

## TEST-TAKING TECHNIQUES FOR BEGINNING NURSING STUDENTS

### Identify key words in the stem that indicate negative polarity

Read the stem slowly and carefully. Look for key words such as not, except, never, contraindicated, unacceptable, avoid, unrelated, violate, and least. These words indicate negative polarity, and the question being asked is probably concerned with what is **false**.

### Identify key words in the stem that set a priority

Read the stem carefully while looking for key words such as first, initially, best, priority, safest, and most. These words modify what is being asked. This type of question requires you to put a value on each option and then place them in **rank order**.

A strategy you can draw on to help you answer priority questions is to refer to basic **guiding theories** that are part of the **foundation of nursing**:

- . Physiologic needs generally need to be met first before higher-level needs
- . Disbelief and denial are generally a person's first response to news of a loss or anticipated loss
- . Meeting the needs of the patient come first over other tasks
- . Patient readiness to learn must be assessed first before designing a teaching program
- . A patient's emotional status must be assessed as part of the first step in the nursing process
- . Nurses need to use interviewing techniques to effectively communicate in a non-threatening way with patients
- . The nurse must deliver care in a nonjudgmental manner
- . Maintaining a patient's airway is always a priority
- . The patient's safety is always a priority
- . A thorough assessment must be completed before other steps in the nursing process

### Identify clues in the stem

Generally, the stem is short and contains only information needed to make it clear and specific. Therefore, a **key** word or phrase in the stem may provide a hint for choosing the correct answer.

### Identify the central person in the question

Test questions usually require the nurse to respond to the needs of a patient. You have to identify the central (significant) person in the stem, and **the significant person is the one to receive the care**.

### Identify patient-centered options

Nursing is a profession that is involved with providing **both physical and emotional care to the patient**. Items that test your ability to be patient centered tend to explore patient's feelings, identify patient preferences, empower the patient, afford the patient choices, or in some other way put emphasis on the patient.

### **Identify specific determiners in options**

A specific determiner is a word or statement that conveys a thought or concept that has **no exceptions** (just, always, never, all, every, none, and only). Frequently statements that use **absolutes** are false. However, some absolutes, such as “**all patients should be treated with respect,**” are correct.

### **Identify opposites in options**

Sometimes an item contains two options that are the **opposite** of each other. One of them will be the correct answer or both can be eliminated. When the opposites are distractors (both eliminated), they attempt to divert your attention from the correct answer which is now one of the two remaining options (increased your odds to choose the correct answer).

### **Identify equally plausible or unique options**

Sometimes items contain two or more options that are **similar**. Usually these options are distractors and can be eliminated from consideration. You now have improved your chances of selecting the correct answer to 50%.

### **Identify the global option**

The global option is usually a broad general statement, whereas the three distractors are specific. You pick the option that is different (Which one of these is **not** the same?).

### **Identify duplicate facts among the options**

When items are designed so that each option contains two or more facts, identifying a fact that is incorrect will eliminate all options containing this fact.

### **Identify options that deny patient feelings, concerns, and needs**

Options that imply everything will be all right deny patients’ feelings, change the subject raised by the patient, encourage the patient to be cheerful, or transfer nursing responsibility to other members of the health team are usually distractors and can be eliminated from consideration.

**ITEM:** entire multiple choice question (background statement, stem, and options)

**BACKGROUND STATEMENT:** brief scenario or framework for the stem

**STEM:** statement that asks the question or contains a specific problem to answer

**OPTIONS:** possible answers to the question (stem) or solutions to the problem

**KEYED RESPONSE:** the option that answers the question correctly

**DISTRACTORS:** remaining options that are incorrect answers to the question

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