

Study Strategies for Success

What to expect during your **FIRST NURSING SEMESTER**

As a nursing student you have already demonstrated a great deal of academic excellence and study skill success. It is not easy to complete the requirements to be accepted into CCRI's Nursing program so, CONGRATULATIONS!

Many of the study skills and academic knowledge that you have learned as you pursued acceptance into the nursing program will help you complete the program. That being said, in your nursing courses you will have to develop, adopt, or expand new study strategies and critical thinking skills as well possibly discard old study strategies! An overview of specific study skill strategies will be examined later in this booklet. For now...

BE PREPARED TO BE OVERWHELMED!

The amount of information reviewed in lecture, addressed in your course materials, and your clinical experience may be overwhelming.

There are a lot of textbooks, websites, and other study tools that you will have exposure to as you complete your degree. You may not use all the textbooks each semester. Be sure to speak with your lead nursing instructor to determine which books and resources you should be using for the semester you are completing.

Be prepared to spend a lot of time studying and preparing for your classes and clinical. Many nursing graduates have reported spending 18 – 25 hours per week in studying and clinical preparation. Nursing students attend lecture on campus and clinical in a medical or hospital environment. Let's tally up the time:

NURS 1010	6 credits	(4 class hours & 6 clinical hours)	4 exams & a final, various assignments
NURS 1015	2 credits	(2 class hours)	mid & final exam, various assignments
NURS 1061	1 credit	(1 class hour)	mid & final exam, various assignments
BIOL 1020	4 credits	(4 class hours)	mid & final exam, various assignments

11 hours of lecture

6 hours of clinical

25 hours of studying

42 Total Hours

One of the major obstacles of success for students in this program is the issue of time management. Several graduating nursing students and the Nursing Department **strongly recommend** that you **DO NOT WORK** as you complete this program. If you do have to work; try to work less than 15 hours per week during the semester. This is no exaggeration.

Time Management Issues & Strategies

Time management involves understanding how you CHOOSE to spend your time, setting goals and prioritizing, and having the motivation to change your behaviors. We all have the same amount of time each week – 168 hours. Some people use their time wisely while other people do not know how their time is spent. To become a better time manager, you must first understand how you are currently spending your time. Complete the following *Time Management Assessment* to get a rough idea of how you spend your time during a typical week in a semester.



Things I Do (the average number of hours spent each week for each activity)	Daily Time X 7	Total Weekly Time
Average amount of sleep per day	X7	
Grooming hours per day	X7	
Preparing & eating meals per day	X7	
Travel Time (work, school, weekends, errands, etc.) per day	X7	
Hours per day for chores, errands, family, etc. per day	X7	
Regularly scheduled functions such as worship, entertainment, exercise, etc. per week		
Total work hours per week		
Total school hours per week		
Total studying hours per week		
Total hours socializing (including texting, web browsing , etc.) per week		
Total Number of Hours in a Week		168
<i>Subtotal of how you spend your time. Subtract this number from 168.</i>		
Is there a large difference between your subtotal and 168? Why?		

This is an interesting exercise to complete because many students do not have a clear idea of how and where they spend their time. Once you understand how you are spending your time, you can start to make decisions on how you CHOOSE to spend your time. A discussion of time management goes hand in hand with a discussion of goal setting and prioritizing goals and activities.

As a nursing student, your goal is to complete the nursing program successfully. This program is very academically demanding and time consuming as demonstrated on the preceding page with students averaging between 35-40 hours per week in studying, attending lectures, and clinical. Successful nursing students must learn how to balance school with other life activities (work, family, etc.). As important that family and work are, your main priority is to complete your nursing class each semester. It is vital for you to really think about the time commitment of the nursing program and make decisions about how your time will be spent during the semester. *Most, if not all nursing students will have to make significant sacrifices in regard to spending time with their family and the ability to work full-time.*

It is important for you to think about the following issues prior to the start of the semester.

- Your schedule
- Family and work commitments
- Academic goals

Academic Goals & Prioritizing

You will need to prioritize your goals and commitments and eliminate low priority goals and obstacles to obtaining academic success. Once you have done this, you must share this information with your family and friends. As you know, your decision to apply to CCRI's Nursing program has affected not only yourself, but your family, friends, and workplace. Sharing this information with your family and work colleagues (if necessary) will help them to understand the importance of how they can be a crucial source of support for you as you complete the nursing program. Most critical to your success is asking for and accepting help from your family and friends. Now is the time for you to delegate responsibilities if possible by asking your friends and family to pitch in and help you to eliminate chores, family commitments, overtime, etc. ***This is often difficult for students to accept as they try to "do it all" by themselves.***

Developing Your Weekly Semester Schedule

A good way to get an overview of what your schedule will look like during the semester is to develop a weekly schedule at the start of each semester. A sample *Weekly Semester Schedule* is located on the next page of this booklet for you to review. A blank electronic copy of a *Weekly Schedule* can be downloaded at www.ccri.edu/success. By writing out your weekly schedule in advance, you will be able to clearly see your commitments and identify niches of time that you may be able to use for studying.

Nursing students are advised to treat the Nursing program as if it were a full-time job by assigning certain academic tasks to specific days and times just like you may have done so at a job. In addition, you should strongly consider using a *Calendar* or *To Do List* to keep track of your academic, personal, work commitments as well. Using a *Calendar* (electronic, web, or paper) or a *To Do List* requires that you check and update your *Calendar* or *To Do List* on a daily basis. By writing down your exam dates, scheduled appointments and other appointments, you will be able to minimize over-scheduling yourself and/or "running out of time" to accomplish your studying.

Remember, when using a *Calendar* or developing a *Weekly Schedule*, the best time managers build flexibility into their *Calendars* and *Weekly Schedules*. Each semester will be different. It is difficult to forecast how you should be spending your future time. Be sure to be open to modifying your *Calendar* and *Weekly Schedule* to accommodate unexpected surprises and unforeseen obstacles. You should be using the *Weekly Schedule* as a semester guide and be prepared to modify the schedule as necessary based on how well you are adapting to the nursing program. Your daily appointments are kept on your *Calendar*. If you choose to use a calendar it is important to check and update your *Calendar* at least once a day so that you can plan your day and look ahead for scheduled activities later in the week for planning purposes.

Post your *Weekly Schedule* on the refrigerator or some other central location for your family to see so that they know where and what you are doing at any point of time during the week. This may help family members to realize how much of your time is needed to successfully complete your class and explain why you may be absent from family events or unable to complete your normal household responsibilities. This is the perfect tool to use to discuss delegating household chores with your spouse, partner, parents, or children prior to the start of each semester.

If you struggle with managing your time, you should consider signing up for a time management workshop by visiting www.ccri.edu/success. Simply click on the link to reach the on line request form, complete the form, and click on the submit button. A coordinator from the Student Success Center (SSC) will contact you directly to schedule an appointment.

Time	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
6am	Travel		Travel				
7am	Work	Kids	Clinical	Kids	Kids	Errands	Family
8am			7am-3pm			Chores	
8:30		Travel		Travel	Practice		
9am		Lecture		Lecture	Quiz		
9:30		9am-11		9am-11	Questions	Travel	
10am					Read	CCRI	
10:30					Text/Notes	Text/Notes	
11am					Errands	Review	Practice
11:30					Chores	Web	Quiz
12pm		EAT		EAT			Questions
12:30		Care		Study		Review	Review
1pm		Plan		Group		Previous	Web
1:30				Review	Read	Chapters	
2pm				Web	Text/Notes		
2:30		Me		Me			
3pm		Time		Time		Work	
3:30	Pick up	Kids	At	Daycare	School		
4pm	Travel	Travel	Travel	Travel	Travel		
4:30	Dinner	Kid's		Activities	w/Kids		
5pm	Dinner	Kid's		Activities	w/Kids		
5:30	Dinner	Kid's		Activities	w/Kids		
6pm	Dinner	Kid's		Activities	w/Kids		
6:30	Dinner	Kid's		Activities	w/Kids		
7pm	Dinner	Kid's		Activities	w/Kids		
8pm	Read	Care Plan	Read	Me			Read
9pm	Text/Notes	Care Plan	Text/Notes	Me			Text/Notes
10pm		Care Plan		Me			
11pm	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep		Sleep
12am	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep	Sleep		Sleep

Sample Nursing Student Weekly Schedule
Note: 15 minute breaks in between studying methods

Critical Thinking Skills for NURS 1010 Foundations of Nursing Practice Class

The study strategies that you learned and used to help you complete the required courses for acceptance into the Nursing program may not be as helpful in preparing you for your NURS 1010 Foundations of Nursing Practice lectures, clinical, and exams. The amount of information that is contained in the textbooks and lectures is impossible to memorize. In fact, memorization is not the key skill students need to be successful in a nursing program – especially in preparing for exams. Memorizing does not require critical thinking. The nursing program and exams are designed to get students to use CRITICAL THINKING skills. Nursing requires not only the learning of facts and procedures, but the ability to evaluate each patient’s unique situation. CRITICAL THINKING is:

- Purposeful goal-directed thinking
- Aims to make judgments based on evidence and fact rather than guesswork or opinions (KVCC)

The Nursing department exams use a specific type of exam question for NURS 1010 called case-based or application-based questions. Nursing students commonly call this type of question design the “NCLEX style” question after the national licensing exam. The “NCLEX style” question may be difficult for nursing students to adjust to. The questions typically follow a multiple choice format with a question and four stems (see sample below).

The school nurse observes a group of school aged children playing on the playground. A child begins to cry and tells the nurse he was stung by a bee. Which of the following actions should the nurse take first?

- A. Inject IM epinephrine
- B. Remove stinger
- C. Apply a warm compress
- D. Wash with soap and water

The difficulty with these types of questions is that sometimes all of the answer stems may be technically correct, but the test taker *must select the best answer* based on the information provided in the question. Sometimes the questions may lean more on common sense than the memorization of nursing facts. The point is that there will be questions on your nursing exams that you may not be able to anticipate and prepare for so it is best to develop or improve upon your critical thinking skills. Critical thinkers:

1. Base judgments on facts and reasoning
2. Support views with evidence
3. Evaluate the credibility of sources
4. Turn mistakes into learning opportunities
5. Ask “why” and “why not”?
6. Seek themes, patterns
7. Follow hunches (KVCC)

All students can improve critical thinking skills with practice. Graduating CCRI nursing students interviewed by the SSC reported that they built into their *Weekly Schedule* time to practice taking the NCLEX quizzes available through the textbook and website. Several purchased a practice DVD or on-line access to practice questions to supplement their course materials. The more familiar you become with the NCLEX style test questions, the better prepared you will be for your semester exams.

Preparing for Classes & Exams

As a nursing student you will have exams in all of your courses each semester. You should be preparing for your exams throughout the semester by attending all lectures, keeping up with your assignments and using the faculty office hours to receive additional help as necessary. With that in mind, please review the following pages for specific suggestions. You may schedule a study strategy workshop by visiting www.ccric.edu/success.

Critical Questions You Must Ask Yourself:

1. How do I make the connection between what I am learning in lecture and in my textbooks, to what I will find on my exam?
2. What is the most effective use of my time, and how do I study effectively for my exams?
3. How can I be sure to do my best on my exams?

General Study Tips

Let's face it; the point of studying (whether it is reading, reviewing web videos, or creating flash cards, etc.) is to remember enough information to pass your test. That being said, it is especially important for you to understand that the most effective studying happens in short, manageable "chunks of time" – 45 to 60 minutes at a time.

Studying for three, four, or more hours in a row without breaks, IS NOT AN EFFECTIVE STUDY STRATEGY for retaining information.

Your brain becomes saturated (full) after an hour or so. Studying efforts performed after your brain is full are not beneficial. Often your brain will give you clear messages that you need a break by sending you thoughts and feelings like,

- "I can't remember what I just read"
- "I can't keep my place on the page"
- "I am distracted – I am having difficulty concentrating"

Unfortunately some students ignore the messages from their brain and continue to "plow through the material" like it is a badge of honor to sit for hours studying beyond their ability to comprehend the material. This behavior is not beneficial. It is stressful and frustrating. Stop! Schedule your studying into the "manageable chunks of time."

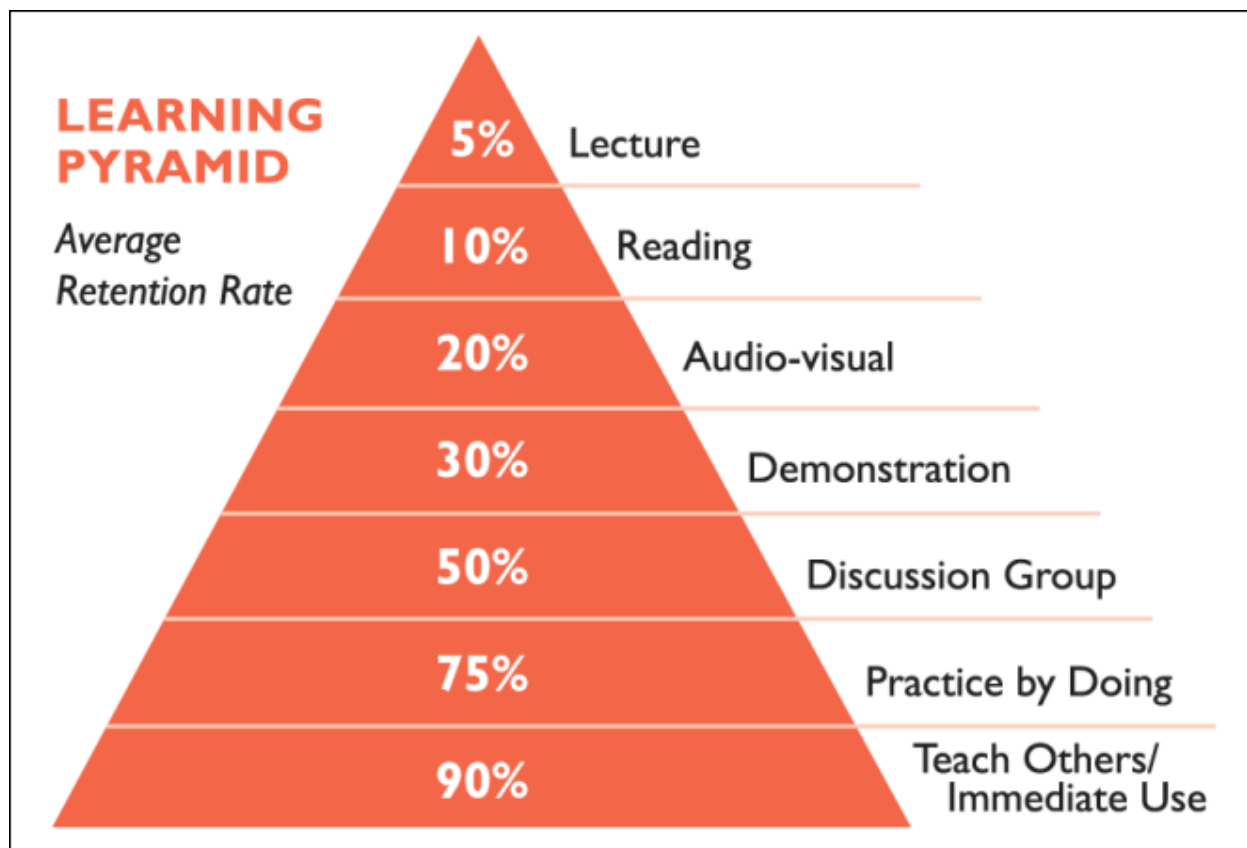
Think of your brain as a kitchen sponge. If you pour water on a sponge, it will absorb the water until the sponge is full. At this point, the sponge is saturated, and any water that you pour onto the sponge will roll right off the sides of the sponge. The same thing happens to your brain. It becomes full of information and your brain cannot absorb any more information. Your brain needs a break to be "wrung out" like a sponge. It is easy to lose track of time when you are studying, but it is important to be aware of how you are spending your time and if that time is beneficial. If you start to have some or all of the above thoughts (e.g. "I can't remember what I just read!") **YOUR BRAIN IS FULL AND NEEDS A BREAK!** *Try and imagine the words you are readings are like water and that they are dripping out of your ears because your brain is saturated.*

Taking a break means actually getting up from the table and doing another activity for at least 10 – 15 minutes.

If you are at home, take the dog out for a quick walk, check your texts, watch a show, or eat. If you are on campus, take a walk around the building, visit with a friend, go for a snack, or get a drink. After 15 minutes, you may return to your table to resume your studies.

Finally, break up the type of studying you are doing. Perhaps you will read for an hour, take a break, and resume your studies but change your study method. So for the next 45 minutes you might be on-line reviewing videos, take a 15 minute break and return to read for another half hour, take a 10 minute break and return to complete the chapter quiz on the textbook's website.

The more you vary the study materials and methods that you use, the greater the chance that your retention of that material will increase. Studies have demonstrated this point repeatedly. Please review the Learning Pyramid below. It clearly demonstrates that the average retention rate for textbook reading is only 10%. That's amazing; on average most people remember only 10% of what they read. Clearly, the use of varied study methods is extremely important. The study strategies that you used in the courses that you took in order to apply to the nursing program may not be the best strategies for your nursing classes. Be open to the idea that you may need to try a different study method to retain the most information.



Textbook Strategies

As noted earlier, you will purchase a large number of textbooks and supplemental texts prior to your first nursing semester. In addition, there are websites and other supporting documents that you may find or be recommended to you by faculty and classmates. Prior to the semester, you should review your textbooks and web resources. Look at how the textbooks and web resources are organized. See if your textbook has a companion website or disk. Review what materials are provided to you by the publisher to help you to fully use the textbooks and web resources. Finally, you have purchased a tablet as part of your course supplies. You have access to an online electronic version of your textbook. Explore the many resources that the tablet and your electronic resources may offer. *For example, you may have your electronic textbook read to you via your tablet (or any internet enabled device) as you drive to work or complete household chores!* Be open and creative to new study strategies and maximizing your time.

The amount of information that you will be exposed to is overwhelming and could quite possibly be paralyzing. It is important to refer to your syllabi and confirm with your instructor which book(s) will be the primary text for the semester you are completing and concentrate your efforts on those course materials.

Also, reading a textbook is quite different than reading for pleasure. As a student, you are not expected to read the primary nursing textbook from cover to cover. It is not an effective use of your time. Think of your nursing textbook as a reference. You must review the textbook when you do not understand the material addressed in lecture or covered in the clinical. You will not be able to memorize your textbooks, and attempts to do so will add to your anxiety and frustration levels.

As a student, you should adopt the motto of “work smart, not hard.” There are many textbook reading strategies that you may adopt to get the most benefit from your reading and studying efforts. In this booklet, the PARROT method is described. *PARROT is an acronym that stands for Preview, Ask & Activate, Read, Recite, Organize, and Test.* The reading assignments for nursing classes can be daunting in length, so it is vital for you to adopt a reading strategy to make sure that your time is spent productively. PARROT helps you to understand how much effort you need to invest in the reading assignment by following the systemized format explained below.

PARROT System for Textbook Reading – A 6 Step Reading Strategy

- 1. Preview:** This step involves looking over the entire reading assignment with the purpose of familiarizing yourself with the concepts that will be covered and the length of the reading assignment. Previewing involves skimming the major headings, illustrations, charts, figures and anything else that stands out from the text. If there is a summary, read it for the first time during the preview stage. This helps you prepare for what is to come and understand how concepts relate to one another. As you preview, you will begin to determine how many pages you can read in 45 – 60 minutes and your level of familiarity with the topics.
- 2. Ask & Activate:** As you preview the material and prepare to read, it is important to formulate questions based on the topics and subheadings. Ask yourself if anything is familiar, hence activating your prior knowledge on the subject. Ask yourself what you can expect to learn or what you need to find out. This creates a purpose for you to begin reading. Determine the exact number of pages you hope to cover within the 45 – 60 minute time frame. Mark in the text where you will stop reading for your break. During this phase you may decide that there are parts of the reading assignment that you are already familiar with and that you may decide to skim that section.

3. **Read:** When you read the passage that you have selected, do so without a highlighter or pen in hand. Don't take notes or highlight on your first reading because everything seems important the first time you read it. *There is a tendency to over highlight or take notes on information that is not important or that you already know!*
4. **Recite:** Reciting does not mean word-for-word recitation of what you read. Recite refers to the point at which you stop to check your comprehension by saying aloud, if possible, a summary of the material you have just read, preferably in your own words. The objective of this step is to help you make personal connections to the information in the textbook. As you recite or explain the material you read to yourself, you should be taking note of how the information is organized.
5. **Organize:** At this step, you should organize the information in a format that will help you better comprehend and study. This may involve creating an outline, developing study cards, constructing a concept map, taking Cornell notes, or another process that suits both your learning style and the level at which you need to recall the material. **DO NOT TAKE NOTES ON MATERIAL YOU KNOW!** This is a waste of your time, and you do not benefit by this activity. You should be focusing your activities at this step on devising methods to recall information that is complex and that you don't have a strong grasp on.
6. **Test:** Remember, you don't know *what you know*, until you actually test yourself. Use the study questions and/or quiz questions at the end of the chapter, or go on-line to complete the chapter quiz to determine what information you have retained. You can also create your own questions by forming the headings, subheadings, italicized, and bolded words into questions. If you are able to answer all the questions successfully, you are ready to move onto the next reading assignment. *If you get some answers wrong, you only have to go back to the section of the chapter that you got wrong.* Don't punish yourself by rereading information you already know!

Active Reading

Reading your textbook several times is not enough! You must be an active reader. While you read you should:

- Think about what you already know
- Identify topics you don't understand with questions
- Reorganize the information for better retention
- Pick out topics and concepts that you believe will be on the test

Don't just read. Do the activities in the text. Review the websites referenced in the chapter. Be selective about what you read and how you will read. Don't waste your time on reading information you already know. Finally, be open to asking for help and trying new study strategies if the strategies you are currently using are not working. To get you started, listed below are a few tips from nursing students who recently graduated from CCRI's nursing program.

1. Read the chapter summary first to figure out what the author believes is important.
2. Complete the chapter quiz questions first before reading to ascertain what knowledge of the material you already possess. After completing the quiz, only read the sections of the assignment where you got an answer wrong on the chapter quiz.

3. Vary the color of our highlighter to break up the text. You may even select a highlighter color to correspond to a specific topic (e.g. pink highlighter for anything to do with the cardio system).
4. You don't have to read every word. Skim sections of the reading assignment if you have a good handle on the material.
5. Randomly select a previous chapter to review throughout the semester on a weekly basis by taking the chapter quiz. This will help you keep information from the beginning of the semester fresh and lessen the amount of review for your final exam.

Preparing for Your Lectures

It is vital to complete your weekly reading assignments prior to your lecture. PowerPoint slides are available prior to the lecture. Make note of concepts you don't understand in the textbook. Depending on your instructor, you may be able to email the teacher for an explanation, or post your question on Blackboard for feedback. Certainly, you can ask your instructor for clarification of the textbook material in the next class or make an appointment to meet the teacher during office hours.

BRING YOUR TEXTBOOKS TO CLASS as you will be using the book to complete a mandatory class activities.

Even if you don't understand the reading assignment, by doing the reading prior to your lecture, you will have had exposure to the content. Subsequently, the content of the lecture may be easier for you to understand or be more meaningful since the lecture isn't the first time you have heard or seen the material.

If you wish to tape the lecture, you must ask for your instructor's permission. Sometimes the knowledge of having a tape to listen to as a backup to your notes can relieve the anxiety you may have in "missing" something important in class.

Concentration in Lectures

Your lectures are long – two to three hours. The ability to concentrate for several hours is difficult. As much as you may not want to take an unofficial break during the lecture, it may be more beneficial for you to leave a lecture before you start to experience concentration and exhaustion issues. Quietly leave the room for a bathroom break or just to move around. Many students fear missing something important and refuse to take a break if they are sleepy or distracted.

If you are fighting sleep during a lecture, or unable to concentrate, you are already missing the lecture!

Leaving the room for a few minutes to get energized is more advantageous for you than fighting to stay awake.

Getting the Most from Your Studying

It is important to know yourself and be honest with yourself regarding your strengths and weaknesses as a student. Your academic goal for each semester is to earn a passing grade. Put into practice academic and life behaviors that will increase your success in earning a passing grade each semester. As noted earlier, the objective of studying is to retain information. Your ability to remember is affected by many factors such as distractions, stress, interest in the material, level of motivation, and time of day. To ensure your success, be sure to know yourself and what is best for you!

- Don't study in a place that has distractions for you. Remember, a distraction could be a person, technology (iPod, texting, etc.), or a place! Select a study location that will not distract you from your task.
- Know your high energy and low energy time of day. If you are not a morning person, don't try to study first thing in the morning.
- Attempt to maintain balance in your life. All work and studying is not healthy. Try to set aside time each day for doing something for you.
- Eat well and get some exercise. Practice the healthy lifestyle your future profession encourages others to do!
- Sleep. Do not skimp on sleep. As a nursing student, you know you should be getting on average, at least 6 hours of sleep each day. Lack of sleep exacerbates your emotional state, your ability to concentrate, and feelings of anxiety.
- Don't sweat the small stuff. Accept that during the semester you may not be able to maintain the same level of commitment to life's daily chores. The house can stay messy and dinner can be a sandwich. Don't let yourself get distracted by busywork instead of meaningful study and preparation for your class or clinical.
- Ask for help! Your instructors are the first people you need to speak with if you are struggling with the content of any nursing class. Don't put off meeting with your teacher.

The Lecture PowerPoint Slides

The slide packets that the nursing faculty produces are substantial in number and complexity of the information being conveyed. Many students print out the handouts three slides to a page. This does not leave a lot of white space for you to add notes to during the lecture and often makes most graphics hard to read. You may want to print the handouts two slides per page. This will result in the images being larger and easier to read, as well as, there being more white space to accommodate your notes.

Taking notes during lecture

You may use your PowerPoint slide handout to record notes or use a notebook. The choice is a personal preference. Please note that as discussed in the textbook strategies section, **DO NOT TAKE NOTES ON INFORMATION YOU ALREADY KNOW!** If the content of the lecture is material that you are comfortable with, sit back and listen to the lecture. Perhaps there might be a point or two that the instructor makes that you may want to jot down a note of clarification, but you should not be attempting to write down everything the teacher is saying. That activity is not one that you will benefit from.

As a student in lecture, your notes should be to clarify a point you did not understand in the textbook, or to explain a nursing process concept that you struggled with during clinical. Ask questions if you are confused. Be a proactive learner and listen to the lecture.



Test Taking Strategies

The ideal situation to aspire to is to keep up with your weekly reading assignments, complete practice quizzes, review web sites, and meet with your study group prior to an exam. The two or three days prior to the test should be a review – not a time to begin learning new material. As noted earlier in this booklet, you will not be able to memorize your textbook(s), and that study strategy is the least effective use of your time and intellectual energy for preparing for your nursing exams.

It is critical that you develop a *Weekly Semester Schedule prior to the start of the semester to identify when, what, and how you will study each day of the week*. Additionally, the most effective way to retain information is to study in small “chunks of time” (45 – 60 minute “chunks”) and to use a variety of learning and study styles (read, watch a video, quiz a classmate, rewrite your class notes, etc.) throughout the day and week.

Be sure to be well-rested and eat well prior to the exam. The day of the exam, set aside plenty of time to get to the campus, but avoid hanging around outside of the testing room listening to or participating in conversations that cause anxiety (e.g. avoid the “toxic” test hysteria from fellow classmates).

If possible, know ahead of time how many questions will be on the exam and how much time is allotted to complete the test. This will allow you to determine approximately how much time you should be spending answering each question. Be sure to answer all the easy questions first and skip the questions you don’t know immediately. Don’t try to figure out the answer by rereading the question several times (that eats up time). Don’t beat yourself up because you chose not to study that topic. Just **SKIP THE QUESTION!** By skipping the question you will not run out of time to answer the remaining questions and you may get a clue from a later question.

Try not to over think the question – go with your gut reaction or hunch – your initial response is usually correct. Avoid second-guessing yourself.

At the conclusion of the exam, if you still have unanswered questions, you must now make a conscious decision to switch testing strategies.

Your initial strategy was to be as prepared as possible for the exam. Your final strategy is to make **the best educated guesses** for the remaining unanswered questions. Instead of reading and rereading the question in the hopes that suddenly a light will turn on in your brain, or allowing yourself to become emotional, or overly anxious, admit to yourself that you **DO NOT KNOW THE ANSWER**. Stop wasting time trying to figure out the correct answer.

*At this point you should be using the following **tips to make the best educated guess**.* When making an educated guess, if possible, eliminate the obviously wrong answer stem(s) to narrow your guessing options. This strategy will reduce the odds from a one in four chance of guessing the correct answer to a one in three chance, or a 50/50 chance of guessing correctly. Reducing the number of answer stems and using the tips below may increase the likelihood of a correct guess.

1. The correct answer is frequently longer & more detailed than the wrong answer
2. The incorrect options are often similar and the correct answer is the one option that is different
3. Answer stems that contain **Absolute Words*** such as *all, never, everyone, never, no one, nobody, none, only, and always* often signal wrong or false answer

4. Answer stems that contain **General Qualifiers** ** such as *sometimes, usually, probably, most, often, some, sometimes, and generally* are more likely to be included in correct or true answers
5. If two answers seem equally correct, and there's no "all of the above" option, choose the answer choice that comes later in the list of answers. Test takers frequently put the wrong answer first because they know that some students are quick to choose the first answer that seems correct and often students will not bother to continue reading through the answer stems thoroughly
6. Silly or foolish answers usually are not meant to trick you – they are wrong

* **Absolute Words** are words that describe situations in black and whites terms. The phrase, "All diabetic patients" should be a red flag to you. The word ALL is the tipoff that the phrase or answer stem may be incorrect. Think about it...no two persons will experience a disease or respond to a treatment in exactly the same way. You and another person may develop diabetes, but how the disease manifests itself in the two of you, and what treatment will be prescribed, will be different. To demonstrate this point, review the four answer stems below and try to select the correct answer without the benefit of reading the question!

- A. The nurse should follow universal contact precautions at all times in every case.
- B. The nursing assistant demonstrated completely poor awareness of transfer safety.
- C. Never allow new medications to be accessible in the unit.
- D. Sometimes, the action taken by the aide was not well-planned.

The correct answer choice is “D” because the term ‘sometimes’ is in the answer stem.

** The *GENERAL QUALIFIER* **, “sometimes” indicates there were a few strong points and weak points about the Nursing Aide’s performance. The other answer stems included absolute words such as ALL, COMPLETELY, AND NEVER – these words are too absolute – too black & white! Remember in most situations dealing with people, there are a lot of grey areas so answer stems that include words like *sometimes, often, and usually* may be the best option for your educated guess.

Study Strategies to Reduce Test Anxiety

Test anxiety is when a student excessively worries about doing well on a test. This type of anxiety is more than the average anxiety all students may experience from time to time. Severe text anxiety can become a major hindrance on test performance and cause extreme nervousness and memory lapses, among other symptoms.

Recognizing Test Anxiety

- Freezing up
- Panicking
- Being easily distracted
- Physical effects; sweating, shortness of breath
- Lack of interest in test or topic

How to Combat Text Anxiety

Being well prepared for a test is the best way to reduce test anxiety.

1. Space out your studying over a few days or weeks, and continually review class material. Don’t wait until the night before to try to learn all the material.
2. Try to maintain a positive attitude while preparing for the test and during the test.
3. Exercising for a few days before the test and throughout the semester will help reduce stress.
4. Get a good night’s sleep during the entire semester and before the test.
5. Stay relaxed. If you begin to get nervous take a few deep breaths slowly to relax yourself and then get back to work.
6. Read the directions slowly and carefully.
7. If you don’t understand the directions on the test, ask the teacher to explain them to you.
8. Skim through the test so that you have a good idea how to pace yourself.
9. Write down important formulas, facts, definitions and/or keywords in the margin first so you won’t worry about forgetting them.
10. Do the simple questions first to help build up your confidence for the harder questions.
11. Don’t worry about how fast other people finish their test; just concentrate on your own test.
12. If you don’t know a question, skip it. Go back to it later if you have time, and remember that you don’t have to always get every question right to do well on the test.
13. Focus on the question at hand; don’t let your mind wander onto other things.

If you believe you suffer from severe test anxiety, you need to address the issue immediately, preferably before the start of the semester. CCRI’s Advising & Counseling department has licensed counselors that offer workshops and one-on-one counseling to students at no charge. In addition, you may wish to speak with your physician about medical options available to you as well.