

CHAPTER 1

PREPARING FOR THE CERTIFICATION EXAMINATION

BEFORE YOU BEGIN STUDYING

Confirm the eligibility criteria. The eligibility criteria will vary for each exam, but may include things like clinical practice hours, degree and license required, etc. Please check the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) website for details on the particular eligibility criteria for your exam.

Review the general testing handbook. The general testing handbook can be found on ANCC's website under "Additional Information and Resources (www.nursingworld.org/certification/certification-policies/). It provides information on how the exam is scored, policies, etc.

Take advantage of all of ANCC's resources.

1. **Test Content Outline.** The test content outline includes the number of questions for each domain of practice and identifies the areas that are included on the examination.
2. **Test Reference List.** Review the test reference list for review resources. While the list is not all-inclusive, it will act as a guide to help you prepare.
3. **Sample Questions.** In addition to the review questions at the back of this book, you can find sample questions that are similar to those on the actual examination on ANCC's website. For many exams there are also banks of practice questions available from the American Nurses Association's website: www.nursingworld.org/continuing-education/ce-subcategories/certification-review/. Make sure to look at practice tests designed for the exam.
4. **Readiness Tests:** Take a practice test in a simulated test environment either at a Prometric Testing Center or via Live Remote Proctoring to increase your comfort with the test environment and procedures. Find more details about Readiness Tests on ANCC's website: www.nursingworld.org/certification/readiness-tests/

Develop a personal study plan approximately 3 months before you plan to take your exam. This could include self-study, finding a study buddy or group, taking a review course,

taking an online narrated review course, reviewing current textbooks and articles, or other methods. The key is to have a study plan that works for you and follow through on it.

Arrange for special testing accommodations. The American Nurses Credentialing Center and its testing vendor make every effort to reasonably accommodate candidates with documented disabilities as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). If you have a disability as defined under the ADA, you must notify ANCC by submitting a report regarding your request from your physician or a qualified healthcare professional. The information must be on the physician's or other qualified healthcare professional's letterhead, typed, dated, and signed by the healthcare professional. Refer to the General Test Handbook for more details.

TIPS FOR PREPARING FOR THE EXAM

STEP ONE: ASSESS CURRENT KNOWLEDGE

General Content

Examine the table of contents of this book and the test content outline, available at [insert website]

- ◆ What content do you need to know?
- ◆ How well do you know these subjects?

Take a Review Course

- ◆ Taking a review course is an excellent way to assess your knowledge of the content that will be included in the exam.
- ◆ If you plan to take a review course, take it well before the exam so you will have plenty of time to master any areas of weakness the course uncovers.
- ◆ If some topics in the review course are new to you, concentrate on these in your studies.

STEP TWO: DEVELOP YOUR STUDY PLAN

- ◆ Write up a formal plan of study.
 - ◇ Include topics for study, timetable, resources, and methods of study that work for you.
 - ◇ Decide whether you want to organize a study group or work alone.

- ◇ Schedule regular times to study.
- ◇ Avoid cramming; it is counterproductive. Try to schedule your study periods in 1-hour increments.
- ◇ Gather your study resources (general test handbook, Test Content Outline, Test Reference List, Review Manual, sample questions, etc.)
- ◆ You will need to know facts and be able to interpret and analyze this information utilizing critical thinking.

Personalize Your Study Plan

- ◆ How do you learn best? Choose study methods that fit your learning style.
- ◆ Have a specific place with good lighting set aside for studying. Find a place with no distractions. Assemble your study materials.
- ◆ Make sure to focus on the areas in which you are weakest and reassess periodically.

STEP THREE: IMPLEMENT YOUR STUDY PLAN

- ◆ Refer to your study plan regularly. Write it up or type it out and put it someplace you will see it regularly. Post it at your desk or even put it into your calendar.
- ◆ Stick to your schedule.
- ◆ Take breaks when you get tired.
- ◆ If you start procrastinating, get help from a friend or reorganize your study plan.
- ◆ It is not necessary to follow your plan rigidly. Adjust as you learn where you need to spend more time.
- ◆ Make sure you reference the Test Reference List and Test Content Outline on ANCC's website for the latest updates and information about the exam.

Pace Your Studying

- ◆ Stop studying for the examination when you start to feel overwhelmed and take a break. If you need to, adjust your study plan:
 - ◇ Break overwhelming tasks into smaller tasks that you know you can do.
 - ◇ Try a new study method.

Work with Others

- ◆ Put together a study group.
 - ◇ Study groups can provide practice in analyzing cases, interpreting questions, and critical thinking.
 - ◇ You can discuss a topic and take turns presenting cases for the group to analyze.
 - ◇ Study groups can also provide moral support and help you stay on track.

STEP FOUR: FINAL PREPARATION

Use practice exams when studying to get accustomed to the exam format and time restrictions. The American Nurses Association has a bank of sample questions available online in many specialty areas.

Practice tests can help you learn to judge the time it should take you to complete the exam and are useful for gaining experience in analyzing questions. However, keep in mind that books of questions may not uncover the gaps in your knowledge that a more systematic content review text like this manual will reveal. If you feel that you don't know enough about a topic, refer to a text from the reference list to learn more. After you feel that you have learned the topic, practice questions are a wonderful tool to help improve your test-taking skills.

Know your test-taking style and be aware of your potential pitfalls. Do you rush through the exam without reading the questions thoroughly? Practice reading the question completely, including all four choices. Choice "a" may sound good at first glance, but "d" is actually correct. Do you get stuck and dwell on a question for a long time? Remember that computer-based exams allow you to mark questions you are unsure about and go back to them later. You should spend about 45 to 60 seconds per question and finish with time to review the questions you marked. There is also no penalty for guessing; you are encouraged to respond to every examination question.

THE NIGHT BEFORE THE EXAM

- ◆ Be prepared to get to the exam on time.
 - ◇ Know the test site location and how long it takes to get there.
 - ◇ Take a "dry run" beforehand to make sure you know how to get to the testing site, if necessary.
- ◆ Get a good night's sleep.
- ◆ Eat sensibly.

- ◆ Avoid alcohol the night before.
- ◆ Assemble the required material to be admitted to the exam. Make sure you have the required form of ID. Reference the general test handbook for information about what you'll need.
- ◆ Read over the exam room rules. Know what you can and cannot bring with you.

THE DAY OF THE EXAM

- ◆ Get there early. You must arrive to the test center at least 15 minutes before your scheduled appointment time. If you are late, you may not be admitted.
- ◆ You will be given a dry erase board, which will be collected at the end of the exam.
- ◆ Nothing else is allowed in the exam room. You will be required to put all personal items in a designated area such as a locker.
- ◆ Items such as eye-wear, jewelry, etc. are subject to visual inspection.
- ◆ No water or food will be allowed. You may leave the testing room to use the restroom or get a drink of water, but you will need to sign out according to the instructions that will be explained at the test site. Your testing time will not be increased to accommodate a break.
- ◆ Think positively. You have studied hard and are well-prepared.
- ◆ Remember your anxiety reduction strategies.

TIPS FOR DEALING WITH ANXIETY

LEADING UP TO THE EXAM:

Everyone experiences anxiety when faced with taking the certification exam.

- ◆ Taking a review course or setting up your own study plan will help you feel more confident about taking the exam. There is no substitute for being well-prepared.
- ◆ Take practice tests and time yourself to get used to the feeling of working on a timer. Remember that the total time for each test is usually 4 hours. Time is not meant to be a factor in the examination.
- ◆ Brush up on test-taking skills.
- ◆ Practice relaxation techniques. A few minutes of deep breathing, meditation, or even just listening to soothing music can help you calm down and focus.

- ◆ Don't put too much stock in what others tell you about their exam experience. Remember that everything they can tell you is based on their memory of a stressful situation; it may not be very accurate. People tend to remember those items with which they are less comfortable; for instance, those with a limited background in women's health may say that the exam was "all women's health." In fact, the test content outline ensures that the exam covers multiple content areas without overemphasizing any one topic.

EXAM DAY ANXIETY:

Test anxiety is a specific type of anxiety. Symptoms include upset stomach, sweaty palms, tachycardia, trouble concentrating, and a feeling of dread. But there are ways to cope with test anxiety.

- ◆ Avoid alcohol, excess coffee, caffeine, and any new medications that might sedate you, dull your senses, or make you feel agitated.
- ◆ Take a few deep breaths and concentrate on the task at hand.
- ◆ Use relaxation techniques such as breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, or imagery and visualization.
- ◆ Go into the exam with a strategy in mind. Plan to take water and bathroom breaks at specific intervals and take that opportunity to stretch. Mark questions you're unsure of to come back to them later rather than spending too much time on one question.

INTERNET RESOURCES:

- ◆ ANCC website: [insert website]
 - ◇ Test Content Outline
 - ◇ Test Reference List
 - ◇ Sample Questions
 - ◇ Readiness Tests
- ◆ General Testing and Renewal Handbook: www.nursingworld.org/~4aae16/globalassets/certification/certification-policies/ancc-generaltestingrenewalrequirements4-1-2017_final.pdf
- ◆ ANA Bookstore: www.nursingworld.org/education-events/Books/
 - ◇ ANA Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice
 - ◇ ANA specialty scope and standards

- ◇ Code of Ethics for Nurses
- ◇ Other titles that may be listed on your Test Reference List
- ◆ American Nurses Association certification review resources: www.nursingworld.org/continuing-education/ce-subcategories/certification-review/
 - ◇ Practice questions
 - ◇ Webinars and review courses
 - ◇ Certification Exam Test-Taking Strategies Web Course