

# NCLEX-RN® Tip Sheet for Student Nurses

Adapted from National Council of State Boards of Nursing. (2023). 2023 NCLEX-RN® test plan.

[https://nclex.com/files/2023\\_RN\\_Test%20Plan\\_English\\_FINAL.pdf](https://nclex.com/files/2023_RN_Test%20Plan_English_FINAL.pdf)

## 1. Understanding the NCLEX-RN

- Purpose: Assesses knowledge, skills, abilities, and clinical judgment essential for entry-level RNs to ensure safe and effective nursing practice.
- Format: Computerized adaptive test (CAT), variable-length (85–150 questions, including case studies and multiple item types).
- Test Duration: Up to five hours, including breaks.
- Passing: Based on meeting or exceeding the passing standard; not based on a percentage or number correct.

## 2. Test Content Breakdown

Questions are distributed across the following four major “client needs” categories:

Category	% of Items on Exam
Management of Care	15–21%
Safety and infection Control	10–16%
Health Promotion and Maintenance	6–12%
Psychosocial Integrity	6–12%
Basic Care and Comfort	6–12%
Pharmacological and Parenteral Therapies	13–19%

Category	% of Items on Exam
Reduction of Risk Potential	9–15%
Physiological Adaptation	11–17%

### 3. Integrated Nursing Processes

These concepts are embedded throughout the exam:

- Nursing Process: assessment, analysis, planning, implementation, evaluation.
- Clinical Judgment: Recognize cues, analyze cues, prioritize hypotheses, generate solutions, take action, evaluate outcomes.
- Communication and Documentation
- Caring
- Culture and Spirituality
- Teaching/Learning

### 4. Question Types

- Multiple-choice
- Select-all-that-apply (SATA)
- Ordered response (putting steps in sequence)
- Hot spot (identify location on image)
- Fill-in-the-blank/calculation
- Exhibits, graphics, charts
- Clinical judgment case studies (6 questions per set)

## 5. Test-Taking Strategies

- Read every word in the question and options carefully.
- Never leave a question blank (you must answer every item).
- Don't look for "tricks"—questions are about safe, evidence-based practice.
- First, assess before you implement or intervene.
- Use Maslow's hierarchy (physiological needs first), ABCs (airway, breathing, circulation), and safety-first principles when prioritizing.
- Eliminate obviously incorrect answers and focus on what is directly asked.
- For SATA questions: Consider each option individually—no partial credit unless directed (partial scoring applies for specific question types).
- Case studies: Each part builds on the previous one; use all the information provided.

## 6. Key Focus Areas

- Management of Care: Delegation, advocacy, collaboration, prioritizing care, advance directives, legal/ethical practice.
- Safety and Infection Control: Infection prevention, safe use of equipment, handling hazardous materials, incident/variance reporting, home safety.
- Health Promotion and Maintenance: Developmental stages, health screening, immunizations, lifestyle education, prenatal/postpartum care.
- Psychosocial Integrity: Therapeutic communication, coping/grief, substance abuse, abuse/neglect, crisis intervention, cultural and spiritual care.
- Basic Care and Comfort: Activities of daily living (ADLs), nutrition, elimination, mobility, comfort measures, sleep/rest.
- Pharmacological/Parenteral Therapies: Medication administration, dose calculations, IV therapy, adverse effects, education, blood products.

- Reduction of Risk Potential: Monitoring vital signs, early ID of complications (e.g., DVT, increased ICP), lab values, pre-/post-procedural care.
- Physiological Adaptation: Managing acute/chronic illness, emergencies, hemodynamic monitoring, wound care, ventilator management.

## 7. Clinical Judgment Tips

- Recognize Cues: What information is most relevant?
- Analyze Cues: How do cues combine to point to problems?
- Prioritize Hypotheses: What's most urgent? What could kill or cause harm first?
- Generate Solutions: What are your best options/interventions?
- Take Action: Implement the selected intervention.
- Evaluate Outcomes: Did it work? What next?

## 8. Exam-Day Practicalities

- Arrive early – bring required ID.
- No personal items – secure lockers are available at the test center.
- Use scheduled and unscheduled breaks wisely.
- Pace yourself – aim for 1–2 minutes per question.
- Once you submit an answer, you cannot go back to change it.
- Do **not** share/discuss content after the exam – that's a violation.

## 9. Mindset and Preparation

- Practice with adaptive NCLEX-style questions.

- Study in small, focused intervals – Use visuals, quizzes, and practice questions.
- Focus on clinical judgment and application, not memorization.
- Review rationales for practice questions (right and wrong).
- Sleep well and eat nutritiously before the exam.
- Manage test anxiety – practice relaxation techniques.

## 10. Final Reminders

- The NCLEX is about *safe, entry-level nursing care*. Always choose the safest, most ethical, most patient-centered answer.
- When in doubt, use the process of *elimination* and select the response most consistent with assessment and safety.
- If a question is unfamiliar, it could be a pretest item (not scored). Always try your best.
- You are tested as a *newly licensed nurse* – not a nurse practitioner and not based on “real world” shortcuts. Go by the book!

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Visit NCLEX.com for additional resources and sample items, including sample clinical judgment case studies and stand-alone items.

National Council of State Boards of Nursing. (2023). 2023 NCLEX-RN® test plan. [https://nclex.com/files/2023\\_RN\\_Test%20Plan\\_English\\_FINAL.pdf](https://nclex.com/files/2023_RN_Test%20Plan_English_FINAL.pdf)