

# Next Generation NCLEX® NEWS

## The Next Generation NCLEX® Usability Studies

The Next Generation NCLEX News is a quarterly publication that provides the latest information about the research being done to assess potential changes to the NCLEX. In this issue, you will find information related to the usability studies conducted as part of the Next Generation NCLEX (NGN) research.

### The Next Generation NCLEX Usability Studies

Usability studies are conducted to understand the extent to which a product can be used by a specific group to achieve defined goals with effectiveness, efficiency and satisfaction within a defined context of use. Usability is a quality attribute for improving ease of use during the design process and is defined by the following quality components:

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- **Learnability:** user can easily accomplish tasks based on the design;
- **Efficiency:** user can easily perform tasks once the design is learned;
- **Memorability:** user is able to reestablish proficiency when returning to the design; and
- **Errors:** user helps with understanding specific errors that occur due to issues with the design.

To address the emerging needs for assessing clinical judgment more directly, the goal of the NGN usability study was to identify more innovative items and response types than those used today on the NCLEX. The objective of the studies was to contribute additional relevant information to the NGN research and evaluation of clinical judgment.

Currently, the NCLEX utilizes mainly multiple-choice or multiple-response type items. These items have a common universal layout and well-known methods for obtaining responses from candidates using radio buttons or checkboxes. However, the newer next generation items measuring clinical judgment employ a wider range of response options and item design features. In addition, NGN prototypes have authentic case study type scenarios where a number of questions became a set of interrelated items representing a scenario, whereas today all items on the NCLEX are unique to themselves.

Given the divergence of current NCLEX items and newer next generation items, there were a number of important considerations that had to be explored to ensure that the new items were easily comprehended and simple to use by the candidate population. This is critical to the validity of the new item and response types in order to ensure that item difficulty is driven by the nature of the item content and required skills, and not by irrelevant features of the item presentation (e.g., poor design, ambiguous response methods).

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A group of nursing students participated in the usability study. Additionally, a group of professional nurses and nursing educators contributed by helping to identify possible design issues and to provide talk aloud feedback for the content of the items. This was done to ensure all item content represented actual nursing clinical judgment scenarios that align with current practice and were targeted at the entry-level practitioner.

The results helped to identify issues related to the design of the items and response formats that could introduce problems or difficulties to the potential candidate population. Once the issues were identified, the items were refactored and reintroduced to both new study participants and returning participants for further evaluation. This process was iterative until all items were deemed appropriate by the study participants. The outcome was a set of item and response types for NGN that were easy to understand, navigate, and made the process of answering items seamless in order to ensure that only nursing clinical judgment content factor into potential candidates' responses.

Along with validating design features, the feedback on the newer items from students and experts was overwhelmingly positive, as participants indicated that the items were more realistic and a better fit to the type of work they encounter both in their internships/practicums and entry-level practice.

**The final results of these studies were incorporated into the development of new Next Generation NCLEX items. These items are now the basis for many of the new items seen by current NCLEX test takers in the Special Research Section as part of Item Type Data Collection (ITDC) research. The usability studies have provided valuable input to ongoing NGN research.**

Looking for updates about the NGN Project?  
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