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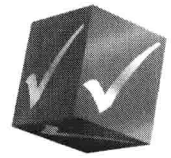


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Building Your Nursing Future

**Successful Problem-Solving &
TEST-TAKING**
for Beginning Nursing Students



THIRD EDITION

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Introduction

Why a Book on Problem-Solving and Test-Taking for Nursing Students?

The purpose of this book is to help you to become a successful and confident professional nurse. To do this, you need to succeed in your nursing courses and exams—and, when you graduate, on the NCLEX exam for licensure.

To succeed as a nursing student and as a professional nurse, you need to develop your ability to apply the *nursing process*. The nursing process is the method that professional nurses use *to solve clinical problems and apply nursing knowledge*. Learning to use the nursing process is a central focus of this book.

This book will show you how to identify clinical problems and compare solutions. It will also teach you the special test-taking, time management and study skills that you need to succeed in your nursing education program. Time management is a critical issue for so many of today's nursing students who have jobs and families in addition to their nursing studies.

The study and review techniques in this book will actually save you time and help you get the most out of your nursing program.

In the past, problem-solving and test-taking were not taught in most nursing programs. There just didn't seem to be a place for them in the curriculum. Today, though, they are recognized by nurse educators as *essential professional skills* that nurses will need throughout their careers.

Why Are Nursing Exams So Hard?

Nursing students from all backgrounds tell us that nursing exams are very difficult. And it's true!

Nursing exams are different, and more difficult, because *nursing requires constant problem solving*. Nurses must constantly make decisions and set priorities.

On nursing exams, you have to identify clinical problems and choose the best solution. So just remembering nursing information isn't enough. You also need top-notch problem-solving skills. Nursing exams test your *nursing judgment*. You need special skills to demonstrate your nursing judgment on a multiple choice exam.

Nursing instructors frequently hear beginning nursing students say:

- “I do very well clinically. However, when it come to the nursing exams, I do poorly.”
- “Sometimes the amount of material covered on an exam is overwhelming! I study very hard, but my nursing grades do not show it.”
- “I get excellent grades clinically, but the results on my nursing exams decrease my overall grade in nursing.”

Does this sound like you? Well, you are not alone—and this book has the help you need to succeed in your nursing courses and on your exams.

If you would like to become more skilled—and more confident—at taking nursing exams, this book is just what you need.

Are There Special Test-Taking Skills for Nursing Exams?

No one likes taking exams, and nursing students are no exception.

Nursing students find their multiple choice examinations to be anxiety-provoking. The questions ask you to solve urgent or complex problems. Sometimes it is hard to understand what the question is asking. It is often hard to choose between the options. And what can you do when you just don't know the answer?

Do you become confused when a question presents a clinical scenario and asks you to “identify the manifestation that should receive the nurse’s immediate attention”? What about questions that ask you to “select the highest (or lowest) priority nursing intervention” in a clinical scenario?

Sometimes a question gives you so much information that it’s hard to tell which facts are most important. And sometimes you find a question that seems to have two, three, or even four correct answers!

Students often think these questions are “trick questions.” But the questions on nursing exams actually use a special kind of “test-taking logic.” For example, in a clinical situation, many actions might be *appropriate*; however, on an exam only one action can be the *best* or *priority* action. This is how the exam tests your *nursing judgment* as well as your nursing knowledge. It is very important to know how to go about answering judgment questions!

The good news is that there are special test-taking skills to help you answer these difficult questions. These skills will give you a new way to approach a nursing test question. With these skills, you can focus on answering the question, and not become distracted or confused. Using these skills, you will be able to *make the most of your nursing knowledge* on an exam.

Are There Special Study Skills for Nursing Exams, Too?

Absolutely!

Preparing for an exam that goes beyond just recalling facts requires a special approach.

To solve a problem presented in a nursing exam question, you use the nursing process. If you use the nursing process when *reviewing* nursing content, you will be well prepared for the exam. This book will show you how to do this. This book will also give you tips on time-saving ways to prepare for class and how to take good class notes.

Can Everyone Learn To Be A Good Test Taker?

Yes! The good news is that becoming a test-wise nursing student or NCLEX candidate is a skill you can learn!

Learning how to do well on nursing exams is a skill like learning a musical instrument or a sport. Becoming a musician or an athlete involves learning skills that must be developed over time with skilled instruction. You can learn to become a good test-taker with the right tips and enough practice. Think of this book as a coaching session by an expert who will “teach you the ropes” and offer tips and suggestions to help you do your best.

As with any other skill, “practice makes perfect”—so we have provided drill questions and a “Final Exam” to help you practice your new skills. As you use these practice questions, you will see how the techniques work, and you will increase your confidence as a test-taker.

What is the NCLEX Examination?

Issued by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing, the NCLEX is designed to test competence: knowledge, skills, and abilities essential to the safe and effective practice of nursing at the entry level for both RN and PN candidates.

NCLEX exam results are an important component used by boards of nursing to make decisions about licensure. Only state boards of nursing can release NCLEX exam results to candidates.

The NCLEX examination is administered in the United States, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. The use of the same exam by all jurisdictions facilitates licensure by endorsement from one board of nursing to another.

The National Council posts a bulletin on its website, www.ncsbn.org, to address the many questions candidates have about the NCLEX. Online test plans explain the manner in which cognitive ability, integrated concepts and processes are tested. They provide a valuable break-down of NCLEX content distribution. The site also reports on any upcoming pilot studies, anticipated policy or exam changes.

Computerized Adaptive Testing and the NCLEX

Pencil and paper are out for those taking the NCLEX exam. Computerized Adaptive Testing (CAT) is in!

The National Council's position is that CAT provides a more accurate measure of a candidate's competency determined by the *difficulty* of questions answered correctly, *not* by *how many* questions are answered correctly.

NCLEX questions are all multiple choice, designed to assess the candidates problem solving skills and cognitive abilities. There are some 3,000 items in the NCLEX pool. Test items include making client assignments, prioritizing care and analyzing complex client data to determine the appropriate nursing response.

With CAT, each candidate's test is unique: it is assembled interactively as the individual is tested.

As the candidate answers each question, the computer calculates a competence estimate based on all earlier answers. The exam is constructed to recognize that each candidate will have strengths and weaknesses in particular subject areas. A question determined to measure the candidate's ability most precisely in the appropriate test plan area is selected. The process is repeated for each question, creating an examination tailored to the individual's knowledge and skills while fulfilling all NCLEX test plan requirements. The examination continues in this way until a pass or fail decision is made.

An RN candidate must answer a minimum of 75 questions (from a total of 265); A PN candidate must answer a minimum 85 questions (from a total of 205). The maximum testing time is five hours.

Prep and Practice with meds

Clearly, it is advantageous for you to prepare for the computerized NCLEX with simulation NCLEX-style exams like those published by meds (see product index). As future nurses you must leave your technology fears behind, get on the computer, pop in the meds companion exam disk and practice, practice, practice!

Now, let's resume preparation and get on with *Successful Problem Solving & Test Taking for Beginning Nursing Students*.

Can This Book Really Help Me Pass the NCLEX exam?

Yes, it can! Thousands of nursing students across the United States and Canada have increased their test scores using the techniques in this book.

Research has shown that *the test-wise candidate will score higher, on average, than the less skilled test-taker* every time. This is also true for nursing exams. If you know how to prepare for an exam and have good test-taking skills, you will be able to *make the most of your nursing knowledge* when you take an exam.

Nursing exams are difficult—but they are only multiple choice exams! If you have the ability to do well clinically, you have the ability to do well on exams. By becoming a skilled problem solver and test-taker and learning how to prepare for an exam, you can decrease your test-taking anxiety and increase your test scores.

What Are the Main Skills Needed to Answer Nursing Exam Questions?

The questions on nursing exams go beyond testing your ability to *recall* nursing information. They are designed to test your *comprehension* and your ability to *apply* your nursing knowledge. In fact, they are designed to test your *competency to practice nursing safely*. For this reason, nursing exams have their own distinctive characteristics and use several *different types of questions* when testing a given clinical area.

On nursing exams, you will find the questions you probably expect—questions about body mechanics, ambulating and transferring clients, safety and infection control, in addition to questions about pathophysiology, medications, nursing interventions and their rationales, and how to provide pre- and post-operative care.

However, an exam in any clinical area may also include communication questions as well as questions about client teaching, privacy and client rights, and special aspects of providing care to infants and children, pregnant clients and new mothers, elderly clients, clients with sensory impairments, confused

clients, or clients with other special needs. In fact, you may need to apply your knowledge of everything from growth and development to special diets!

You will need special study skills to *prepare* for this kind of an exam, in addition to special test-taking techniques. We will show you how to organize your study and review of your course materials, and we will teach you the skills you need to answer the test questions. The key to answering complex nursing exam questions is *knowing how to identify what they are really about!* In this book, you will learn a quick method for correctly interpreting a test questions. You will also learn special guidelines for answering communication questions and questions that select priorities. And we will focus on *using the nursing process to identify and solve the different types of nursing problems* described in these questions. With good test-taking skills and careful preparation, you can “ace” your nursing exams!

What Will I Get Out Of This Book?

This book will show you how to prepare for class, take good lecture notes, and review nursing content. It will show you how to use the nursing process to become a good problem solver. And it will give you the test-taking techniques you need to succeed!

Successful Problem Solving teaches the specialized three-step method developed by MEDS PUBLISHING for correctly interpreting test questions. We developed this method over more than a decade of grass-roots experience. It has been perfected in our NCLEX review courses and test-taking workshops. Using this method, thousands of nursing students have increased their exam scores and passed the NCLEX on their first try.

As a skilled test-taker, you will not become confused or distracted when answering complex questions. You will know how to use pacing strategy to make the most of the time allowed for an exam. Mastering these skills will also increase your confidence and decrease your anxiety when taking an exam.

Successful Problem Solving unlocks the mysteries of the unique “test-taking logic” of nursing exams. With MEDS PUBLISHING's unique strategies, you will be able to decode even the most difficult questions and decide between possible options.













As you will see, all of the skills and techniques presented in this book respect the nursing profession and use the nursing process. The nursing educators at meds PUBLISHING hope that this book will be interesting as well as helpful for nursing students from all backgrounds. We hope you will enjoy *Successful Problem Solving*—and we wish you much success and fulfillment in your nursing career.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patricia A. Hoefler", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Patricia A. Hoefler, R.N., M.S.N.
President
meds PUBLISHING

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Chapter I



HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Learning Objectives

Successful Problem Solving will teach you the specialized skills you need to increase your scores on nursing course exams. It will also help improve your professional problem-solving skills and become a better and more confident professional nurse!

This book will show you how to:

- ✓ "Study smarter" for your nursing courses.
- ✓ Plan your review of nursing content at exam time.
- ✓ Correctly interpret a multiple choice nursing test question by using a quick 3-step method.
- ✓ Identify what a test question is really asking about.
- ✓ Apply a selection procedure to eliminate "distractors" (incorrect options).
- ✓ Compare possible answers in a logical way.
- ✓ Use test-taking strategies to select the best answer when you are unsure.
- ✓ Apply special guidelines for answering communication questions, questions that select nursing priorities, and questions that focus on the nursing process.
- ✓ Pace yourself on a timed exam.

How This Book Is Organized

You can “study smarter”—starting today!—by taking just a few moments to see how this book is organized.

If you haven't read the **Introduction**, this would be a good time to stop and read it, because it will give you a better idea of *how this book can help you*. Of *special interest* is the Q&A on the NCLEX exam.

Chapter One provides an explanation of *how to study and use the material in this book*.

It is very important to read **Chapter Two, “How to Study for a Nursing Exam.”** This chapter shows you *how to “study smarter”*—starting on the first day of class—as well as *how to review material and prepare for a final exam*. In addition, there are valuable *time management tips* in this chapter to show you how to stay “on top” of your assignments and how to get the most out of your study time. Be sure to note that the study methods in this book use the *nursing process*—and Chapter Two is about special study methods for *nursing students*. So even if you have always been a good student, you will benefit from the special tips for the new challenges you will face in nursing school. **NOTE:** Be sure to read Chapter Two **BEFORE** you read the chapters on the test-taking strategies!

Chapters Three through Seven present the powerful *test-taking strategies* developed in the *meds'* test-taking workshops and Live NCLEX Review courses. **BE SURE TO READ THESE CHAPTERS IN ORDER!**

Chapter Three, “How Do I Avoid ‘Reading Into’ a Test Question?” explains the unique “*test-question logic*” used in nursing exams. Students “read into” a test question by assuming information that is not actually given. This can happen when you misinterpret the question. This chapter will show you a quick three-step method for understanding what each test question is really asking. *This is the most basic and the most important test-taking chapter.*

Chapter Four, “How Do I Choose Between the Two Best Options?” shows you how to use three powerful test-taking strategies. There is only one *best* option in each question. These strategies will help you to identify it!

Chapter Five, “Learning to Answer Communication Questions,” provides some useful insight into what makes these questions tick. To succeed in your nursing courses and on the NCLEX, it is *essential* to be able to demonstrate that you can *communicate effectively with the client*. In this chapter you will learn

some simple guidelines to follow when selecting your answer to a complex communication question.

Chapter Six, “Learning to Answer Questions that Select Priorities,” will show you *how to apply priority-setting guidelines*. “What should the nurse do first?” “What is the priority nursing action at this time?” This chapter is *essential* for your success as a nursing student. Learn these guidelines now, and use them on your course exams. Priority-setting questions don’t have to be so confusing!

Chapter Seven, “Learning to Answer Questions that Focus on the Nursing Process,” shows you *how to use the nursing process as a problem solving and test-taking guideline*. You will also learn to identify key words in a question that are signals to apply the nursing process to select the correct answer. Nursing students tell us that this chapter explains a lot about how nursing exams work!

Chapter Eight, “How to Take a Timed Exam,” shows you how to use a simple *pacing* method. When taking a timed exam, it is important to pace yourself so that you will have enough time to complete the exam and avoid getting stalled or “hung up” on any one question. Pacing strategy has been proven to decrease students’ test-taking stress and anxiety—and increase their scores.

When you have completed the chapters on test-taking strategies, be sure to take the *Successful Problem Solving* “**Final Exam**” in **Chapter Nine**. Use this 50-question practice exam to see for yourself how helpful your new test-taking skills can be. Be sure to time yourself and use your pacing strategy, too.

NOTE: Be sure to try using the *Test Smart* CD-ROM enclosed with this book

Using this CD-ROM, you can select either Open Book mode, to view the rationales instantly—or Assessment mode, with automatic scoring and a computerized Personal Performance Analysis.

Chapter Ten, “Final Exam Answers and Analysis,” provides complete nursing rationales for each correct and incorrect answer to every question in the Final Exam. These complete rationales are hallmarks of **meds PUBLISHING** nursing education materials and are included for maximum learning. Test-taking tips are also provided, so you can see exactly how to use the strategies you have learned.

Practice makes perfect! **Chapter Eleven, “Drill Questions on Fundamental Nursing Concepts,”** provides a good sampling of practice test questions arranged according to basic nursing topic. Use these questions to polish your new test-taking skills and to review for your nursing exams. Complete rationales are included in **Chapter Twelve**.

We hope this brief guided tour of *Successful Problem Solving* has given you a good idea of what you will learn from this book and how you can use it. Whether you are studying this book in a nursing class or on your own, you are already well on your way to becoming a better nursing student and improving your scores on nursing exams.

Chapter 2



HOW TO STUDY FOR A NURSING EXAM

Isn't it true that you begin your preparation for a nursing exam *on the first day of class*? After all, don't you usually review your class notes when you review for the exam?

You are preparing for the exam when you take notes and ask questions in class. You are preparing for the exam when you read assigned chapters in your textbook. With a few tips on how to prepare well for class, taking good notes, and using the right review techniques, *you can save time and be more successful.*

**The good news is that good students
aren't born—they have a method!**

Time Management: Preparing for Class

Students today are very busy. Many students complain that they never have time to read the text ahead of time. It is very important, however, to prepare for class. Even if you have *only a few minutes* to spend, a little preparation will go a long way.

If you will take just a few minutes to look at the chapter before you go to class, you will understand more—and you will save time later. In fact, studies have shown that it can cut your study time *in half*. So be sure to prepare!