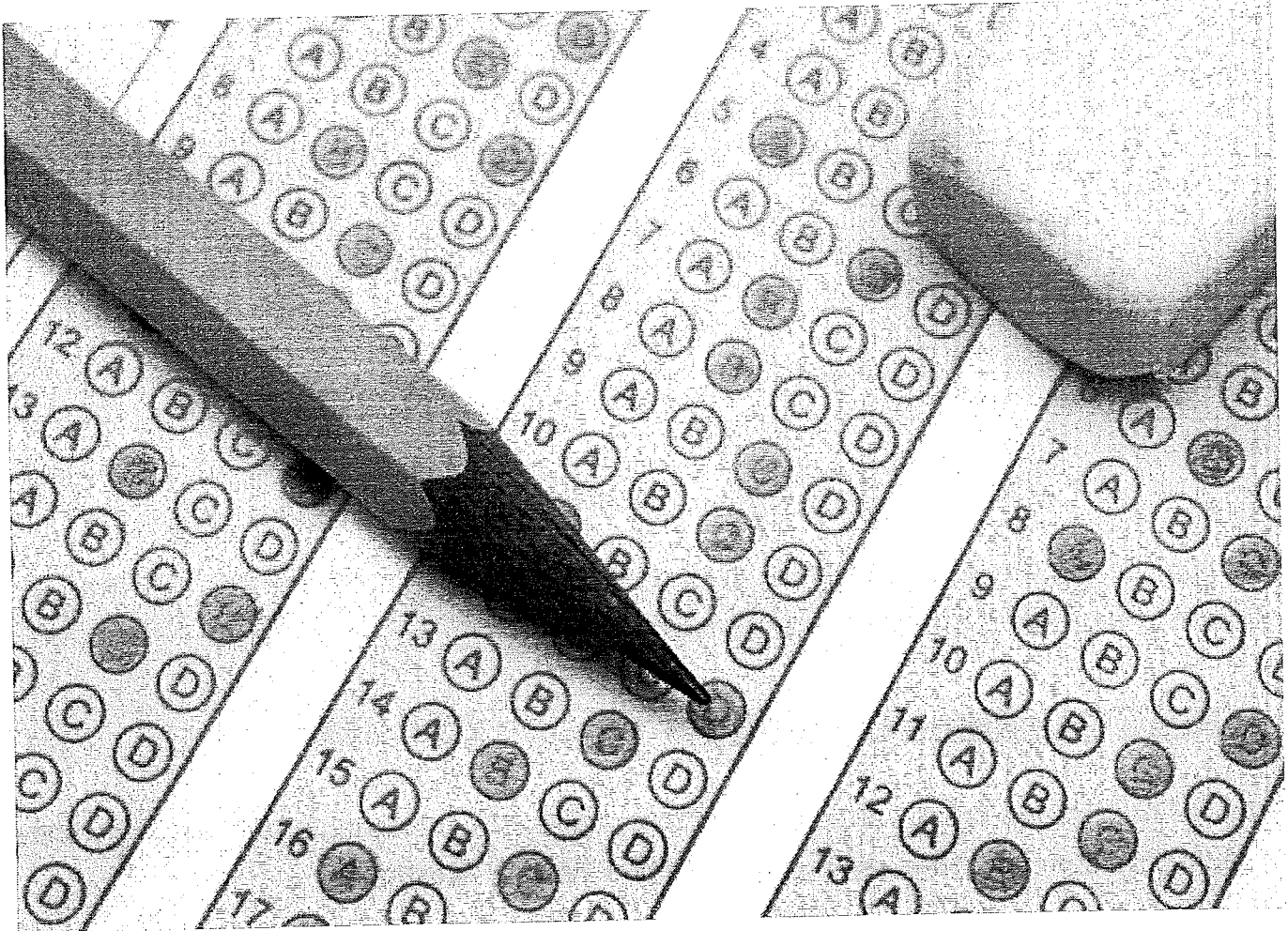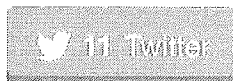# nurseslabs
FOR ALL YOUR NURSING NEEDS

11 Test Taking Tips & Strategies Nurses

By *Matt Vera, RN* - *Jun 11, 2012*

Whether taking the NCLEX, the NLE, or your finals, these 11 test taking tips and strategies w understand on how to properly answer each question.

1. Read Questions Carefully

Scores on tests are greatly affected by reading ability. In answering a test item, you should I reading the stem and then asking yourself the following questions:

- What is the question really asking?
- Are there any key words?
- What information relevant to answering this question is included in the stem?
- How would I ask this question in my own words?
- How would I answer this question in my own words?

After you have answered these questions, carefully read the options and then ask yourself th questions:

- Is there an option that is similar to my answer?
- Is this option the best, most complete answer to the question?

Deal with the question as it is stated, without reading anything into it, or making assumptior Answer the question asked, not the one you would like to answer. For simple recall items the process usually will be completed quickly. For more complex items the self-questioning proce longer, but it should assist you in clarifying the item and selecting the best response.

2. Identify Keywords

Certain key words in the stem, the options, or both should alert you to the need for caution i answer. Because few things are absolute without exception, avoid selecting answers that incl as always, never, all, every, only, must, no, except, and none. Answers containing these key correct because they place special limitations and qualifications on potentially correct answer

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All of the following are services of the National Kidney Foundation except:

1. Public education programs
2. Research about kidney disease
3. Fund-raising affairs for research activities
4. Identification of potential transplant recipients

This stem contains two keywords: **all** and **except**. They limit the correct answer choice to th does not represent a service of the National Kidney Foundation. When except, not, or a phra: one of the following appears in the stem, the inappropriate option is the correct answer—in t option 4.

If the options in an item do not seem to make sense because more than one option is correc
question; you may have missed one of the key words in the stem. Also be on guard when yo
key words in an option; it may limit the context in which such an option would be correct.

3. Pay Attention to Specific Details

The well-written multiple-choice question is precisely stated, providing you with only the info
to make the question or problem clear and specific. Careful reading of details in the stem car
important clues to the correct option. For example:

**A male client is told that he will no longer be able to ingest alcohol if he wants to liv
change in his behavior while he is in the hospital, the nurse should attempt to:**

1. Help the client set short-term dietary goals
2. Discuss his hopes and dreams for the future
3. Discuss the pathophysiology of the liver with him
4. Withhold approval until he agrees to stop drinking

The specific clause to effect a change in his behavior while he is in the hospital is critical. Opt
really related to his alcoholism. Option 3 may be part of educating the alcoholic, but you wou
behavioral change observable in the hospital to emerge from this discussion. Option 4 reject:
well as his behavior instead of only his behavior. Option 1, the correct answer, could result ir
behavioral change while the client is hospitalized; for example, he could define ways to achie
goals relating to diet and alcohol while in the hospital.

4. Eliminate Clearly Wrong or Incorrect Answers

Eliminate clearly incorrect, inappropriate, and unlikely answers to the question asked in the ʂ
systematically eliminating distractors that are unlikely in the context of a given question, you
probability of selecting the correct answer. Eliminating. obvious distractors also allows you m
focus on the options that appear to be potentially sound answers to the question. For examp

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The four levels of cognitive ability are:

1. Assessing, analyzing, applying, evaluating
2. Knowledge, analysis, assessing, comprehension
3. Knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis
4. Medical-surgical nursing, obstetric nursing, psychiatric nursing

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Option 1 contains both cognitive levels and nursing behaviors, thus eliminating it from consic
4 is clearly inappropriate since the choices are all clinical areas. Both options 2 and 3 contain
cognitive ability; however, option 2 includes assessing, which is a nursing behavior. Therefor
correct. By reducing the plausible options, you reduce the material to consider and increase t
of selecting the correct option.

5. Identify Similar Options

When an item contains two or more options that are similar in meaning, the successful test t
all are correct, in which case it is a poor question, or that none is correct, which is more likel
The correct option usually will either include all the similar options or exclude them entirely.

**When teaching newly diagnosed diabetic clients about their condition, it is importa
to focus on:**

1. Dietary modifications
2. Use of sugar substitutes
3. Their present understanding of diabetes
4. Use of diabetic nutritional exchange lists

Options 1, 2, and 4 deal only with the diabetic diet, involving no other aspect of diabetic teac
impossible to select the most correct option because each represents equally plausible, thouç
answers to the question. Option 3 is the best choice because it is most complete and allows t
options to be excluded. As another example:

A child's intelligence is influenced by:

1. A variety of factors
2. Socioeconomic factors
3. Heredity and environment
4. Environment and experience

The most correct answer is option 1. It includes the material covered by the other options, e need for an impossible choice, since each of the other options is only partially correct.

6. Identify Answer (Option) Components

When an answer contains two or more parts, you can reduce the number of potentially corre identifying one part as incorrect. For example:

After a cholecystectomy the postoperative diet is usually:

1. High fat, low calorie
2. High fat, low protein
3. Low fat, high calorie
4. Low fat, high protein

If you know, for instance, that the diet after a cholecystectomy is usually low or moderate in eliminate options 1 and 2 from consideration. If you know that the cholecystectomy client us overweight, you can eliminate option 3 from consideration. Therefore option 4 is correct.

7. Identify Specific Determiners

When the options of a test item contain words that are identical or similar to words in the ste taker recognizes the similarities as clues about the likely answer to the question. The stem w you to a similar word in the option or that limits potential options is known as a specific dete example:

The government agency responsible for administering the nursing practice act in ea

1. Board of regents
2. Board of nursing

3. State nurses' association

4. State hospital association

Options 2 and 3 contain the closely related words nurse and nursing. The word nursing, used
stem and in option 2, is a clue to the correct answer.

8. Identify Words in the Options That Are Closely Associated W
in the Stem

Be alert to words in the options that may be closely associated with but not identical to a wo
the stem. For example:

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

1. Dissociative

2. Compensatory

3. Psychophysiologic

4. Reaction formation

Option 3 should strike you as a likely answer since it combines physical and psychologic fact(
referred to in the stem.

9. Watch for Grammatical Inconsistencies

If one or more of the options are not grammatically consistent with the stem, the alert test t
eliminate these distractors. The correct option must be consistent with the form of the quest
question demands a response in the singular, plural options usually can be safely eliminated.
is in the form of an incomplete sentence, each option should complete the sentence in a grar
correct way. For example:

Communicating with a male client who is deaf will be facilitated by:

1. Use gestures

2. Speaking loudly

3. Find out if he has a hearing aid

4. Facing the client while speaking

Options 1 and 3 do not complete the sentence in a grammatically correct way and can theref
eliminated. Option 2 would be of no assistance with a deaf client, so option 4 is the correct a

10. Be Alert to Relevant Information From Earlier Questions

Occasionally, remembering information from one question may provide you with a clue for ai
question. For example:

A client has an intestinal tube inserted for treatment of intestinal obstruction. Intestinal sucti
excessive loss of:

1. Protein enzymes
2. Energy carbohydrates
3. Water and electrolytes
4. Vitamins and minerals

If you determined that the correct answer to this question was option 3, it may help you to a
question. For example:

Critical assessment of a client with intestinal suction should include observation fo

1. Edema
2. Nausea
3. Belching
4. Dehydration

The correct answer is option 4. If you knew that excessive loss of water and electrolytes ma)
dehydration, you could have used the clue provided in the earlier question to assist you in ar
later question.

11. Make Educated Guesses

When you are unsure about the correct answer to a question, it is better to make an educate
to answer the question. You generally can eliminate one or more of the distractors by using
and the methods just listed. The elimination process increases your chances of selecting the
from those remaining. Elimination of two distractors on a four-option multiple-choice item in
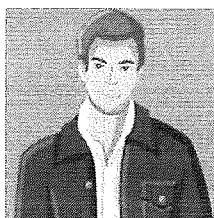your probability of selecting the correct answer from 25% to 50%.

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Matt Vera is a registered nurse and one of the main editors for Nurseslabs.com. Enjoys
and innovations about nursing and medicine, in general.

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