



Official Publication of the Northern California Oracle Users Group

NoCOUG

JOURNAL

VOL. 19, No. 2 · MAY 2005

\$15

Building a Solid Foundation

Foundation Matters

Relational theory legend Chris Date talks about where a solid foundation for your database starts.

See page 4.

Keep Your Career on Solid Ground

Read Brian Hitchcock's latest book review and learn his strategies for passing the Oracle Certified Professional 10g upgrade exam.

See page 8.

SQL Corner

A humorous tale by Iggy Fernandez recounting the adventures of his group of "fellow prisoners in Academia" and some valuable insights on record-at-a-time ("RATTY") processing.

See page 13.

Much More Inside . . .

Strategies for Passing the OCP 10g Upgrade Exam

Review by Brian Hitchcock

OCP Oracle Database 10g: New Features for Administrators Exam Guide

By Sam R. Alapati

Published by Oracle Press, 2004



Summary

Overall review: *Excellent.*

Target audience: *Anyone interested in passing the Oracle 10g upgrade exam.*

Would you recommend to others? *Yes, absolutely.*

Who will get the most from this book? *Anyone who is preparing to take the 10g upgrade exam in the near future.*

Is this book platform specific? *No. The author notes that he prepared the examples in the book using both Unix and Windows systems.*

Why did I obtain this book? *I was studying to take the 10g upgrade exam at Oracle OpenWorld 2004 in San Francisco.*

Overall Review

Let's get to the good part. I passed my exam on the first try, and, therefore, this study guide did its intended job. Based on this alone, I recommend this book. I had virtually no previous formal training with the Oracle 10g database, yet I was able to pass the upgrade exam by reading the chapters of this book and using the review sections and the sample questions at the end of each chapter. This exam guide provided complete and thorough coverage of the material needed to prepare for the exam. The book covers the material without being any longer than necessary. I could not have prepared for this exam so quickly without this guide, and I don't believe I could have passed the exam without using a book like this.

What Does OCP Mean?

OCP stands for Oracle Certified Professional. Oracle provides training classes and sets up the certification exams for many different topics. This exam guide covers DBA certification, specifically the certification of existing

OCP DBAs who are moving up to the 10g DBA certification. In order to take this exam, you need to have your Oracle 9i OCP designation. The exam guide also assumes that you've familiarized yourself with all of the 9i DBA material before you begin studying for the 10g upgrade exam. You need to realize that—even though you are studying for the 10g certification upgrade exam—the exam can ask about material that is unique to Oracle 9i or even 8i. I originally got my OCP certification back on Oracle 8. Since then, I've taken the upgrade exams for 8i, 9i, and now 10g.

In my experience, only one or two of the 60 exam questions specifically related to older material. Therefore, this exam guide does not completely cover all of the material that could possibly be in one of the upgrade exam questions. However, this guide does cover all of the material that will be in the exam that relates to the 10g database.

Overall Comments on Certification in General

I find most DBAs I know have very strong feelings about whether or not certification is worthwhile. Therefore, I think it is important that I explain my views on certification before I get into my review of the certification exam guide to give it proper context.

Understand that the entire certification process is a marketing tool for Oracle. When I was studying for my 10g upgrade exam, I was learning the many new features of the latest Oracle RDBMS product. Even though I was not supporting any 10g databases at the time, by studying for my exam, I was becoming aware of the new features of 10g. This got me thinking about why and how I would implement 10g in my work environment. This way, I was already preparing to use 10g at work, which is to the benefit of Oracle Corporation.

Critics of the certification process will be quick to point out that someone can pass the certification exams without necessarily having any practical experience with any Oracle products. My experience with the 10g upgrade exam will only confirm their criticisms. Other than my preparation for the exam, I do not have any work-related experience with Oracle 10g. And I passed the exam.

While both of the previous criticisms of the certification process are valid, I think there are valid benefits of certification. My organization needs to continually look forward for new products and processes. Certification helps me and the company I work for to be fully aware of

the new features of our vendors' products. The more we know in detail what things are coming next, the better we can prepare for them. If I were to wait until I had experience with the new features of an Oracle product before I tried to learn about those new features, I probably would never implement any of them. I think the certification process provides an organized, systematic way for me to continually be up-to-date on the new features that are coming in the latest Oracle products. I realize that this does make me part of the Oracle marketing machine, but I believe the benefits to me and my organization are worthwhile.

Finally, I personally encourage you to become certified. If you are already certified at the 9i level, and you feel you must be using Oracle 10g before you can try to pass this upgrade certification exam, I want to encourage you to go ahead and get certified now. In the beginning of Chapter 1, the author states that it is essential to practice using the new features of Oracle 10g in order to pass the test. I disagree. In studying for my exam, I did not have any practice using any of the new features and I passed. While I realize this will encourage critics of the certification process, you should still go ahead and get yourself certified just as soon as you can. It's good for you to have it on your résumé, and it's good for you to get it out of the way as soon as possible. Do not use your lack of experience with the latest Oracle product as a reason to delay getting certified.

The Book Itself

The quality of the book is very high. The list of chapters is shown below, and from what I remember of the actual exam, this covers the exam topics very well. Understand that

anything I say comparing the material in the book and in the practice questions to the questions in the actual exam is based solely on memory. Since you are not allowed to make any notes that you can take with you from the exam, I have no way to clinically assess how well the book covers the exam topics.

Any publication will, of course, have some errors. For a normal book, this is less of an issue than for an exam guide. Since you are using the exam study guide to prepare for a test that you are paying for, you'd really like the study guide to be absolutely perfect. I believe this study guide is as close to that ideal as possible. I found very few errors in the text of the book, in the sample problems at the end of each chapter, and in the sample questions on the CD that came with the book.

The flow of the book is very good. The topics in each chapter seem to move easily from subject to subject, and the writing style is approachable. The way the book is written makes it easy to assimilate the relevant information. Those who are critics of the certification process will feel that this is a criticism of this book: this study guide is not the ideal resource for learning all of the possible implications of Oracle 10g (e.g., architecture). What I am saying, though, is that it is a very good way to learn the information you need to pass the OCP upgrade exam.

The chapters are:

1. Installation, Server Configuration, and Database Upgrades
2. Loading and Unloading Data
3. Automatic Database Management
4. Manageability Infrastructure
5. Application Tuning
6. Space and Storage Management Enhancements

7. The Oracle Scheduler and the Database Resource Manager
8. Backup and Recovery Enhancements
9. Flashback Technology Enhancements
10. Automatic Storage Management
11. Enhancements in Analytical SQL and Materialized Views
12. Miscellaneous New Features

Each chapter consists of the material, a two-minute drill, and a self-test of sample OCP test questions. There are also lab questions at the end of each chapter, but I didn't use them. These questions cover tasks that require actually using the Oracle 10g RDBMS, and as we all know, the OCP exam doesn't test your ability to actually use the database. The answers to the self-test questions are provided at the very end of each chapter.

The CD That Comes with the Book

The CD that comes with the book contains two complete sample tests. These sample tests contain 60 questions each, just like the real OCP exam. These sample tests are very similar to what the actual OCP exam will be like. On the other hand, based on my memory, the sample tests on the CD didn't cover nearly the breadth of topics that are on the actual exam.

Understand that the CD with its practice exams is really a teaser. The company that put the practice exams on the CD hopes to get you to purchase more practice exams. Therefore, I'm not really surprised that the sample exams that you get for free on the CD don't cover all of the top-

I want to be very clear that based on my experience, I firmly believe I would've done just as well on the OCP upgrade exam whether I had the day-long class or not.

ics on the exam. I didn't purchase any additional practice exams, and I did well on the real exam. So, I don't think you need to purchase any additional practice exams for yourself.

What Could Have Been Better

Since I passed the exam on the first try, it isn't obvious what needs to be improved in this study guide. I think my one suggestion for improvement, which probably isn't practical, would be to include more practice questions. Having studied for, taken, and passed multiple OCP DBA certification exams over the years, I believe that the practice questions are the absolute best way to prepare for these exams. So, while it isn't a criticism of this study guide per se, I think any way that you can get exposure to more practice questions is the best way you can become even better prepared for any of the OCP exams. If you are willing to spend the money for the additional practice

exams from the company that put together the CD that comes with the book, I think that would be my only suggestion for further improving your odds of passing the exam after you have used this study guide.

Notice that I'm not suggesting that you install and work with the Oracle 10g database as a way to prepare for the exam. This may seem odd to you. If you have a very long lead time, say six months, before you plan to take the exam, then I would agree that actually installing and using the various new features of Oracle 10g would probably help you with the exam. However, I firmly believe that while this would be worthwhile, it would only slightly increase your ability to do well on the certification exam compared to working with more practice exam questions.

Exactly What I Did to Prepare for the Exam

I was not planning to take the certification exam until I received an email from Oracle telling me that they were offering a free OCP 10g upgrade exam during Oracle OpenWorld 2004 in San Francisco. That forced me to make a decision. I decided that I was going to try to pass the exam while it was free. This all happened about six weeks before the conference, which meant I had very little time to get up to speed to pass this exam.

I had also been waiting to see if and when the official upgrade OCP study guide would be published. As it turns out, the study guide was published just in time. I ordered the study guide from Amazon and it arrived within a few weeks of Oracle OpenWorld. Oracle also sent me an email telling me about an exam cram session that was going to be held the Sunday of Oracle OpenWorld. This session was free for Oracle OpenWorld attendees. So my plan was to go through the study guide, attend this cram session at Oracle OpenWorld, and take the OCP upgrade exam the following day. The material presented during this all-day cram session was the same material they normally present in their week-long class to prepare people to take the Oracle 10g OCP upgrade exam. I'm confident that the book was much more helpful than the class.

Don't get me wrong: the class was fine, and it provided good reinforcement for what I'd gotten from the study guide. However, I want to be very clear that based on my experience, I firmly believe I would've done just as well on the OCP upgrade exam whether I had the day-long class or not. The class itself, again, while being OK, went over material at a pretty high level. It didn't go into the level of detail that I think is needed to be well prepared for the kinds of questions that come up on an OCP exam.

From my experience, the upgrade exams are actually more challenging than the regular OCP DBA exams. The reason is that on an upgrade exam, you can be asked anything about the latest version of Oracle and all previous versions of Oracle. For example, during the 10g exam, there were one or two questions that were specific to Oracle 9i. I find it to be more challenging than what I remember of studying for the Oracle 8 OCP exams, where a single exam would cover, for example, backup and

recovery. On the upgrade exam, the single exam can cover backup and recovery, networking, utilities, installation, and just about anything else you can think of with respect to Oracle DBA topics.

How I Used the Book to Prepare for the Exam

I went through the book chapter by chapter, from start to finish. I read every page, read the review section at the end of each chapter, and then answered the sample test questions to see how I was doing. It quickly became obvious that I needed to study a whole lot more. Based on how I did on the actual exam, I think this was a very effective way to go.

Going chapter by chapter, answering the questions as you go, gives you a very precise measurement of which topics you have mastered, and which topics you haven't. I also found that by using the study guide, I was quickly able to greatly increase my ability to answer the test questions. For example, the first time I would read through a chapter and answer the sample questions, I might only get 40% or so correct. Then I would review the chapter again the next day and go over the sample questions again, scoring significantly better.

Now obviously, since you see the same questions over and over, your score naturally goes up. If you don't write the answers to the questions in the book, and use a separate piece of paper for your answers, you'd be surprised how effective it is to look at the same questions again the next day. The best preparation for these tests is lots and

**Mark your calendar
for NoCOUG's Summer
Conference:**

Thursday, August 18

**ChevronTexaco
San Ramon, CA**

lots of practice answering OCP test questions.

This also highlights why I think you're much better off preparing for the exam using this study guide than, for example, a book that covers simply the new features of Oracle 10g. A book covering the new features simply doesn't have the focus that you need to pass an OCP exam.

The OCP exam questions are very particular—some would even say insane—in the way they probe for detail and at times ask questions that I don't believe have a single correct answer. Passing an OCP exam is a game. You need to learn the rules of the game to be successful. You don't have to agree with the way the certification exams are written, but you do have to be good at figuring out the correct answer if you want to pass the exam.

After going through all the sample exam questions at

If you commit yourself to the book, and answer the sample questions in the book and on the CD, I believe you will pass the exam by a comfortable margin.

the end of each chapter as well as the two full-length practice exams on the CD, you will have seen over 300 questions. Again, lots of practice answering OCP exam questions is the best way to prepare for an OCP exam.

After I had completely gone through the book and answered all the practice exam questions, I took the first of the two practice exams on the CD to see how I was doing. My score was acceptable but not great, so then I reviewed the material on which I knew I was weak. Again, from the practice exams at the end of each chapter and the first practice exam on the CD, I was very aware of which areas I needed to go over again. Finally, I took the second practice exam on the CD and my score was a lot better. At this point, I was feeling fully prepared. Actually, I think what I was feeling was burned out on studying, and I decided that I was about as prepared as I was going to get, and further effort probably wasn't going to improve my results.

Conclusion

Using the study guide, I was able to go from virtually no knowledge of Oracle 10g DBA features to passing the exam by a comfortable margin in about two weeks. Note that I did this at a total cost of just a study guide versus the cost of the full-week Oracle class. This means the book is an excellent value. Even if you paid the full retail

price for the OCP exam, which I believe is around \$150, and around \$50 for the book, you could become Oracle 10g DBA OCP certified for \$200 and roughly two weeks of evenings. This is not a bad deal compared to a week-long Oracle class, which can easily cost \$2,000 and requires you to be away from work for a week. For those who want to become Oracle 10g DBA OCP certified, this study guide is excellent. It works, and if you commit yourself to the book, and answer the sample questions in the book and on the CD, I believe you will pass the exam by a comfortable margin. ▲

About the Author

Sam R. Alapati is an Oracle Database Administrator Certified Professional (OCP) who manages Oracle databases for the Boy Scouts of America at their National Office in Irving, Texas. Prior to this, Sam worked at Sabre, Lehman Brothers, AT&T, and the ABC Corporation in New York City. He also worked in the New York Practice of Oracle Corporation as a Senior Principal Consultant. In 2003, he published the book Expert Oracle 9i Database Administration.

About the Reviewer

Brian Hitchcock has worked at Sun Microsystems in Newark, California, for the past nine years. Before that he worked at Sybase in Emeryville, California. Even further in the past, he spent twelve years at Lockheed in Sunnyvale, California, designing microwave antennas for spacecraft. He supports development databases for many different applications at Sun, handling installation, tuning, NLS, and character set issues as well as Unicode conversions. Other interests include Formula One racing, finishing a Tiffany Wisteria lamp, Springbok puzzles, Marklin model trains, Corel Painter 8, and watching TV (TiVo® rules!). Brian can be reached at brian.hitchcock@aol.com or brhora@aol.com.

TECH TIPS

Oracle Backup and Recovery Using RMAN

If you are looking for an introductory article on using RMAN for Oracle backup and recovery, check out the resources on www.orafusion.com. Kailash Awati and Arati Apte have started a three-part series on the subject: Part one explains how to script RMAN backups, and part two discusses some recovery scenarios in detail. The focus is on Windows servers, but much of the information applies to other platforms as well. In addition, you'll find the following and more in the "Articles" section of the website, at <http://www.orafusion.com/resources.htm>:

- "Oracle Fine Grained Access Control": Implementing row-level security in Oracle.
- "Oracle SQL Aggregation Extensions": An introduction to "cube" and "rollup" extensions of the "group by" clause.
- "Oracle Generic Heterogeneous Services": A quickstart guide on connecting to non-Oracle databases from within Oracle.
- "Java Stored Functions in Oracle": Write, compile, and invoke a Java stored module in Oracle. ▲