

A FORMULA FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

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INTRODUCTION

As college students, you must have a positive attitude, take responsibility for your own learning, and decide how you learn best and implement your own individual study plan accordingly. This means doing more than just passively listening to your professors or the rote completion of your course assignments without critically contemplating what you hear or what you write. It's better to spend one to two hours of concentrated intensive study, rather than many hours of aimless and superficial review. The following tips are designed to increase your academic success and help ensure a positive experience in nursing school.

WRITE DOWN GOALS

Writing down your goals makes them more real and attainable. Begin by asking yourself this question: what do I want to accomplish this semester? Next, write the strategies you will employ to achieve these goals. Post your goals and strategies in a visible place, such as on your computer or refrigerator, and check them off as you complete them. Evaluate your progress periodically. Have I met my goals? Were my goals unrealistic or set too high? Have I made progress? So be kind and gentle with yourself when you evaluate your academic performance during and at the end of the semester. Remember, look for improvement, not perfection.

MANAGE YOUR TIME EFFECTIVELY

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, may never feel like enough time to juggle family, school, and work. Make sure you schedule study time each week in your calendar or study diary. Keep this study time precious, and let others know you cannot be interrupted. Sneak in mini study opportunities, while doing household chores, standing on the checkout line at the supermarket, or before bed.

READ ACTIVELY

Do you pay attention when you read? If you read passively without active reflection, the content will most likely go in one ear and out the other. Find a way to stay actively interested and engaged with your required reading material, such as paraphrasing information in your own words after reading a chapter. Other strategies include: answering the discussion questions at the end of the chapter, taking notes on your assigned reading, and completing all study guide assignments. Complete all reading assignments before class, by spreading out the reading as much as possible between assignments. This prevents you from having to read huge amounts of material at once. Ask yourself questions about your reading. What are the most important points? What questions will your teacher most likely ask?

ORGANIZE AND REVIEW CLASS NOTES

Many students make the mistake of taking notes in class, forgetting about them, and then cramming the night before the test. You should organize and re-read class notes within the first 24 hours after a lecture to help increase memory recall and reinforce the material. Summarize lecture content and insert clinical examples where relevant. Jot down any material unclear to you. Pose important critical thinking questions that emanate from your re-reading to yourself or those in your study group.

JOIN THE RIGHT STUDY GROUP

Learning from your peers in an informal setting can complement your classroom work and help make studying more interactive, which is why study groups are popular. But you should keep a few considerations in mind when choosing a group. For example, look for a group where the students are at the same level academically as you are, or even higher. This will help keep you challenged. Follow study group ground rules on attendance and work group issues, and make sure the group leader weeds out those who don't do their part. Active questioning helps stimulate learning and critical thinking. As a group leader you may ask a group member, "How does metabolic acidosis differ from respiratory alkalosis?" The group leader can synthesize the responses and discussion. In this way, everyone learns.

VERIFY YOUR SOURCES

Learn to critically evaluate the reliability and accuracy of information, particularly when researching on the internet. It is increasingly difficult to stay current in this information age — even your textbooks, which are usually revised often, can rapidly be outdated by new technology. When evaluating the reliability of a resource, consider the following: who is providing the information and what are their credentials? What evidence is presented to support the author's thesis or argument? What is the original source of the information? Does the author have a bias?

GET HELP EARLY

If you are struggling in the classroom, seek assistance early. Approach your professor for help. Ask the professor for examples of a concept that is confusing to you, or ask for suggestions for additional reading. Seek counseling if you face issues that may interfere with your academic performance.

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"Learning Gems"

- Take the time to actively listen to your patients and their families.
- Identify the learning needs of your patients when providing discharge teaching.
- Nurture a therapeutic relationship with your patient and their families even if your time with them is limited.
- Enjoy yourself and don't be afraid to find humor in your day.
- Take charge of your destiny. The steps you take now will insure that you will become the best nurse possible.

Some Helpful Hints for Clinicals

BE PREPARED

Nursing students are always anxious during their clinical rotations; nevertheless, most overcome this anxiety and succeed mainly by being as prepared as possible. This means: a) never go to labs without having done the required reading and; b) always arrive early for lab, pre-conference, and clinicals. Being punctual reflects your professionalism and indicates you take your education and nursing student role seriously. Carry the essentials, which include: the latest pocket drug and disease reference guide (a 1999 drug guide is already outdated.); stethoscope; penlight; hemostats; scissors; and calculator.

SET GOALS

Maximize your learning by setting daily personal learning goals, based on your clinical preparation and the profiles of your patients. Maybe you will review your patient's 12 lead EKG's in more detail and consult the primary care RN or your nursing faculty about your observations. You may decide to practice more empathy or make extra efforts to converse with families. You are really the one in charge of your learning, and the more responsibility you personally take for your learning, the more pride you will take in your accomplishments.

JOT DOWN "LEARNING GEMS"

Keep a special clinical learning notebook that you can use as a resource throughout your nursing education, in addition to your preclinical preparation notebook. Jot down "learning gems" that highlight key experiences which you can refer to and apply to future situations. Keep a page of steps to recall when performing tracheostomy care, or record the amount of O₂ delivered by various oxygen delivery systems. List

therapeutic drug levels or list criteria for clinical depression. This is your PERSONAL reference book — the best kind!

COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY

You must possess good communication skills to succeed in any work environment, particularly clinicals. Establish a good rapport with your clinical faculty and assigned nurses. Always introduce yourself to everyone on your patient's health care team and work collaboratively with them. Make sure you ask questions of your clinical faculty, and keep them informed of your whereabouts and your patient's condition. If you have made an error, inform your supervisor immediately.

KEEP A DAILY SCHEDULE AND TAKE BREAKS

Keep a detailed schedule to be sure you stay on track. Disorganization only leads to stress and increases your chances of making mistakes. Establish priorities and stick to them. For example, always assess the least critically ill patient first and then spend more time with the more critically ill patient. General and meal time breaks are important for your mental health. Before you go on break report your patients' condition to a colleague, and always notify your primary RN and clinical faculty, and work your breaks around the schedule of your primary RN.

TAKE ON A CHALLENGE

The best way to maximize learning and gain confidence is to ask for challenging clinical assignments and go beyond your comfort zone. Taking care of the sickest patient on the floor can be scary, but intellectually and personally gratifying. Don't be afraid to test yourself — you have the support of your colleagues and instructors.