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Introduction

In order to become licenced as a registered nurse (RN) in Nova Scotia, you must successfully complete an entry-level registration exam, called the NCLEX-RN® Exam. The NCLEX-RN uses computer adaptive testing to test your knowledge of the entry-to-practice competencies that are needed to provide safe nursing care at the beginning of your career.

This is most likely the first time you have written a registration exam for entry into a regulated profession. You may have questions about how to prepare for this type of exam and may not be sure where to begin.

Knowing that, we've pulled together all of the supports and resources that are available to you to help make your exam preparations as straight forward as possible. You should review this Guide and the suggested supports and resources as you develop your NCLEX-RN study plan. At the end of this Guide we've included a check list that will also help you develop your own exam study plan.

NCSBN Exam Preparation Resources

Your first stop for any NCLEX-RN preparation should be the [NCLEX-RN website](#) of National Council State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN), the organization that develops the NCLEX-RN. These resources are your best source of information on how to prepare for the NCLEX-RN.

The two key documents to help you prepare for the NCLEX-RN are:

NCLEX-RN EXAMINATION CANDIDATE BULLETIN

This [Bulletin](#) will provide you with all the information you require to write the exam including how to register and schedule your exam and the test site rules and regulations. The Bulletin also provides you with information on NCLEX-RN content, test development and test plans, as well as information on NCLEX-RN psychometrics, including computer adaptive testing, pass or fail decision rules, the passing standard, and the effect of guessing on the exam.

CANDIDATE AND EDUCATOR TEST PLANS AND DETAILED TEST PLANS

The [test plans](#) provide information about the exam structure, content areas and administration of NCLEX-RN, and can guide candidates preparing for the exam. The detailed test plans provide more in depth information about the content areas tested in the NCLEX-RN, and include sample NCLEX-RN items.

In addition to the Candidate Bulletin and the Test Plans, NCSBN also offers other important information to help you prepare for the exam:

- [Computer Adaptive Testing \(CAT\) Tutorial](#) which explains why CAT is used for NCLEX-RN and how it works. This is particularly important for anyone who has never written a CAT exam before.
- [NCLEX Practice Exam](#) which provides you with the opportunity to trial the NCLEX exam before the day of your test. The practice exam has been designed to provide the look and feel of the NCLEX exam and includes actual test questions from previous NCLEX exams and is presented in a similar format as the actual NCLEX exam.
- A variety of [FAQs](#), such as
 - [Taking the NCLEX](#)
 - [How the NCLEX Works](#)
 - [What the Exam Looks Like](#)
 - [Creating the NCLEX & Passing Standard](#)
 - [Preparing Students for the NCLEX](#)
- [NCLEX-RN Candidate Bulletin](#) which provides short blasts of information about the exam
- You can also follow NCLEX-RN on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) for the most up to date information!

Your exam preparation plan should include, at a minimum, a review of these materials from NCSBN.

Other Exam Prep Materials

Other organizations unaffiliated with NCSBN and the NCLEX-RN also offer preparatory courses and materials. Some of these materials were used by your school of nursing, and are currently offered or recommended by employers and the Registered Nurses Professional Development Centre (RN PDC).

Some of the preparatory materials offered by other companies include:

- HESI
- Saunders Comprehensive Review
- Saunders Q&A Review
- Kaplan’s NCLEX-RN Premier
- Kaplan’s NCLEX-RN Content Review Guide
- Linda LaCharity et al’s book “Prioritization, Delegation and Assignment, 3rd edition”
- Lippincott’s Q&A Review
- UWorld

There are also preparatory courses that are offered by other organizations.

- RN PDC occasionally offers exam preparation assistance. Contact rnpdc@nshealth.ca for more information

NOTE: While you may find these courses and materials helpful, be aware that any resources that are not affiliated with NCLEX-RN do not have access to the exam’s questions and may not accurately reflect the actual content of the exam’s questions. These courses and materials should supplement your use of NCSBN approved exam preparatory resources, not replace them.

Notification of Exam Results

You will be notified of your exam result within two weeks of writing the exam.

If you have failed the exam, NSCN will send you a letter with your exam results, as well as information about rewriting the exam and exam supports available to you. You will also be sent a Candidate’s Performance Report for Pearson Vue which gives you information on how you performed on each section of the exam, and indicates whether you performed above, near or below the passing standard.

NOTE: If you held a registered nurse-conditional licence and failed the NCLEX-RN for the third time, your registered nurse-conditional licence is no longer valid and you are not able to continue to work. You can find more information about registered nurse-conditional licences on our website [here](#).

Rewriting the Exam

There is no limit to the number of times you can write the NCLEX-RN exam with NSCN. However passing the NCLEX is only one of several registration and licensure requirements you must meet before you can become registered and licenced.

NOTE: after you pass the exam and you apply for registration and initial licensure, you must demonstrate currency of practice by having graduated from a nursing program in the past five licensure years. If you do not meet this requirement, [click here](#) for information on how to re-establish your currency of practice.

Preparing to Rewrite the Exam

Finding out you were not successful on the NCLEX-RN can definitely affect your confidence. What is important is to not let this setback derail your next writing of the NCLEX-RN. Over the years, we have seen that it was not unusual for students who excelled in their nursing program to fail their first write of the entry exam, but pass on a subsequent write.

Before you begin your exam preparation to rewrite the NCLEX-RN, you should take the time to consider what factors may have contributed to failing the NCLEX-RN. Identifying these factors can help you ensure that you develop the best exam preparation plan possible. Remember: study better – not necessarily more!

In no particular order, you may want to consider whether any of the following factors played a role in your performance on the NCLEX-RN:

UNFAMILIARITY WITH EXAM FORMAT

The NCLEX-RN consists of multiple-choice and alternate format questions presented through Computer Adaptive Testing (CAT) model. Not everybody is as familiar with this type of testing as they might be with other forms of testing, which could have a negative impact on your exam performance.

Study Tips:

- Review the [NCSBN Computer Adaptive Testing \(CAT\) Tutorial](#)
- Review the NCLEX-RN Psychometrics section in the [NCLEX Examination Candidate Bulletin](#)
- Review NCSBN's FAQs, such as [Taking the NCLEX](#), [How the NCLEX Works](#), [What the Exam Looks Like](#)

You may have also been unfamiliar with the scope and content of the NCLEX-RN exam. Understanding how the exam content is organized and broken down into categories will provide you with guidance in preparing for the exam.

Study Tips:

- Review the NCLEX-RN Content, Test Development and Test Plans section in the [NCLEX Examination Candidate Bulletin](#)
- Review the [Candidate and Educator Test Plans and Detailed Test Plans](#)
- Review NCSBN's FAQs such as [Taking the NCLEX](#), [Creating the NCLEX & Passing Standard](#), [Preparing Students for the NCLEX](#)

PARTIAL OR INCOMPLETE INTEGRATION OF NURSING CONTENT

Failure of the exam may indicate that you are weak in one or more areas of nursing content or that you have not sufficiently integrated your knowledge of nursing to respond to situations typically encountered by entry-level registered nurses.

The good news is that Pearson Vue provides you with a Candidate's Performance Report identifying any areas of nursing content in which you need to spend more time in your exam preparations.

Study Tip:

- Use your Candidate's Performance Report to identify any areas of nursing content in which you need to spend more time in your exam preparations.
- Review the [Candidate and Educator Test Plans and Detailed Test Plans](#) to ensure that you have prepared for each area of exam content

COPING WITH THE STRESS OF EXAMS

Examinations can be very stressful. Stress is an appropriate response to events in our lives. It becomes problematic if our level of stress is too high and we cannot cope effectively. Fatigue and undue stress can affect your performance on the exam. Major life events could also impact your ability to deal with the stress of writing the NCLEX-RN and you may decide that writing the exam at a later date is what is best for you.

Study Tips:

- Planning in advance for the examination, scheduling your time effectively for studying, doing other activities and resting, can help reduce your level of stress
 - If you are working on a registered nurse-conditional licence:
 - Contact your Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) for stress management resources
 - Talk to your colleagues – they have all written registration exams and understand the stress you may be experiencing
 - Reach out to your manager and/or union shop steward for guidance on how to manage your work commitments while preparing for the NCLEX-RN
- You should not have to study the day before the exam. You may wish to spend the day doing relaxing activities. There are a number of relaxation techniques you can use. Choose one that works for you. Try to be active, but avoid overexertion. Most important, get a good night's sleep the day before the exam.

Other Exam Prep Resources

After completing all of the above, you may feel that you still need some additional help, and may want to consider using exam prep resources from other companies. Remember there are plenty of exam preparatory courses and materials available, but these should be used to supplement the NCSBN's exam prep resources, not replace them.

Study Tips:

- Contact Nova Scotia Health Learning Institute for Health Care Providers for information on the exam prep resources they recommend
- Contact your employer for information on exam prep resources they may have or recommend
- Review the exam prep resources used by your school of nursing
- Contact other organizations such as Bloomberg Faculty of Nursing for information about their prep courses

How Will I Know That I Am Ready to Rewrite the NCLEX-RN?

A positive attitude can be a strong ally. Have confidence in yourself. Use the experience you have gained from your previous attempt to pass the examination. An advantage you have is that you are familiar with the exam format, how it is administered and what happens on the day of the exam.

Keep in mind that you have successfully completed your nursing education and taken remedial steps to correct your weaknesses. If you have prepared for the exam and rested well the day before, you will have taken the best steps towards success.

Exam Preparation Checklist

This checklist should help you develop your own exam preparation plan. As you develop your plan, ask yourself the following:

Do I understand what Computer Adaptive Testing is and how it works?

- Review the NCSBN [Computer Adaptive Testing \(CAT\) Tutorial](#)
- Review the NCLEX Psychometrics section in the [NCLEX Examination Candidate Bulletin](#)
- Review NCSBN's FAQs, such as [Taking the NCLEX](#), [How the NCLEX Works](#), [What the Exam Looks Like](#)

Do I understand what content will be tested in the NCLEX-RN?

- Review the NCLEX Content section in the [NCLEX Examination Candidate Bulletin](#)
- Review the [Candidate and Educator Test Plans and Detailed Test Plans](#)
- Review NCSBN's FAQ's such as [Taking the NCLEX](#), [How the NCLEX Works](#), [What the Exam Looks Like](#), [Creating the NCLEX & Passing Standard](#), [Preparing Students for the NCLEX](#)

Do I understand which nursing content areas I need to focus on?

- Use your Candidate's Performance Report to identify any areas for improvement
- Review the [Candidate and Educator Test Plans and Detailed Test Plans](#)

Do I need to better manage my stress level?

- Develop a study plan that balances my work, social life and exam preparation
- Contact Employee and Family Assistant Program (EFAP) for stress management resources
- Reach out to colleagues, my manager and/or my union shop steward for support and guidance on how to manage my work commitments while preparing for the NCLEX-RN

Do I need to use other exam preparation resources?

- Contact RN PDC or my employer for information on the exam prep resources they recommend
- Review the exam prep resources used by my school of nursing

Do I have a plan for the day of the exam?

- Plan for my meals, clothing to wear, information to bring and my travel to the exam test site
- Plan relaxation techniques I can use while writing the exam to keep myself calm and focused