

# Is the CFA the right choice for you?

The CFA is particularly valuable for individuals who are either starting out or advancing in roles such as investment analyst, portfolio manager, or research analyst.

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

The Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) program is administered by the CFA Institute and is often considered one of the most prestigious credentials in the finance industry. It consists of three sequential levels: Level I focuses on the foundational tools and concepts of investment valuation and portfolio management; Level II delves into the application of those tools in real-life scenarios; and Level III emphasises portfolio management and wealth planning.

Each level requires an average of 300 hours of study, meaning the full program demands close to 900-1,000 hours of preparation, often spread over 2-4 years. In addition to passing the exams, candidates must complete at least 4,000 hours of relevant work experience over a minimum of three years and adhere to strict ethical and professional conduct standards to earn the CFA charter.

who are either starting out or advancing in roles such as investment analyst, portfolio manager, or research analyst. The program's rigorous focus on investment principles, ethics, and financial analysis makes it an ideal fit for those who want to gain credibility and expertise in these areas. "The CFA degree significantly deepened my knowledge and skill for the finance industry, especially all things related to the asset management industry. It also created unprecedented access to potential employers, partners and investors," explains Md Saimum Hossain, a CFA charter holder. Hence, for someone aiming to analyse stocks, bonds, or other financial assets and provide investment recommendations, the CFA equips you with a standardised, globally recognised skill set that is well-regarded by top financial institutions.

**Financial advisors and wealth managers**  
For financial advisors looking to provide a higher level of service and analysis to clients, the CFA

a professional degree is absolutely necessary for my line of work if you want to move up the ladder," shares Kazi Ajwad Ahmed, a charter holder currently working as a deputy manager at LafargeHolcim Bangladesh Limited.

Analysts involved in evaluating investments, mergers and acquisitions, or capital projects can apply CFA knowledge to assess the financial viability of business decisions and growth initiatives. For these professionals, the CFA adds depth to their financial modelling and analysis skills, though some may consider alternatives like an MBA if their focus is broader.

**Equity and credit analysts**  
The CFA is almost a must-have for analysts who specialise in assessing companies' stock or creditworthiness. Equity analysts use CFA-based skills to conduct in-depth valuations of public companies, while credit analysts assess the risk and profitability of lending or investing in businesses. "Preparing for CFA exams provided me with a solid foundation for my roles in corporate finance and sell-side equity research. Having a deeper dive into finance and adjacent areas such as economics and statistics were incredibly helpful in doing a better job at my work," shares Tanvir Ahmed, a former investment professional who is currently an MBA candidate at Kelley School of Business.

**Bankers with a focus on financial markets**  
Investment banking analysts and associates who aspire to specialise in financial markets and trading may find the CFA valuable. "In retail product management, the CFA has improved my decision-making abilities and allowed me to provide more informed and valuable advice in business strategy formulation," explains Fahad Bin Sultan, Head of Customer Value Management at HSBC. The designation provides a deeper insight into securities markets, derivatives, fixed income, and other assets. This knowledge can complement on-the-job learning, especially for those who want to move into buy-side roles, such as private equity or hedge funds.

While the CFA is highly respected, it is not the only path to a successful career in finance. For example, if you are more interested in accounting, auditing, or tax roles, the Certified Public Accountant (CPA) is often more relevant. It is a strong credential for roles in accounting firms, corporate finance departments, or regulatory bodies. Alternatively, if you are interested in hedge funds, private equity, or other alternative investments, the Chartered Alternative Investment Analyst (CAIA) is designed to provide specialised knowledge in these areas. Lastly, those focused on corporate finance, managerial roles, or accounting may find more value in qualifications like an MBA.

The CFA's investment focus might not align with the needs of professionals interested in broader business leadership, strategic planning, or specific finance functions. Additionally, for professionals who prioritise networking and soft skills, an MBA may offer more immediate benefits, providing access to alumni networks, management training, and a broader business perspective.

Choosing to pursue the CFA is a big decision, one that could impact your career for years to come. For those with a clear interest in investment management or financial analysis, the CFA can be a career-defining credential. But if your aspirations lie outside these areas, another credential may provide a better return on investment.

designation offers a significant advantage. "The CFA gives you an edge in roles like Investment Analyst or Portfolio Manager and even helps corporate bankers stand out. It is increasingly valued by employers in Bangladesh, but the time commitment, around 1,000 hours, is intense," shares Baha Uddin Khan Sayem, who recently cleared CFA Level II and is currently working as an Associate at Standard Chartered Bank.

The CFA program's emphasis on ethical standards and fiduciary responsibility further helps advisors build client trust, while the knowledge in asset allocation, portfolio management, and client needs analysis allows advisors to construct and manage diversified portfolios.

**Corporate financial analysts**  
While most corporate finance roles do not require the CFA, certain positions, particularly those related to corporate strategy, financial planning, and analysis, benefit from the CFA curriculum. "The CFA is mostly relevant to the investment industry. Think banks or asset management companies. In that way, I am an outlier as I am in more of a corporate finance role. Professionally, it has set me apart. Having

Deciding whether the CFA designation is the right choice depends on your career aspirations, readiness to undertake rigorous study, and the professional paths you are aiming for. While it is ideal for finance professionals, not all functions require it and hence, the CFA journey may not be worth it for everyone. Read on to learn if the CFA is the right choice for you.

**Considering a career in finance**  
For students still pursuing their undergraduate degrees, the CFA can serve as both a differentiator and a developmental tool. The curriculum not only introduces complex financial concepts but also builds analytical discipline and ethical grounding, i.e. qualities highly valued by employers. "Being a member of the CFA Society of Bangladesh helps me stay updated with the market on macroeconomic policies and provides the opportunity to network with charter holders around the world. This helps me see the bigger picture of the financial markets around the world," explains Mita Somoyeeta, a charter holder currently working at HSBC.

**Aspiring investment professionals**  
The CFA is particularly valuable for individuals



ILLUSTRATION: ZARIF FAIAZ

## JOBS SPOTLIGHT

### World Food Programme



Logistics Assistant, SC5

**Deadline:** June 9

**Eligibility:**

🔗 Bachelor's degree in Supply Chain Management, Logistics, Economics, Business Administration or any relevant subject.

**Minimum experience:** 5 years

### Radiant Export Import Enterprise



Technical Services Officer

**Deadline:** June 14

**Eligibility:**

🔗 BSc in Electrical Engineering, Biomedical Engineering, or Master of Science in any discipline from any well-reputed university.

**Minimum experience:** N/A

### Aga Khan Academy Dhaka



BMS Engineer

**Deadline:** June 15

**Eligibility:**

🔗 Diploma/BSc in Electronics or Electrical Engineering, with hands on experience in BMS operation and maintenance.

**Minimum experience:** 5-8 years

### South Breeze Housing Ltd.



IT Executive

**Deadline:** June 30

**Eligibility:**

🔗 BSc in CSE, with prior experience in IT & Software Development.

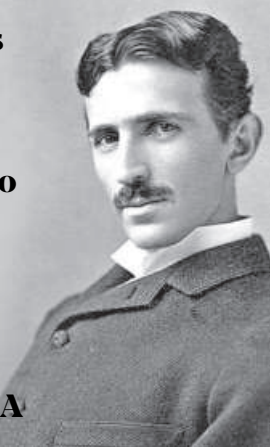
**Minimum experience:** 5 years

**FOR MORE DETAILS AND THE APPLICATION LINKS, SCAN THE QR CODE BELOW.**



**"The scientists of today think deeply instead of clearly. One must be sane to think clearly, but one can think deeply and be quite insane."**

**NIKOLA TESLA**



## How to get started with competitive programming

IKRAM HOSSAIN AKIF

Some people enjoy solving problems, and then there are those who land top tech jobs by doing just that. Competitive programming (CP) is a sport for the mind, where coders have to solve problems with efficient solutions on a ticking clock. It is a wonderful avenue for anyone to become a smarter coder, and be ready for some of the most competitive job interviews in the world. We've broken the enigma down to a short guide so you can get started too.

### Getting started

The first step is choosing a programming language. While many competitive programmers prefer C++ for its high performance and flexibility, C is also a solid choice, though it might be a bit more challenging for beginners. What about other languages like Python and Java? Although less performant and popular, they are still accepted in the CP community as valid alternatives for beginners.

"It is more important to develop comprehension and problem-solving skills at the beginning. If you don't know where your destination is or which route to take, then it does not matter how good your car is, you will never get there," says Dr Asif Mahmood, Assistant Professor of Computer Science and Engineering at Independent University, Bangladesh, and an experienced competitive programmer. "Similarly, understanding and solving the problem is more important,

especially for beginners, than the choice of programming language."

After your pick, you must learn to speak this language well. By embracing the syntax or grammar of code, you can let the computer be an extension of your mind without getting lost in translation. Dr Mahmood added, "It is important for young students to practice a lot, and understand how their approaches can make a solution efficient." In essence, this will teach you how certain coding approaches can be faster and use less memory.

If you're new to coding, platforms like HackerRank are a great starting point. They offer lessons that gradually increase in difficulty, helping you build a strong foundation. To get a feel for how CP contests work, try platforms like Codeforces. Once you're comfortable with these, you can move on to sites like LeetCode and AtCoder, which focus on problems that mirror the kinds of challenges you'll face in coding interviews.

Finally, once you feel comfortable solving easy problems and want to prepare, you should try and form a team to participate in contests in person. Most contests require a three-person team from the same institution, so reach out to your peers and mentors in your own school or university and find your own people. Participating in team contests will accelerate your journey, with a good team complementing each others' growth and skills in various areas.



ILLUSTRATION: ZARIF FAIAZ

### The big leagues

If you are an undergraduate student, CP has a breadth of opportunities to offer you. There are a variety of programming contests for university teams that take place all year round. The biggest of these is the International Collegiate Programming Contest (ICPC), where teams from all over the world get to fight for glory. The ICPC has a regional round in Bangladesh, usually held in Dhaka, followed by the winners moving on to the next round. Out of the eight geographical ICPC Regions, winners from Bangladesh fall under Asia West, and from there participants can advance to the highly coveted ICPC World Finals.

There are also numerous Inter-University Programming Contests (IUPCs) organised by universities all over the country, such as Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST), Bangladesh University of

Engineering and Technology (BUET), and more. These contests are more frequent than the yearly ICPC, and offer a great introduction to the arena of competitive programming. These contests offer great cash prizes to the winners, often to the top ten teams, as well as an opportunity to network with leading tech firms that tend to sponsor contests.

Participating in these contests not only hones your skills but also keeps you motivated to push yourself further. Most universities have vibrant CP communities, so connecting with like-minded peers can make learning more enjoyable and collaborative. Munawar Shakil Muhit, a veteran in the CP scene from the University of Dhaka, shares: "CSEDU has fostered a strong contest culture, encouraging newcomers to join the community through sessions, problem-solving classes, and of course, the success of our top problem solvers." He

added that when a community has a top-class culture and successful seniors willing to help, you're already halfway to success.

### What then?

Solving problems in CP is rewarding in itself, but the real advantage is how it builds your ability to reason and prepares you for the toughest tech interviews. Israfil Diganta, Software Engineer Level II at Enosis Solutions and Competitive Programming Instructor at American International University Bangladesh says, "To be hired, you need to present employable skills from your university life. Although there are many ways to do so, such as by building projects or participating in hackathons, CP is the easiest to get started with in my opinion."

Diganta shares that all you need to get started is basic coding to begin solving problems and participating in contests. As such, you will develop transferable skills and grow outside your comfort zone. "Companies want the employee to be clay, ready to be moulded to the job at hand. Applying logic to solve a problem is the same skill, no matter what framework or tools we use. CP allowed me to secure that invaluable skill to utilise in my career," he says.

By consistently practising, mastering essential concepts, and engaging with the community, you can significantly improve your problem-solving abilities and position yourself for success in both coding competitions and the tech industry.

## THE BOSSMAN

BY E. RAZA RONNY

