

What Can I Do Differently Next Time?

**Preparing to Re-Write the Canadian Practical Nurse
Registration Examination (CPNRE)**

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Some of the reasons given by past candidates for their exam results include:

- Incomplete understanding of the nursing content;
- Problems coping with the stress of writing exams; and
- Difficulty with multiple-choice exams.

Incomplete Understanding of the nursing content

Failing the exam may mean that you have not mastered one or more areas of nursing content, or that you have not mastered your knowledge of nursing enough to respond to situations typically encountered by beginning practical nurses.

You should first review your nursing knowledge and your mastery of this knowledge. Ask yourself if there are areas of nursing knowledge and practice that you have found particularly difficult in your practical nurse program, clinical experience, in preparing for the exam, or in the exam you have recently taken. You are often the person best able to identify your own areas for improvement. You may also want to discuss and confirm your strengths and weaknesses with others you trust and whose feedback you believe is accurate (for example, educators, supervisors, peers, and colleagues).

This will help you determine how to prepare to retake the exam. Some options are: study by yourself, study with other candidates, use exam prep guides, use the online predictor test, work with a tutor/teacher or enroll in an exam preparatory class or refresher course.

Problems coping with the stress of writing exams

Writing an exam can be very stressful. Stress is a normal response to events in our lives, but it becomes a problem when our stress is too high and we cannot cope effectively. Fatigue and undue stress can affect your performance on the exam. By planning in advance for the exam, scheduling your time wisely for studying, other activities and resting, you can reduce your level of stress.

The next time you take the exam, you should try to prepare well in advance. You should not have to study the day before the exam. You should also prepare for the exam day by checking the location of the exam centre and exam room ahead of time, and determining how much time you will need to get there.

The day before the exam, you may be wise to spend the day in relaxing activities. There are a number of relaxation techniques that you can use. Choose one that works for you. Try to be active but avoid overexertion. Most important, get a good night's sleep before the exam day. That morning, eat a good breakfast, put on comfortable clothing and bring the information you will need (the instructions received for the exam).

Difficulty with multiple-choice exams

Some people choose the wrong answer on an exam because they make mistakes processing facts and information, or because they are unfamiliar with the exam format (multiple-choice questions). These errors are related to writing exams, not to a lack of nursing knowledge or skills. Some of the most common mistakes are:

- Overlooking important information in the question;
- Misreading the question;
- Failing to pick out important key words in the question;
- Not linking the question to information in the case text;
- Making assumptions in the case text/question;
- Focusing on insignificant details and missing key issues;
- Selecting more than one answer;
- Incorrectly transferring the selected answer from the exam book to the computer answer sheet;
- Changing the answer selected.

You are the person best able to determine what difficulties you may have experienced in taking the exam. Focus on what you experienced during the exam and keep in mind that you may have made more than one technical error on a particular exam question.

Tips for your next attempt

One question at a time

Treat each question as a separate problem. Do not let one difficult question make you anxious as you move on to the next one. Do your best on each question, then move on to the next. Try not to rush, but do not spend more than two or three minutes on any one question. If you do not know the answer, skip that question and come back to it later. If you still do not know the answer when you come back to the same question, don't be afraid to guess. No points are deducted for wrong answers. When you choose an answer from the options available, immediately mark your choice on the answer sheet before moving on to the next question.

Read the question carefully

Concentrate on what the question is asking and link it to the information provided. Do not make assumptions unless they are directly implied. Read the question carefully before looking at the possible answers. Use the information provided and your nursing knowledge to try to imagine the correct answer. Then study each possible answer and select the one that comes closest to the answer you imagined.

Take advantage of the process of elimination

If you are not presented with an option that matches or is close to the one you imagined, try to eliminate some of the options that you know for certain are incorrect.

Changing your answer

Be cautious about changing your answer. Your first choice very often is correct. Making a new selection is wise only if you are confident that the new option is correct.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Do exam questions have more than one correct answer, and how is the correct answer determined?

A multiple-choice question is designed so that only someone who has mastered the subject matter will select the correct answer. That person will find only one option to be the correct answer. Someone who lacks a firm grasp of the subject matter will find that most or all options look equally attractive and plausible. The exam is the end result of many test development activities that take place throughout a two-year period. Practical nurse educators, practitioners and administrators from across Canada have created and evaluated the exam questions. Each question on the exam and the correct answer must be supported by two current references. The references show that the correct answer for each question has authoritative support from at least two experts in the field. Every attempt has been made to use references that are up-to-date, accessible and accepted among practical nurses. These references are typical of those used in practical nursing programs across Canada.

Why is my exam result indicated as FAIL and not as a score?

The exam is designed to determine whether candidates possess the competencies (knowledge, abilities, skills, attitudes and judgment) required of a beginning practical nurse to practise safely and effectively. The exam strives to separate candidates who meet the required standard (PASS) from those who do not (FAIL). The exam is marked by a computer. The computer first tallies the total number of correct answers obtained by the candidate, then compares this number with the number of correct answers needed to meet the standard (pass mark). If your total number of correct answers was equal to or higher than the standard, the computer would have assigned you a pass result, but because your total number of correct answers was lower than the standard, the computer assigned you a fail result.

Could a mistake have been made in marking my exam?

As stated in the preceding paragraph, the exam is marked by computer, a highly accurate method. The answer sheets of candidates with a “borderline” result— those with a total number of correct answers close to the standard (pass mark) - are remarked by hand to confirm the number of correct answers. Several additional measures are taken throughout the marking process to ensure that answer sheets were completed correctly and that the correct result is assigned to each candidate. Candidates who did not pass the CPNRE can request that their answer sheets be remarked. There is a fee for this service.

How is the pass mark for the exam set?

The standard or pass mark is set in reference to the content and the difficulty of the test questions. The pass mark is set by a panel of content experts from across Canada. These content experts work closely with beginning practical nurses, and include educators, experienced practitioners and administrators. The pass mark is set at a level that represents the performance expected of a competent beginning practical nurse. The panel of content experts reviews each exam question and produces ratings based on a common understanding of a competent beginning practical nurse. In addition to these ratings, a variety of relevant data (for example, information on the preparation of new graduates, data on results from previously administered exams) are carefully considered to ensure the standard that candidates must achieve on the exam is valid and fair. Based on this information, an appropriate standard (pass mark) is set. Also, to ensure fairness, the different versions of the exam are equated so that all candidates have to meet the same standard regardless of the version or language (French or English) of the exam.

How will I know when I am ready to retake the exam?

A positive attitude can be a strong ally. Have confidence in yourself. Use the experience you have gained from your previous attempt to pass the exam. One advantage you have over other candidates is that you are familiar with the exam, how it is administered, and what happens on exam day. Keep in mind that you have successfully completed your nursing education and have taken remedial steps to correct your weaknesses. If you have prepared for the exam and rested well the day before, you can be confident that you have taken the best steps to succeed.

We hope this information proves helpful and we wish you good luck.

For additional information about the
Canadian Practical Nurse Registration Examination
Or to contact your regulatory authority,
go to www.cpnre.ca