



**STRATEGIES
FOR WRITING
MULTIPLE CHOICE
NURSING EXAMS**

**SEMESTER 1
NURSING**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TYPES OF QUESTIONS	5
Type 1	5
Type 2	6
GENERAL TIPS FOR WRITING MULTIPLE CHOICE NURSING EXAMS	7
STRATEGIES FOR ANSWERING MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS	8
MEDICAL TERMINOLOGY PRETEST	14
COMIC RELIEF	14

The following information has been prepared by the Academic Support Centre in order to assist Semester 1 nursing students in writing multiple choice exams. The Academic Support Centre staff is available to assist students on an individual basis.

TYPES OF QUESTIONS

There are two types of multiple-choice examination questions.

Type 1

This type of question consists of:

- A. **Stem**: The stem, which is the first part of the question, poses the problem. It may be worded as a question or an incomplete statement.
- B. **Options**: The options are the possible answers. There may be anywhere from three to five options in the question and one of them is the correct or best answer.

Example #1: Stem is worded as a question.

Which of the following food portions has the lowest caloric value?

- (a) 4 oz. lean meat
- (b) * ½ c. **orange juice**
- (c) one slice of bread
- (d) one 8 oz. glass of milk

Example #2: Stem is worded as an incomplete statement. The options complete the statement to form a full sentence.

Food contains an essential non-nutritive substance known as:

- (a) * **fibre**
- (b) additive
- (c) starch
- (d) energy

* **The asterisk (*) indicates the correct answer.**

STRATEGIES FOR ANSWERING MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

Type 2

This type of question consists of **two** parts.

The **first part** is similar to Type #1 (previous page) in that it has a **stem** and four or five options. **One or more** of these options are the correct answers.

The **second part** contains the options in various combinations.

Example:

Which of the following are functions of the large intestine?

1. Absorption of nutrients
2. Absorption of water
3. Absorption of sodium and chloride
4. Secretion of digestive enzymes

- (a) 1 only
- (b) * **2 and 3**
- (c) 1, 2 and 3
- (d) all of the above

These two types will be referred to in this handout.

GENERAL TIPS FOR WRITING MULTIPLE CHOICE NURSING EXAMS

1. Make sure you have the required supplies with you (e.g. watch, pens, pencils, ruler, calculator, etc.).
2. Allow about one minute per question.
3. Don't spend too much time on difficult questions. Make a mark beside them and return to them later.
4. Deliberating over a difficult question may cause anxiety which in turn may block the recall of familiar information required to answer other questions.
 - Leaving a difficult question and going on to answer others successfully will increase your confidence.
 - Questions that seem complicated at first can often be returned to and answered easily once confidence is established.
 - Information in the stem or options of other questions may help with a difficult question.
5. Once you have indicated an answer, don't change it unless you are absolutely sure your new answer is correct.
6. If you don't know the answer to a question, make an educated guess. You are not penalized for wrong answers on most nursing exams.
7. Develop your own system for checking that the number of the question you are answering is the same on the test paper as on the computer answer sheet.
8. Do not worry if you select the same numbered or lettered answer repeatedly since there is usually no pattern to the answers.

STRATEGIES FOR ANSWERING MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

The following test taking strategies can increase the probability of choosing the correct answer.

1. Read the stem once to get a general understanding of the type of question; then read the stem again (especially if it is long) to process it.
 - We frequently see what we want to see. When you encounter an easy, familiar-looking question, don't jump to the conclusion that you know what it is. Reread the stem to make sure it is indeed the question you think it is.

When there is a case situation followed by a series of questions, read the case once to gain a general understanding; then glance at the series of questions to determine what to look for when rereading the case. Now with a purpose in mind, you are able to process the case situation.

Processing the stem is crucial and, depending on the level of difficulty, you may need to:

- A. Identify and underline key words such as initial, most important, primary, least, etc.

Example:

The **first** thing you should do for a victim requiring mouth-to-mouth resuscitation is:

- (a) Tilt the head back and extend the neck
 - (b) Pinch the nose and place your mouth directly over the victim's mouth
 - (c) Check the mouth and throat for obstruction of the air passage
 - (d) Breathe into the victim's mouth at the rate of 16 breaths per minute
- B. Reword the stem so that it is more meaningful to you.
 - C. Name the concept or content area from which the stem is derived.

STRATEGIES FOR ANSWERING MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

2. Predict the answer after reading the stem and before looking at the options. Then read each option and look for your answer. Even if you find it, read each option carefully to make sure yours is the most correct.
 - It is a myth that the correct answer will always hit you in the eye. You should try to actively recall the relevant information before looking at the options.

3. Read the stem with each option.
 - This helps you to consider the question as a complete unit of thought.
 - This is not always possible in combination questions.

4. Identify and eliminate incorrect, inappropriate and unlikely options. These options are called distractors and there is usually one in each multiple choice question. Eliminating obvious distractors allows you more time to focus on the options that appear to be correct.

Example:

The best way to succeed on multiple-choice tests is

- | | |
|--|---------------------|
| a. Read the question carefully | [contender] |
| b. Check on the weather | [distractor] |
| c. Look for language cues to throw out choices | [contender] |
| d. * A & C | [correct contender] |

STRATEGIES FOR ANSWERING MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

Distractors often contain exceptions to the general rule, controversial matter or degrading responses.

Example:

Situation: Miss Hayes, a 19 year-old college freshman, has been admitted to a psychiatric hospital because she refuses to get out of bed. Her personal appearance has deteriorated steadily. She talks to unseen people, occasionally eats with her hands, and refuses to shower or wear her own clothes.

When Miss Hayes eats with her hands, the nurse can handle this problem by:

- (a) * **Placing the spoon in her hand and suggesting that she use it**
- (b) Commenting, "I thought college girls had better manners than that." [distractor]
- (c) Removing the food and saying, "You can't have any more until you can use your spoon."
- (d) Saying in a joking way, "Well, fingers were made before forks."

Distractors often focus on hospital rules as a reason for action. Avoid them and choose answers that are directed toward the client.

Example:

Mrs. Smith, a 50 year-old married housewife, has been admitted to hospital for possible removal of her right breast. The nurse's pre-operative assessment should include:

- (a) * **Ascertaining the degree of threat she perceives to her physical, emotional and social well-being**
- (b) A detailed explanation of hospital policy [distractor]
- (c) Sending a urine specimen to the lab
- (d) Having her sign the pre-operative consent

STRATEGIES FOR ANSWERING MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

5. Eliminate incorrect options by marking an X beside them or drawing a line through them.
 - This is especially important when options are long and/or complex or when there are combination response questions; because you can waste valuable time reprocessing options that you have already decided are incorrect. Try to follow an elimination system similar to this one for combination response questions.

Example:

Of the different foods listed below, which would be the best sources of carbohydrates?

- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
| 1. Low-fat yogurt | X |
| 2. Steak | ? |
| 3. Beans | |
| 4. Potatoes | |
| 5. Bread | |
| | |
| (a) All of the above | X |
| (b) All except 2 | X |
| (c) * 3, 4 and 5 | ✓ |
| (d) 4 and 5 | X |

6. Look for words in the stem that are the same or similar to words in the options. These may provide a clue to the correct option.

Example:

When a person develops symptoms of physical illness for which psychogenic factors act as causative agents, the resulting illness is classified as:

- (a) Dissociative
- (b) Compensatory
- (c) * **Psycho Physiologic**
- (d) Reaction formation

STRATEGIES FOR ANSWERING MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

7. In some questions, you will find that each option has two or more parts. Remember that by eliminating one part of the option, you can eliminate the entire option.

Example:

When giving a bed bath, in which position would the nurse place the patient in the hospital bed?

- (a) Move the patient ~~away~~ from the nurse, and put the bed in low position
 - (b) Move the patient ~~away~~ from the nurse, and put the bed in high position.
 - (c) Move the patient toward the nurse, and put the bed in low position.
 - (d) * **Move the patient toward the nurse, and put the bed in high position.**
8. Because few things in life are absolute, that is, without exception, avoid selecting options that contain restrictive words such as "always, never, all, every", and "must". Options containing words that provide some level of exception such as "often, usually, most, less, may, sometimes", are more likely to be correct.

Example:

The nurse is planning to teach a group about sexually transmitted diseases. When discussing AIDS, the nurse should stress:

- (a) It is only transmitted through homosexual contact
- (b) Symptoms usually occur within a year of exposure
- (c) * **The disease may be transmitted when body fluids are exchanged**
- (d) The virus only enters the body through open lesions

STRATEGIES FOR ANSWERING MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

9. Try to classify options, preferably into two categories.

Example:

Situation: Nancy Hand, a 5-year-old child, is admitted to the hospital with pneumonia. She requires bed rest, a soft diet, liberal fluid intake, and ampicillin, 250 mg. p.o.q.i.d. She is restless and fretful and tells the nurse she feels sick.

Nursing care, likely to be most effective in alleviating Nancy's fretfulness is:

- (a) giving her a jigsaw puzzle
- (b) putting her in a room by herself
- (c) letting her play with a doll
- (d) * **reading a story to her**

NOTE: Options a), b), and c) are solitary activities. Option d) involves others. Option d) would be more likely to alleviate her fretfulness.

10. You may encounter questions where all options appear correct and in fact, this may be true. However, the best option may be more complete than the other options in that it may include one or more of them.

Example:

In teaching a new diabetic about his condition, it is important for the nurse to discuss:

- (a) dietary modifications
- (b) the use of exchange lists
- (c) the use of sugar substitutes
- (d) * **his present understanding of diabetes**

NOTE: Options a), b), and c) are correct. However, they relate to only one aspect of diabetes, the diet. Option d) is the best answer because in discussing his understanding of diabetes, the nurse will discuss those aspects referred to in options a), b), and c). Therefore, option d) is more all-inclusive.

MEDICAL TERMINOLOGY PRETEST

When confronted with unfamiliar terms on an exam, it helps to break the word into its component parts. Test your knowledge of prefixes, suffixes and root words.

Set 1

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. ___ dyspnea | a. absence of breathing |
| 2. ___ tachypnea | b. abnormally slow breathing |
| 3. ___ eupnea | c. rapid breathing |
| 4. ___ bradypnea | d. normal breathing |
| 5. ___ apnea | e. painful, difficult breathing |

Set 2

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. ___ nephritis | a. inflammation of the gall bladder |
| 2. ___ hepatitis | b. inflammation of a vein |
| 3. ___ cystitis | c. inflammation of the kidney |
| 4. ___ phlebitis | d. inflammation of the liver |
| 5. ___ cholecystitis | e. inflammation of the bladder |

Set 3

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| 1. ___ nocturia | a. excessive urine formation |
| 2. ___ dysuria | b. presence of blood in the urine |
| 3. ___ polyuria | c. diminished urine formation |
| 4. ___ hematuria | d. excessive urination during the night |
| 5. ___ oliguria | e. painful, difficult urination |

Set 4

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------|
| 1. ___ \bar{c} | a. nothing by mouth |
| 2. ___ N.P.O | b. without |
| 3. ___ \bar{s} | c. as needed |
| 4. ___ p.r.n. | d. with |
| 5. ___ ad lib | e. as desired |

Total Score

20 = excellent!

Between 15 - 20 = average

Below 15 = hit the books

Your Fundamentals text by Potter & Perry is an excellent reference.

STRATEGIES FOR ANSWERING MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

COMIC RELIEF

Listed below is some medical terminology that you may want to refer to for comic relief:

Artery: The study of fine paintings

Barium: What you do when C.P.R. fails

Cesarean section: A district in Rome

Colic: A sheep dog

Coma: A punctuation mark

Congenital: Friendly

Dilate: To live longer

Fester: Quicker

G.I. series: Baseball games between teams of soldiers

Grippe: A suitcase

Hangnail: A coat hook

Medical staff: A doctor's cane

Minor operation: Coal digging

Morbid: A higher offer

Nitrate: Lower than the day rate

Node: Was aware of

Organic: Musical

Outpatient: A person who has fainted

Postoperative: A letter carrier

Protein: In favour of young people

Secretion: Hiding anything

Tablet: A small table

Tumour: An extra pair

Urine: Opposite of you're out

Varicose veins: Veins which are very close together