS & ASSIGNMENTS	QS	HRS
1	Sec 1	Programming + Site & Environmental Analysis + Coordinating Engineering Systems (Themes 1 + 2 + 3). CHOP design-phase chapters + Studio Companion. Start daily flashcards Day 3.	50	23
2	Sec 1	Cost Management + Schematic Design + Design Development (Themes 4 + 5 + 6). End-of-section quiz.	50	22
3	Sec 4	Bidding & Contract Negotiations + Construction Phase – Office (Themes 9 + 10). CHOP + CCDC 2 Articles A-1 to A-13 + GC 1–4.	50	23
4	Sec 4	Construction Phase – Field + Project & Business/Practice Management (Themes 11 + 12). CCDC 2 GC 5–9 + ethics. End-of-section quiz.	50	22
5	Sec 3	Final Project — Materials + Construction Principles + Assemblies (Themes 8.1, 8.2, 8.3). Ching's BCI + Studio Companion.	35	23
6	Sec 3	Sustainable Design Literacy (Theme 13) + Components of CDs + Spec writing (Themes 8.4 + 8.5). LEED Core Concepts. RAIC Document 6 + 9 reading.	35	23
7	Sec 3	Final Project — Evaluate construction documents (Theme 8.6). MasterFormat. Mock 3-part spec. End-of-section quiz.	35	22
8	Sec 2	NBC structure + Part 3 (Major Occupancies). Occupancy classification matrix + Parts cheat sheet.	35	26
9	Sec 2	Fire separations + Exiting + Accessibility + NECB integration (Themes 7.2, 7.3, 7.4).	35	25
10	Sec 2	Part 9 + Parts 4–8 (skim) + Part 11. End-of-section quiz.	35	25
11	Integ	Cross-section interleaved practice. Mock Exam #1 (full, timed). Targeted weak-area drilling. Mock Exam #2.	Full mocks	23
12	Exam	TAPER WEEK. Mon–Tue: half-mock + light review. Wed–Thu: flashcard-only. Fri: rest. Sat: rest. Sun: EXAM.	Half mock	12

SECTIONS STUDY ORDER:

The natural impulse is to study the four sections in numerical order. That's close to right, but with one swap. The order that works is Section 1 → Section 4 → Section 3 → Section 2.

1st: Section 1 (Pre-Design)

- Lightest content load. A good launch where confidence builds quickly and you re-engage with the architectural process from school and practice.
- Maps directly to the architectural lifecycle you already know; programming, site analysis, schematic design, design development. Retrieval is fast.
- Programming, schematic design, and cost management are the conceptual scaffolding for the technical sections that follow.

2nd: Section 4 (Project Delivery & Practice)

- Most behaviorally-coded section: contracts, ethics, project management. Once memorized, it stays. Front-load it while motivation is high.
- CCDC 2 vocabulary recurs throughout Section 3 (specifications, bidding, change orders). Knowing it cold makes Section 3 faster.
- Builds your professional identity early in the cycle, which is motivating.

3rd: Section 3 (Final Project & Sustainable Design Literacy)

- Integrates with everything you've learned — schematic design problems (Section 1), code-driven assembly choices (Section 3), code compliance during CA (Section 4).
- Heaviest technical content. Materials, assemblies, building envelope physics, specifications, sustainability frameworks.
- Placed after Section 4 so the specifications, bidding, and CCDC pieces are already familiar. Requires deep reading and synthesis — best done while you still have stamina.

4th: Section 2 (Building Codes)

- Code recall fades fastest. Tables, classifications, fire separations, pure memorization, easily lost if studied 12–16 weeks before the exam.
- Placed in the final teaching phase so it stays fresh.

SECTION 1 BRIEF:

Programming · Site and Environmental Analysis · Coordinating Engineering Systems · Cost Management · Schematic Design · Design Development.

ExAC themes covered:

- **Programming:** needs analysis, room data sheets, area calculations, occupant counts, functional adjacencies.
- **Site and Environmental Analysis:** zoning, easements, climate, microclimate, solar studies, hydrology.
- **Coordinating Engineering Systems:** structural, mechanical, electrical, civil; architect's role in scoping consultants.
- **Cost Management:** order-of-magnitude estimates, elemental cost analysis, value engineering.
- **Schematic Design:** parti, massing, plan organization, code-driven planning, sustainability strategies.
- **Design Development:** detailing, material selection, system coordination.

What gets tested hardest:

- **Programming sequence:** initial client meeting to final program document. Know the order of operations.
- **Site analysis deliverables:** what goes on the drawing, what consultants you trigger, what regulatory documents you reference.
- **Schematic design integration:** how code, program, site, and structure cohabit in the same drawing set.
- **Elemental cost estimating:** Class A–D classification and when each is used.

Primary materials (Tier 0 + Tier 1)*:

- ExAC Preparation Guide (2026) — ExAC.
- Canadian Handbook of Practice (CHOP) — RAIC, 3rd Edition.
- IAP — ROAC.
- Building Construction Illustrated — Ching.
- The Architect's Studio Companion — Allen & Iano.

Section 1 tactics:

- Practice writing a 1-page program for a hypothetical project. The exam will ask you to identify missing items.
- Build a master site analysis checklist. Memorize the order: zoning → climate → topography → hydrology → access → utilities → cultural/heritage.
- Know the cost estimating Class A–D categorization and the +/- accuracy range for each.

Time budget:

- **16-week:** 3 weeks (Weeks 1–3), ~46 hours.
- **12-week:** 2 weeks (Weeks 1–2), ~45 hours.

** Not the full reference list. See the EXACTLI Resource Guide for every official ExAC reference, curated and grouped by section, plus EXACTLI's own supplemental library.*

SECTION 4 BRIEF:

Bidding and Contract Negotiations · Construction Phase – Office Functions · Construction Phase – Field Functions · Management of the Project & Business/Practice Management.

ExAC themes covered:

- **Bidding and Contract Negotiations:** bid documents, contract types, project delivery comparison (DBB / DB / CM / IPD).
- **Construction Phase — Office Functions:** shop drawings, RFIs, change orders, supplemental instructions, payment certification.
- **Construction Phase — Field Functions:** site visits, progress assessment, deficiencies, substantial performance, total performance, warranty.
- **Management of the Project & Business/Practice Management:** office organization, billing, professional liability, ethics, project management process, fees.

What gets tested hardest:

- **CCDC 2 specific clauses:** dates, durations, payment percentages, holdback rules. Memorize the numbers.
- **Legal documents:** substantial performance, holdback release sequence, certificates required.
- **Site administration:** change orders, RFIs, responsibilities.
- **Ethics and practice principles:** conflict of interest, scope creep, signing drawings, public welfare obligations.

Primary materials (Tier 0 + Tier 1)*:

- ExAC Preparation Guide (2026) — ExAC.
- Canadian Handbook of Practice (CHOP) — RAIC, 3rd Edition.
- IAP — ROAC.
- **Standard contracts:** CCDC 2 (2020), RAIC Document 6 (Owner-Architect), RAIC Document 9 (Architect-Consultant).
- An Architect's Guide to Construction — Brian Palmquist.

Section 4 tactics:

- Read CCDC 2 twice end-to-end, then again in pieces. The numbers must be reflexive.
- Build a CCDC 2 timeline diagram: bid → award → contract → mobilization → substantial → total → warranty.
- Ethics: imagine each scenario from three perspectives — architect, client, public. The right answer almost always serves the public interest first.

Time budget:

- **16-week:** 3 weeks (Weeks 4–6), ~46 hours.
- **12-week:** 2 weeks (Weeks 3–4), ~45 hours.

** Not the full reference list. See the EXACTLI Resource Guide for every official ExAC reference, curated and grouped by section, plus EXACTLI's own supplemental library.*

SECTION 3 BRIEF:

Final Project · Sustainable Design Literacy.

ExAC themes covered:

- **Construction materials:** load-bearing, insulating, air/vapour/water barriers, finishes, fire resistance.
- **Construction principles and systems:** soil mechanics, foundations, envelope, acoustical design.
- **Evaluate assemblies and details:** acoustical, firestop, thermal, moisture, weathertightness, durability, life cycle.
- **Components of construction documents:** project manual, working drawings.
- **Principles of specification writing:** MasterFormat, NMS structure.
- **Evaluate construction documents:** verify conformity, coordination, completeness.
- **Sustainable Design Literacy:** climate impacts, life cycle analysis, sustainable design strategies, occupant wellness, rating systems.

What gets tested hardest:

- **The 3-part specification structure:** what goes in Part 1 vs Part 2 vs Part 3.
- **Building envelope control layers:** water, air, vapor, thermal.
- **Drawing components:** wall section vs elevation vs plan detail vs schedule.
- **Verification activities:** shop drawing review vs approval, mockup protocols, performance testing.

Primary materials (Tier 0 + Tier 1)* + cross-section references:

- ExAC Preparation Guide (2026) — ExAC.
- Canadian Handbook of Practice (CHOP) — RAIC, 3rd Edition.
- IAP — ROAC.
- Building Construction Illustrated — Ching.
- The Architect's Studio Companion — Allen & Iano.
- LEED Core Concepts Guide — USGBC.

Section 3 tactics:

- Specifications: write your own 3-part spec for a single product (e.g., gypsum board).
- Envelope: draw the 4 control layers on 3 different assemblies (rainscreen wall, low-slope roof, slab-on-grade).
- Sustainability: know LEED categories and how Canadian programs (Zero Carbon, Built Green) differ.

Time budget:

- **16-week:** 4 weeks (Weeks 7–10), ~63 hours.
- **12-week:** 3 weeks (Weeks 5–7), ~68 hours.

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SECTION 2 BRIEF:

National Building Code of Canada (2020) · National Energy Code of Canada (2020).

ExAC themes covered:

- **NBC structure:** the 12 Parts, Division A/B/C framework, Objectives and Functional Statements.
- **Major occupancy classifications:** Groups A, B, C, D, E, F.
- Fire separations, fire resistance ratings, fire compartments, firewalls.
- **Exiting:** number of exits, exit width, travel distance, dead-end corridors.
- **Accessibility (NBC 3.8):** barrier-free routes, washrooms, signage.
- **Part 9 small buildings:** 600 m^2 / 3 storey boundary with Part 3.
- **Part 3 large buildings:** encapsulated mass timber, combustible vs noncombustible, sprinklered triggers.
- **NECB:** building envelope insulation, HVAC efficiency, lighting power, performance vs prescriptive paths.

Primary materials (Tier 0 + Tier 1)*:

- ExAC Preparation Guide (2026).
- **NBC 2020:** Read Parts 1, 3, 4, 9 cover-to-cover. Skim Parts 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11.
- **NECB 2020:** Section 2 companion to NBC.
- Tab and highlight your printed copies of the NBC and NECB. These are the only references you may bring into the exam room.

What gets tested hardest:

- **Occupancy classification scenarios:** given a building description, classify it.
- **Fire separation ratings tables:** memorize 1h, 2h common ratings and triggers.
- **Exit width and travel distance calculations:** capacity factors, dead-end corridor limits.
- **Part 9 vs Part 3 boundary:** the 600 m^2 / 3 storey threshold.

Section 2 tactics:

- Build the NBC Data Matrix yourself for 3 sample buildings: a 4-storey apartment, a small daycare, a hospital wing.
- Memorize Part 3 occupancy classifications cold.
- **Build your tabbing system early:** By exam day, finding a fire-separation provision should take less than two minutes.

Time budget:

- **16-week:** 4 weeks (Weeks 11–14), ~65 hours.
- **12-week:** 3 weeks (Weeks 8–10), ~76 hours.

** Not the full reference list. See the EXACTLI Resource Guide for every official ExAC reference, curated and grouped by section, plus EXACTLI's own supplemental library.*

EXAM-DAY PLAYBOOK:

You've done the work. Exam day is no longer a knowledge test — it's a logistics, pacing, and composure test. Use this playbook during the exam itself.

1. **Initial scan, first one to two minutes.** Before writing a single answer, flip through the section. Count the questions, note the formats, identify which questions look long. Form a time budget on the spot.
2. **Tackle high-value written questions first.** Short-answer questions carry more points and demand sustained writing. Do them while your mind is sharp.
3. **Flag and return.** On any question you can't solve in under two minutes, flag it and move on.
4. **Section 2 only, NBC and NECB strategically.** Section 2 is open-book for the NBC and NECB. Index first, then chapter. If a lookup will cost more than two minutes, make an educated guess and move on.
5. **Never leave a question blank.** There is no advantage to a blank — put down your best answer on every question before time runs out.
6. **Section-to-section resets.** Each section is its own mini-exam. Between sections, stretch, hydrate, walk a hallway if you can.

TRUST YOUR WEEKS OF PREPARATION. THE EXAM IS YOUR FIFTH OR SIXTH MOCK, NOT YOUR FIRST.

You've seen the shape of the work. The rest is execution, and you don't have to do it alone.

01 — Download

Get your reference library in order.

Pull the current-year ExAC Preparation Guide from the ExAC website, then download the EXACTLI Resource Guide, a curated map of every official reference grouped by section, plus EXACTLI's own library.

02 — Webinar

Join an EXACTLI webinar.

Three live sessions a year: kickoff (March), mid-cycle deep dive (July), and final sprint (October). Free to attend, taught by Canadian architects who teach this material at McGill, Université de Montréal, and Cégep du Vieux Montréal.

03 — Community

Study with people who get it.

The EXACTLI community brings together intern architects from across Canada (in English and en français) to share notes, ask questions, and prep for the November exam together. The candidates who pass aren't the ones who study in isolation.

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