By Geanetta Johnson Agbona, CPC, CPC-I, CBCS

# Failed the Coding Exam?

## Strengthen your confidence by boosting resources, meditating on guidance, and believing in yourself.

Recently, my 8-year-old wanted me to buy him a skateboard. My initial response was, "No way!" He presented his request differently each day. He even explained that skateboarding would improve his respiratory system by increasing his daily exercise activity. After so much persistence, I granted his request. Three days later, he informed me that skateboarding was too hard and he wanted to give up. "I can't do it. I am a failure," he said.

This is a typical response to an unsuccessful attempt at something new. My son's attitude and response can relate to how coders feel after failing a national coding exam.

When you began your studies, you were most likely excited. Having failed the exam, however, you probably feel discouraged—especially if it's the second or third time you've failed. What you need now is a boost of confidence.

### Use Smart Tools

Determine why you think you failed the exam. Ask yourself:

- Did I have the right tools I needed to pass the exam?
- Did I take advantage of the AAPC practice exams (www.aapc.com/training/cpc-exam-preparation.aspx)? If so, did I effectively review the rationales provided?
- Did I take advantage of AAPC's low-cost practice tests, exam tips (www.aapc.com/certification/exam-tips.aspx), and free Internet quizzes (www.justcoding.com)?
- Did I attend the free monthly webinars at www.codingcertification.org?

Tools such as these are readily available. Use them to strengthen your weak areas and gain confidence in your ability to pass the exam.

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# Don't Give Up!

## Determine why you think you failed the exam.

### Good Study Habits Go Far

1.  The next step is to strengthen your study habits. Consider reflection as a way to retain the information. For example, in regards to lesions:

2.  Open your CPT® 2013 codebook to "Excision-Benign Lesions 11400-11471."

3.  Read the guidelines for this section in an audible, low voice.

    Explain the key points of the guidelines to yourself in an audible, low voice:

    - Excision of benign lesions includes a simple, non-layered closure, so it's unnecessary to code a simple, non-layered closure with a benign lesion. If the scenario includes a benign lesion and intermediate closure, however, I will code the lesion and intermediate closure. If the scenario includes a benign lesion and complex closure, I will code the lesion and complex closure.

    - I must code each benign lesion excised separately. If there are three benign lesions, I will code each lesion separately.

    - Note: Excision of benign lesions 11400-11446 cannot be reported with adjacent tissue transfers 14000-14302.

    - Review the formula for measuring and coding the removal of a lesion: excised diameter + margin + margin.

4.  Turn your CPT® codebook to "Excision Malignant Lesions 11600-11646."

    - Note that the guidelines for benign lesions and malignant lesions are extremely similar.

    - There is one paragraph regarding frozen section pathology margins that is significantly different in the malignant lesion section. Read that paragraph until you understand it well.

5.  Close your book and, in an audible, low voice, explain what you read.

6.  How will these guidelines help you when taking the national exam? Imagine a scenario that requires you to use these coding guidelines.

### Be Determined and Resourceful

Here are a few tips to keep you determined and dedicated to pass the exam:

- **Passing the exam should be a priority.** Do not watch TV, use your cell phone, etc., until you have studied for the day or week.

- **Plan your day to include quality study time.** Quality is more important than quantity. If your schedule is hectic, include short bursts of 15-minute study sessions throughout the day instead of planning two-hour study sessions that are not productive due to fatigue, distractions, etc.

- **Believe you can pass the exam.** You won't pass the exam if you have doubts. Recite positive reaffirmations.

**Remember:** Most employers are interested in the credential(s) you possess, not the length of time and number of exams it took you to earn them.

### Persistence Will Persevere

My son decided not to give up on skateboarding. In fact, a neighbor noticed his struggle and spent some time assisting him. The neighbor's willingness to step in and help can be paralleled to the importance of helping other AAPC members pass the exam through mentoring in local chapters.

Although my son is not ready for a major competition, he can skate now. He has built his confidence and is proud of himself because he did not give up. I urge you to persevere, as well. Obstacles and disappointments are a part of life that can be overcome. Don't give up!

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