

Study Skills for Nursing Students

These suggestions for study skills for nursing students came from nursing faculty and students. Use what you can and if you would like one-to-one guidance to refine your learning skills for nursing courses, call the Student Academic Resource Center at 823-5130 and make an appointment with the learning skills counselor.

From Sue Wickham, Academic Achievement Center Instructor at Des Moines Area Community College:

“Although I haven't designed study skills workshops specifically for nursing students, I have worked extensively on an individual basis with students in our nursing program. What's helped me most in giving study skills advice has been reviewing tests with students to identify the sources of their errors. Based on those interactions, here are a few topics you should emphasize:

1. Time management is a HUGE issue for nursing students. Many of them are parents (often single parents) holding down jobs with odd hours (they're likely to be CNAs).
2. Study groups are an absolute necessity in this program. Students need to rehearse the material actively, honing their teamwork skills, and combine a little social life with academics.
3. The standard suggestions for taking multiple choice tests (e.g. watch out for absolutes) don't go very far. Students need to be made aware of the importance of applying concepts to particular cases, not just memorizing definitions.
4. As they study their texts, they should be alert for cause-effect and comparison-contrast patterns. What symptoms are normal for the 4th month of pregnancy and what symptoms require further testing? What characteristics distinguish a melanoma from a squamous cell carcinoma? They should also be thinking about their roles as nurses as related to the roles of other professionals. These students tend to be warm-hearted, sympathetic people who easily slip into a counseling role when their job is supposed to be eliciting or providing factual information about a patient's condition.
5. After reviewing their tests with me, most students realize that they need to study more, study differently, and/or read the test questions more analytically in order to succeed. Still, stress management and test anxiety are important to address.”

You can reach her at: Moines Area Community College: smwickham@dmacc.cc.ia.us

From Lisa Kramme, Midland Lutheran College, Fremont, Nebraska:

“I asked 3 sophomore nursing majors what study strategies they have found particularly helpful. They said that using case studies of "real" patients with diseases, etc. was helpful because it helped them learn how to "pull out" information that is critical for them to work with. Many times their test questions also consist of case studies, so using case studies is helpful when preparing for tests.

Another student said that having practice questions to work at the end of each chapter is helpful. In study groups, students should write their own practice questions and then share them with a study group to formulate complete and accurate answers.

Finally, another student said that, in his Pathophysiology course, they had to make "concept maps" regarding clients' medical diagnoses. These concept maps were cascading charts that included information such as: disease/medical diagnosis, definition, etiology/risk factors, pathophysiology changes, clinical manifestations (signs, symptoms, laboratory test results/diagnostic tests), treatment, nursing interventions (nursing actions, client teaching, meds, diet, kardex orders), prognosis. (I took this info off a handout from the student's class).

I've done inservices with nursing majors regarding learning style assessment, time management, working with study groups and memory strategies.”

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From Sharon Green at Niagara University:

“Some years back, I did workshops for nursing students, and they were most interested in test-taking strategies - especially for the types of questions used on the nursing board exam. For example, some questions would list four possible treatments or actions, and the stem would ask students to determine which is the BEST. Students found such questions rather difficult.

You might want to find out if professors are writing similar types of questions, to prepare students for the board exam. If so, take a look at some sample questions for recent board exams, if your nursing department can provide them.

In my workshops for nursing students, I focused on analytical thinking, an awareness of how the test questions are written, and careful reading of the questions.”

You may contact Sharon at: Sharon Green, Seton Hall - 1st floor, Niagara University, NY 14109 www.niagara.edu/oas/lc (716) 286 – 8071

From Linda Riggs at Blessing-Rieman College of Nursing:

“These are some of the books that are written for the specific needs of nursing students:

- **Critical Things In Nursing: A Practical Approach**, Rosalinda Alfara-LeFevre: W.B. Saunders, Pub.
- **Nurse's Guide to Successful Test-Taking**, Marian B. Sides, Nancy B. Cailles: J. B. Lippincott, Pub.
- **Test-Taking Techniques for Beginning Nursing Students**, Patricia M. Nugent, Barbara A. Vitale: F. A. Davis, Pub.
- **Successful Problem-Solving & Test-Taking for the Beginning Nursing Student**, Patricia Hoefler: Meds, Inc., Pub.
- **Math for Meds**, Curren and Munday, W.I. Publications; **Mathematics for Health Careers**, Castellon, Baker, Stone: Delmar Pub.
- **Programmed Mathematics for Nurses**, George Sackheim, Lewis Robins: McGraw Hill, Pub.
- **The Mathematics of Drugs and Solutions**, Richardson & Richardson: Moseby, Pub.
- **Math for Nurses, a Problem-Solving Approach**, Sally Lipsey, Donna D. Ignatavicius: W. B. Saunders, Pub.

Post-admission testing at our school indicates many nursing students need help in reading speed and comprehension and a great majority benefit from test-taking skills. I don't use nursing-specific materials to help with reading and I avoid teaching test-taking skills with materials that depend on levels of nursing knowledge. I think doing that teaches nursing content instead of test-taking strategy. When I tutor one-on-one for test-taking skills, my favorite is the Nugent and Vitale book. The content is nursing-specific and so basic that students can analyze how to tackle the question itself, apart from content, which is then useful in all the subject areas. Even I can get the right answers using critical thinking and analytical strategies instead of nursing knowledge. We meet for five 30-40-minute weekly sessions, and go through chapters 1 and 4. It has been a highly effective series for many of the students, and one that could easily be adapted to a workshop format.

Over the years, course evaluations have indicated that many of the students believe they benefit most from learning what their preferred learning style is, and learning specific skills to maximize that, and to adapt to teaching styles that do not fit their learning styles. Many of the courses in nursing have one, and only one, teaching technique: lecture or lab, so teaching them how to adapt is a big help. The other highest response is time-management skills, which, of course, is not nursing specific. I really like the Ferrett book (below) for that. The one-hour workshop that has received the best reviews is one on writing a research paper. People who plan to be nurses are often stronger in math and sciences than language skills, and appreciate a "nuts and bolts" approach to writing a college-level paper, presented using auditory, visual and tactile components.

Some of our nursing faculty require all students to purchase the Hoeffler book, which includes a CD, and assignments. For non-nursing people, not-yet nurses, and me I prefer the format of the Nugent book. For my class, and for one-shot workshops, I like **Connections: Study Skills for College and Career Success** by Sharon Ferrett: Glencoe Publishers, because it isn't terribly academic, it uses multiple learning styles. Each chapter has very specific applications to the world of work.”

You may reach her at Linda Riggs Mayfield, MA, Associate Faculty for Academic Enhancement, Blessing-Rieman College of Nursing, Quincy, IL 62305-7005 limayfield@blessinghospital.com

“When I did our Nursing Study Skills Workshops I emphasized memory and mnemonic techniques, test taking, time management and physical environments for studying including standing up and walking around while reading. Many of our LVN students are young mothers!”

You may reach her at: Sue_Tsuda@cmccd.cc.ca.us

From Peg Gallagher at William Rainey Harper College:

“A significant number of our nursing students are deficient in their reading skills. Reading nursing textbooks has proved to be difficult so I initiated a reading comprehension workshop for nursing students last summer. In the workshop I provided an overview of strategies to help the students understand and remember content from their nursing texts. I also did some meta cognitive assessing. I had the students bring their fundamentals text to the program and we did some practice with their text.”

You may reach her at: Peg Gallagher, Assistant Professor of Nursing, William Rainey Harper College, 1200 W. Algonquin Road, Palatine, IL 60067

From Sharon Hagy at Mt. Hood Community College:

“Here are two books that are helpful to nursing students:

- Keys to Nursing Success, Janet R. Katz, Prentice Hall, Pub. ISBN 0-13-019575-8
- Learning Strategies in Nursing, Meltzer & Palau W.B. Saunder, Pub. ISBN 0-7216-6342-7

I have been working with nursing students on study skills for just a short time, but I have found they often have these issues:

- 1) Dealing with enormous amounts of reading and extract important information.
- 2) Synthesizing great amounts of information and applying it to real life situations. It can be helpful to work with students on Bloom's taxonomy, to help them identify the kind of thinking to use on different test questions. The vast majority of test questions on the Boards (I hear) are application and synthesis. I have also had success teaching the students to use concept maps to organize their info into study guides.
- 3) Test-anxiety and test-taking strategies. Many students come into nursing programs with bachelors and sometimes master's degrees. It can be disconcerting to some to have to struggle in a nursing program. Many nursing students are also "type A" people. As a result, they develop a lot of test anxiety.”

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