
The Pearls for Nursing School Success

Lynn M. Franck, MN, RN

Welcome to this course designed to assist the new nursing school student to tackle the multiple obstacles facing them. Many of these include inappropriate time management skills, failure to organize and lack of critical thinking skills. Today's nursing school students typically experience a multitude of stressors which can further hinder their success. Nursing school success is accomplished by finding, and maintaining, a delicate balance of all of these stressors.

Please follow along with this handout and outline as you view the on-demand video portion of the course.

Objectives

- Identify the pitfalls to successful time and stress management.
- Identify the various types of learning by completing a learning inventory.
- Identify current studying strategies and isolate pitfalls to successful studying.
- Define critical thinking and adapt it to the nursing process.
- Develop an understanding of Maslow's hierarchy of needs.
- Understand the basic components of test question construction.
- Identify the key strategies of successful test taking.

I. Time management

A. Identify ways in which you currently manage your time

B. Identify current responsibilities and roles

1. Nursing school

2. Family

3. Employment

4. Social life

C. How much time should be invested in nursing school?

1. A typical 8 credit hour class equals 4 hours for class time, 4 hours for lab preparation and 12 hours of clinical per week.

$4 \text{ class hours} + 4 \text{ lab hours} + 12 \text{ clinical hours} = 20 \text{ hours/week}$

So 20 hours of direct time on the nursing course – NO studying

2. Studying in nursing school = a 3 hour to 1 hour ratio

$\text{The 8 credit class} \times 3 \text{ hours} = 24 \text{ hours studying per week}$

3. Add it all together

$20 \text{ hours of direct time} + 24 \text{ hours studying} = 44 \text{ hours/week on nursing school (doesn't include clinical paperwork)}$

Nursing school is your **FULL-TIME** job

4. Attempting to work full time and go to nursing school full time is not realistic. Full time employment will negatively impact nursing school success.

II. Stress management

- A. Do some self-reflection. Ask yourself...
 - 1. “What is my stress level?”
 - 2. “Where is my stress coming from?”
 - 3. “Do I really know how to successfully manage my stress?”
- B. Write down all of the current and potential stressors (Ex: Exams, Studying, Clinical, Care plans, Role Strain, Finances, Social, Children, Relationships, etc.). You can’t manage the stress levels until we can identify what is creating the stress.
- C. If you find yourself extremely stressed out every day ... consider... “Is now the BEST time for me to be going through nursing school?” “Could waiting a couple of years improve your chances of nursing school success?”
- D. Additional stressors to consider
 - 1. Problems with spouse/partner and children
 - 2. Non-supportive family and friends
 - 3. Financial issues
 - 4. Health problems
 - 5. Work requirements
 - 6. Unaddressed psychological issues – anxiety, depression, grief, anger, or psychiatric problems
- E. Work and nursing school
 - 1. Nursing school MUST be the priority
 - 2. School can’t work around your job
 - 3. Ask for a break (help) from your employer.....you just might get it
 - 4. Determine if you could work part-time
 - 5. Remember time management

F. Where does the stress come from?

1. Inadequate knowledge – in class, clinicals, and for exams
2. Inadequate support from family and/or peers
3. Real or imagined pressure from instructors
4. Fear of making a mistake or “hurting someone”
5. Actually making mistakes or doing poorly
6. Dealing with pain, death, and dying

G. Managing time and stress

III. How do you learn?

A. Learning styles inventory to identify types of learners

1. Auditory learners
 - a. Learn best with listening
 - b. Ways to enhance learning
 - Read notes or textbooks aloud
 - Create flashcards and quiz aloud
 - Discuss main ideas with a classmate
 - Create mnemonic devices to help remember
 - Take breaks frequently – often easily distracted
 - Have music on softly in background
 - Explain information out loud to a family member or classmate or the mirror
 - Imagine possible test questions as you study
 - Self-quiz aloud
 - Benefits from out loud repetition

-
- Pretend you are the instructor and it is your responsibility to educate others on the topic – helps to improve confidence

2. Visual learners

- a. Learn best by seeing
- b. Ways to enhance learning
 - Use graphs, charts, illustrations or other visual aids
 - Include outlines, concept maps, agendas, handouts for reading and taking notes
 - Re-read notes frequently
 - Use notes and flip charts
 - Eliminate distractors
 - Draw pictures or act out subject matter

3. Kinesthetic or tactile learners

- a. Learn best by being involved in a physical activity
- b. Ways to enhance learning
 - Use activities that keep you actively engaged
 - Play music when appropriate
 - Keep hands busy when studying – koosh ball, play dough
 - Cross-link with other senses – scents, flavors, colors, etc. Gum, candy, smells, or highlighters helps to remember difficult concepts
 - Transfer information learned in class to another medium – notebook, keyboard, tablet, etc.

4. Most students learn best by a combination of all of these types

5. Take some time to identify which learning style is best for you

6. Inventories available on the intranet

B. Explore current study habits

1. Reading

- a. If reading comprehension is problematic and/or you lack time to read all assignments, focus on the graphs, charts, pictures, care plans and specialty boxes
- b. Test questions are often derived from those areas

2. Flashcards

- a. Use caution with flashcards. In nursing school, use them only when you are remembering terminology and/or basic concepts
- b. Flash cards focuses on memorization of terms
- c. Nursing exams are written at a higher thought process

3. Note taking

- a. Read notes and topic outlines prior to class – will promote understanding of the lecture in class

4. Recordings

- a. If available online, listen to the lectures prior to class and take notes.
- b. Be sure you are actively listening during class. No cell phones, Facebook, games, or conversations with friends during class.
- c. Focus on what the professor is explaining.

C. Pitfalls to successful studying

1. Lack of attention, motivation, time and desire
2. Procrastination
3. Cramming for an exam
4. Overconfidence
5. Concentration problems
6. Frustration
7. Too many external responsibilities
8. Perfectionist
 - a. Perfectionists tend to want everything “perfect”. Keeping a immaculately cleaned home or cooking wholesome meals may take time and energy away from active studying.
 - b. Have children complete age appropriate chores and tasks
 - c. Cook several meals at one time
 - d. Study away from home – so you won’t be tempted to do chores instead of study

D. Successful studying habits

1. Based on learning inventory results
2. Be an active learner and use different ways to bring everything together
3. Brainstorming – finding conclusions for a specific problem by gathering information and analyzing it
4. Mind mapping – a diagram used to visually outline information. Often created around a single word or concept with associated ideas, words, and concepts radiating from the central idea. Often known as concept maps
5. Case studies – a powerful tool used by the student to more completely understand difficult concepts. Forces the student to explore and explain complex concepts or diseases.

E. Critical thinking

1. Critical thinking is a process of inquiry in which we try to gain a better understanding of the world
 - a. Essential questioning – the actual asking of the questions.
 - b. Possible answers – begin to form hypotheses by searching and investigating the questions and making correlations with the information that is available.
 - c. Testing hypotheses – Takes all information gained and begins to test the information by looking for plausible answers.
2. Suggestions to improve critical thinking skills
 - a. Summarize information and put into own words
 - b. Elaborate on what was said
 - c. Relate the issue or content to own experiences
 - d. Give examples to clarify or support information
 - e. Make connections between related concepts
 - f. Describe to what extent the point of view on the issue is different or similar to own point of view
 - g. Write down the most pressing question on mind
 - h. Participate in group discussions
3. Components of critical thinking – **“Why”** – the most important question
 - a. Reflection – examination and evaluation of own thoughts and ideas
 - b. Observation
 - c. Inquiry
 - d. Opening mind to new perspectives
 - e. Planning strategically
 - f. Reasoning

-
- g. Making decisions
 - h. Solving problems

IV. Test question components

A. The stem – The case/scenario

1. Sets the stage for the question
2. Gives insight into what is happening in the situation
3. The question asking part of the question
 - a. Must have GREAT critical reading skills
 - b. Identify key words
 - c. Determine what the question is asking
 - d. Determine the most appropriate facts about the patient and scenario
 - e. Good opportunity to re-phrase the question in your mind to make it more understandable
 - f. Eliminate intimidating terms and replace them with ones you understand more clearly

Ex: exudate = pus or drainage
 - g. Eliminate jargon and put question into simpler more personal terms
 - h. Read the stem multiple times before looking at the options – focus on last line of the stem – the question asking part

B. The options

1. The plausible answers
2. Many times all options look very similar
3. Be sure to determine what the question is asking prior to reading the options
4. Read ALL of the options – even if option #1 sounds correct. NCLEX style questions often have multiple correct answers – but only one BEST answer

C. The distractors

1. Options that are plausible and possible, however are not the correct response
2. Often contain only 1 word that makes the response incorrect
3. If you have poor reading skills – you could miss the one word making that response correct
4. Suggestion for improvement – Lip read the test. By lip reading the test we are tricking our brains into thinking we are reading aloud. When we read aloud, we do not skip words. So, lip reading the test will slow down the reading and prevent you from skipping important words.

V. Tips to successful test taking

A. Don't read into the question

1. For example: "This response could be correct if _____".
2. Reading into the question could possibly make every response correct.
3. Makes the exam much more difficult.

-
- B. Look for key words
 - 1. Very powerful strategy
 - 2. Examples: “psychosocial”, “most appropriate”, “prior to surgery”
 - 3. Eliminate responses that don’t correlate with the key words
 - 4. If the question is asking for a psychosocial response, then eliminate the responses associated with physiological safety

 - C. Use guidelines for prioritization
 - 1. Used when 2 or 3 responses are very similar
 - 2. Assists the student in finding the “most correct” response

 - D. Identify True/False responses
 - 1. Use when answering multiple response questions
 - 2. More than 1 response is correct
 - 3. Attack each option as true or false – this simplifies the question and also decreases anxiety associated with testing

 - E. Eliminate similar options
 - 1. If the options appear almost identical, then there is a possibility that neither one of the responses are correct
 - 2. Look for similar words in the stem as in the responses

Example: If the stem of the question speaks about oxygenation, then look through the responses for terms associated with oxygenation

 - F. Watch for absolute words
 - 1. Typically makes the responses incorrect
 - 2. Examples: all, always, every, must, none, never, and only
 - 3. In the nursing world – always, every, and never rarely occur

-
- G. Look for umbrella options
1. The option that may contain components of the other 3 options
 2. For example: If option #1 contains blood pressure, option #2 contains pulse, and option #3 contains blood pressure and pulse – choose this option because it more thoroughly includes the other responses
- H. Applying the nursing process – guides your critical thinking
1. Assessment and data collection
 - a. You must assess the situation before you can provide an intervention for the patient
 - b. Ask yourself – “Do I have enough assessment data to proceed to an intervention, or do I need to gather more assessment data before I can safely intervene?”
 - c. Majority of questions will focus on assessment and intervention
 - d. Example: “Which of the following data...”
 2. Analysis & establishing the nursing problem
 3. Planning the interventions
 4. Implementation of the interventions
 - a. Often seen in nursing questions
 - b. Be sure to prioritize interventions
 5. Evaluation of the outcomes
 - a. Often seen in teaching types of questions
 - b. “Which of the following demonstrates successful outcome...?”
 - c. “What is the desired effect of _____ medication?”

I. Maslow's Hierarchy

1. Physiological needs – Safety – Love & Belonging – Self Esteem – Self Actualization
2. Basic physiological needs must be met before any safety concerns, psychosocial, love and belonging, and self-actualization can be addressed.
 - a. Physiologic includes need for food, shelter, water, sleep, oxygen, and sexual expression.
 - b. For example: The patient's breathing must be addressed before any psychosocial concerns are addressed.
 - c. Do not automatically choose the airway as the best answer. Always correlate it back to the stem of the question. If the question is not concerned about airway, then the airway response is simply a distractor.
 - d. Always ask yourself "Does this choice make sense for the scenario in the stem of the question."
3. Safety concerns must be met before psychosocial concerns, love and belonging, and self-actualization.

J. Patient safety

1. If the patient does not have an urgent physiological need, then focus on safety.
2. "Which answer will best ensure the safety of this patient?"
3. Used when answering questions involving lab values, drug administration or nursing procedures.
 - a. If the question is asking about the side effects of a medication – find the side effect that fits directly with the system that the medication was intended for. Example: Metoprolol is an anti-hypertensive – choose the answer that deals with blood pressure.
 - b. Ask yourself "What if this medication works too well, what would happen?"

-
4. Focus on the answers that directly affect/influence the patient.
 - a. Involve the patient as much as possible
 - b. Involve the needs of the patient before the needs of the family or nurse
 5. When answering these types of questions always ask yourself - "Which of the responses makes me the SAFEST practicing nurse?" By doing so, you begin to accurately prioritize the interventions for the patient.

VI. Levels of question difficulty based on Bloom's Taxonomy

A. Knowledge

1. Recall of data or information
2. Words that identify knowledge level questions
 - Name
 - Locate
 - Tell
 - List
 - Repeat
 - Point to
 - Identify
 - Match
 - Recite
3. This is the basic level of questioning
4. Use of flashcards would be appropriate for these types of questions
5. This level of questioning is rarely used during nursing school examinations
6. Example: "A foley catheter is used to"

B. Comprehension

1. Understanding the meaning
2. State the problem in your own words
3. Words that identify comprehension level questions
 - Define
 - Infer
 - Project
 - Describe
 - Interpret
 - Rewrite
 - Convert
 - Estimate
 - Summarize
 - Translate
 - Rearrange
 - Paraphrase
4. You understand the meaning of the situation and paraphrase it into the situation.
5. Example: “Which of the following diseases are associated with osteopenia and renal calculi?”

You need to understand what osteopenia and renal calculi are before you can determine which disease process is related to it.

C. Application

1. Applies what was learned in the classroom into new situations in the work place.
2. Words that identify application level questions
 - Use
 - Solve
 - Adapt
 - Relate
 - Perform
 - Change
 - Compute
 - Operate
 - Show
 - Demonstrate
3. The questions are situational based. The question paints a picture and the student is required to apply all of the information to identify the correct answer.
4. Higher level of thinking.
5. Majority of NCLEX style questions are at this level.

D. Analysis

1. Separates material or concepts into component parts so that its organizational structure may be understood.
2. Distinguishes between facts and inferences.
3. Words that identify analysis questions
 - Compare
 - Classify
 - Screen
 - Examine
 - Test for
 - Outline
 - Break down
 - Discriminate
 - Diagram
 - Order
 - Categorize
 - Distinguish
4. Forces the student to understand the basics of a disease process and then think deeper into the situation to determine the correct answer.

E. Synthesis

1. Puts parts together to form a whole.
2. Words that identify synthesis questions
 - Create
 - Develop
 - Generate
 - Build
 - Compile
 - Design
 - Combine
 - Compose
 - Rearrange
 - Plan
 - Produce
 - Generalize
3. Rarely used in NCLEX style questions.
4. Example would include essay exams.

F. Evaluation

1. Make judgments about the value of ideas or materials.
2. Words that identify evaluation style questions
 - Judge
 - Reject
 - Criticize
 - Rate
 - Rank
 - Justify
 - Appraise
 - Compare
 - Support
 - Contrast
3. Used when evaluating whether a patient understands discharge teaching or not.

VII. Types of NCLEX style questions

- A. Multiple choice – identify the one most appropriate response out of 4 choices
- B. Matching – match a disease with its symptoms or match a medication with its intended action
- C. Sequencing – place items in order of importance or chronological order
- D. Fill-in-the-Blank – math calculations or word identification questions
- E. Drag and drop – seen during NCLEX exam where students identify a medication and/or diagram and drop it to the proper location on the body
- F. Diagram identification – seen during NCLEX exams – students identify anatomical locations on a diagram. Example: where an aortic heart murmur would be heard or cardiac rhythm strip interpretation
- G. Multiple response – questions where more than one choice is correct and the student is required to identify all of the correct responses
 - 1. As a general rule for multiple response questions – always choose more than one response and never choose them all. The reason to not choose them all is that having an incorrect response available increases the complexity of the test question.
 - 2. Remember to attack these responses as True/False

VIII. Answering prioritization questions

- A. Deciding which needs or problems require immediate action and which ones could be delayed until a later time because they are not as urgent.
- B. 4 Ps: Purpose – Picture – Plan – Part
- C. Order of care delivery for a caseload of patient based on current conditions.
- D. Plan for care delivery for a caseload of patients based on verbal and written reports and documentation.
- E. Care based on assessment/data collection of assigned patients' current condition.
- F. Recognize changes in in patient's status and promptly notify other members of the health care team.

-
- G. Evaluate patient outcome achievement and revise plan of care as needed.
 - H. The nurse continuously sets and resets priorities in order to meet the needs of multiple patients and to maintain patient safety.
 - I. The nurse must be able to predict a possible problem if another option is chosen first.
 - J. The nurse must be able to consider the potential future events if the tasks are not completed, the time it would take to accomplish it, and the relationship of the tasks and outcomes.

IX. Empowerment

- A. Be mentally and emotionally prepared to take your exams
- B. Challenge your nursing thoughts
- C. Use controlled breathing
- D. Desensitize yourself from fear
- E. Perform muscle relaxation
- F. Exercise
- G. Get plenty of rest
- H. Have confidence
- I. Make an educated guess

Enjoy the journey through nursing school.....

Manage your obstacles!!

Realize you **CAN** be **SUCCESSFUL** with these tips and strategies!!!

Copyright information

All rights to this program are reserved by the author and Brainynurses.com by Educational Concepts, LLC. No part of this program may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system without written permission.

In addition, this program format and content may not be duplicated or used by any individual or group.

Copyright © 2014 by Brainynurses.com by Educational Concepts, LLC

Any inquiries regarding the contents of this program or continuing education needs should be directed to:

P.O. Box 55
Coldwater, OH 45828
Phone: 419-305-3043
E-mail: info@edconcepts.net
Web site: www.brainynurses.com