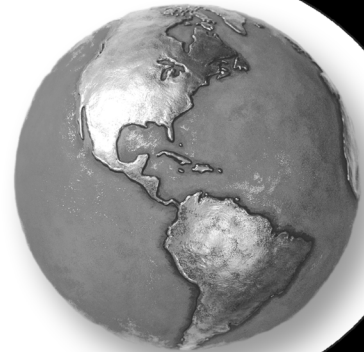


UNIT 1

PREPARING FOR THE NCLEX EXAMINATION



This first unit of the NCLEX-RN® Review will provide you with the important information you need to know about the construction of the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN®, often referred to as “state boards”), with tips on how to study and with test-taking techniques you can use to improve your success when writing the examination.

UNIT OUTLINE

- 2 Understanding the NCLEX Examination
- 3 Preparation and Test Taking



Understanding the NCLEX Examination

THE TEST PLAN

The NCLEX-RN® examination questions are based on a test plan of client needs with concepts and processes fundamental to the practice of nursing integrated throughout the categories. These categories are nursing process, caring, communication and documentation, and teaching and learning. The latest plan went into effect in April 2007.

Categories of Client Needs

The health care needs of clients across the life span in a variety of settings are grouped under four broad categories, some with several subcategories. The four main categories are safe, effective care environment; health promotion and maintenance; psychosocial integrity; and physiological integrity.

A. Safe, Effective Care Environment

This category has two subcategories: management of care and safety and infection control. These two subcategories account for 21–33% of test items, which measure the nurse's ability to provide and direct nursing care that enhances the care delivery setting in order to protect clients and their families/significant others and other health care personnel.

1. Management of care comprises 13–19% of test items. This includes, but is not limited to, advocacy, client rights, confidentiality, delegation, ethical practice, legal rights and responsibilities, and supervision.
2. Safety and infection control comprises 8–14% of test items. This includes, but is not limited to, disaster planning, emergency response plan, and error prevention.

B. Health Promotion and Maintenance

The second major category comprises 6–12% of test items and measures the nurse's ability to provide and direct nursing care of clients and their families/significant others that incorporates the knowledge of expected growth and development principles, prevention, and/or early detection of health problems and strategies to achieve optimum health. This includes, but is not limited to, the aging process, ante/intra/postpartum and newborn care, developmental stages and transitions, growth and development, health and wellness, self-care, and techniques of physical assessment.

C. Psychosocial Integrity

The third category comprises 6–12% of test items and measures the nurse's ability to provide and direct care that promotes and supports the emotional, mental, and social well-being of the families/significant others experiencing stressful events as well as clients with acute or chronic mental illness. This includes, but is

not limited to, abuse/neglect, behavioral interventions, cultural diversity, end of life, grief and loss, psychopathology sensory/perceptual alterations, stress management, and therapeutic communications.

D. Physiological Integrity

The fourth major category has four subcategories: basic care and comfort, pharmacological and parenteral therapies, reduction of risk potential, and physiological adaptation. These subcategories account for 53–67% of test items and measure the nurse's ability to promote physical health and wellness by providing care and comfort, reducing risk potential, and managing health alterations.

1. Basic care and comfort comprises 6–12% of test items and includes, but is not limited to, alternative and complementary therapies elimination, mobility/immobility, and rest and sleep.
2. Pharmacological and parenteral therapies comprises 13–19% of test items and includes, but is not limited to, central venous access devices, dosage calculation, intravenous therapy, and medication administration.
3. Reduction of risk potential comprises 13–19% of test items and includes, but is not limited to, diagnostic tests, laboratory values, monitoring conscious sedation, and therapeutic procedures.
4. Physiological adaptation comprises 11–17% of test items and includes, but is not limited to, fluid and electrolyte imbalances, hemodynamics, pathophysiology, and radiation therapy.

Levels of Cognitive Ability

The practice of nursing requires application of knowledge, skills, and abilities. To assess the candidates' ability in these areas, a majority of the test items are written at the application or higher levels of cognitive ability, which requires more complex thought processing. Bloom's taxonomy for the cognitive domain serves as a basis for writing and coding the test items.

HOW THE TEST IS CONSTRUCTED

- A. The National Council of State Boards of Nursing Inc. is the central organization for the independent member boards of nursing, which includes the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, and the Virgin Islands. The member boards are divided into four regional areas, which supervise the selection of test item writers (representing educators and clinicians), whose names are

suggested by the individual state boards of nursing. This provides for regional representation in the testing of nursing practice. All test items are validated in at least two approved nursing textbooks or references.

- B. The National Council contracts with a professional testing service to supervise writing and validation of test items by the item writers. This professional service works closely with the Examination Committee of the National Council in the test development process. The National Council and the state boards are responsible for the administration and security of the test.
- C. The exam is a computer exam known as CAT, which stands for Computerized Adaptive Testing. The exam is taken on a computer utilizing state-of-the-art technology.

There are several formats for questions. Multiple-choice questions with four choices, single-answer items or ones that require more than one response. There may be fill-in-the-blank questions or ones that ask the test taker to identify the area on a picture or a graphic, or drag-and-drop. The computer screen displays the question and the answer choices. There may also be questions that require responses to be placed in priority order. Each of these types of questions are integrated throughout the sample tests in this book.

Each candidate is oriented to the computer before the exam starts. Because the exam is geared to the candidate's skill level, each candidate will have a unique exam. Each exam will include approximately 15 experimental questions dispersed throughout the exam, so the candidate will be able to answer all the questions with equal effort. The experimental questions will not be counted for or against the candidate. Some candidates will be finished in a little over an hour; others will use the entire allotted time. The minimum number of questions candidates must answer is 75, and the maximum they may answer is 265. There is not a time limit for each question, but a 6 hour limit for the entire exam, which includes the exam instructions explaining how to use the mouse, the space bar, and the enter key; samples representing each type of question in the exam; and rest breaks.

- D. The exam is given at Pearson Professional Testing Centers across the United States. The candidate submits credentials to the State Board of Nursing in the state in which licensure is desired. Once the credentials are accepted, the candidate calls the testing service for an appointment, which will be scheduled within 30 days.

HOW THE TEST IS SCORED

- A. The NCLEX-RN® is scored by computer and a pass/fail grade is reported.
- B. A criterion-referenced approach is used to set the passing score. This provides for the candidate's test performance to be compared with a consistent standard of criteria. Passing the exam will determine if the candidate is safe to practice as an entry-level nurse by using critical thinking skills to make nursing judgements.

HOW CANDIDATES ARE NOTIFIED OF RESULTS

- A. Candidates in the following states may access their unofficial results within two days via the NCLEX Candidate Web site or from the NCLEX-RN®. Quick Results line: Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Washington, Wisconsin, Wyoming.
Website: www.pearsonvue.com/nclex
NCLEX Quick Results line: 1-900-776-2539.
- B. Unsuccessful candidates are provided with a diagnostic profile that describes their overall performance on a scale from low to high, and their performance on the questions testing their abilities to meet client needs.



Preparation and Test Taking

USING THE TEST PLAN TO YOUR BEST ADVANTAGE

Performing a Self-Needs Analysis

The first step to take when preparing to study for the NCLEX-RN® is to perform a self-needs analysis to

identify your knowledge base in relation to the information provided in the test plan.

- A. Look carefully at the elements of the test plan (Categories of Client Needs), which are also reported to those who fail the test.

- B. Go through your notes and text references. Select what is important and star, underline, or highlight this information.
- C. Categorize this information in terms of material that needs to be learned or material that needs only to be reviewed.

Planning for Study

- A. Look at the period of time available to you for study between now and when you are scheduled to take the NCLEX-RN®. Ideally, plan to study up to four nights before the test, allow three nights for review, and the night before the test for relaxation. If you have limited time for study, plan your time so that you have at least one night for nothing but review.
- B. Identify your maximum concentration time for profitable study. It is better to block out short periods of time (45–60 minutes, interspersed with planned breaks) that can be quality study time, rather than setting aside 3 hours of time to study, which may only produce 90 minutes of quality study time.
- C. When you decide what your maximum time for profitable study is, then that is the block of time you should set aside on a regular basis for study purposes. Within the confines of your allocated study time, make sure you establish a schedule that permits you to cover completely all the material to be learned.
- D. Nursing research has shown that reviewing more than 5,000 questions before sitting for the exam produces greater success rates of passing.

How to Study

- A. To promote maximum concentration, ensure that your study materials are your prime area of focus.
- B. Make sure you are mentally alert and in a room where you will be free from outside interruptions. If possible, choose a room with no telephone.
- C. Do not smoke, do not nibble on snacks, and do not answer the telephone. This will allow you to direct your energy to the study activity.
- D. Proceed with your planned study periods in an organized manner by choosing an approach that will be meaningful to you. Some content lends itself to study using concepts, while other content is best studied using systems.
- E. Use methods of memory improvement that will work for you. Mnemonic devices (where a letter represents the first letter of each item in a sequence) are an effective means of retrieving material. Mental imagery is the technique of forming pictures in your mind to help you remember details of the sequence of events, such as the administration of an injection. Try practicing self-recitation to improve your study habits. Reciting to yourself the material being learned will

promote retention of information being studied. Concentrate on the information you identified in your self-needs analysis as needing to be learned.

- F. The final step of your study program involves organizing the material so that you will be able to learn all the “need to learn” and review all the “need to review” information within the allotted study time period. Your schedule should have allowed you to complete your review so you can close your books and do something relaxing on the night before the examination.

FINAL PREPARATION FOR TEST TAKING

In addition to having studied appropriately to assure yourself of a good knowledge base, there are measures you can take to be in prime physiologic and psychologic shape for writing the examination.

Physiologic Readiness

To prime yourself physiologically, you should meet your own needs for nutrition, sleep, and comfort.

- A. You will function best if you are well nourished.
 1. Plan to eat three well-balanced meals a day for at least 3 days prior to the examination.
 2. Be careful when choosing the food you consume within 24 hours of the examination.
 - a. Avoid foods that will make you thirsty or cause intestinal distress.
 - b. Minimize the potential of a full bladder midway through the examination by limiting the amount of fluids you drink and by allowing sufficient time at the test site to use the bathroom before entering the room.
- B. Assess your sleep needs.
 1. Determine the minimal amount of sleep you need in order to function effectively.
 2. Plan to allow sufficient time in your schedule the week before the examination to provide yourself with the minimum sleep you need to function effectively for at least 3 days prior to the examination.
- C. Plan your wardrobe ahead of time.
 1. Shoes and clothes that fit you comfortably will not distract your thought processes during the examination.
 2. Include a comfortable sweater.
 3. Your clothes for the test day should be ready to wear by the night before the examination.
- D. If you wear glasses or contact lenses, take along an extra pair of glasses.
- E. If you are taking medications on a regular basis, continue to do so during this period of time. Introduction of new medications should be avoided until after completion of the examination.

Reducing Psychologic Stress

While a certain amount of anxiety will stimulate your nervous system to focus keenly on the examination, excess anxiety will interfere with your ability to concentrate on the examination and, indeed, hinder your success. You must approach the examination with a positive attitude. You have graduated from a school of nursing that has prepared you to provide safe and effective nursing care to your clients. Trust that the curriculum in your school of nursing was designed to include all the important concepts and principles necessary for safe nursing practice. Feel confident that you accessed multiple resources to allow you to learn the content. Most of the tests you wrote while in school were developed in the style used for the NCLEX-RN®. Keeping these points in mind will enable you to approach the examination with a positive frame of reference for success.

Minimize the anxiety-producing situations related to writing the examination by carefully planning your pre-examination activities. Make a list of the important things you need to accomplish.

- A. Rehearse the route or means of transportation you plan to take to the test location, preferably at the same time of the day on which you actually will be going. Check your local resources for road conditions that might necessitate altering your planned route. In your time assessment, include parking your car, locating where you are to report for registration, and locating the bathrooms. To ensure adequate travel time and to minimize stress related to getting to the test site on time the morning of the test, add an extra 30 minutes to the total time needed for the rehearsal run.
- B. Have your admission materials readily available.
- C. If you are staying overnight near the test site, be sure you pack everything you will need. Before retiring for the night, make your rehearsal run to the test location in preparation for the next day.
- D. Plan to use relaxation exercises to control your anxiety level. If you have been using a specific method of relaxation successfully, then continue using it during this period of time. If you have not, consider trying one of the following.
 - 1. Yoga or meditation before the exam
 - 2. Guided imagery: requires using your imagination to create a relaxing sensory scene on which to concentrate.
 - 3. Breathing exercises.
- E. For any of the methods to achieve the desired results, you must be willing to commit the time necessary to implement their prescribed protocols.

TAKING THE TEST

While having a good knowledge base is important for success in test-taking situations, the following strategies can be used to maximize your skill in choosing the correct answers.

- A. Take your seat and give yourself an opportunity to implement the method of relaxation you have been practicing.
- B. Read the directions carefully, and then be sure to follow them carefully.
- C. Plan to manage your time effectively. While taking the CAT test, work steadily. You do not have to answer a specific number of questions in a given time period. If you take the maximum length of time, your score will reflect the number of questions you have completed.
- D. Read the stem of the question carefully. This is the part of the question that describes what is being asked.
- E. Read the stem a second time to key in on important words and then reword the question to determine the purpose of the question.
- F. Move to the answer choices. In a single multiple-choice item there will be one correct and three incorrect choices. Incorrect answers are called distractors. A multiple-choice item that has more than one correct answer may have fewer distractors.
- G. Consider if the question is asking about
 - 1) a needed assessment that should be done first,
 - 2) Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, or
 - 3) a safety issue. Keep these in mind for each question.
- H. Carefully evaluate the answer choices for key words. Be sure to appreciate the universality of words such as *each*, *all*, *never*, and *none*; the limitations of words such as *rarely*, *most*, and *least*; and the latitude offered by words such as *usually*, *frequently*, and *often*.
- I. Read each option twice. Use the space bar on the keyboard to highlight each answer choice.
- J. Answer it by saying to yourself
 - 1. *Yes*, it answers what is being asked.
 - 2. *No*, it does not answer what is being asked.
 - 3. *Maybe* it answers what is being asked.
- K. Use this procedure for all the answer choices. When you first read the question, if an obvious answer comes to mind, restrain your desire to look for it in the answer choices. For a single multiple-choice item, read all the choices to make sure your thought was indeed the only *yes* answer. For this type of question, if you are fortunate enough to have only one *yes* answer, then you have eliminated the three distractors. For a multiple multiple-choice item, you likely have the correct answers and have eliminated the other distractors.
- L. If you identified more than one *yes* option for a single multiple-choice item, then evaluate those other options in terms of which is more *yes* than *maybe*. If you have no *yes* answer, then evaluate the *maybe* choices for one that leans more toward *yes*.
- M. Always choose the answer that has the highest likelihood for being *yes* (correct). Look critically at the answer choices for clues. If you see choices that are opposites, frequently one is the correct answer. For example:

During insertion of a central venous catheter, in which position should the client be placed?

1. A supine position.
2. Trendelenburg's position.
3. Reverse Trendelenburg's position.
4. A high-Fowler's position.

Choices 2 and 3 are opposites, and in this case 2 is the correct answer.

- N. If you have an answer that contains more than one option, all of the options must be correct for that choice to be correct. If you can eliminate one of the options in an answer, you can automatically eliminate the other answer choices with that option. For example:

What complications can occur from the administration of TPN?

1. Hyperglycemia and hypocalcemia.
2. Hyperglycemia and hyperkalemia.
3. Hypoglycemia and hypercalcemia.
4. Hyperkalemia and hypercalcemia.

Hypercalcemia and hyperkalemia are distractors. Eliminate the choices with these options and there is only one correct choice remaining.

- O. Look for options that do not meet the requirements of the stem. For example:

Which medication is used to lyse (break up) already formed clots?

1. Warfarin sodium (Coumadin).
2. Heparin sodium (Lipo-Hepin).
3. Streptokinase (Kabikinase).
4. Vitamin K.

Choices 1, 2, and 3 are all used in the treatment of formed clots. Choice 4 is necessary for clot formation and therefore does not meet the requirements for the stem and must be eliminated as a possibility. Now choose among the remaining options. 3 is correct.

- P. If the stem asks for the exception or which choice is not the answer, you are looking for the *no* answer rather than the *yes* answer. For example:

Individuals from which group would be excluded from getting TB?

1. Lower socioeconomic groups.
2. Malnourished and debilitated individuals.
3. Individuals on steroid therapy.
4. White females with a history of alcohol abuse.

Choices 1, 2, and 3 are all at risk and therefore, *yes* responses. Choice 4 is the *no* response and, therefore, the correct answer.

- Q. Be careful to avoid reading elements into the question that are not specifically included in the stem and answer choices.

- R. Assume you have a doctor's order and all the equipment or supplies you need. Remember, the questions are based on texts and not the "real world."
- S. When you have decided on an answer, press the return key. The computer will ask if this is your desired answer choice. If it is, then press the enter key again and your choice will be recorded. If you wish to review the answer choices again, use the space bar to do so and then press the enter key when you have made your decision. The computer will again ask if this is your desired answer choice. If it is, then press the enter key again to record your choice.
- T. A calculator will be accessible on the desktop of the computer screen.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

As you go through each unit of this book, use it to perform your self-needs analysis and as a basis for study. You will make the best use of both your time and the book if you use the study skills suggested earlier in this unit.

- A. For more detailed information on the particular subjects you feel need extra study, review those subjects in current textbooks, and scan the list of suggested readings at the end of each unit for further resources.
- B. The questions interspersed throughout Units 2 through 7 are typical of the board questions, and they will help you to become more familiar with the style of questions found in the NCLEX-RN®.
- C. When setting up your study time include time to take the practice tests on the enclosed disk in the back of this book. You may take these tests once, before you start studying, to help you with your needs analysis. When you have completed studying, you may take them again, to evaluate for test performance.
- D. While taking the practice tests, apply the test-taking strategies discussed earlier in this unit.

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