

THE NURSING STUDENTS' GUIDE FOR NCLEX SUCCESS

GOALS:

1. To state the history and current use of the NCLEX
2. To suggest successful learning methods that encourage the successful passing of the NCLEX

WORDS FOR APPLICATION:

1. NCLEX (RN & PN)
2. Next Generation NCLEX (NGN)
3. Computerized Adaptive Test (CAT)
4. Nursing License Compact (NLC)
5. Scientific Skepticism
6. Critical Thinking
7. Common Sense

The National Council Licensure Exam (NCLEX) has been a national exam for licensing nurses in the U.S. since 1982, Canada since 2015, and Australia since 2020. The test is available for its members in 50 states, the District of Columbia, and four U.S. territories (American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, and U.S. Virgin Islands.) It was developed (and continues to be updated) by the test owner entitled, National Council of State Boards of Nursing, Inc. (NCSBN). NCLEX tests knowledge, skills, and nursing abilities essential for the safe and effective nursing entry level to ensure public health protection.

There are two types of NCLEX examinations taken upon graduation from a nursing school/educational program:

NCLEX-RN: Taken by students completing a nursing school/educational program for registered nurse preparation.

NCLEX PN: Taken by students completing a nursing school/educational program for practical nurse preparation.

Upon completing the NCLEX exam successfully and keeping with the nursing student's education, the student is awarded the title of Registered Nurse or Practical Nurse.

THE NCLEX MESSAGE:

NCLEX testing is a Computerized Adaptive Test (CAT) administered by a network entitled: Pearson Professional Centers (PPC). The questions are based on how the test-taker answered each previous question. Scientific Skepticism, Critical Thinking, and Common Sense are related to the testing goal of NCSBN.

To remain current with the changing nursing informational/testing needs, NCSBN analyzes current nursing practice at least every three years and makes changes related to:

- Frequency of a nursing practice
- Impact of nursing on the safety of patients
- Location of nursing activities

It is necessary to pass the NCLEX computerized test as a nursing school/educational program graduate to help establish the known personal theoretical knowledge, ability to perform safe nursing practice, and to make life-sustaining decisions on behalf of others. The testing intends to test the ability of nursing graduates to use Scientific Skepticism, Critical Thinking, and Common Sense under situations requiring life-sustaining nursing scrutiny.

As of April 1, 2023, the new updated testing version of NCLEX will be known as “Next Generation NCLEX” (NGN).

THE NURSING LICENSE COMPACT

The Nursing License Compact (NLC) is an agreement between states (not all states) that allows nurses who have passed the NCLEX to obtain a multistate license in their state and start working immediately with a temporary license in another state. This multistate agreement is sometimes called “nurse employment state reciprocity.” Such reciprocity is also available for Certified Nursing Aides (CNA).

PREPARING FOR THE NCLEX EXAM—Scientific Skepticism, Critical Thinking, and Common Sense

The Three Amigos (Scientific Skepticism, Critical Thinking, and Common Sense) provide the usual roadmap to NCLEX testing success!

Scientific Skepticism requires a nursing student to:

Use an attitude of reasonable doubt when considering the correct answer

Critical Thinking requires a nursing student to:

1. Analyze: Acquire available information by gathering, understanding, and interpreting data and information
2. Infer: Draw conclusions based on relevant data, personal knowledge, and experience
3. Communicate: Share and receive information in all forms from others
4. Problem Solve: Gather, analyze, and communicate information to arrive at the correct answer

Common Sense requires a nursing student to:

Use sound practical nursing knowledge and judgment based on a nursing and health care perception of the situation and associated facts.

Scientific Skepticism, Critical Thinking, and Common Sense (The Three Amigos) used in test-taking are like learning to ride a bike—knowing how to coordinate the technique (using the Three Amigos), not be distracted (recognize the answers that are obvious “outliers”), coordinating the movements around the bumps by remembering the tricks of success and balance (knowing the amount of time each question should receive and recognizing “distractors”), and remembering the intended destination of the ride (successful passing of the NCLEX test). Practice and more practice riding (discussing and taking many practice tests) are required. Then--the falls (wrong answers) become less often, and the student’s destination (passing the test) is more likely. Then—A happy day for students is successfully passing the NCLEX exam!

SCIENTIFIC SKEPTICISM, CRITICAL THINKING, AND COMMON SENSE IN MULTIPLE-CHOICE TEST-TAKING:

The roadmap to Scientific Skepticism, Critical Thinking, and Common Sense related to multiple-choice testing success involve using the Three Amigos. Remember—Thinking is not as simple as you think! The Three Amigos represent the “Rules of Successful Test-taking” of multiple-choice test questions.

Richard Feynman, a Nobel Prize-winning physicist, reminds us that our inferences/decisions from lazy thinking often occur illogically, and our history and experience often cloud judgment. However, using Scientific Skepticism, Critical Thinking, and Common Sense (the Three Amigos) when considering each multiple-test answer to determine the best answer requires the insertion of sound nursing professional inquiry into each possible answer. The forceful thinking while using the Three Amigos increases the ability to arrive at the correct answer.

FYI: Some research has shown that people with very high Intelligent Quotients (I.Q.’s) often defer Common Sense and use and relate to theoretical concepts related to their field of study to make decisions. Nursing is associated with the care and support of humankind/humanity, and Common Sense (on behalf of caring for humankind/humanity) is the foremost requirement of professional nursing practice.

Frequent test-takers have found that reading the question and attempting to determine the correct answer through Scientific Skepticism, Critical Thinking, and Common-Sense *before* reading the answer options is, often, the best approach. Then, the answer, at times, will naturally pop up as the correct answer.

THE MARKETING OF NCLEX SUCCESS

Numerous NCLEX exam practice books and practice questions are available on the market. Some review questions are offered as NCSBN practice questions. There are options for help and practice by entrepreneurs who charge for their services and some promise NCLEX success. Research has shown that many entrepreneurs teach more general theoretical concepts and less Scientific Skepticism, Critical Thinking, and Common-Sense. Many students succeed on their first attempt at taking the NCLEX with conscientious study and practicing the Three Amigos. Therefore, this article encourages incorporating the elements of the Three Amigos into nursing education from the beginning of nursing studies. This consistent approach and practice will help in the success of any multiple-choice test and eventually result in more easily and correctly choosing the correct answer on the NCLEX.

IN-CLASS SCIENTIFIC SKEPTICISM, CRITICAL THINKING, AND COMMON SENSE PRACTICE

Choosing the best or correct choice from several possible nursing behaviors on a multiple-choice practice test can be challenging and FUN. The supervision of this challenge is accomplished under the direction of the nursing instructor. Hopefully, the nursing instructor will introduce the Three Amigos. If that introduction and encouragement for thinking does not occur—show your intellect by encouraging such astute thought for your success to the other members of the nursing class. Never hesitate to show your intellectual prowess by verbally expressing the thinking process of the Three Amigos. It is not enough to identify the right answer—knowing and sharing WHY it is the right answer is necessary. The class will be impressed—and you will be a STAR for the day!

Using the Three Amigos through the nursing program—especially when nursing multiple-choice exams occur, helps with the successful passing (in the future) of the NCLEX exam.

THE FINAL CHALLENGE: TAKING THE NCLEX EXAM

NCLEX multiple-choice test questions and answers to test questions usually follow a specific format. The practice of multiple-choice answers to questions is typically prepared to follow the most likely NCLEX exam combination of possible answers per question. The four types of answers included in the choice of answers (format) are most likely:

1. One answer is absolutely wrong
2. Another answer is/can be wrong under the certain circumstances
3. Another answer is correct under certain circumstances—but not in the case/circumstance(s) of the question
4. Another question that is the most correct and consistent under the circumstances(s) stated in the presented question

No one has said that nursing education is easy—only that it is worth it!

The heights of great men reached and kept were not attained by sudden flight, but while their companions slept, they were toiling upward in the night. (Henry Wadsworth Longfellow)

YOU CAN DO THIS—HAVE FAITH—YOUR REGISTERED NURSE OR PRACTICAL NURSE DREAM IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER. GOOD LUCK!!

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