

# Overview of the CFA® Program

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# The CFA® Program

The Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA®) Program is designed to equip candidates with the knowledge and skills necessary to compete and excel in today's complex and evolving investment industry.

The CFA Program is a three-part exam that tests the fundamentals of investment tools, valuation across various asset classes, portfolio construction, and ethical and professional standards.

The curriculum is developed by CFA Institute, one of the world's leading associations of investment professionals. By enlisting the investment industry's brightest minds to continually improve the CFA Program, CFA Institute ensures that the curriculum is always relevant and provides real-world skills in investment analysis.

## WHY THE CFA PROGRAM IS RIGHT FOR YOU

As an aspiring or practicing investment professional, you need the knowledge and skills to thrive in a highly competitive industry. The CFA Program is designed to equip you with the kind of expertise and real-world skills in investment analysis that will help you advance your career. Whether you are looking to advance in your role, switch careers or looking to start a career in this field, the CFA Program offers a way to achieve your professional goals and differentiate yourself in applications.

## WHAT IS A CFA CHARTER?

A Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA®) charter is a designation given to those who have successfully passed all three levels of the CFA Program exams, achieved the work experience requirements and became a CFA Institute member.

The CFA Program is typically completed by those with backgrounds in finance, accounting, economics, or business. CFA charterholders are qualified to work in senior and executive positions in investment analysis, risk management, portfolio management, and many more related positions such as institutional sales, private equity, and private wealth management.

“

*If you hire investment professionals with a CFA [designation], you absolutely have confidence at the level of qualification. You can hire people with an MBA, but you don't necessarily know that one MBA is the same as another MBA.”*

**Jenny Johnson**  
**Franklin Templeton**  
**CEO/President**

# The benefits



## DEMONSTRATING YOUR EXPANSIVE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Designed with your future in mind, the CFA® Program provides a strong foundation for investment analysis and real-world portfolio management skills. Ongoing input from industry experts ensures that the curriculum remains relevant and prepares charterholders to enter today's market desk-ready.



## RELEVANT IN A VARIETY OF CAREER PATHS

CFA charterholders occupy a range of investment decision-making roles, typically as a research analyst or portfolio manager. CFA charterholders go on to enjoy lifelong careers in asset and wealth management, investment banking, commercial banking, and consulting, alongside a diverse range of career paths in and outside the industry.



## VALUE IN AN EVOLVING INDUSTRY

As a globally recognized credential in the investment management profession, earning the CFA charter demonstrates to employers that you have the knowledge and commitment to thrive in today's complex and evolving investment industry.



# A program that grows with you

## EXAM ELIGIBILITY POLICY FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

CFA Institute has extended CFA® Program candidate eligibility to include university students with two years remaining in their undergraduate studies. This policy allows us to meet the expressed needs of student candidates, providing them with the opportunity to prepare for investment careers, while also addressing industry demand for well-trained, ethical professionals. This eligibility policy provides students with the opportunity to use Level I of the CFA Program as a robust way to differentiate their resumes when applying for internships or entry level jobs. Completion of the CFA Level I exam supplies both interns and early career entrants with the foundational knowledge they need for success.

## BENEFITS TO STARTING YOUR CFA PROGRAM JOURNEY EARLY

- **Utilize your time in university**  
Many universities have partnerships with CFA Institute that can help prepare you for the CFA Program. Even if your school or program doesn't directly teach the CFA Program curriculum, your CFA Program study time will be enhanced by your business and finance courses.
- **Take advantage of your head start**  
You are already used to studying, and if you are in a finance-related degree, you are well prepared to tackle the more advanced, higher education curriculum of the CFA Program.
- **Gain a competitive advantage**  
By beginning the CFA Program during university, you'll gain a competitive advantage for both jobs and internships, and signal to potential employers your commitment to the investment profession.
- **Provides a powerful alternative to an MBA**  
While a traditional MBA program offers a broad business curriculum, the CFA Program curriculum specifically focuses on investment analysis and portfolio management. Completion of the program provides a deep knowledge of investment principles and ethics, and a respected certification as a Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA).
- **Global recognition**  
The CFA charter is globally recognized as the gold standard in the investment management profession, giving you a passport to work in global financial markets.



# Frequently asked questions

## **When can I take the CFA® Program curriculum?**

Undergraduate students are eligible to register and sit for the exam in any of our offered exam cycles (February, May, August, or November) as long as you are within 23 months of graduation.

## **How much study time is involved?**

A candidate should plan to devote about 300 hours of study time in the pursuit of success on their Level I exam. This includes 10-20 hours of a Practical Skills Module (PSM) that provides hands-on application of the material you are learning. Find out more about PSMs from page 10.

## **Is there a best time to take the CFA exam?**

Circumstances differ for everyone, but students beginning their third year of study may already be enrolled in finance courses that complement their study of the CFA Program curriculum. Students planning to apply for a summer internship might benefit from sitting for their Level I exam in August, to allow final studying over holidays and to avoid conflict with academic exams. This will allow focused study time and to use your results during critical fall internship and job application periods.

## **If I pass Level I while I'm in university, when can I move on to the Level II exam?**

You may register and sit for the Level II exam while you are still at university, but you must have received your undergraduate degree before your Level III exam date.

## **How often can I take the CFA exams?**

Candidates are permitted to take the exam twice per calendar year (when applicable), but not in consecutive windows or windows that are six months or less apart. Candidates are allowed a maximum of six attempts per exam level.

## **Are there any other rules?**

All candidates are also subject to the CFA Institute Code of Professional Conduct, and any breaches could mean suspension from participation in the CFA Program. More information on the Code will be sent when you register.

# The CFA<sup>®</sup> Program curriculum



## KEEPING THE CURRICULUM RELEVANT AND RIGOROUS

The CFA Program includes the foundational knowledge that firms expect as well as the critical advanced investment analysis and portfolio management skills that are needed in the investment industry today. CFA Institute updates the curriculum regularly, so it reflects modern financial practices, including machine learning; fintech; organizing, visualizing, and describing data; and sustainable investing. Thus, allowing candidates to bring what they have learned through the CFA Program to real-world scenarios.



## INDUSTRY PRACTITIONER INPUT AT EVERY STAGE

The curriculum is developed through an Education Advisory Committee that includes industry practitioners, security market regulators, university faculty, and policymakers. Involving financial thought leaders helps ensure that the CFA Program curriculum provides the skills the industry wants. This approach, known as the Program Practice Analysis process, plays a key role in establishing the CFA Program as the global gold standard of investment credentials.



## KNOWLEDGE THAT EVOLVES WITH INDUSTRY NEEDS

CFA Institute researches and identifies trends that significantly affect the investment industry. These insights inform updates to the curriculum to reflect current practices and help CFA charterholders succeed in a constantly changing profession.





## **SAMPLE CURRICULUM TOPICS**

### **Financial Statement Analysis**

including Analysis of Financial Institutions, Financial Statement Modeling

### **Corporate Finance**

including Corporate Restructuring, ESG Considerations in Investment Analysis

### **Equity Investments**

including Equity Valuation Concepts and Basic Tools, Overview of Equity Securities

### **Alternative Investments**

including Private Real Estate Investments

### **Fixed Income**

including Fixed-Income Instrument Features, Credit Risk

### **Portfolio Construction**

including Portfolio Planning and Construction, Active Equity Investments



## EXAMS THAT EVOLVE IN COMPLEXITY

The CFA® Program is comprised of three levels. Each level of the curriculum builds on the prior level and becomes increasingly complex, with a core of ethics and professional standards across all levels. The total testing time for each exam is 4.5 hours.

## PRACTICAL SKILLS MODULES

The CFA Program includes practical, relevant skills training to provide candidates with on-the-job application of what they are learning in the curriculum. A Practical Skills Module (PSM) uses a combination of videos, multiple-choice questions, guided practice, and case studies to develop candidates' practical skills. In order to receive their exam result, candidates are required to complete at least one PSM at each level. The PSM topic may be chosen after registration at any time during your exam study period and must be completed before results are released. Each PSM takes 10-20 hours to complete.

# EXAM OVERVIEW: PRACTICAL SKILLS MODULES

## Financial Modeling

How to build a three-statement financial model of a company in Excel to understand how the value of a company is determined.

## Python Programming Fundamentals

A fundamentals course to demonstrate the basics of Python and how to use Jupyter Notebook for developing, presenting, and sharing data science projects related to finance.

## Analyst Skills

Focuses on the skills equity analysts need using insights gained from hundreds of successful analysts.

## Python, Data Science & AI

Introduces candidates to machine learning, artificial intelligence, and data science to understand financial statements, reporting, and analysis using Python.

## Portfolio Development and Construction

Develop, implement, and manage an institutional investor portfolio, drawing from lessons learned in the CFA® Program curriculum and using advanced Excel skills.

|                                  | Level I                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Level II                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Level III                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Exam Topics</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethics &amp; Professionals Standards</li> <li>• Quantitative Methods</li> <li>• Economics</li> <li>• Financial Statement Analysis</li> <li>• Corporate Finance</li> <li>• Equity Investments</li> <li>• Fixed Income</li> <li>• Derivatives and Risk Management</li> <li>• Alternative Investments</li> <li>• Portfolio Construction</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethics &amp; Professionals Standards</li> <li>• Quantitative Methods</li> <li>• Economics</li> <li>• Financial Statement Analysis</li> <li>• Corporate Finance</li> <li>• Equity Investments</li> <li>• Fixed Income</li> <li>• Derivatives and Risk Management</li> <li>• Alternative Investments</li> <li>• Portfolio Construction</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethics and Professional Standards</li> <li>• Derivatives and Risk Management</li> <li>• Portfolio Construction</li> <li>• Asset Allocation</li> <li>• Performance Measurement</li> </ul> <p><b>+ Choice of Pathway:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Portfolio Management</li> <li>• Private Markets</li> <li>• Private Wealth</li> </ul> |
| <b>Question Format</b>           | Multiple choice questions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Vignette-supported multiple-choice questions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Vignette-supported multiple-choice questions and constructed response (essay) questions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Exam Results Availability</b> | Within 60 days of taking the exam                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Within 60 days of taking the exam                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Within 90 days of taking the exam                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Level Advancements</b>        | Meet CFA Program enrollment requirements                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Pass Level I CFA exam                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Pass Level II CFA exam                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Practice Skills Module</b>    | Required                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Required                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Required                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Practice Packs (Optional)</b> | Available                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Available                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Available                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

# CFA® charterholder's career path

## RELEVANCE IN A VARIETY OF CAREER PATHS

CFA charterholders occupy a range of investment decision-making roles including buy-side, sell-side, corporate and advisory positions. Many CFA charterholders are portfolio managers (including hedge fund managers), private wealth managers, equity research analysts, manager-of-managers, and traders.

## VALUE IN AN EVOLVING INDUSTRY

As a globally recognized credential in the investment industry, earning the CFA charter demonstrates to employers that an individual has the knowledge and commitment to thrive in today's complex and evolving investment industry. The CFA designation is a mark of distinction, and investment firms know it represents a higher standard.

## EXPANSIVE KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND COMMITMENT TO ETHICS

The CFA charter provides the strongest foundation for advanced investment analysis and real-world portfolio management skills for an advantage that can be used at all stages of an individual's career. It prepares an individual to enter today's market and signifies a strong technical foundation and commitment to ethics and professionalism.

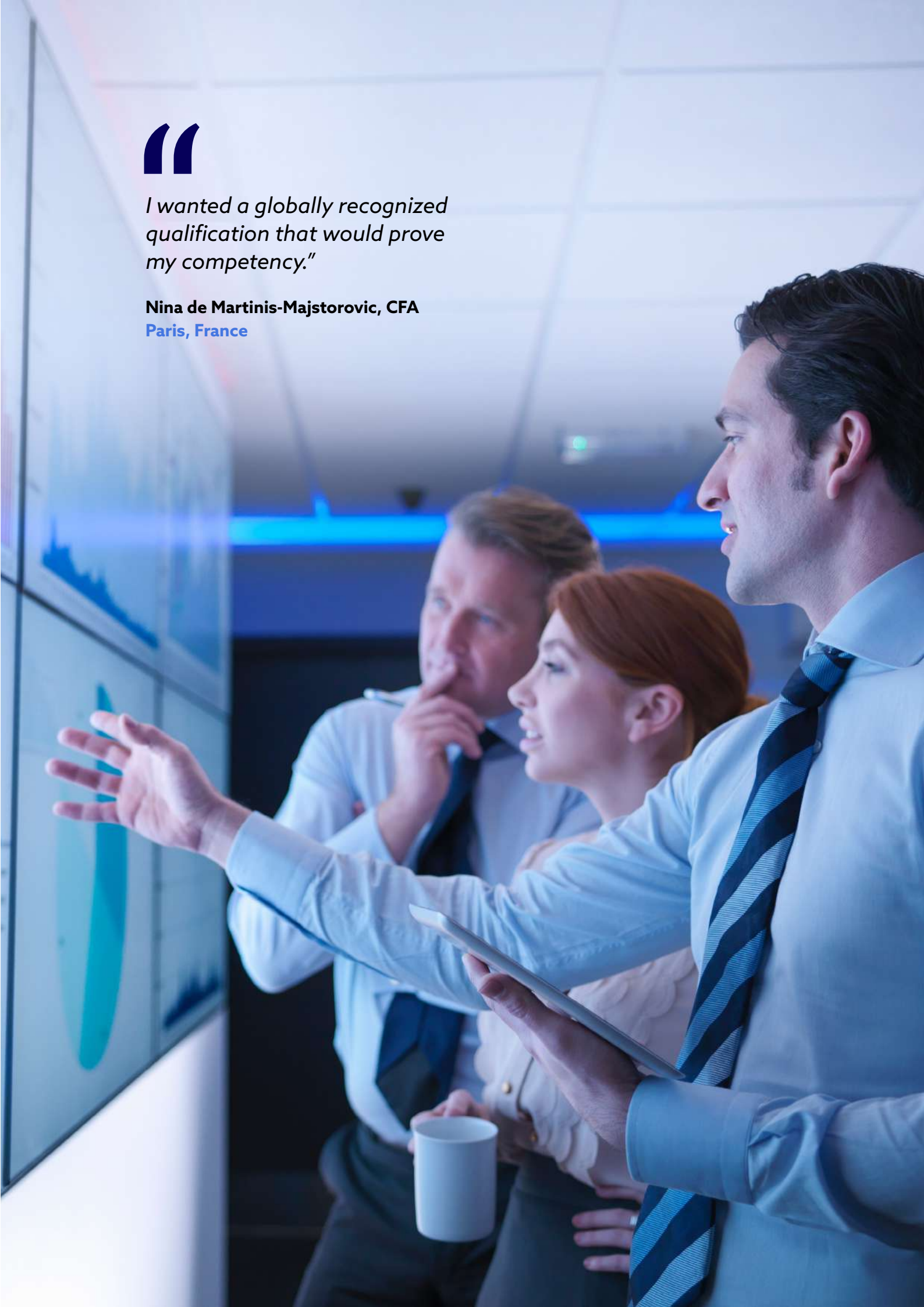
## LEVEL III SPECIALIZED PATHWAYS

The CFA Program curriculum has always prepared people well for buy-side jobs. As we grow and develop to meet the needs of our global audience, we know that the needs of our diverse candidate base go beyond the buy-side.

We performed a job role analysis in April 2021, then subsequently a market analysis to determine adjacent job role sectors from which to focus the specialized pathways. Aside from the traditional Portfolio Management path, two sectors rose to the top: Private Wealth Management and Private Markets.

At Level III, CFA Program candidates are able to select one of three Specialized Pathways which involve detailed content related to specific areas of the investment industry including Portfolio Management, Private Markets or Private Wealth. Each candidate must master a 'common core' curriculum which comprises approximately two-thirds of Level III content, with the remaining third comprised of pathway-related content.





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*I wanted a globally recognized qualification that would prove my competency.”*

**Nina de Martinis-Majstorovic, CFA**  
Paris, France

# All about the CFA® Program

## TEST CENTERS

Exams are hosted in over [400 testing centers](#) located in most major cities around the world. Availability in test centers will vary by market. Schedule your exam appointment by the deadline (typically 60 days before the start of the exam window). Appointments are based on first-come, first-served basis. Candidates can take the exam a maximum of twice each calendar year but not in consecutive windows or windows that are six months or less apart. Candidates will have a total of six maximum attempts per exam level.

## CFA PROGRAM FEES\* BY EXAM LEVEL

Registration costs vary depending on when a candidate decides to register for the exam. An early registration period is available for all three levels, which reduces the exam fee. See table below. All fees must be paid in US dollars.

## REGISTRATION PROCESS

Registering for the CFA exam is a two-step process:

- **Step 1**  
Enroll in the CFA exam through the CFA Institute website [www.cfainstitute.org/programs/cfa-program](http://www.cfainstitute.org/programs/cfa-program)
- **Step 2**  
After the registration process is complete and payment processed, candidates will be able to schedule their exam via a Prometric scheduling tool, which presents available testing centers with dates and times. This step must be completed by the scheduling deadline.

| LEVEL I                                   | LEVEL II                                  | LEVEL III                                 |
|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| EARLY REGISTRATION<br>USD <b>1,140</b>    | EARLY REGISTRATION<br>USD <b>1,140</b>    | EARLY REGISTRATION<br>USD <b>1,240</b>    |
| STANDARD REGISTRATION<br>USD <b>1,490</b> | STANDARD REGISTRATION<br>USD <b>1,490</b> | STANDARD REGISTRATION<br>USD <b>1,590</b> |

\*Pricing effective from the February 2026 CFA Exam window onward.



## STUDY MATERIALS

Passing the three exams marks true mastery of the curriculum and is the most important task required to earn the CFA® charter. On average, candidates report investing over 300 hours of study in advance of successfully passing each level. Becoming a CFA charterholder takes hard work and commitment. When you are a candidate, complete support is provided through the Learning Ecosystem, that helps candidates to prepare for the exam, available online and as an app. CFA Institute provides candidates with access to a wealth of information that will help them to pass the CFA exams and excel in their career.

## STUDY TOOLS: LEARNING ECOSYSTEM

CFA Institute provides the full curriculum in a comprehensive digital Learning Ecosystem to all registered candidates. It includes practice questions, mock exams, and more.

## OPTIONAL PRACTICE PACKS

[Practice Packs](#) are available for all three exam levels and include a suite of additional prep materials, such as extra practice questions, exam day experience and mock exams from the authors of the CFA Program. They are available for purchase either at registration or at anytime before your exam day.

## SCHOLARSHIPS

As part of CFA Institute commitment to promoting the highest standards of professional excellence, [scholarships](#) help make the CFA Program more accessible. Eligibility requirements and rules apply.

## PREP PROVIDERS

In addition to the support provided by CFA Institute, candidates in the CFA Program can benefit from extra exam prep courses and materials. [Browse our list of approved prep providers](#)

### WHAT IS KEY TO EXAM SUCCESS?

#### 300 HOURS

On average, candidates spend 300 hours of study per exam level, plus completion of mandatory Practical Skills Module (PSM).

#### EXAM PREP

All exam questions are based on CFA Program curriculum.

#### STUDY TOOLS

Online Learning Ecosystem, practice questions, mock exams, candidate discussion board, CFA Institute Learning App, optional practice packs and prep courses.

#### 4+ YEARS

On average, it takes four years to complete the full program, including work experience requirements.



Visit [www.cfainstitute.org/programs/cfa](https://www.cfainstitute.org/programs/cfa)  
for more detailed information.