

# Tips for Nursing Students

## Preparing to Write the NCLEX-RN

### General Information about the NCLEX-RN®

- The NCLEX-RN® will be the licensure exam in Canada (except Quebec) beginning in January 2015.
- It is developed by the National Council of State Board of Nursing (NCSBN) in the United States.
- **There will not be a separate exam for Canadian students.**
- **Students will not be tested on factors that Canadians would not be expected to know** (e.g. related to the US health care system or legislation). The Canadian provincial/territorial regulatory bodies are reviewing the NCLEX-RN® to ensure that such questions are removed.<sup>1</sup>
- **The Detailed NCLEX-RN® Test Plan for Candidates outlines the content covered on the exam. It is critical that students thoroughly review the Test Plan.** It includes:
  - the four processes that are integrated through the test: nursing process, caring, communication and documentation, and teaching/learning.
  - “the client needs” categories and sub-categories used to organize test content, and the percentage of questions in each category that a candidate answers.
  - specific content in each category which should be reviewed carefully as some categories may include content you might not expect to be tested on, and
  - sample NCLEX-RN® questions.<sup>2</sup>
- **Students must memorize normal lab values for the NCLEX-RN®,** and should be able to identify deviations from the norm (lab values that are too high or too low) and their associated signs and symptoms.<sup>1</sup>
- The NCLEX-RN® will include **both metric and imperial measurements.**<sup>1</sup>
- **Students should know therapeutic dosages for commonly used drugs,** and recognize deviations from the norm. In most cases, the NCLEX-RN® uses only the generic drug names.<sup>1</sup>
- The NCSBN do not recommend specific study materials or preparation guides. **Students should familiarize themselves with all the materials about the NCLEX-RN® that NCSBN has on its website** and use their own discretion in selecting additional NCLEX-RN® preparation materials.
- A good strategy is to organize your time so that you can **specifically study** for the NCLEX-RN®, either alone or in a study group, over a couple of months prior to taking the exam.

### Formats and Types of Questions on the NCLEX-RN®

- **Nursing students should be familiar with the different types of question formats used on the NCLEX-RN®:** Multiple Choice, Multiple Responses, Hot Spots, Fill-in-the-Blank, Charts/Exhibits, Ordered Responses, Audios, and Graphics.<sup>1,3</sup>
- Most NCLEX-RN® questions are written at the application or analysis level. This means that **you need to use problem solving skills as well as memorized knowledge to answer questions.**<sup>1</sup>

### Taking a Computer-Adaptive Exam

Students should be psychologically prepared for writing a computer-adaptive exam. Here are some important considerations:

- The NCLEX-RN® varies in length. You must answer 75 questions. From this point on, you answer questions until **there is 95% confidence that you have passed or failed.**<sup>4</sup>
- The most questions you can answer is 265; the most time you can take is six hours. In 2012, the average number of questions answered was 119 and the average time taken was 2.5 hours.<sup>1</sup>
- No two people take the same test. **Questions are drawn from the test bank by the computer system in relation to your performance.** If you answer a question correctly, the computer selects from a more difficult set. If you answer incorrectly, it selects from a less difficult set.<sup>4</sup>

- Questions are presented one at a time on a computer screen. **You will not be able to go back and change a response or wait to answer a question later.**<sup>4</sup>
- You must answer a question before you can go to the next one, so consider each one carefully and select the answer you think is best, even if you do not know.<sup>4</sup>
- If after six hours you don't answer 265 questions a **Run-Out-Of-Time (ROOT) rule** is used: If you have answered more than 75 questions, the computer will consider the last 60 questions you answered. If you stayed above the passing standard on these 60 questions you will pass the NCLEX-RN.<sup>4</sup>

### Scheduling and Writing the NCLEX-RN®

- **Candidates travel to a PearsonVUE testing center to take the NCLEX-RN®.** There will be twelve permanent centers in Canada and 15 temporary ones when high numbers of students write (February, June, and October).<sup>5</sup>
- You will receive an authorization to test (ATT) from your provincial/territorial regulatory body. **Your ATT will provide a prescribed amount of time during which you must schedule your NCLEX-RN® exam with PearsonVUE** either online or by phone.<sup>4</sup>
- On the exam day, you must provide a government-issued photo ID at the testing centre. **The name you used to register for the exam must appear exactly as it does on your photo ID, or you will not be allowed to write the exam.**<sup>4</sup>
- On entering the exam room, you will be given a white board that you may use to write on while answering questions. **You may not write on the board before the exam starts.**
- You may take a scheduled break **at 2 hours and at 3.5 hours.** If you need an additional break, you must raise your hand and notify a test administrator.<sup>4</sup>
- Personal belongings you bring will be kept in a locker during the exam. **Prohibited items, such as mobile phones, will be sealed in a plastic bag.** The test center administrators will examine the bag for tampering and open it for you at the end of the exam.<sup>4</sup>

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1. **NCLEX Frequently Asked Questions:** NCSBN publishes FAQs about different aspects of the exam, including alternative item formats, practice analysis, etc. There is even an FAQ for Canadian students! NCSBN. (2014). *Frequently Asked Questions*. Retrieved from <https://www.ncsbn.org/1201.htm>
  2. **2013 NCLEX-RN Detailed Test Plan for Candidates:** The Test Plan should be read carefully so that you gain a deep understanding of the content that will be covered on the NCLEX-RN. NCSBN. (2013). *Detailed NCLEX-RN Detailed Test Plan – Candidate*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncsbn.org/1287.htm>
  3. **PearsonVUE Alternative Item Format Online Tutorial:** This online tutorial gives students an opportunity to practice completing alternative item format questions. PearsonVUE. (2014). *Online Tutorial for NCLEX Examinations*. Retrieved from <http://www.pearsonvue.com/nclex/>
  4. **NCLEX Candidate Bulletin:** This document contains important information about registering for the NCLEX-RN and rules for writing the exam. NCSBN. (2014). *2014 NCLEX Candidate Examination Bulletin*. Retrieved from <https://www.ncsbn.org/1213.htm>
  5. **2015 Canadian Testing Centers and Locations:** A list of permanent and temporary testing centers in Canada. PearsonVUE. (2014). *2015 Canadian Testing Centers & Locations*. Retrieved from [http://www.pearsonvue.com/nclex/2015\\_Testing%20Locations.pdf](http://www.pearsonvue.com/nclex/2015_Testing%20Locations.pdf)