

The NCLEX-RN at a Glance

What the exam covers, how it thinks, and how it ends.

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What it covers: client needs

Every NCLEX-RN draws from 8 categories in set proportions. The percentages are from the NCSBN NCLEX-RN Test Plan.

Category	Share of the exam	What it's about
Management of Care	15–21%	Coordinating care: prioritizing, delegating, legal and ethical duties, and teamwork.
Safety and Infection Prevention and Control	10–16%	Keeping clients and staff safe from harm and infection.
Health Promotion and Maintenance	6–12%	Growth and development, pregnancy and newborn care, screening, and prevention.
Psychosocial Integrity	6–12%	Mental health, coping, crisis, abuse, and therapeutic communication.
Basic Care and Comfort	6–12%	Comfort and daily living: mobility, nutrition, elimination, rest, and hygiene.
Pharmacological and Parenteral Therapies	13–19%	Giving medications safely, dosage math, adverse effects, and blood products.
Reduction of Risk Potential	9–15%	Lowering the risk of complications from tests, procedures, and treatments.
Physiological Adaptation	11–17%	Managing acute, chronic, and life-threatening physical conditions.

How it thinks: 6 clinical judgment steps

Next Generation NCLEX items are built on the NCSBN Clinical Judgment Measurement Model. Ask yourself the question in the right-hand column at each step.

Step	What you do	Ask yourself
1. Recognize cues	Pick out the findings that matter.	What here is abnormal or concerning?
2. Analyze cues	Connect findings to what could be happening.	What conditions fit these findings?
3. Prioritize hypotheses	Rank the problems by likelihood and urgency.	What is most likely, and what is most dangerous?
4. Generate solutions	Identify the outcomes you want and the actions that get there.	What should happen, and what should I do or avoid?
5. Take action	Choose and carry out the best actions.	Which actions come first?
6. Evaluate outcomes	Compare what happened with what you expected.	Is the client better, worse, or the same?

How it ends

Length

- 85 to 150 questions
- Up to 5 hours, including the tutorial and breaks
- 15 of the questions are unscored pretest items you can't tell apart

Stopping rules

- **95% confidence:** the exam stops once it's 95% sure you're above or below the passing standard.
- **Maximum length:** at 150 questions, it decides from your final ability estimate.
- **Out of time:** with at least the minimum 85 answered, it decides from your final ability estimate. Fewer than 85 is an automatic fail, so keep a steady pace.

What the items look like

Item type	What you do
Case study	One client, 6 linked items, one for each clinical judgment step
Multiple response	Select all that apply, or select a set number
Matrix (grid)	Mark each row, for example indicated or not indicated
Drop-down (cloze)	Fill blanks in a sentence or table from drop-down lists
Highlight	Click the words in a note or table that matter
Drag and drop	Move options into the right places or order
Bowtie	Pick the condition, the actions to take, and the parameters to monitor

Partial credit

Many NGN items give partial credit. Some score each correct choice; others subtract for wrong selections. So on select-all items, choose only what you're confident is right.

Sources

1. NCSBN. NCLEX-RN Test Plan (current edition), [nclex.com](https://www.nclex.com).
2. NCSBN. Next Generation NCLEX: Clinical Judgment Measurement Model and item types, [ncsbn.org](https://www.ncsbn.org) and [nclex.com](https://www.nclex.com).
3. NCSBN. NCLEX scoring and passing rules, [nclex.com](https://www.nclex.com).

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