

Joyce UNIVERSITY OF NURSING

& HEALTH SCIENCES

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Introduction

Taking the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX-RN) can be an intimidating prospect for many nursing students. We get it. We've been there, and we've watched thousands of students worry about it—from their very first day in nursing school until they take the exam and pass.

The thing is, the NCLEX-RN doesn't have to be scary. Put simply, the exam was designed by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing to ensure that students had gained the right knowledge to become successful, working RNs. So, as long as you're graduating from a fully accredited nursing school like Joyce, you most likely already have the knowledge you need to succeed. Now, you just have to put it to good use to pass your exam. Luckily, this complimentary eBook is designed to help you do just that.

At Joyce College of Healthcare, helping nursing students successfully pass the NCLEX is one of our top priorities. That's why we offer a comprehensive NCLEX-RN review course to prepare our students for the exam, including what areas of study they should review, what formatting to expect, and how to approach each question strategically. It's also why, in any given year, over 90% of Joyce's nursing students pass their exam on the first try.

Our years of experience with helping our students pass the NCLEX have equipped us with an arsenal of proven strategies and now, we're passing our best study tips on to you. Designed to help you pass the exam with flying colors, this helpful eBook covers the different types of NCLEX questions, the most common test language that trips students up, useful strategies for choosing the right answer to specific types of questions, and lots more. Just like with our own nursing students, our ultimate goal is to help you tackle the NCLEX confidently and effectively.



As one of the nation's top nursing schools, Joyce is committed to preparing our students for successful, long-lasting careers in healthcare. In everything we do, we strive to produce nursing graduates that are highly-skilled and prepared—for day one on the job and beyond. This approach has earned us a reputation for excellence with both our students and the country's top healthcare employers—and we're proud to have helped thousands of nursing students pass the NCLEX and launch exciting new careers.

There are various strategies that everyone should learn before tackling NCLEX questions. We'll go over the different types in the next two chapters, but if you want to pass the NCLEX, you'll need to have the right strategy for each question. These five tips are a great place to start:

1. Aim for 60 seconds.

When you take NCLEX practice exams, try to spend about one minute on each question. Obviously, you may be able to answer some questions more quickly than that, but understand that it will take more time to answer others, so 60 seconds is a good target to shoot for. Also, if it helps alleviate some pressure, remember that the NCLEX is set up so that you have a little more than one minute per question: 1.3 minutes to be exact!

2. Stop after 2 minutes.

Similarly, you should avoid taking more than two minutes per question. If you've sped through a series of questions in under a minute, you will have accumulated enough extra time for harder questions, but even then, you should still plan on setting a limit. Two minutes is a long time, so if you can't figure out the answer by then, you likely don't know the answer and strategically, you just need to move on.



3. Avoid changing answers.

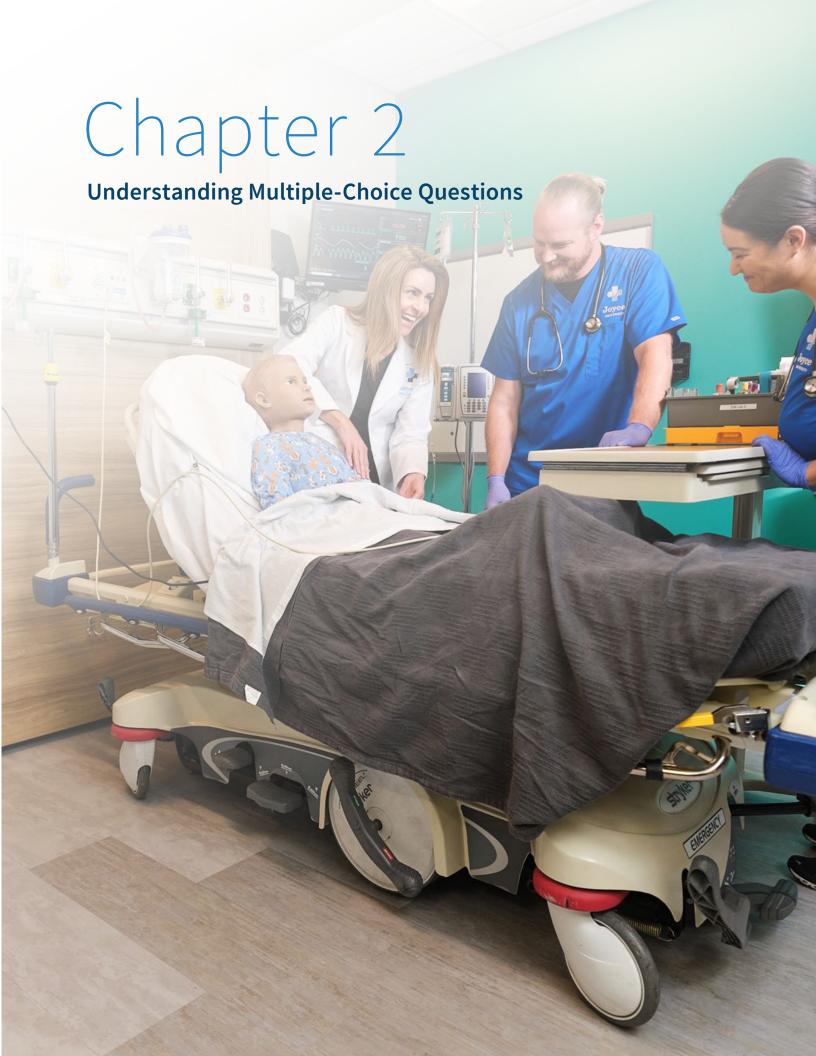
Sometimes, with a jolt of inspiration, you'll remember the exact calculation or word you need to answer a question that's stumped you. If so, it's great to change the answer that you first put down as a guess. If you don't feel that spark of certainty, do not change a previous answer. You're likely going to second-guess yourself on questions where you hesitate, and will often switch to the wrong answer inadvertently.

4. Remember that the test is random.

The answer to each question is randomized by the computer, so your answer option strategy should be to abandon strategizing. For example, don't always choose option 3. Similarly, don't avoid option 3 just because you chose it for the past two questions. Remember that the NCLEX is random, so stay focused on the options and choosing the correct one—and don't fixate on their order.

5. Move forward, don't look back.

When analyzing a question, eliminate all of the options you can, choose the best answer, and then, move on—emotionally and strategically! Even if you feel evenly split between two options, it's wiser to just keep going through the exam, rather than sitting and worrying over a single question, especially if it's taking you more than two minutes. You can't go back and change your answer later, so forget about the question once you move past it. Worrying and obsessing over a question that you didn't know the answer to will only distract your focus from the rest of the exam.



OK, those were some general test-taking strategies, but what about the format of NCLEX questions?

If you've heard anything about the National Council Licensure Examination, you probably know that the majority of the questions will be in a multiple-choice format. Others are considered Alternate Item Format questions, which we'll cover in the next chapter.

1. Expect these multiple-choice themes.

You're going to see two different kinds of multiple-choice questions:

1) priority (i.e. what should the nurse do first?), and 2) positive (true) and negative (false) questions. We'll talk about priority questions later, but for now, keep in mind that there will often be more than one "right" answer. However, there's always a correct action to choose first.

2. Narrow down the positive statements.

Positive questions will present four statements, and only one of them will be the correct answer. All of the other answers are incorrect. These might be called "classic" multiple-choice questions, and they're presented in a way that most of us are more comfortable with. For these questions, cross out any answers that are obviously wrong to narrow down your options. By ignoring what's obviously incorrect, you'll be able to concentrate more on choosing the one correct answer.







3. Think differently for negative questions.

"A negative event query uses strategic words that ask you to select an option that is an incorrect item or statement; for example, the event query may read, "Which statement by the client indicates a need for further teaching about the side effects of the prescribed medication?" These types of questions are much harder for many people because in test-mode, our minds want to automatically choose a correct statement as soon as we see it. This means that you'll need to look vigilantly for signs that a question is negative, instead of positive. When you see it, you'll have to adopt the paradoxical mindset that the "correct" answer is the wrong one.

4. Don't expect "except."

The old NCLEX exam used the word "except" when asking a question. For example, "all of the following are true, except which option:"). That one little word made things clear, and its absence has made the exam trickier. Instead of "except," you should now expect to see questions phrased closer to "which option indicates that the client needs further instruction?"

In the newer version of the exam, this language equates to the same thing as using the word "except" (meaning that all of the options are correct statements except for one). In this case and others like it, you should look for the option that is an incorrect statement, which makes it the correct answer.

Confusing? It can be, which is why it's so important to take your time and really read the question.

Paying close attention and truly comprehending what's asked of you will keep you from answering too hastily. If you do that, you're going to look for something that's a correct statement — which would, in this case and in all negative questions, be the wrong answer.



While you'll mostly see the multiple-choice format on the NCLEX, you'll also need to prepare for the rest, which are considered alternate item format questions.

Select All That Apply (also called Multiple-Response)	
☐ Ordered Response	
☐ Fill-in-the-Blank	
☐ Hot Spot	
☐ Exhibit/Chart	
☐ Graphic Options	
□ Audio	

Now, here's what all of those terms mean:

1. Select All That Apply: Think "true or false."

The Select-All questions are pretty self-explanatory, including more than one answer in the same question and usually, with five possible options. When you read through them, it's best to consider each answer as either true or false, with the true options being the correct answers.

Here's the tricky thing—with these types of questions, you'll get all or no points. No partial credit is given if you choose only some of the correct answers. That may seem daunting and even frustrating, so remember to take your time. Make sure to review several selectall questions as you study, so that you're familiar with and prepared for this format. In our experience, many students find these to be the most difficult questions on the exam.

2. Ordered Response: Order everything.

Ordered Response questions require you to place the answer options in the correct order, using the drag-and-drop method with your computer mouse. While there's nothing wrong listed in this question type, remember that there is only one correct order from start to finish. Whatever the scenario of the question, you'll use all of the answer options and rank them in the correct order as directed.

3. Fill-in-the-Blank: Study up on your calculations.

The Fill-in-the-Blank format may seem intimidating at first, as you won't have any answer in front of you. However, with the right studying, you'll know exactly how to find it. These questions are often used for calculations of medication dosage, IV drip rates, intake and output, and due dates for pregnant women (using the first day of their last menstrual period as a guide). So, as long as you study and know how to do these and similar calculations, you should be able to handle this category on the exam.

4. Hot Spots: Pay attention to specific areas.

Hot Spot questions are often used with pictures of a body part. You'll be asked to use the mouse to click on the specific area indicated in the question's scenario. For example, you may be asked the best place to auscultate the apical pulse. You would then click on the correct place on the picture of the chest.

5. Exhibit/Chart: Remember how to use (and interpret) bedside charts.

Exhibit/Chart questions include tabs that when clicked on with the mouse, will provide more information about the client—similar to a bedside chart. There may be several tabs to open to reveal the information needed to answer the question. You'll use this information to guide you toward the correct answer.

6. Graphic Options: Think in pictures, not words.

Instead of using words as answer options, these types of questions utilize graphics (e.g. pictures, diagrams, heart rhythm tracings, etc.). For example, you may be asked to identify the heart rhythm that requires the most rapid action by the nurse. You would then choose from four different illustrations of rhythms. Alternatively, you may be told that your laboring client is having back pain and would then need to choose a picture of the best position to relieve this client's pain.

7. Audio: Listen closely for answer clues.

Audio questions will require the use of headphones to listen to an audio clip of information. This may include heart sounds, lung sounds, or even client speech patterns. You'll then be asked to interpret what you hear or make a decision for care based on what you hear. Take your time and listen closely. You will be allowed to replay the audio if needed.







By now, you've learned more about the kinds of questions to expect on your exam and gained some general strategies for tackling them—but what about how to analyze them?

Question analysis on the NCLEX can be just as important as knowing what to expect, so be sure to follow these eight steps to set yourself up for success.

1. Read the whole question.

Although we've said this before, it's definitely worth repeating. When taking the NCLEX, it's absolutely crucial that you read the entire question before looking at the answers. In our experience, a huge portion of incorrect responses aren't due to a lack of knowledge. Instead, they're caused by misunderstanding the question, as a result of failing to read it all the way through. For this reason, it's important to take your time and not rush through reading the question. Remember: what you initially think the question is asking may not be what the question is actually asking.

2. Ask yourself first.

Test yourself while you're taking the exam. Before moving on to the answer options, try to reword or rephrase the question. Being able to restate the question in your own terms will ensure that you know you understand what the question is really asking.

3. Think about the types of questions.

Remember, different NCLEX questions are asking different things. One of the quickest ways to ensure that you know what a question is asking is to determine if it's priority, positive, or negative.

4. Focus on each possible answer.

Once you're sure that you know what the question is asking, look at the answer choices and carefully read and consider each option. Scrutinizing every one of them in light of the question before going on to the next answer choice will keep you from choosing one too quickly.

5. Decide if the answers are wrong, right, and possible.

As you're reading through the answers, decide whether they're right, wrong, or possibly right. If one of them is obviously incorrect, eliminate it immediately and don't return to consider it. If it's a possible answer, then keep it in mind as you read the other options. Remember that with negative questions, the right answer will be the false one—which is why it's so important to ensure that you know the type of question before answering it.

6. Rank your correct and possible options.

After scrutinizing the answer options, you'll probably be left with a few that either seem right or at the very least, possibly right. If one answer seems better than another, be sure to put that answer at the top of your choices.









7. Reread the question after choosing "finalists."

Try to narrow the answer options down to two. Then, go back and reread the question with those two possible answers in mind. Look for clues in the question to help you determine which option is the better of the two.

8. Make a decision and don't look back.

Finally, make your selection, remember the two-minute rule, and move on! Don't stay on the question too long or you'll allow time to second-guess yourself. Since the exam is timed, you can't deliberate over a question forever—but believe it not, that's actually a good thing. In our experience, second-guessing yourself tends to be more detrimental than helpful. More often than not, if you panic and change your answer, you will move from a correct answer to an incorrect one.



Since priority questions appear so often in the multiple-choice format on the NCLEX, it's crucial that you understand them. This question type can be very different from positive and negative questions, so we've assembled some tips to help clear things up.

1. Remember, they might all be "right."

NCLEX priority-type questions often begin with something like "Which action should the nurse take first?" or "What is the priority nursing action?" The operative words here are first and priority. Questions like these can be tricky, as often, all of the answers listed are correct actions. In the scenario, you may have to perform all of the actions, but these questions test your knowledge about taking the first step. Even if they all look like proper clinical actions, they may be, but one of these actions will take priority over the others.

2. Consider these categories.

As you're studying the answer options, the first thing you should do is consider them in light of three categories: client safety, the nursing process, and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. You can often use these to correctly choose which action to take first, which makes your deliberations a lot less complicated.

3. Address the physiological first.

In a given scenario, the client may be visibly distraught, and one of your answer options will probably involve calming them down. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the client's physiological needs come before psychosocial needs. This is where the ABCs (airway, breathing, circulation) come into play.

4. The answer isn't always "airway."

The hierarchy of needs will be extremely valuable throughout the NCLEX, especially with priority questions. However, it can also lead you astray. So, when using the ABC framework, you should know that airway is not always the correct answer—particularly if the question does not give you an airway problem. If airway and breathing are not the problem, then look to circulation and see if that applies.

5. Care should begin with the client.

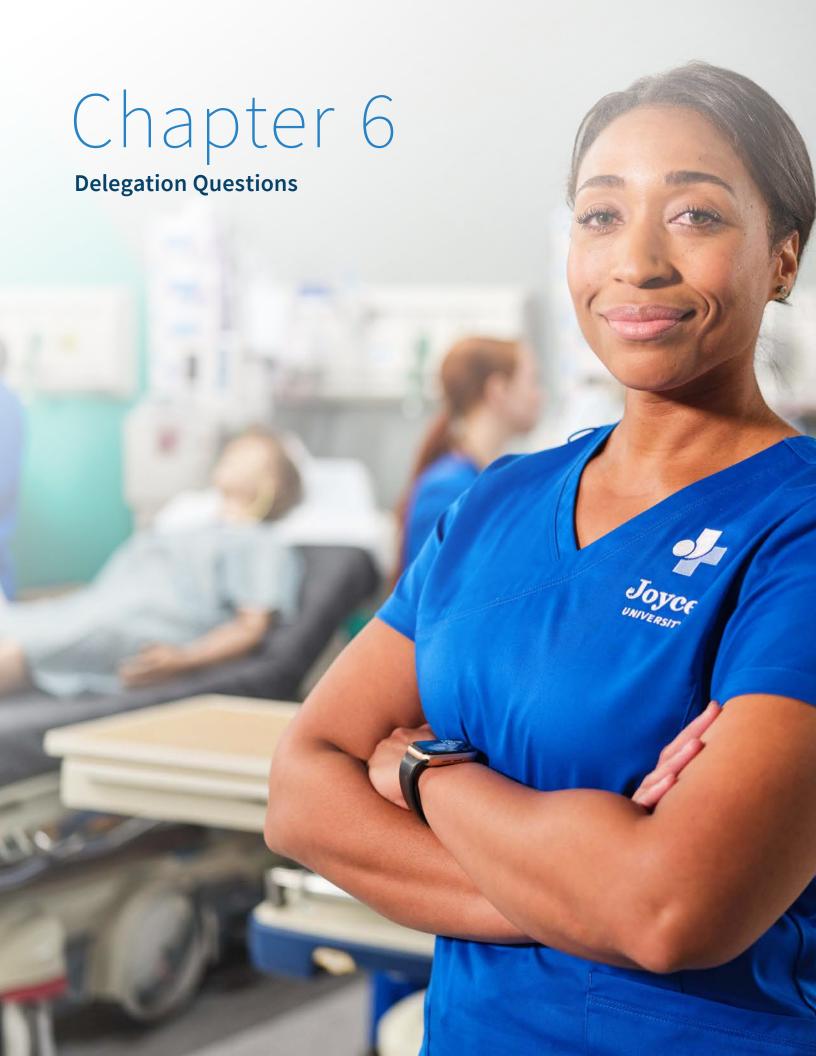
Client safety is of utmost importance when planning and implementing nursing care. This includes prevention of errors and accidents, standard precautions, and environmental safety. When analyzing NCLEX questions, think about first meeting the client's basic needs (e.g. oxygen, nutrition, elimination, etc.) and then, decide which option will benefit the client the most.

6. Assess first, unless...

When using the nursing process to answer questions, remember that the first step is assessment. Assessing the client and situation must be done first, in order to plan and implement care. However, if in the question you receive data that indicates that an assessment has already been done, it's time to act! Read the stem of the question carefully to understand what is being asked. Is the question focusing on implementation or evaluation? Knowing this will help guide you to the correct answer.







As every NCLEX is a little different and new questions are appearing all the time, there's no guarantee that any one topic will appear. Luckily, you can often make educated guesses as to what will be covered, like questions related to delegation.

As delegation is a critical component of nursing, there is a high likelihood that this topic will appear on your NCLEX-RN exam. More specifically, it's common for the exam to ask what an RN can delegate to another RN, to an LPN (Licensed Practical Nurse, also known as an LVN in some states), or to UAPs (Unlicensed Assistive Personnel, like CNAs or nurse's aides). To help you master this exam category, here are some general things to remember:

1. Never step out of line.

Any actions that you delegate to the UAP must be defined, monitored, and directed by an RN. Even so, you can never assign nursing judgments or steps in the nursing process to anyone except for an RN. Keeping this rule at the front of your mind can help you eliminate incorrect choices and guide you towards skillfully picking the right answers on your NCLEX exam.

2. Base everything on the nursing process.

In everything you do and delegate, you must implement the nursing process. Remember that "Assessment, Diagnosis, Outcomes/Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation" should always guide your actions, especially when deciding if delegation is appropriate. You must always make judgments for client care based on the nursing process.

3. Only let nurses teach.

If the scenario involves client teaching, you can cross UAPs off of your potential delegation list. Client teaching must be performed by the RN and cannot be delegated to anyone except for another RN. An LPN may reinforce teaching, but the RN must begin the teaching and evaluate the results of the teaching plan.

4. Begin and end treatment with nurses.

Though an UAP can provide valuable support during the middle of various treatments, everything begins and ends with registered nurses. Both admission assessment and discharge teaching must be performed by an RN.

5. Consider specificity and stability.

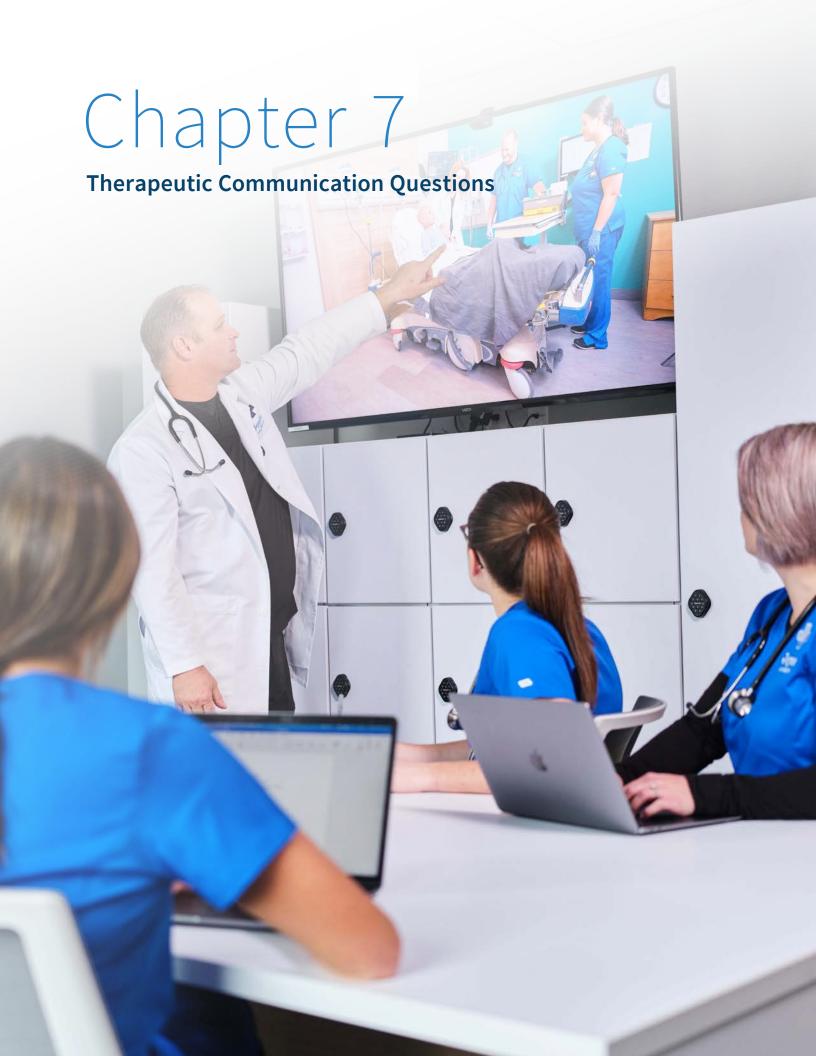
Before you consider delegation as an option, consider the specificity of the task and the stability of your client. The RN can delegate tasks that have specific guidelines that are used in the care of stable clients.

6. Remember this list.

Tasks that can be delegated to UAPs include: bathing, providing personal hygiene, collecting urine samples, assisting with ambulation, taking vital signs, and taking capillary blood sugar. UAPs can also document data that they specifically gathered, including intake and output, vital signs, and blood sugars.

7. Mind RN keywords.

When you see words like evaluate, assess, determine, teach, instruct, and decide, these are all things that only a registered nurse can do.



Wherever you are at in nursing school, you've already learned that part of being a great nurse is being a great communicator. How you speak and listen to patients is hugely important to successful treatment—something that even the writers of NCLEX questions understand.

Like with delegation, there's a good chance that you'll come across NCLEX questions that ask you to choose the "best response" and most "therapeutic response." These may be mental health questions, but they're just as likely to be any type of client situation, especially those dealing with a client experiencing stress and anxiety. These types of questions are less intuitive than you may think, so you'll need to prepare for exam questions about therapeutic communication.

1. Focus on the client.

During the NCLEX review course that we provide to our own students, this little phrase might be the one that's repeated most often. Focusing on the client is crucial for many situations, including therapeutic communication. When choosing the best and most therapeutic response, look for the answer that focuses on the client's concerns. Avoid telling the client that you "know how they feel." This takes the focus away from the client and puts it on the nurse.

2. Seek more information.

Sometimes the best and most therapeutic response is asking for more information. That's because when clients are distressed, they may not be able to immediately articulate their needs. Look for responses that encourage the client to "tell more" about what they are feeling. This kind of response will better inform you as the nurse, while validating the client's concerns and showing them that you care. Often, these are open- ended statements by the nurse, and may be a mere restatement of the client's original words.

3. Always validate the client.

It's common for nurses to feel frustrated and exasperated by clients, especially if they seem to overreact about a situation. Vocalizing that, even tactfully, is never the best response. Avoid choosing the options that invalidate the client's concerns, such as "don't worry" and "everything is going to be all right." Even if these sound reassuring to your ears, what they're really doing is dismissing the client's fears and worries with a short, careless phrase.

4. Listen, don't tell.

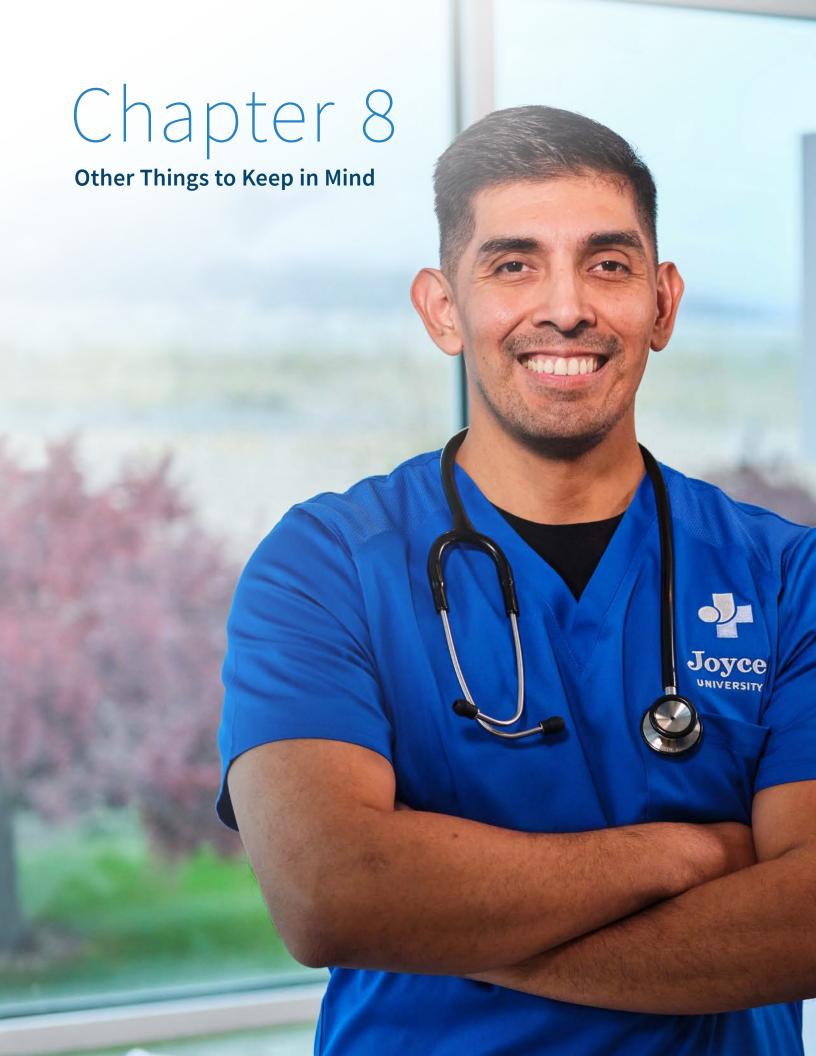
You'll show much more respect for the client's beliefs and viewpoints by not telling them what they should and should not do. It's likely that you'll have your own opinions or advice on the situation, but those will never be the best responses in mental health or high stress scenarios. A big part of therapeutic communication is therapeutic listening, so always opt for this option over dictating your ideas and opinions.

5. Ask open-ended questions.

Along the same vein of seeking more information, try to avoid closed-ended statements where the client could answer the guestion in one or two words. These tend to be questions that begin with "Do you ..." or "Does this ..." which a client can answer with a yes or no. Instead, look for options that encourage clients to express their feelings.

6. Avoid aggressive language.

Obviously, you'll never think a combative response is the best or most therapeutic, but you'll also need to be wary of questions that could trigger a defensive reaction. If you ask questions beginning with "why" or "what were you thinking," you present a verbal presumption that the client has done something wrong. Although they might have, this language never encourages clients to further express themselves. Instead, it automatically puts the client on the defense, which is never good therapeutic communication.



While we can't cover every possible topic of NCLEX questions in one eBook, we can point you toward a few more things to expect, as well as some skills to brush up on. The NCLEX review course that we give to our students covers each of these in greater depth, but for your studying purposes, keep these general tips in mind.

1. When you're stumped, look for difference.

As much as you study, you're still likely to come across a few questions that you know (or remember) nothing about. Sometimes, the right answer will just come to you. If that doesn't happen, try to find a commonality between the answers so that you can at least identify a theme. If two or more answers are alike, choose the option that is different.

2. Assume that you have resources and textbook scenarios.

When you read NCLEX questions, always assume that the theoretical hospital has unlimited staff, equipment, and resources. Also, remember that the NCLEX is a national, standardized exam. As you've learned from clinical rotations, every situation has many variables, and every patient can react and behave differently. But the exam doesn't take those what-if scenarios into consideration, which means that you shouldn't either. Instead, you must assume that the client will respond exactly as the textbook indicates, and you should base your answers around that assumption.

3. Study the positions.

Nurses constantly have to position patients, which is why related questions appear so frequently on the NCLEX. Each patient position is done for a very specific reason and you should study all of them. When presented with these types of questions, you need to remember clearly what each position accomplishes, so that you know what you're trying to promote or prevent with the positioning.

4. Focus on the end.

The last line of the question is often the most important, so turn your focus there and reread it if necessary. This is the stem of the question and will state what the question is asking, as well as what you should be looking for in the answer. You'll need to understand it fully to answer correctly.

5. Remember your math and lab values.

After you graduate and begin working as a professional nurse, you'll take a lot of vitals and order a lot of lab tests. You'll have to know normal lab values for common lab tests, as the results will affect your delivery of nursing care. The NCLEX writers know that, so assume that they'll test your knowledge of normal lab values.

Also, because so much of the NCLEX tests practical knowledge, test writers expect that you'll know how to perform mathematical computations (e.g. calculation of IV rates and drip factors, medication dosages based on the order and labeled dosage, conversion of units of measurement, etc.).

6. Pay attention to ages.

If you've experienced pediatric settings, you know that children require certain approaches and procedures, which can throw you off as you're completing the NCLEX. With each question, consider every client to be an adult, unless otherwise directed. On a similar note, if the question mentions a client's specific age, there is a reason for doing so. Look for the answer that goes along with something unique to the age of the client. As you answer the question, be thinking about why knowing the age is important, as that can direct you toward the best answer.

7. Practice, practice, practice exams.

Practice exams aren't just good for introducing you to more content and giving you a better idea of what you should be studying. They'll also familiarize you with the NCLEX itself, which can make the actual exam much less daunting. So, in the months leading up to your exam date, find a quiet place several times a week and take as many practice tests as you can. The more questions that you can review, the more prepared you will be for the real thing.





ARE YOU READY FOR THE NCLEX YET?

It's OK if you're not, and it's understandable if you're still feeling nervous.

Passing the NCLEX is your last hurdle before becoming a registered nurse—and it's a big step! For that reason, it's totally normal for every nursing student to feel at least some fear about taking the NCLEX. Just remember that by reading this eBook, you've taken an important first step in preparing for your exam. Even better, you are now equipped with some of the proven test-taking strategies that have helped over 90% of Joyce's nursing students pass the NCLEX-RN successfully the first time.

Although the tips we've shared are just a small portion of the NCLEX review that we provide to Joyce students, we hope they steer your exam prep in the right direction. As you continue through nursing school and take NCLEX practice exams, you'll no doubt become even more prepared for exam day. Above all, don't get discouraged! Even if you've studied for the exam for a thousand hours, it's still possible that you'll come across a question that stumps you. If that happens, trust that you have the knowledge necessary to become a nurse—and remember that by taking the NCLEX strategically, you can use that knowledge to pass the test successfully. Hopefully, the strategies that we've shared here will get you well on your way.

MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR NURSING CAREER.

Once you've completed your nursing program and passed the NCLEX, you may want to consider enrolling in a RN-BSN degree completion or BSN-MSN degree program to help maximize your career potential. As many of today's top healthcare employers look more favorably on nurses with BSN and MSN degrees, it can be your ticket to staying competitive in the field— greatly improving your job prospects, earning potential, and opportunities for leadership positions. BSN and MSN degrees are also a must if you wish to work in the highest paying nursing specialties (like nurse practitioner or nurse anesthetist), or continue your education in a Doctoral level program.

At Joyce, we offer a fully accredited RN-BSN degree completion program and a BSN-MSN degree program—designed specifically for working nurses. Following the same standards for excellence that have made us one of the nation's top nursing schools, our affordable and online programs deliver the flexibility you need to complete your RN-BSN degree or your BSN-MSN degree, while continuing to work as a registered nurse. With our RN-BSN program all courses are completed online on your own schedule, you can choose the pace that's right for you—completing the program in just over 1 year or take up to 3 years. Our BSN-MSN program can be completed in as few as 3 semesters or 1 year. We even offer financial aid options for those who qualify.

We're proud to prepare nurses that are skillful, sought after, and ready to succeed—from the moment they graduate, to their first day at work and long after. Find out how Joyce can help you achieve your nursing career goals with our flexible, fully accredited RN-BSN and BSN-MSN programs.

Learn more about our post-licensure nursing programs: https://www.Joyce.edu