NEED for SPEED on the CPC Exam

Whenever you get to a certain point in studying for the CPC exam it is all about your ability to read, think and act quickly. I know I am a CPC-I and I put a great deal of effort into studying for the CPC exam in the later part of 2019 I studied for the CPC exam after losing my father, suddenly. Loosing a loved one is never easy, but it is especially hard when you are trying to study and take a major exam for certification. My ability to concentrate was a challenge. I have worked as a coder before and so I knew what was expected of me but the test being timed was a major hurdle for me. I want to add that the best thing you can do is prepare yourself by learning the information outlined on the website AAPC. Preparation is always the key. Timing is secondary. So, like my mother told me you either know the material or you do not. I have found that if you are scoring in the 75% -80% range on any type of practice test you need to bump it up before you sit for the certification. (Just my rule of advice)

Here are some tips to overcome the dreaded timer.

1. Read your instructions and read them carefully. Not following the instructions can lead to failing the CPC test.
2. Know your books. I had my books so marked up that the proctor made a comment and said whoa, it looks like you are ready. I think there were notes in different colors on every page. (My handwritten notes)
3. Answer easy questions first. Therefore, some people will start off with something like the medical terminology/anatomy series first because they feel really confident in this area.
4. Learn to read the questions. I am a professor, so I understand how test questions are put together. A multiple-choice question (MCQ) is composed of two parts: a stem that identifies the question or problem, and a set of alternatives or possible answers that contain a key that is the best answer to the question, and a number of distractors that are plausible but incorrect answers to the question.   Yes, there are guidelines on how questions should be addressed.
5. Make sure that you know how to read an operative Report. AAPC has their own guidelines I would suggest that you read them.
6. Know the ICD-10 and CPT guidelines. Most medical coders can code, and they know how to select codes very well but interpreting the rules can cause some headaches.
7. Practice taking test with a timer.
8. Placement of your books before the exam and during the exam is critical. You need to find out what works for you but I knew that most of the questions were going to come from the CPT so I had it in front of me with my test slightly to the right. (I am right-handed) I had my ICD-10 to my far right and my HCPCS book up front of me slightly to the left.
9. Most test will ask questions in a series, so you are not hunting all over the book, so you need to think like that. Answer questions as if they were from that series.
Example: A patient diagnosed with chronic ulcerative pancolitis goes to her GI doctor for a check-up. She currently has no complaints. How would this diagnosis be billed?

A. K50.90 B. K51.00 C. K51.30 D. K51.40 Correct answer: K51.00   Code K50.90 is for Crohn's disease, unspecified, without complications. Since this is not what the question is asking for, this would be an incorrect answer.

10. Read every answer for the question. Sometimes they like to put two codes in a line and change the order with different sequencing.
11. Use the process of elimination every time. You can mark on the test, so this is what I did. I would draw a line through the ones that were not correct.
12. When there is a question that ask about "all the of above". Rule of thumb is you do not have to make sure that all the answers are correct, but you do need to make sure that at least 2 of them are correct. There again mark through the ones that are not correct
13. Answer all the questions. Save a second for this one at the end. I usually would mark each question that I was not sure of with a X if I needed to go back to it.
14. Looking at the clock I only looked at the clock when I was halfway done with the exam. That was my preference. It stressed me out if I watched it more often.   However, I watched the clock very closely at the end.

No real time for these activities

1. Skimming the entire test or correcting/double checking each page before moving to the next page. (This would work if the tests were not timed)
2. In class most of the time you have been asked to read everything twice. You really do not have time for this one.

Positive tips. When in doubt and you cannot or do not know the answer try envisioning where were at when you learned the material. This is called Content Dependent Memory. I used it on my test. I was stuck on a question in the Laboratory /Pathology section and I remembered that I wrote down the answer in my book on the left page up at the top and boom I had enough time to skim the section and I located the answer really quickly.

William Poundstone has studied all different types of test. He has studied over 2400 different type of test. (i.e., driver test, college exams, bar exams, etc.) and he found that test questions that have 4 possible answers (like the CPC) the answer is usually B.   So if you had to mark any answer at the end.