

Effective | April 2016



NCLEX-RN® Examination

Test Plan for the National Council
Licensure Examination for
Registered Nurses



National Council of State Boards of Nursing

Mission Statement

The National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN®) provides education, service and research through collaborative leadership to promote evidence-based regulatory excellence for patient safety and public protection.

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2016 NCLEX-RN® Test Plan

National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN® Examination)

Introduction

Entry into the practice of nursing is regulated by the licensing authorities within each of the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN®) member board jurisdictions (state, commonwealth, and territorial boards of nursing). To ensure public protection, each jurisdiction requires candidates for licensure to meet set requirements that include passing an examination that measures the competencies needed to perform safely and effectively as a newly licensed, entry-level registered nurse. NCSBN develops a licensure examination, the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN®), which is used by member board jurisdictions to assist in making licensure decisions.

Several steps occur in the development of the NCLEX-RN Test Plan. The first step is conducting a practice analysis that is used to collect data on the current practice of the entry-level nurse (*Report of Findings from the 2014 RN Practice Analysis: Linking the NCLEX-RN® Examination to Practice*; NCSBN, 2014). Twelve thousand newly licensed registered nurses are asked about the frequency and importance of performing nursing care activities. Nursing care activities are then analyzed in relation to the frequency of performance, impact on maintaining client safety, and client care settings where the activities are performed. This analysis guides the development of a framework for entry-level nursing practice that incorporates specific client needs as well as processes fundamental to the practice of nursing. The second step is the development of the NCLEX-RN Test Plan, which guides the selection of content and behaviors to be tested.

The NCLEX-RN Test Plan provides a concise summary of the content and scope of the licensing examination. It serves as a guide for examination development as well as candidate preparation. The NCLEX® examination assesses the knowledge, skills and abilities that are essential for the entry-level nurse to use in order to meet the needs of clients requiring the promotion, maintenance or restoration of health. The following sections describe beliefs about people and nursing that are integral to the examination, cognitive abilities that will be tested in the examination and specific components of the NCLEX-RN Test Plan.

Beliefs

Beliefs about people and nursing underlie the NCLEX-RN Test Plan. People are finite beings with varying capacities to function in society. They are unique individuals who have defined systems of daily living reflecting their values, motives and lifestyles. People have the right to make decisions regarding their health care needs and to participate in meeting those needs. The profession of nursing makes a unique contribution in helping clients (individual, family or group, including significant others and population) achieve an optimal level of health in a variety of settings. For the purposes of the NCLEX Examination, a client is defined as the individual, family, or group which includes significant others and population.

Nursing is both an art and a science, founded on a professional body of knowledge that integrates concepts from the liberal arts and the biological, physical, psychological and social sciences. It is a learned profession

based on knowledge of the human condition across the life span and the relationships of an individual with others and within the environment. Nursing is a dynamic, continually evolving discipline that employs critical thinking to integrate increasingly complex knowledge, skills, technologies, and client care activities into evidence-based nursing practice. The goal of nursing for client care is preventing illness and potential complications; protecting, promoting, restoring, and facilitating comfort; health; and dignity in dying.

The registered nurse provides a unique, comprehensive assessment of the health status of the client, applying principles of ethics, client safety, health promotion and the nursing process, the nurse then develops and implements an explicit plan of care considering unique cultural and spiritual client preferences, the applicable standard of care and legal instructions. The nurse assists clients to promote health, cope with health problems, adapt to and/or recover from the effects of disease or injury, and support the right to a dignified death. The registered nurse is accountable for abiding by all applicable member board jurisdiction statutes related to nursing practice.

Classification of Cognitive Levels

Bloom's taxonomy for the cognitive domain is used as a basis for writing and coding items for the examination (Bloom, et al., 1956; Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Since the practice of nursing requires application of knowledge, skills and abilities, the majority of items are written at the application or higher levels of cognitive ability, which requires more complex thought processing.

Test Plan Structure

The framework of Client Needs was selected for the examination because it provides a universal structure for defining nursing actions and competencies, and focuses on clients in all settings.

Client Needs

The content of the NCLEX-RN Test Plan is organized into four major Client Needs categories. Two of the four categories are divided into subcategories:

Safe and Effective Care Environment

- Management of Care
- Safety and Infection Control

Health Promotion and Maintenance

Psychosocial Integrity

Physiological Integrity

- Basic Care and Comfort
- Pharmacological and Parenteral Therapies
- Reduction of Risk Potential
- Physiological Adaptation

Integrated Processes

The following processes are fundamental to the practice of nursing and are integrated throughout the Client Needs categories and subcategories:

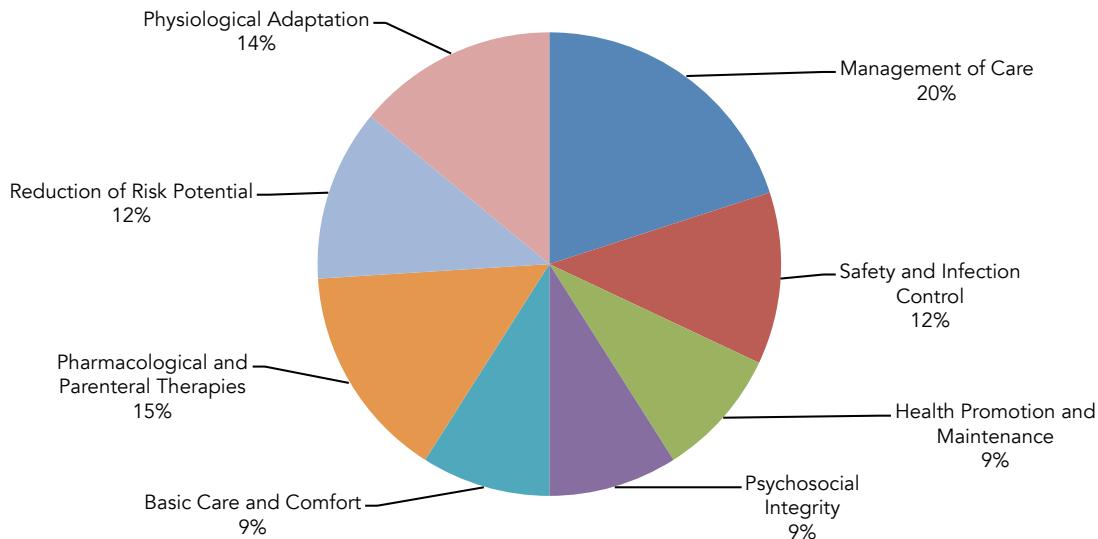
- *Nursing Process* – a scientific, clinical reasoning approach to client care that includes assessment, analysis, planning, implementation and evaluation.
- *Caring* – interaction of the nurse and client in an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust. In this collaborative environment, the nurse provides encouragement, hope, support and compassion to help achieve desired outcomes.
- *Communication and Documentation* – verbal and nonverbal interactions between the nurse and the client, the client's significant others and the other members of the health care team. Events and activities associated with client care are recorded in written and/or electronic records that demonstrate adherence to the standards of practice and accountability in the provision of care.
- *Teaching/Learning* – facilitation of the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes promoting a change in behavior.
- *Culture and Spirituality* – interaction of the nurse and the client (individual, family or group, including significant others and population) which recognizes and considers the client-reported, self-identified, unique and individual preferences to client care, the applicable standard of care and legal instructions.

Distribution of Content

The percentage of test questions assigned to each Client Needs category and subcategory of the NCLEX-RN Test Plan is based on the results of the *Report of Findings from the 2014 RN Practice Analysis: Linking the NCLEX-RN® Examination to Practice* (NCSBN, 2014), and expert judgment provided by members of the NCLEX® Examination Committee.

Client Needs	Percentage of Items from Each Category/Subcategory
Safe and Effective Care Environment	
■ Management of Care	17-23%
■ Safety and Infection Control	9-15%
Health Promotion and Maintenance	6-12%
Psychosocial Integrity	6-12%
Physiological Integrity	
■ Basic Care and Comfort	6-12%
■ Pharmacological and Parenteral Therapies	12-18%
■ Reduction of Risk Potential	9-15%
■ Physiological Adaptation	11-17%

Distribution of Content for the NCLEX-RN® Test Plan



NCLEX-RN examinations are administrated adaptively in variable length format to target candidate-specific ability. To accommodate possible variations in test length, content area distributions of the individual examinations may differ up to $\pm 3\%$ in each category.

Overview of Content

All content categories and subcategories reflect client needs across the life span in a variety of settings.

Safe and Effective Care Environment

The nurse promotes achievement of client outcomes by providing and directing nursing care that enhances the care delivery setting in order to protect clients and health care personnel.

- *Management of Care* – providing and directing nursing care that enhances the care delivery setting to protect clients and health care personnel.

Related content includes but is **not limited** to:

- Advance Directives/Self-Determination/
Life Planning
- Advocacy
- Case Management
- Client Rights
- Collaboration with Interdisciplinary Team
- Concepts of Management
- Confidentiality/Information Security
- Continuity of Care
- Assignment, Delegation and Supervision
- Establishing Priorities
- Ethical Practice
- Informed Consent
- Information Technology
- Legal Rights and Responsibilities
- Organ Donation
- Performance Improvement (Quality Improvement)
- Referrals

- *Safety and Infection Control* – protecting clients and health care personnel from health and environmental hazards.

Related content includes but is **not limited** to:

- Accident/Error/Injury Prevention
- Emergency Response Plan
- Ergonomic Principles
- Handling Hazardous and Infectious Materials
- Home Safety
- Reporting of Incident/Event/Irregular Occurrence/Variance
- Safe Use of Equipment
- Security Plan
- Standard Precautions/Transmission-Based Precautions/Surgical Asepsis
- Use of Restraints/Safety Devices

Health Promotion and Maintenance

The nurse provides and directs nursing care of the client that incorporates the knowledge of expected growth and development principles; prevention and/or early detection of health problems, and strategies to achieve optimal health.

Related content includes but is **not limited** to:

- Aging Process
- Ante/Intra/Postpartum and Newborn Care
- Developmental Stages and Transitions
- Health Promotion/Disease Prevention
- Health Screening
- High Risk Behaviors
- Lifestyle Choices
- Self-Care
- Techniques of Physical Assessment

Psychosocial Integrity

The nurse provides and directs nursing care that promotes and supports the emotional, mental and social well-being of the client experiencing stressful events, as well as clients with acute or chronic mental illness.

Related content includes but is **not limited** to:

- Abuse/Neglect
- Behavioral Interventions
- Chemical and Other Dependencies/Substance Use Disorder
- Coping Mechanisms
- Crisis Intervention
- Cultural Awareness/Cultural Influences on Health
- End of Life Care
- Family Dynamics
- Grief and Loss
- Mental Health Concepts
- Religious and Spiritual Influences on Health
- Sensory/Perceptual Alterations
- Stress Management
- Support Systems
- Therapeutic Communication
- Therapeutic Environment

Physiological Integrity

The nurse promotes physical health and wellness by providing care and comfort, reducing client risk potential and managing health alterations.

- *Basic Care and Comfort* - providing comfort and assistance in the performance of activities of daily living.

Related content includes but is **not limited** to:

- Assistive Devices
- Elimination
- Mobility/Immobility
- Non-Pharmacological Comfort Interventions
- Nutrition and Oral Hydration
- Personal Hygiene
- Rest and Sleep

- *Pharmacological and Parenteral Therapies* - providing care related to the administration of medications and parenteral therapies.

Related content includes but is **not limited** to:

- Adverse Effects/Contraindications/Side Effects/Interactions
- Blood and Blood Products
- Central Venous Access Devices
- Dosage Calculation
- Expected Actions/Outcomes
- Medication Administration
- Parenteral/Intravenous Therapies
- Pharmacological Pain Management
- Total Parenteral Nutrition

- *Reduction of Risk Potential* - reducing the likelihood that clients will develop complications or health problems related to existing conditions, treatments or procedures.

Related content includes but is **not limited** to:

- Changes/Abnormalities in Vital Signs
- Diagnostic Tests
- Laboratory Values
- Potential for Alterations in Body Systems
- Potential for Complications of Diagnostic Tests/Treatments/Procedures
- Potential for Complications from Surgical Procedures and Health Alterations
- System Specific Assessments
- Therapeutic Procedures

- *Physiological Adaptation* - managing and providing care for clients with acute, chronic or life threatening physical health conditions.

Related content includes but is **not limited** to:

- Alterations in Body Systems
- Fluid and Electrolyte Imbalances
- Hemodynamics
- Illness Management
- Medical Emergencies
- Pathophysiology
- Unexpected Response to Therapies

Administration of the NCLEX-RN® Examination

The NCLEX-RN Examination is administered to candidates by computerized adaptive testing (CAT). CAT is a method of delivering examinations that uses computer technology and measurement theory. With CAT, each candidate's examination is unique because it is assembled interactively as the examination proceeds. Computer technology selects items to administer that match the candidate's ability. The items, which are stored in a large item pool, have been classified by test plan category and level of difficulty. After the candidate answers an item, the computer calculates an ability estimate based on all of the previous answers the candidate selected. The next item administered is chosen to measure the candidate's ability in the appropriate test plan category. This process is repeated for each item, creating an examination tailored to the candidate's knowledge and skills while fulfilling all NCLEX-RN Test Plan requirements. The examination continues with items selected and administered in this way until a pass or fail decision is made.

All registered nurse candidates must answer a minimum of 75 items. The maximum number of items that a registered nurse candidate may answer is 265 during the allotted six-hour time period. The maximum six-hour time limit to complete the examination includes the tutorial, sample questions and all breaks. Candidates may be administered multiple choice items as well as items written in alternate formats. These formats may include but are not limited to multiple response, fill-in-the-blank calculation, ordered response, and/or hot spots. All item types may include multimedia such as charts, tables, graphics, sound and video. All items go through an extensive review process before being used as items on the examination.

More information about the NCLEX examination, including CAT methodology, items, the candidate bulletin and Web tutorials can be found on the the NCSBN website: <http://www.ncsbn.org>.

Examination Security and Confidentiality

Any candidate that violates test center regulations or rules, or engages in irregular behavior, misconduct and/or does not follow a test center administrator's warning to discontinue inappropriate behavior may be dismissed from the test center. Additionally, exam results may be withheld or cancelled and the licensing board may take other disciplinary action such as denial of a license and/or disqualifying the candidate from future registrations for licensure. Refer to the current candidate bulletin for more information.

Candidates should be aware and understand that the disclosure of any examination materials including the nature or content of examination items, before, during or after the examination is a violation of law. Violations of confidentiality and/or candidates' rules can result in criminal prosecution or civil liability and/or disciplinary actions by the licensing agency including the denial of licensure. Disclosure of examination materials includes but is not limited to discussing examination items with faculty, friends, family, or others.

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