

## THE NURSING INSTRUCTORS' GUIDE FOR STUDENT NCLEX SUCCESS

### GOALS:

1. To state the history and current use of the NCLEX exam
2. To suggest successful teaching 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 the nursing student to:

Use and encourage an attitude of reasonable doubt when considering the correct answer.

Critical Thinking requires the 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 the 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”), coordinate 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 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 a nursing student to insert 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. However, many students succeed with conscientious study and practicing the Three Amigos. Research has shown that many individuals with high I.Q.'s who claim to be academically helpful toward positive test-taking outcomes teach more theoretical concepts and less Scientific Skepticism, Critical Thinking, and Common-Sense. However, this article encourages nursing instructors who teach nursing students preparing for the NCLEX to teach nursing theory and positive clinical practice to incorporate the elements of the Three Amigos into nursing education. This general teaching approach helps students to eventually be able to more easily and correctly choose the correct answer on multiple-choice tests/questionnaires—like the NCLEX.

## IN-CLASS SCIENTIFIC SKEPTICISM, CRITICAL THINKING, & COMMON SENSE PRACTICE

Choosing the best or correct choice from several possible nursing behaviors on a multiple-choice practice test can be challenging for nursing students, but it can be fun. The supervision of this challenge is accomplished under the direction of a nursing instructor who can prepare challenging multiple-choice questions that reflect each course topic. It is recommended that a nursing instructor conduct in-class Three Amigos practicing sessions to answer instructor-prepared multiple-choice questions that represent current course content. To help students determine the correct answer related to multiple-choice questions:

1. Spend time with the entire class as they consider all answer options. Hear why some answers to questions are not correct and why one answer is correct. The instructor encourages and supports the student's correct answer with a statement as to why the chosen answer is correct. Have the students identify their skills and how they arrived at the correct answer.
2. As the nursing instructor, affirm their understanding of using the Three Amigos to determine the correct answer.

An instructor that tells the correct answer does not encourage Scientific Skepticism, Critical Thinking, and Common-Sense decisions. This mental exercise process results in helping students/future nurses learn how to identify correct nursing responses on the NCLEX. Teaching the Three Amigos pathway to Cognitive Thinking requires students to practice the consideration of possible answers. When this occurs in a classroom setting, it is enhanced by hearing what each student says about each answer option. Then the students realize (without doubt) which answer from the several possible answers is the correct choice and WHY THE CORRECT ANSWER IS TRULY CONSIDERED MOST CORRECT.

The purpose of the question(s) is to give an understanding of the correct and safe practice of the Science and Practice of Nursing in the situation(s). The test practice occurs by determining the correct answer among several possible answers. Teach that the questions are often written to be easily misread, misunderstood, or misleading—often by just one word; therefore, it easily causes an unaware and

uninformed test-taker to select a wrong answer. This learning process tests a student's *attention to detail*—very much a part of the professional practice of nursing! As a nursing instructor, prepare practice tests with hidden words (one-word descriptors)—examples: always, never, if, only, sometimes, etc. that can easily cause a student to select an incorrect multiple-choice answer.

Your choice of presenting a correct answer on instructor tests should follow a planned, specific, reasonable, logical, and recognized pattern of using the Three Amigos. The first practice tests for a given time during a nursing course should be tests that a student can easily identify the correct answer among the wrong answers. Over time, increase the complexity of the question and answers to include an accommodation of a student's required knowledge/theory, increase of nursing practice, and professional nursing text/reading. Reflecting on current nursing lectures and clinical practice provides excellent content for determining multiple test questions.

Nursing educator tactics to enhance student test-taking capability:

1. Placement of a forever-visual wall/board guide related to the Three Amigos and their definition
2. Application and reference to a wall/board of the Three Amigos and their definition as a guide to explain their choice of multiple-choice test answers
3. Regular classroom multiple-choice tests
4. Multiple Choice testing as a result of all formal classroom lectures
5. Frequent entire class reviews of multiple-choice questions, consideration of each question, and why the correct answer is correct
6. Recognition by the class of the use of the Three Amigos as it applies to each multiple-choice question

## **DEVELOPING MULTIPLE-CHOICE TEST QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ACCORDING TO FORMAT**

NCLEX multiple-choice test questions and answers to test questions usually follow a specific format. The practice of multiple-choice answers to questions is best 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 consistently under the circumstance(s) stated in the presented question.

When preparing instructor questions with answers according to the above format, select questions and answers that seem to encourage the most use of the Three Amigos. When practicing test-taking with the class, the entire class must identify how each question meets one of the above format possibilities. Always have the students communicate the reason for their decision.

## CONCLUSION

The general message for nursing instructors is that NCLEX testing awareness begins at the beginning of a nursing program. The nursing educator must remain aware, watchful, and persistent with multiple choice testing throughout the nursing program. Ongoing and regular test practice helps student testing success and perfection!

Multiple choice NCLEX test questions regarding a specific nursing problem are written to test Scientific Skepticism, Critical Thinking, and Common Sense about the most appropriate nursing behavior. Selective multiple-choice test questions might test cognitive ability, choice of psychomotor behaviors, or nursing professional attitude. Encouraging students to read the question carefully for trick descriptors that can cause a wrong answer choice is important. However, promote student smartness in carefully reading the keywords that could result in choosing the correct answer. The “Descriptors” sometimes show up in the NCLEX (and can be included in practice NCLEX tests) as one word—such as “always,” “never,” “sometimes,” or other limiting words that may or may not be supportive in identifying the correct answer to the stated problem.

For the most part, students have hopefully experienced/seen many convoluting healthcare problems as they interact with patients with numerous impinging health variables. Therefore, selecting the correct answer requires special attention. Multiple-choice questions test a student’s keen understanding of nursing principles related to patient care and safety. A correct multiple-choice answer to each NCLEX question requires careful reading. It intends to demand full attention to the exact wording of the question to determine the right answer, check the knowledge of nursing practice, and the ability of the nursing student’s attention to detail—as if a patient’s life depends on it. All practice questions for the NCLEX should support the required attention to nursing detail.

By knowing and learning to use the requirements of successful multiple-choice testing, as stated in this article, the potential test-taker of the NCLEX Exam will learn the quiet success and confidence of using the Three Amigos henceforth. Such intellectual application to the NCLEX exam promotes student nurse NCLEX success. As a nursing instructor, there is a responsibility to help nursing students vicariously practice nursing knowledge and application regarding each practice question with its choice of answers. As in all of life, success is enhanced by our success in using the Three Amigos! With the nursing instructor’s constant pursuit of multiple-choice testing success, a nursing student’s successful NCLEX exam is “just around the corner.”

### Reference:

FYI: Why high I.Q. people tend to be deficient in common sense  
(<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19733444/>) by Bruce G. Charlton

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