NCLEX-PN® Examination

Test Plan for the National Council
Licensure Examination for
Licensed Practical/Vocational Nurses

NCLEX®
EXAMINATIONS

Mission Statement

The National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) provides education, service and research through collaborative leadership to promote evidence-based regulatory excellence for patient safety and public protection.

Purpose and Functions

The purpose of the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN®) is to provide an organization through which boards of nursing act and counsel together on matters of common interest and concern affecting the public health, safety and welfare, including the development of licensing examinations in nursing.

The major functions of NCSBN include developing the NCLEX-RN® and NCLEX-PN® examinations, performing policy analysis and promoting uniformity in relationship to the regulation of nursing practice, disseminating data related to NCSBN's purpose, and serving as a forum for information exchange for NCSBN members.

2017 NCLEX-PN® Test Plan

National Council Licensure Examination for Practical/Vocational Nurses (NCLEX-PN® Examination)

Introduction

Entry into the practice of nursing is regulated by the licensing authorities within each of the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN®) member board jurisdictions (state, commonwealth, and territorial boards of nursing). To ensure public protection, each jurisdiction requires candidates for licensure to meet set requirements that include passing an examination that measures the competencies needed to perform safely and effectively as a newly licensed, entry-level practical/vocational nurse (LPN/VN). NCSBN develops a licensure examination, the National Council Licensure Examination for Practical/Vocational Nurses (NCLEX-PN®), which is used by member board jurisdictions to assist in making licensure decisions.

Several steps occur in the development of the NCLEX-PN Test Plan. The first step is conducting a practice analysis that is used to collect data on the current practice of entry-level practical/vocational nurses (Report of Findings from the *2015 LPN/VN Practice Analysis: Linking the NCLEX-PN® Examination to Practice* [NCSBN, 2016]). There were 12,000 newly licensed practical/vocational nurses are asked about the frequency and priority of performing nursing care activities. Nursing care activities are then analyzed in relation to the frequency of performance, impact on maintaining client safety and client care settings where the activities are performed. This analysis guides the development of a framework for entry-level nursing practice that incorporates specific client needs, as well as processes that are fundamental to the practice of nursing. The next step is the development of the NCLEX-PN Test Plan, which guides the selection of content and behaviors to be tested. Variations in jurisdiction laws and regulations are considered in the development of the test plan.

The NCLEX-PN Test Plan provides a concise summary of the content and scope of the licensure examination. It serves as a guide for examination development, as well as candidate preparation. The NCLEX® examination assesses the knowledge, skills and abilities that are essential for the entry-level practical/vocational nurse to use in order to meet the needs of clients requiring the promotion, maintenance or restoration of health. The following sections describe beliefs about people and nursing that are integral to the examination, cognitive abilities that will be tested in the examination, and specific components of the NCLEX-PN Test Plan.

Beliefs

Beliefs about people and nursing influence the NCLEX-PN Test Plan. People are finite beings with varying capacities to function in society. They are unique individuals who have defined systems of daily living that reflect their values, cultures, motives and lifestyles. Additionally, people have the right to make decisions regarding their health care needs and to participate in meeting those needs. The profession of nursing makes a unique contribution in helping clients (i.e., individuals, family, or group) achieve an optimal level of health in a variety of settings. For the purposes of the NCLEX Examination, a client is defined as the individual, family, or group which includes significant others and population.

Nursing is both an art and a science, founded on a professional body of knowledge that integrates concepts from the liberal arts and the biological, physical, psychological and social sciences. It is a learned profession based on an understanding of the human condition across the life span and the relationships of an individual with others and within the environment. Nursing is a dynamic, continually evolving discipline that employs

critical thinking to integrate increasingly complex knowledge, skills, technologies and client care activities into evidence-based nursing practice. The goal of nursing for client care is preventing illness; promoting comfort; protecting, promoting, and restoring health; and promoting dignity in dying.

The practical/vocational nurse uses "specialized knowledge and skills which meet the health needs of people in a variety of settings under the direction of qualified health professionals" (NFLPN, 2003). Considering unique cultural and spiritual client preferences, the applicable standard of care and legal instructions the practical/ vocational nurse uses a clinical problem-solving process (the nursing process) to collect and organize relevant health care data, assist in the identification of the health needs/problems throughout the client's life span and contribute to the interdisciplinary team in a variety of settings. The entry-level practical/vocational nurse demonstrates the essential competencies needed to care for clients with commonly occurring health problems that have predictable outcomes. "Professional behaviors, within the scope of nursing practice for a practical/ vocational nurse, are characterized by adherence to standards of care, accountability of one's own actions and behaviors, and use of legal and ethical principles in nursing practice" (NAPNES, 2007).

Classification of Cognitive Levels

Bloom's taxonomy for the cognitive domain is used as a basis for writing and coding items for the examination (Bloom et al., 1956; Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). The practice of practical/vocational nursing requires application of knowledge, skills and abilities; therefore, the majority of items are written at the application or higher levels of cognitive ability.

Test Plan Structure

The framework of Client Needs was selected because it provides a universal structure for defining nursing actions and competencies for a variety of clients across all settings and is congruent with state laws/ rules.

Client Needs

The content of the NCLEX-PN Test Plan is organized into four major Client Needs categories; two of the four categories are divided into subcategories:

Safe and Effective Care Environment
- Coordinated Care
- Safety and Infection Control

Health Promotion and Maintenance

Psychosocial Integrity

Physiological Integrity
- Basic Care and Comfort
- Pharmacological Therapies
- Reduction of Risk Potential
- Physiological Adaptation
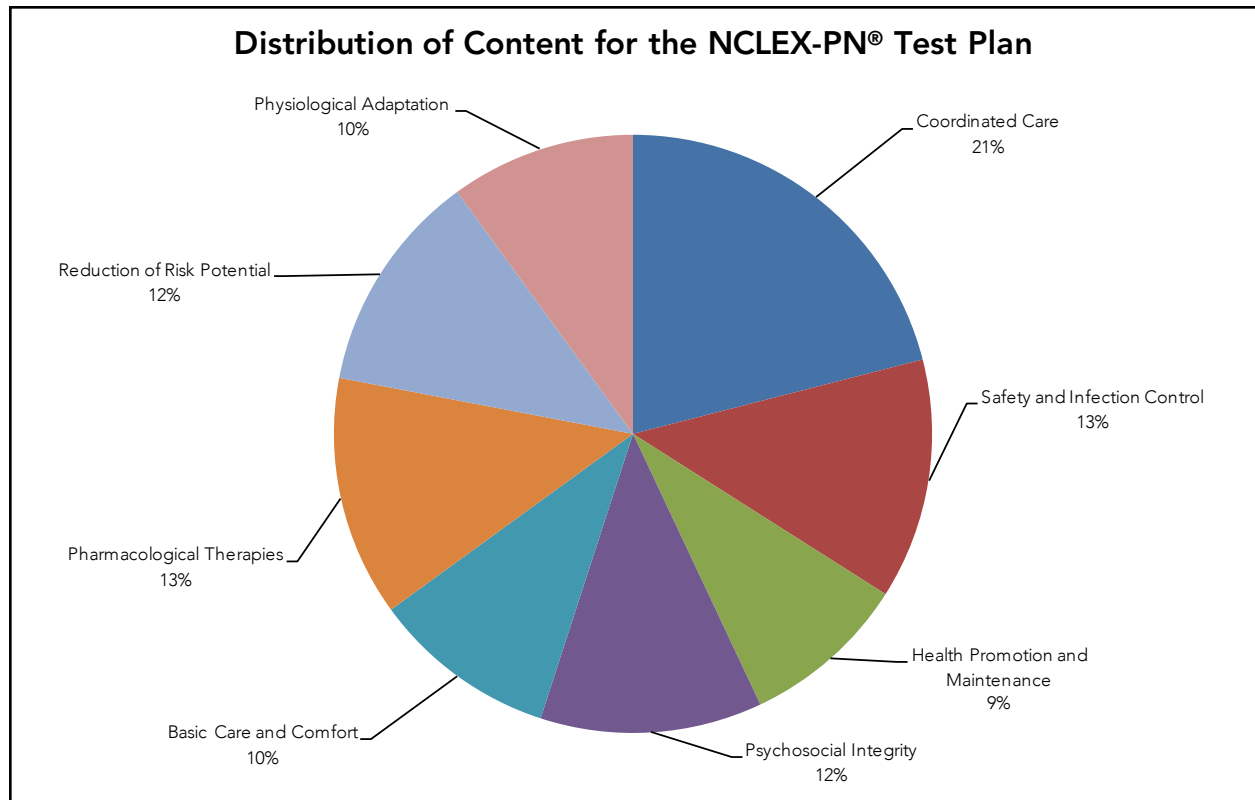
Integrated Processes

The following processes fundamental to the practice of practical/vocational nursing are integrated throughout the Client Needs categories and subcategories:

- *Clinical Problem-solving Process (Nursing Process)* – a scientific approach to client care that includes data collection, planning, implementation and evaluation.

- *Caring* – interaction of the practical/vocational nurse and client in an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust. In this collaborative environment, the practical/vocational nurse provides support and compassion to help achieve desired therapeutic outcomes.

- *Communication and Documentation* – verbal and nonverbal interactions between the practical/vocational nurse and the client, as well as other members of the health care team. Events and activities associated with client care are validated in written and/or electronic records that reflect standards of practice and accountability in the provision of care.

- *Teaching and Learning* – facilitation of the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes to assist in promoting a change in behavior.

- *Culture and Spirituality* – interaction of the nurse and the client (individual, family or group, including significant others and population) which recognizes and considers the client-reported, self-identified, unique and individual preferences to client care, the applicable standard of care and legal instructions.

Distribution of Content

The percentage of test items assigned to each Client Needs category and subcategory in the NCLEX-PN Test Plan is based on the results of the study *Report of Findings from the 2015 LPN/VN Practice Analysis: Linking the NCLEX-PN® Examination to Practice* (NCSBN, 2016), and expert judgment provided by members of the NCLEX® Examination Committee.

Client Needs	Percentage of Items from Each Category/Subcategory
Safe and Effective Care Environment	
▪ Coordinated Care	18–24%
▪ Safety and Infection Control	10–16%
Health Promotion and Maintenance	6–12%
Psychosocial Integrity	9–15%
Physiological Integrity	
▪ Basic Care and Comfort	7–13%
▪ Pharmacological Therapies	10–16%
▪ Reduction of Risk Potential	9–15%
▪ Physiological Adaptation	7–13%

Distribution of Content for the NCLEX-PN® Test Plan

Physiological Adaptation
10%

Reduction of Risk Potential
12%

Pharmacological Therapies
13%

Basic Care and Comfort
10%

Psychosocial Integrity
12%

Health Promotion and
Maintenance
9%

Safety and Infection Control
13%

Coordinated Care
21%

NCLEX-PN Examinations are administered adaptively in variable length format to target candidate-specific ability. To accommodate possible variations in test length, content area distributions of the individual examinations may differ up to ±3% in each category.

Overview of Content

All content categories and subcategories reflect client needs across the life span in a variety of settings.

Safe and Effective Care Environment

The practical/vocational nurse provides nursing care that contributes to the enhancement of the health care delivery setting and protects clients and health care personnel.

- *Coordinated Care* – The practical/vocational nurse collaborates with health care team members to facilitate effective client care.

   Related content includes, but is **not limited** to:

   - Advance Directives
   - Advocacy
   - Client Care Assignments
   - Client Rights
   - Collaboration with Interdisciplinary Team
   - Concepts of Management and Supervision
   - Confidentiality/Information Security
   - Continuity of Care

   - Establishing Priorities
   - Ethical Practice
   - Informed Consent
   - Information Technology
   - Legal Responsibilities
   - Performance Improvement (Quality Improvement)
   - Referral Process
   - Resource Management

- *Safety and Infection Control* – The practical/vocational nurse contributes to the protection of clients and health care personnel from health and environmental hazards.

  Related content includes, but is **not limited** to:

  - Accident/Error/Injury Prevention
  - Emergency Response Plan
  - Ergonomic Principles
  - Handling Hazardous and Infectious Materials
  - Home Safety
  - Reporting of Incident/Event/Irregular Occurrence/Variance
  - Least Restrictive Restraints and Safety Devices
  - Safe Use of Equipment
  - Security Plan
  - Standard Precautions/Transmission-Based Precautions/Surgical Asepsis

Health Promotion and Maintenance

The practical/vocational nurse provides nursing care for clients that incorporate the knowledge of expected stages of growth and development, and prevention and/or early detection of health problems.

Related content includes, but is **not limited** to:

- Aging Process
- Ante/Intra/Postpartum and Newborn Care
- Data Collection Techniques
- Developmental Stages and Transitions
- Health Promotion/Disease Prevention
- High Risk Behaviors
- Lifestyle Choices
- Self-care
- Community Resources

Psychosocial Integrity

The practical/vocational nurse provides care that assists with promotion and support of the emotional, mental and social well-being of clients.

Related content includes, but is **not limited** to:

- Abuse or Neglect
- Behavioral Management
- Chemical and Other Dependencies
- Coping Mechanisms
- Crisis Intervention
- Cultural Awareness
- End-of-Life Concepts
- Grief and Loss
- Mental Health Concepts
- Religious and Spiritual Influences on Health
- Sensory/Perceptual Alterations
- Stress Management
- Support Systems
- Therapeutic Communication
- Therapeutic Environment

Physiological Integrity

The practical/vocational nurse assists in the promotion of physical health and well-being by providing care and comfort, reducing risk potential for clients and assisting them with the management of health alterations.

- **Basic Care and Comfort** – The practical/vocational nurse provides comfort to clients and assistance in the performance of activities of daily living.

  Related content includes, but is **not limited** to:

  - Assistive Devices
  - Elimination
  - Mobility/Immobility
  - Nonpharmacological Comfort Interventions
  - Nutrition and Oral Hydration
  - Personal Hygiene
  - Rest and Sleep

- **Pharmacological Therapies** – The practical/vocational nurse provides care related to the administration of medications and monitors clients who are receiving parenteral therapies.

  Related content includes, but is **not limited** to:

  - Adverse Effects/Contraindications/Side Effects/Interactions
  - Dosage Calculations
  - Expected Actions/Outcomes
  - Medication Administration
  - Pharmacological Pain Management

- **Reduction of Risk Potential** – The practical/vocational nurse reduces the potential for clients to develop complications or health problems related to treatments, procedures or existing conditions.

  Related content includes, but is **not limited** to:

  - Changes/Abnormalities in Vital Signs
  - Diagnostic Tests
  - Laboratory Values
  - Potential for Alterations in Body Systems
  - Potential for Complications of Diagnostic Tests/Treatments/Procedures
  - Potential for Complications from Surgical Procedures and Health Alterations
  - Therapeutic Procedures

- **Physiological Adaptation** – The practical/vocational nurse participates in providing care for clients with acute, chronic or life-threatening physical health conditions.

  Related content includes, but is **not limited** to:

  - Alterations in Body Systems
  - Medical Emergencies

- Basic Pathophysiology
- Fluid and Electrolyte Imbalances
- Unexpected Response to Therapies

Administration of the NCLEX-PN® Examination

The NCLEX-PN Examination is administered to candidates by Computerized Adaptive Testing (CAT). CAT is a method of delivering examinations that uses computer technology and measurement theory. With CAT, each candidate's examination is unique because it is assembled interactively as the examination proceeds. Computer technology selects items to administer that match the candidate's ability. The items, which are stored in a large item pool, have been classified by test plan category and level of difficulty. After the candidate answers an item, the computer calculates an ability estimate based on all of the previous answers the candidate selected. The next item administered is chosen to measure the candidate's ability in the appropriate test plan category. This process is repeated for each item, creating an examination tailored to the candidate's knowledge and skills, while fulfilling all NCLEX-PN Test Plan requirements. The examination continues with items selected and administered in this way until a pass or fail decision is made.

All practical/vocational nurse candidates must answer a minimum of 85 items. The maximum number of items that a practical/vocational nurse candidate may answer is 205 during the allotted five-hour time period. The maximum five-hour time limit to complete the examination includes the tutorial, sample questions and all breaks. Candidates may be administered multiple choice items, as well as items written in alternate formats. These formats may include but are not limited to multiple response, fill-in-the-blank calculation, ordered response, and/or hot spots. All item types may include multimedia, such as charts, tables, graphics, sound and video. All items go through an extensive review process before being used as items on the examination.

More information about the NCLEX examination, including CAT methodology, items, the candidate bulletin and Web tutorials is listed on the NCSBN website: www.ncsbn.org.

Examination Security and Confidentiality

Any candidate that violates test center regulations or rules, or engages in irregular behavior, misconduct and/or does not follow a test center administrator's warning to discontinue inappropriate behavior may be dismissed from the test center. Additionally, exam results may be withheld or cancelled and the licensing board may take other disciplinary action, such as denial of a license and/or disqualifying the candidate from future registrations for licensure. Refer to the current candidate bulletin for more information.

Candidates should be aware and understand that the disclosure of any examination materials including the nature or content of examination items, before, during or after the examination is a violation of law. Violations of confidentiality and/or candidates' rules can result in criminal prosecution or civil liability and/or disciplinary actions by the licensing agency, including the denial of licensure. Disclosure of examination materials includes, but is not limited to discussing examination items with faculty, friends, family, or others.

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