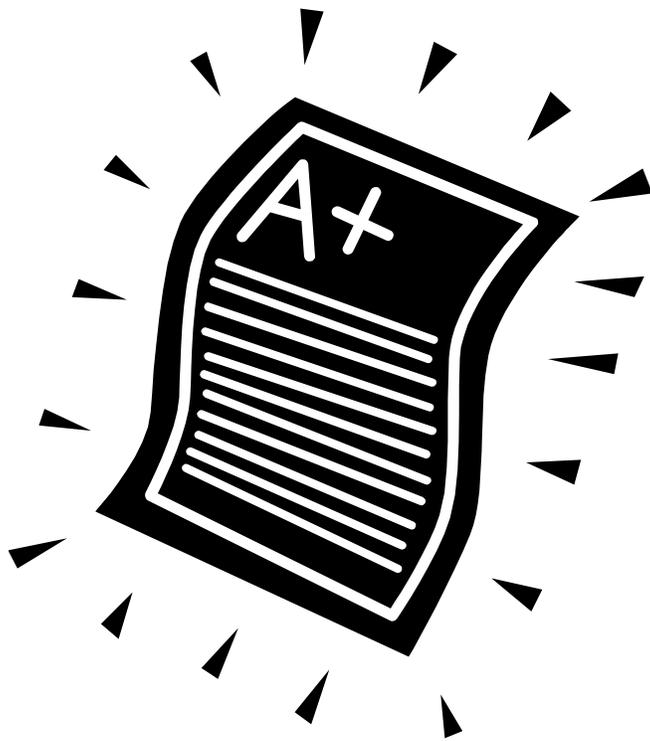


Test-Taking Strategies



Learning how to approach tests in a calm and logical way can improve test-taking confidence and outcomes.

General Test-Taking Strategies

“DUMP” INFORMATION

When you receive the exam, immediately take a few minutes to write down or “dump” any information that you do not want to forget. This may include formulas, mnemonics, or facts that you want to refer to during the exam.

FOLLOW DIRECTIONS

It is critical to take the time to read the directions on the test as well as listen to any directions given by your instructor. This can be the difference between passing or not passing an exam. Remember that the directions are not necessarily the same for all sections of the exam.

PREVIEW THE EXAM

Previewing the exam gives you an idea of what you need to accomplish. Scan the exam to see what types of questions are included, count the total number of questions, and identify point values of questions.

BUDGET YOUR TIME

If you budget your time, you should be able to complete the entire exam. You want to be careful not to lose track of time or spend too much time on any one question. Pay particular attention to point values of the questions when dividing time accordingly. You may want to spend more time on questions that are worth more points.

PLAN BEFORE THE EXAM

Find out everything you can about the exam ahead of time (how many questions, types of questions, time allowed, etc.). If the instructor does not give this information, ask. This will give you the opportunity to plan how you will approach the exam. Having knowledge about exam specifics will also help decrease anxiety related to exam unknowns.

ANSWER THE QUESTIONS YOU KNOW FIRST

You are able to maximize your score by first answering all questions that you know while skipping questions you are not sure about. If you do run out of time, you will receive points for the questions that you did know.

WORK STRATEGICALLY

Be strategic as you work through the exam. If you do not know the answer to a question, don't spend a lot of time on it. You can skip the question and come back to it. Also, look for clues to previous questions as you move through exam. Information given in one question may give clues or trigger your memory to help answer a different question.

WHEN TIME IS RUNNING OUT

You do not want to leave answers blank if you are about to run out of time. Try to pick up the pace, read the questions more quickly, and spend less time pondering answers. You may need to quickly make an educated guess to avoid leaving anything blank.

Strategies for Multiple-Choice Questions

❖ Treat each statement as a true-false item.

Connect the stem of the question to each answer option to create several true-false statements.

Example:

1. The second stage of mitosis is
 - a. Prophase
 - b. Metaphase
 - c. Anaphase
 - d. Telophase

This question can be analyzed like this:

- a. The second stage of mitosis is prophase
- b. The second stage of mitosis is metaphase
- c. The second stage of mitosis is anaphase
- d. The second stage of mitosis is telophase

❖ **Don't be confused by negative words in the question.**

Always take the time to underline any negative words to minimize confusion. Negatives may include: except, not, false, and incorrect.

❖ **Try to answer the question in your own words first.**

Read the question and try to answer it before looking at the choices.

❖ **Absolute statements may be incorrect.**

Absolute statements often include words such as all, every, always, none, and never. The presence of these words in an answer option can be a clue that the option may be a distractor.

❖ **Unfamiliar material is typically not the correct answer.**

If you have studied well, a choice that contains unfamiliar content is probably incorrect.

❖ **High or low numbers may be incorrect answers.**

If you must guess at this type of question, you may increase your chance of guessing correctly if you eliminate the lowest and highest numbers.

Strategies for Nursing

THE COMPONENTS OF A QUESTION

Multiple choice questions will typically contain:

- ❖ **A case event.** This is the heart of the question and provides information you need to think through in order to answer the question.
- ❖ **A question query.** This is a statement that asks you something specific about the case event. It typically follows the case event.
- ❖ **Multiple answer options (typically 4).** These are all of the potential answers presented with the question.

Knowing the ingredients of a question will help you sort out the facts from what the question is asking.

Example from Silvestri (2009):

Case Event: A nurse is reviewing the laboratory results of a patient who is receiving magnesium sulfate by IV infusion and notes that the magnesium level is 3.5 mg/dL.

Question Query: Based on this lab result, the nurse would most likely expect to find which of the following in the patient?

Options:

- A. Tremors
- B. Hyperactive reflexes
- C. Respiratory depression
- D. No specific signs or symptoms because this value is a normal level

ANSWER STRATEGICALLY

These actions should be applied when answering each question.

1. Read the question carefully, including each answer option.
2. Note any strategic words or phrases.
3. Use nursing knowledge as it relates to information given in the case event.
Focus on the case event.
4. Identify what the question is asking (this is the “subject” of the question)

5. Use the process of elimination.
6. Always double check a calculation.

STRATEGIC WORDS AND PHRASES

These are some of the common strategic words and phrases to look for in the question:

- Best
- First
- Initial
- Immediately
- Most likely/least likely
- Most appropriate/least appropriate
- Highest/lowest priority
- Order of priority
- At highest risk
- At lowest risk
- Early sign
- Late sign
- Goal has been achieved
- Goals not yet fully met
- Adequately tolerating
- Unable to tolerate
- Inadequate
- Ineffective

THE PROCESS OF ELIMINATION

This involves reading each answer option and eliminating the options that are incorrect or do not address the subject of the question. As you apply this process, it is likely that you will initially be able to remove two of the four options. Following these steps can help when you are trying to decide between the last two options:

1. Read the question again
2. Identify the case event and the question query
3. Look for strategic words
4. Identify the subject of the question and ask, "What is the question asking?"
5. Read both options again
6. Choose an answer by using nursing knowledge

WHAT IF?

Sometimes instead of focusing on the information in the question, a student will ask “What if...?” Try to avoid this question because it easily leads you into the danger of reading into the question. You will need to think critically to answer the question, but keep focused on what the *question* is asking.

ONLINE RESOURCE

Evolve Learning System has a video tutorial series including the ***Top Ten Test-Taking Tips***. The video series expands on some of the strategies above and includes additional tips specific to nursing exams, including the NCLEX.

https://evolve.elsevier.com/staticPages/s_student_development.html

Resources:

Hopper, C. H. (2004). *Practicing college learning strategies*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Silvestri, L. (2009). *Saunders strategies for test success: Passing nursing school and the NCLEX examination*. Philadelphia, PA: Elsevier.

Van Blerkom, D. L. (2000). *College study skills: Becoming a strategic learner*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.

Van Blerkom, D. L., & Mulcahy-Ernt, P. I. (2005). *College reading and study strategies*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.

Wong, L. (2006). *Essential study skills*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.