



TIPS ON PASSING THE NCLEX-RN™

by Judith C. Miller

Preparing for the NCLEX is like preparing for a marathon...

The NCLEX-RN™ is one of the most important exams you will ever take, and proper preparation is the key to passing the first time. There are two primary skills you need to pass the exam: command over the body of knowledge required, and critical

thinking skills. With regard to the former, a good review book is key, as is taking a quality review course, which helps you identify your weak and strong areas and highlights key areas to study. While in your review class, take notes on areas you need to review in more depth, and allow yourself time after the class for practice questions. All the exam questions require nursing judgment, or critical thinking skills, an area where new graduates often need the most practice. You should prepare by answering several thousand questions before taking NCLEX.

Preparing for NCLEX is like preparing for a marathon, but instead of practicing running, you practice sharpening your judgement with multiple-choice questions. I recommend reviewing a topic area and immediately answering questions on that topic — this helps train your mind to apply knowledge to different situations. After practicing this drill with single topics, you may want to start taking practice comprehensive tests that cover several topics, to help keep your mind sharp. It is also a good idea to answer practice questions from more than one source, so that you are not accustomed to only one style of question.

While most of the questions on the NCLEX exam are multiple-choice, you may encounter questions that read, “select as many items as apply.” The question might ask: “What precautions are necessary for someone who has hepatitis A?” followed by a list of choices.

■ NCLEX-RN is the exam that opens the gateway to your future as a nurse. The boards of nursing of all the states and territories formed the National Council of State Boards of Nursing and agreed to use the same licensing examination and the same passing score. NCLEX stands for National Council Licensing Examination. All the states and territories use the same exam and the same passing score, so once you pass the exam you do not need to take it again to be licensed as a registered nurse in another state. ■



Some questions will require you to type in the correct answer, locate an anatomic landmark on a picture, or place several options in priority order. Whenever you encounter any question with dosages, do the calculations, as this may be the only way to determine the correct response.

Write out your calculations even if you think you can do them in your head, so as to avoid careless errors. The number of questions related to pharmacological and parenteral therapies will double this year, so be

sure you know common drugs, actions, interactions, side effects, and dosages.

The test is an adaptive test, meaning the degree of difficulty of each question depends on your answer to the previous question. The minimum number of questions is 75 and the maximum is 265, with 5 hours being the most time allotted, although most candidates will not take the maximum amount of time. Still, it's a good idea to plan ahead and not schedule any other activities the day of the test.

Quick Tips to Keep in Mind:

- Schedule your exam when you get your authorization to test (ATT), at the time of day when you function best. Remember, if you registered electronically, your ATT may come electronically, so be careful not to delete it by mistake.

- When taking the NCLEX, work slowly and accurately rather than rushing and making mistakes. There are no extra points for being the first one done!

- Get plenty of rest before the test, and do not stay up late the night before the exam trying to cram last minute studying, as you will only wear yourself down. Make sure you eat well before the test, and dress in comfortable clothing.

- Remember to bring a government issued photo ID card with you to the test. If you are prone to test anxiety, learn to recognize when you are getting anxious and develop a strategy to help you refocus, such as deep breathing, visualization, or stretching your muscles.

After the Test

First, breathe a sigh of relief! You did your best, so treat yourself to a night off...you deserve it. Now, onto results. States vary in their response times. Some allow you to find out online

results through the testing company two to three days after the exam, for a fee. In some cases, you are provided a phone number to call for your results, or you are notified by mail within 2-3 weeks.

In recent years, about 84-88% of new graduates who take NCLEX pass. If you fail the exam you can take it again, but the number of times you can retake the exam varies from state to state. If you do fail, take a deep breath, give yourself a few days or even a week to recover (and you will recover!) and then start studying. You will receive a report showing areas you need to work on, which will help serve as a study guide. Remember to *practice practice practice*, and don't hesitate to join a study group or get a tutor to assist you. Try and stay confident, and remember, if at first you don't pass, try again, and by all means don't give up! Good luck on the NCLEX and in your nursing careers. ■

resources

Stein, A. and Miller, J. *NSNA NCLEX-RN Review*, 4th Edition. Delmar Learning, 2000. 1-800-347-7707. www.delmarhealthcare.com

National Council of State Boards of Nursing
www.ncsbn.org

Billings, P. Lippincott's Review for NCLEX-RN. Saxton, DE. Mosby's Review Questions for NCLEX-RN. Silvestri, L. Saunders. A Review for NCLEX-RN.

www.delmarhealthcare.com

Delmar's online NCLEX Review



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