

## “Drexel’s NCLEX EXCEL” Test taking strategies:

### Multiple Choice

The question contains several parts:

- **The case (scenario)** – the description of the patient and what is happening to him/her.
- **The stem** – the part of the question that asks the question. Watch for negative modifier (*ie. Which is least helpful?*).
- **The correct response**
- **Distracters** – incorrect choices. Do not look for a pattern.

### Key Words

The most important skill for the test taker is the ability to read the question carefully and determine the key elements in each question. Each question has key words. Key words relate to the patient; to the problem; and to specific aspects of the problem. (*Best, essential, highest, immediate, least likely, most, most appropriate, vital*)

- **Example:** Two hours after a liver biopsy, the nurse finds the patient lying on the left side. What is the best nursing action at this time?
  1. Check for bleeding.
  2. Turn the patient onto the right side.

Option 2 is correct because it incorporates option 1. You can check for bleeding as you turn the patient to the right side (location of the liver) putting pressure on the site to prevent bleeding.

### Patient – Focus on the patient

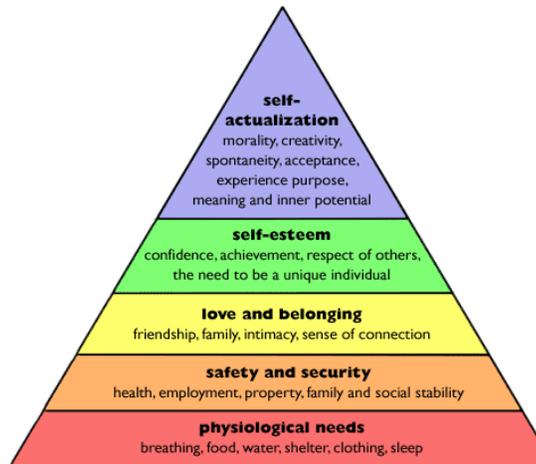
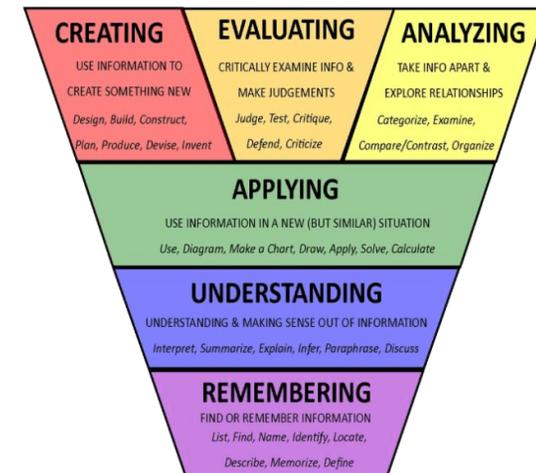
Factors such as age, sex, and marital status may be relevant. When a child’s age is given, it is often relevant to the answer. Vital signs vary with age. Preoperative teaching methods vary with age. Appropriate toys and diversional activities vary with age. Always pay special attention to the age of a patient. Who is the focus of the question? The patient may be the identified sick person, or it might be a relative of the identified sick person, or even a staff member.

### Problem/Behavior

The problem may be a disease, a symptom or a behavior.

### Details of the Problem

- Is the question asking for nursing actions or patient symptoms or family response?
- Does the question ask about a specific aspect of nursing care assessment, planning, implementation, evaluation?
- Does the question ask details relevant to a specific symptom or behavior the patient exhibits?



## Student Retention

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### COMMANDMENTS OF TEST TAKING:

- I. Reword the question in two or three words...What is the question truly asking?
- II. Don't read into the Question: Avoid asking "What if?"
- III. Look for strategic words: *immediate, initial, first, priority, most important*
- IV. Focus on the SUBJECT of the question
- V. Use the process of elimination
- VI. Strategies for prioritizing: ABCs, Maslow's Hierarchy, & the Nursing Process
- VII. Recognize expected outcomes
- VIII. Eliminate comparable or alike options
- IX. Eliminate options with close-ended words
- X. Look for the Umbrella Option

*"I can do all things through Christ  
which strengtheneth me."  
Philippians 4:13*

- Is there additional information about the patient or the problem that is important?
- Visualize the condition, behavior, situation, & options to help you choose the best answer.
- In a standard four-answer multiple-choice question if you can systematically eliminate false answers, you can reduce the four-answer question to a two-answer one.
- Look for **negative modifiers** such as: least, contraindicated, & avoid. In this type of question, a correct answer may reflect something that is false.

#### **Priority Setting**

- “What action takes priority?”
- “What should the nurse do first?”
- “What should the nurse do initially?”
- “What is essential for the nurse to do?”

**Physiologic needs are first**, followed by safety needs, then love and belonging, self-esteem and self-actualization.

The first step of the nursing process is assessment! When the stem of a question asks for the initial nursing action always look to see if there is a relevant assessment answer. The nurse will take an action only when there is enough data to act. Call the physician only when there is not a nursing action that should be taken first. The stem of the question may ask for a nursing action and the correct answer may be to assess.

- **Example:** What is **most important** for the nurse to ask a patient **immediately after** a paracentesis?
  1. “Are you in pain?”
  2. “Do you feel dizzy?”
  3. “Does your underwear fit better around the belt line?”
  4. “Do you need to urinate?”

Options 1, 3, 4, are expected outcomes. Option 2 is the correct answer which is a complication.

- **Example:** What is the best action for the nurse to take when a mother at the clinic reports that her child who has diabetes is hyperglycemic in the morning (215 mg/dL), although the child has been well controlled with NPH and regular insulin before breakfast and dinner?
  1. Suggest that the mother give the bedtime snack earlier.
  2. Suggest that the insulin be given later in the evening.
  3. Suggest that they continue with the same regimen.
  4. Check the blood sugar now, and suggest that the mother check it during the night.

The correct answer is option 4, check is an **assessment response**.

When the stem of the question asks what is essential for the nurse to do, **think safety**. Remember many of the test questions are safety questions.

- **Example:** What is the priority nursing care for a patient after electroconvulsive shock therapy?
  1. Reorient to time and place.
  2. Put the side rails up.
  3. Explain that memory loss is an expected outcome.
  4. Give the patient 400mg acetaminophen

Option 2 is best. Remember Maslow’s Hierarchy. Physiological needs before psychosocial needs.

#### **What is the Time Frame?**

Whenever a specific time frame is indicated in a question it is **very important**. Pay attention to it. Time-related words may include **early** or **late** in relation to systems, **pre-operative** or **post-operative**, care on the day of surgery or later post-operative care.

#### **Repeated Words**

Words from the question are repeated in the answer. Sometimes the same word or a synonym will be in both the question and the correct option.

#### **Age appropriateness – When caring for a toddler.**

#### **Opposites**

When two answers are opposite such as high blood pressure and low blood pressure or increase the drip rate and stop the IV, or turn on the right side and turn on the left side, the answer may be one of the two.

#### **Same Answer**

If two or three answers say the same thing in different words **none** can be the correct. If the answers are too alike, then neither one is correct.

#### **Odd Answer Wins**

The answer that is different from the others may be the correct answer.

- **Example:** During which activity would it be important to protect the patient who is on phenothiazines from the side effects of this drug?
  1. Sunday church services.
  2. A twilight concert.
  3. A midday movie in the theater.
  4. A luncheon picnic on the hospital grounds.

Options 1, 2, 3 all involve indoor activities. Option 4 involves outdoor exposure during the height of the sun’s rays. Clients/patients need to be protected against photosensitivity and burns when on phenothiazines.

- **Example:** The primary objective in ileostomy teaching with a patient during the early postoperative period is to:
  1. Facilitate maintenance of intake and output records.
  2. Control unpleasant odors.
  3. Prevent skin excoriation around the stoma.
  4. Reduce the risk of postoperative wound infection.

Option 3 is correct. Preventing in turn may prevent contamination of the abdominal incision.

#### **Umbrella Answer “umbrella effect”**

One answer includes the others. There may be more than one correct answer. One answer is better than all the others because it incorporates the other options.

- **Example:** A main nursing function in group therapy is to:
  1. Help patients give and receive feedback in the group.
  2. Encourage patients to bring up their concerns.
  3. Facilitate group interaction among the members.
  4. Remind patients to address their comments to the group.

Option 3 is the best choice because all the other choices fall under it.

#### **Absolutes**

Answers containing universal or absolute words are apt to be incorrect. Little in life or nursing is always correct or incorrect. Answers stated in absolute terms should be looked at with great caution.

#### **“Deadly”**

All, nothing, only, never, every, always, any, none, total, each, & nobody.

#### **“Dangerous”**

Main, major, rarely, chief, shall, impossible, avoid, inevitable, too, primarily, & eliminate.

#### **“Safe”**

Usually, may, should, nearly, seldom, almost, sometimes, few, maybe, often, frequently, partial, essentially, could, normally, probably, some, generally, commonly, potentially, might, occasionally, & average.

**Non-therapeutic** – Eliminate answers that deny feelings, offers false reassurances, changing the subject, or makes patient feel unworthy.

- Focus on feelings (therapeutic)
- Recognize what is normal or an expected outcome