



6 TIPS ON PREPARING FOR THE NCLEX-RN EXAM

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1. How can I develop a good study plan?

Arrange to take the exam soon after graduation, and consider a review course if you want a structured study program. Determine the number of days until your exam date, and do a self-assessment to decide the length of each day's study session. Most people concentrate best for a one- or two-hour period with a ten-minute break every 45 to 60 minutes. Once you commit to a date, stick to it. Daily studying is imperative. However, if you miss a day, just get back on schedule the next day. Next, carefully review your class notes, textbooks, and the Test Plan for the NCLEX-RN exam. (You can order the Test Plan at www.ncsbn.org/publications/publist.asp. \$3 plus \$1.00 shipping) to determine the amount of material to be studied. Divide the material so that you will review all areas covered on the Test Plan before your test date. Most parts of the Test Plan may only need your review, but you might be weak in other areas, and these will require more study time. Form small study groups for support and review of materials, and try to study with at least one other person. This will provide you with a support system and makes it easier to stay on schedule. Group materials according to concepts and systems using memory aids to help make studying easier.

2. What are the test questions like, and how can I best prepare for them?

Arrive at the test center early, well rested and alert. Don't cram the night before. Bring your Authorization to Test form and two forms of ID, both with your signature and one with a recent photograph. Carefully read and follow all directions. Try and stay relaxed and focused, since we tend to make mistakes when we are nervous. It is imperative that you understand the test directions. Don't read into questions— your first answer is often the best one. Don't change your answer without good reason.

The questions include the Case or Scenario, the Stem, the Correct Option, and the three Distractors. Sometimes all four options seem plausible. In this case, there may be a qualifying term in the stem that will exclude all but one choice. Look for the key words that substantiate your choice. Key words reflect details of the questions and can also include most appropriate initial response, immediate nursing action, and least likely. Remember the "odd man out" theory: if three of the answers are similar and one is different, the different one may be the option. Eliminate obviously wrong



options. Sometimes, three of the options are correct, but each option only addresses part of the stem. In this case, the fourth option will be the global answer that encompasses the other three and completely answers the stem. This is known as an "umbrella" question. If two options are opposites, it is likely that one is the answer. If two options are similar, one may be more right in answering the stem or both may be distractors. If an option contains a correct and incorrect fact, it cannot be the answer. Watch out for absolutes like "always," "never," "all," and "none." There are few things in life that are always right or always wrong. Qualifiers are words that help make the answer correct. Words like "usually," "sometimes," "commonly," "average," and "often" are examples of helpful qualifiers.

3. What are the best time and place to study?

It is important to establish a routine for studying, so try to choose the same time every day, such as early morning, or late evening, when you are less likely to be interrupted. Try to create a study area that is exclusively yours. You will need a desk or table, a straight-backed chair, good lighting, and preferably a door which you can close. If you can't secure a quiet room at home, try the library. Be sure your family and friends recognize the importance of your quiet time and avoid interruptions. Have phone messages taken for you and avoid distractions like television, radio, or the internet. Make use of in-between study time by carrying flashcards or lists with you during the day to review while waiting in line, during your commute, or eating lunch.

4. What study areas should I focus on?

The box which accompanies this article lists test plan categories and the percent of questions in each area. This should help serve as a useful guide on what to study. Also, take as many practice tests and answer as many practice questions as you can—they are your best indicator on your mastery of the material. Review books, courses, and disks all contain practice tests.

5. How can I control my test anxiety?

Deep breathing, visualization, muscle relaxation, and positive self-talk are all effective ways of controlling anxiety. Deep breathing involves breathing from the diaphragm, similar to the way babies or children do. Inhale slowly through the nose, allowing the abdomen to rise first and then the chest to fill. Exhale slowly through the mouth, allowing the abdomen to compress and then emptying the chest. Repeat this sequence several times, and you will feel more relaxed.

Visualization involves breathing deeply as you close your eyes, and imagine yourself in your favorite place, such as at the beach or in the mountains. Or, you can bring back a special moment or favorite person in your life. Muscle relaxation involves deep

breathing, and progressive concentrated relaxation of various muscle groups, beginning at the head and neck and progressing through the rest of the body.

Positive self-talk is one of the most effective confidence booster theories. If you think you will pass this exam, you will. Be sure to increase your confidence level by reminding yourself of how much you know and have learned already, and all you have accomplished in your career or in nursing school. Negative thoughts will only sabotage you.

There are many videos, CDs, and magazines that can help guide you in these relaxation techniques.

6. When and how will I get my results?

It takes approximately one month to receive your test results through the mail. Results are not given over the telephone. Students unsuccessful in the exam receive a Diagnostic Profile providing information about strengths and weaknesses in certain test areas and indicating how close they came to passing. More information about the

Diagnostic Profile can be found at the National Council of State Boards of Nursing web site at <http://www.ncsbn.org/files/nclexinfo.html>. Before repeating the exam, the student should consider taking a review course. NSNA and MCP Hahnemann University offer the NSNA NCLEX EXCEL™ Course, which includes Prep for the Boards, Pharmacology for the Boards and Test Smart: How to Pass NCLEX-RN. Information about these courses can be found in *IMPRINT*, on the NSNA web site at <http://www.nsna.org/nclexreview/info.html> and on the MCP Hahnemann University web site at <http://PassNCLEX.mcpbu.edu>, or by calling 800-666-7737.

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TEST PLAN CATEGORIES

Physiological Integrity	
Basic Care and Comfort	7-13%
Pharmacological and Parenteral Therapies	5-11%
Reduction of Risk Potential	12-18%
Physiological Adaptation	12-18%
Safe, Effective Care Environment	
Management of Care	7-13%
Safety and Infection Control	5-11%
Psychosocial Integrity	
Psychosocial Adaptation	5-11%
Coping and Adaptation	5-11%
Health Promotion and Maintenance	
Prevention and Early Detection of Disease	5-11%
Growth and Development Through the Life Span	7-13%

Source: National Council of State Boards of Nursing