How to Pass Scrum.org's PSPO I, PSPO II, and PSPO III Certificates

Generally, there are three different Product Owner certificates from Scrum.org available, independent of whether the candidate attended a Professional Product Owner class or not: PSPO I, PSPO II, and PSPO III. While the PSPO I is an entry-level Scrum certificate, heavily focused on the theory of the Scrum Guide, the PSPO II certificate addresses the advanced practitioner's knowledge on how to deal with different scenarios. Both of these Product Owner certificates are entirely based on multiple-choice assessments. This is only partly true for the PSPO III certificate. The significant part of the PSPO III questions require a written answer in English. Also, the PSPO III assessment is mainly graded by a human.

How to Pass Scrum.org's PSPO I Product Owner Certification

The PSPO I Product Owner certificate requires a solid knowledge of the theory of agile product development in general and the Scrum framework in particular. While I would not suggest it, you can pass this Product Owner certificate little practical knowledge of Scrum if you are willing the put in the time to get familiar with the fundamentals. To pass the PSPO I Product Owner assessment, I recommend the following preparation:

- Read the Scrum Guide in advance several times. The answers to many questions will be in there.
- Diligently practice with Scrum.org's Open Assessments; you will need to understand the mental model behind creating the assessment question and what kind of answers candidates shall provide. Please keep in mind: Passing Product Owner certificates by Scrum.org is about the pure application of Scrum as it is supposed to be. (Not one of the botched derivates of Scrum you may have encountered somewhere.)
- When I mention Scrum.org's Open Assessments, I am not only referring to the Product Owner Open. You also need to get familiar with the Scrum Open and the Nexus Open. I would even suggest looking at the Agile Leadership Open and the Evidence-Based Management Open.
- To pass the Product Owner certification, it is essential that you pass the Open Assessments routinely with 100 % in significantly less time than advertised. For example, aim for 5 minutes for the Product Owner Open and the Scrum Open. Also, please note that the actual PSPO I to PSPO III assessments will likely comprise more difficult questions.
- Also, read the explanation the Open Assessment tests provide to you when you answer a question incorrectly. But, again, it is about understanding the mental model behind the questions in the first place. (Some students deliberately answer all questions wrong to learn the correct answers.)
- You will have to answer 80 questions in 60 minutes. While the PSPO I assessment is an open book assessment, there will be little to no time to start googling anything.
- Do not spend too much time on answering a single question. First, aim to answer all 80 questions in about 45 minutes while booking marking those you want to revisit.

- Test the bookmarking function of the Open Assessments. Its software is identical to the one used in the PSPO I, PSPO II, and PSPO III certification tests. (You do not want to be stressed during the "real" PSPO certification.)
- Read the questions carefully. There are no trick questions; however, swapping 'Product Backlog' for 'Sprint Backlog' changes the game. (Don't fall victim to pattern matching instead of reading.)
- Make yourself familiar with the [Standard of Conduct for Assessments](#).
- Do you feel well prepared to pass a Product Owner certification? Excellent! Now, pick a quiet hour where you will not be disturbed. Maybe, ready a sheet of paper and a pencil and check your mobile to provide an alternative to your normal ISP if needed. (I once encountered a crashing WiFi router during an PSM II assessment, and switching to the mobile hotspot worked well. I like backup solutions.)

📈 The **PSPO I Certification Results** from my Professional Product Owner classes in 2021 are as follows:
- 95% of course participants took the included PSPO I certification.
- 77% of exam takers passed PSPO I certification with an average score of 91%. (Required: 85%.)

How to Pass Scrum.org's PSPO II Product Owner Certification

Compared to the PSPO I Product Owner certificate, the [PSPO II assessment](#) provides 60 minutes to answer 40 questions. The challenge is that all questions address real-life scenarios, and many suggested choices will sound familiar to you. But, unfortunately, sounding familiar to you won't necessarily make them acceptable from Scrum's perspective:

- To prepare yourself for passing this Product Owner certification, go back to the suggestions for the PSPO I assessment; those apply here, too.
- Then continue your preparation by studying the [Scrum Guide 2020 Reordered](#). I based the Scrum Guide 2020 Reordered on about 95 percent of the text of the Scrum Guide 2020, extending its original structure by adding additional categories, for example, on self-management, commitments, or accountability. It allows you to get a first understanding of Scrum-related questions quickly. For example, it is good at relating specific topics—say "stakeholders"—with Scrum's first principles, such as Scrum Values or empiricism. This kind of Scrum pattern recognition helps to sort out scenarios that are not compliant with Scrum's basic ideas.
- Another recommended reading is the Scrum Anti-Patterns Guide. It is a collection of articles I have been writing and refining for years. They detail the necessary steps to identify and overcome Scrum anti-patterns, from Scrum events to Scrum artifacts to Scrum roles.
- Additionally, allocate sufficient preparation to become familiar with topics that the Product Owner needs to master that, at the same time, are not appropriately documented in the Scrum Guide. For example, these topics comprise:
    - How do Product Owners get from the product vision to product strategy and to the Product Goal?

- How do Product Owners create a system to identify what is worth building from a customer perspective? Moreover, how do Product Owners include stakeholders and Scrum team members in this process?
- How do Product Owners create alignment among team members regarding Product Backlog management and refinement?
- How do Product Owners deal with ordering the Product Backlog? What frameworks support Product Owners in ensuring that the Scrum Team is working on the most valuable work items?
- How do Product Owners deal with estimation, forecasting, and release planning?
- How do Product Owners manage stakeholder expectations?

- Finally, you may want to consider [Scrum.org's Product Owner Learning Path](). While it is not a pre-requisite for passing the PSPO II Scrum Master certification, the Scrum Master Learning Path offers a structured approach to learning for Product Owners.

📈 The **PSPO II Certification Results** from my Advanced Professional Product Owner classes in 2022 are as follows:
- 100% of course participants took the included PSPO II certification.
- 71% of exam takers passed PSPO II certification with an average score of 90%. (Required: 85%.)

How to Pass Scrum.org's PSPO III Product Owner Certification

Passing the [PSPO III Product Owner certification]() is tricky and requires probably a months-long preparation. (I spent more than two months preparing myself.) Many candidates face two significant challenges: Firstly, you need to be able to type fast, and secondly, you need to do this in English. And at the same time, you need to provide precise and concise answers. While you may consider using a translation plug-in for the PSPO I and PSPO II, this won't help much with the PSPO III. Also, writing answers in your native language and then translating them won't work, as pasting any text into the answer boxes is impossible. So instead, you will have to type manually:

- To prepare yourself for passing this Product Owner certification, go back to the suggestions for the PSPO I and PSPO II assessments; those apply here, too.
- Practice typing fast. During my PSPO III assessment, I had less than ten questions that required a written answer and about 25 multiple-choice questions. I had to answer all of those questions within 120 minutes. So, I set a count-down of three minutes per question, and I forced myself to move on to the next question at the end of that period. (You will lose more points by not answering a question at the end of the assessment because you run out of time than moving a 90 % answer to a 95 % answer by adding two minutes to the original interval.)
- Create questions yourself, for example, based on the Scrum Guide, and try answering them with the time-box. (The Scrum Anti-Patterns Guide and the Scrum Guide Reordered support this effort; I created the first Scrum Guide Reordered as a tool to support my attempt to pass the PSM III assessment.)
- Revisit the [Standard of Conduct for Assessments](), particularly the "Additional expectations for essay-based assessments - PSM III and PSPO III" paragraph.

- Start reading many books on Scrum, Product Owner mastery, and product management in general. (Marty Cagan's "Inspired," Melissa Perri's "Escaping the Build Trap," and Teresa Torres' "Continuous Product Discovery" come to mind.)
- Track your preparation progress by engaging with the Product Owner Learning Path, see above.
- Join Scrum.org's forum or the Hands-on Agile Slack community—see the sign-up form below—and engage in discussions with fellow Product Owners on topics unclear to you. (I know some people in the Hands-on Agile Slack community who are considering taking the PSPO III or preparing for it.)

There is a reason why there are only 408 certificate holders worldwide as of today: The PSPO III assessment is a difficult and expensive Product Owner certification. You need to prepare yourself properly. Just showing up and hoping for the best is a futile approach. (By the way, attending an Advanced Product Owner class will reduce the $500 price tag of the PSPO III by $200.)

Conclusion

If passing a Product Owner certificate is a good career choice and sound signaling for prospective employers, customers, or peers, which PSPO certificate shall you consider? Personally, in most cases, I would consider a PSPO I to be the minimum and a PSPO II to be the standard. However, on the other side, someone holding a PSPO III certainly has my full attention as they accomplished quite a feat.

Of course, there are exceptions to the rule that proves it. For example, some excellent agile practitioners do not believe in any form of Scrum certificates, and it works fine for them. However, they also put in a lot of work for the agile community and have corresponding visibility. Just ask yourself: Do you belong to this group?

📖 Scrum Certification Resources

Scrum Certification: Is It a Sound Investment for Your Career?
Product Owner Anti-Patterns — 33 Ways to Improve as a PO
Hiring: 82 Scrum Product Owner Interview Questions to Avoid Agile Imposters
How to Pass the Scrum Master Certification — PSM I, PSM II, and PSM III
Hiring: 60 Scrum Master Interview Questions To Avoid Agile Imposters
Download the 'Scrum Anti-Patterns Guide' for Free
The Scrum Guide Reordered — understand the Scrum Guide's patterns and concepts quickly